

A Review of Pennsylvania's Tourist Signing Programs

Report Highlights

The PA Logo Signing Trust, established in 1984 to create a tourist service signing program on the Commonwealth's interstates, is administered by the PA Travel Council (PTC) and funded through participant fees. PennDOT operates a somewhat similar program, the Tourist-Oriented Directional Signing (TODS) Program, on non-interstates. The TODS program has recently been expanded to allow counties to join together to create a signing "region."

- *The Logo Signing Program Is Operating in an Efficient and Effective Manner.* The Logo Signing Program is financially sound and is in compliance with federal and state guidelines. Stakeholders (businesses, tourist promotion agencies, and the motoring public) are satisfied with the program, although businesses believe the initial fees (\$10,050) are high.
 - *Certain Aspects of the Tourist-Oriented Directional Signing Program Need Additional Attention.* PennDOT districts typically charge businesses a \$100 administrative fee and \$300 per TODS sign. Actual costs are estimated at \$800 or more per sign. We also found that many businesses are unaware of the TODS program and that two "signing districts" do not have signed agreements with PennDOT.
 - *Efforts to Develop a Regional Signing Program Have Progressed Slowly.* In 1996, a coalition of businesses and economic development agencies sought to promote tourism by creating "wayfinding" signs for their region (the Laurel Highlands). DCED awarded a \$250,000 Regional Marketing Initiative grant for this effort in January 1997. The project, however, has experienced several delays, and no signs have yet been placed. We found:
 - Due in part to concerns over contracted work products, three consulting firms have been involved in designing program guidelines and signs.
 - RMI grants are not subject to DCED's normal grant oversight procedures. As a result, the entire \$250,000 grant was
- disbursed at the beginning of the project rather than as expenses were incurred, and matching funds were not used until all state funds had been spent. The grant was also not subject to DCED's normal reporting, auditing, and closeout requirements.
- Costs for the project, through 12/31/00, were \$516,000, of which \$312,000 are state funds.

Recommendations. The report contains 14 recommendations, including:

- *The Logo Signing Trust should increase allowable distances for popular attractions.* The Turnpike allows signs for attractions up to 30 miles away, depending on attendance. The Logo program has a 3- (urban) or 15-mile (rural) limit.
- *PennDOT should set TODS fees at a level sufficient to cover the program's cost.* We also recommend PennDOT maintain up-to-date information on TODS signs; include TODS information on its web site; and develop an application form for municipalities seeking to be signing districts.
- *DCED should administer RMI grants directly.* Because RMI grants have been administered through private contractors, they have not been subject to DCED's normal oversight procedures. DCED should also assess the need for incentive monies for future regional signing efforts.
- *DCED and PennDOT should define their respective responsibilities.* The departments should develop a Memo of Understanding outlining their respective responsibilities in future regional signing efforts.