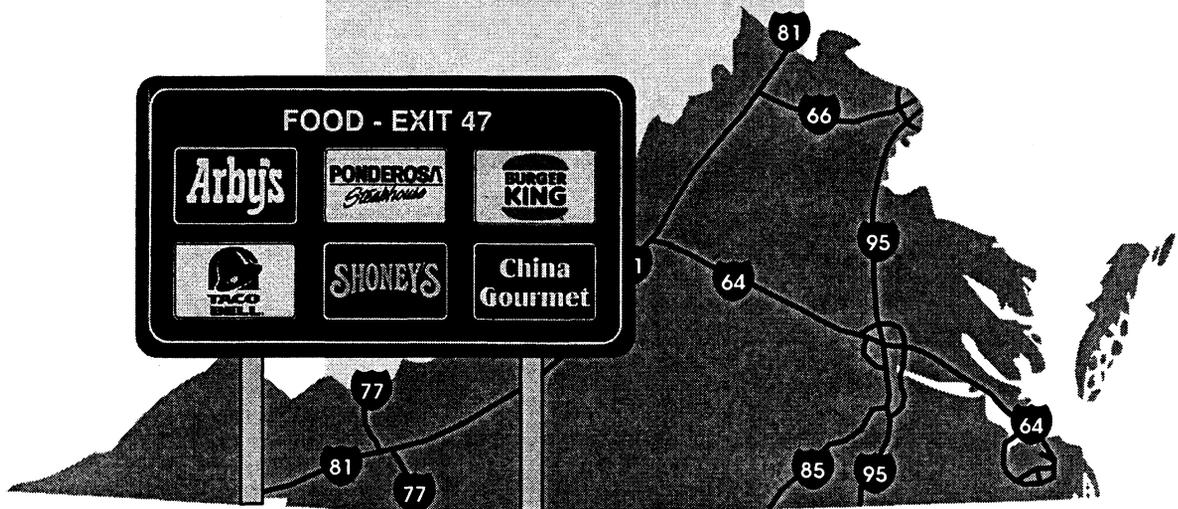


TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
REPORT

AN ASSESSMENT
OF MOTORISTS' PERCEPTIONS
OF FOOD LOGO SIGNS



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TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH COUNCIL

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(The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this
report are those of the authors and not necessarily
those of the sponsoring agency.)

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ABSTRACT

Blue food logo signs are a familiar sight to travelers on Virginia's interstate and limited access highways. The Virginia Transportation Research Council was asked to conduct a study of motorists' use of food logo signs and their expectations about businesses featured on such signs. A short, 12-item survey was distributed at four state welcome centers and one state rest area in August and early September of 1998, ultimately yielding 520 completed surveys. Respondents reported using logo signs very frequently to make decisions about where to stop on the road.

Businesses must meet specified requirements to be included on such signs. Respondents' expectations for businesses included on logo signs corresponded with some of the program's requirements (e.g., proximity to an interchange, serving hours). Respondents did not, however, expect all businesses included on logo signs to serve breakfast food, which is a requirement.

AN ASSESSMENT OF MOTORISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF INTERSTATE FOOD LOGO SIGNS

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BACKGROUND

Blue food logo signs are a familiar sight to motorists traveling on controlled and limited access highways across the nation. Business owners want to be included on such signs since inclusion can increase their volume of customers (sometimes substantially).

In Virginia, as in other states, specific regulations govern a business's eligibility for inclusion on the logo signs. In the case of food businesses, they are required to be in continuous operation for at least 12 hours daily and to serve breakfast, lunch, and supper 7 days a week. They must also be located not more than 3 miles from the center of the intersection or from the first exit ramp in the direction of travel on a bypass route. They may, however, be as far as 6 miles from an interchange if no food business is located within 3 miles. Other requirements, such as public telephone availability and minimum seating capacity, also apply.

Although the logo program requirements are well known to Virginia Logos, Inc. (the private sector firm that manages the logo sign program in Virginia) and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) staff who oversee it, it is unclear whether motorists have particular expectations about the businesses shown on food logo signs. Do motorists expect, for example, that all businesses included on logo signs will serve breakfast foods? Or that they will be no more than a particular number of miles from an interchange? VDOT's customer service mission points to the importance of identifying any gaps between motorists' expectations of businesses on food logo signs and the current requirements for inclusion on the signs. For that reason, the Virginia Transportation Research Council (VTRC) was asked to conduct a study of motorists' perceptions of food logo signs in the late summer and early fall of 1998.

METHOD AND SCOPE

The primary data gathering method for this study was a short, 12-item written survey developed by the researchers (see Appendix A for a copy of the survey). Staff of VDOT's Traffic Engineering Division (TED); Virginia Logos, Inc.; the Virginia Tourism Corporation;

and the Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association suggested content for the survey. The researchers hypothesized that the average motorist was probably unfamiliar with the requirements for logo sign participation. Several of the survey questions were designed to determine what, if anything, motorists assume from the inclusion of a business on a food logo sign.

VTRC staff had previously achieved very good completion rates for motorist surveys handed out at VDOT rest areas. For this study, the researchers decided to use both rest areas and welcome centers as sites for survey distribution. The sites chosen (see Table 1) represent all of the interstate highways in Virginia except one (I-66) and a range of geographic locations. Representatives from the tourism and travel industries suggested August, the busiest travel month of the year, as an ideal time to conduct the survey.

Table 1. Survey Distribution Sites

Site	1998 Survey Dates
I-85 Bracey Welcome Center	August 10-11
I-77 Rocky Gap Welcome Center	August 12-13
I-64 Covington Welcome Center	August 17-18
I-81 Mount Sidney Rest Area (northbound)	August 25-26
I-81 Mount Sidney Rest Area (southbound)	August 25-26
I-95 Fredericksburg Welcome Center	September 3 and 10

At each site, two members of the project team set up a small table displaying a sign “VDOT Logo Sign Survey.” A foam core board display showed a large photograph of a food logo sign. Each person who approached the table was greeted and asked if he or she would like to complete a survey to help VDOT better serve the public. Motorists were also given the option of filling out the survey immediately or taking it with them and mailing it back, postage paid.

A total of 520 completed surveys were available for inclusion in the analysis summarized in this report. The overall response rate for all 758 surveys taken by travelers at rest areas and welcome centers was 68%. This rate reflects both surveys filled out on site (86% of the 520 completed) and surveys taken from the site and mailed back (14% of the 520 completed). The mail-back return rate for the 313 surveys taken from the sites was 24% (the researchers had no way of sending reminder letters to achieve a higher mail-back return rate). The Rocky Gap (145 surveys completed) and Fredericksburg (138 surveys completed) sites contributed notably more to the total than the other sites.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the report summarizes the survey results, question by question. Readers should bear in mind that the instruction for some of the survey questions was “check all that apply;” for those items, percentages shown in the tables will total more than 100. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Respondent Profile

The typical survey respondent was a resident of a state other than Virginia and was traveling for pleasure in the company of other adults (but not children). A more specific respondent profile, based on survey questions 8 through 12, would be:

- 30% Virginia residents, 70% residents of other states
- 24% traveling on business, 76% traveling for other reasons
- 67% traveling with one or more other adults
- 12% traveling with one or more children under age 12
- 7% traveling with one or more children aged 12 or older
- 10% professional truck drivers
- 70% make interstate trips of 200+ miles four or more times per year.

The researchers are not certain why so few of the respondents were traveling with children. Possible reasons include that August is the start of the school year in some parts of the nation; families with children may not wish to stop long enough to complete the survey; and families with children may tend to stop at places other than VDOT welcome centers or rest areas (e.g., fast food restaurants with playgrounds).

Other than the availability of restrooms, respondents indicated the following reasons for stopping at a VDOT welcome center or rest area (respondents could check multiple reasons for stopping):

- 56% were taking a break from driving
- 25% wanted to obtain a state map
- 17% wanted to obtain brochures
- 8% wanted to ask welcome center staff some questions
- 8% were seeking parking for a tractor-trailer.

How Travelers Decide Where to Stop for Food and What Meals to Buy

This section summarizes the results for survey questions 1 through 7, which asked motorists a series of questions about the meals they buy when traveling and how they decide where to buy those meals.

Table 2 shows how often respondents reported buying breakfast, lunch, and dinner when traveling on the interstate.

Table 3 summarizes the responses to survey question 2 (a “check all that apply” question), which asked motorists to identify all of the kinds of food businesses from which they regularly buy meals when traveling. Restaurant chains—either fast food or family style—were regular stops for twice as many respondents as any non-chain food business.

Table 2. Survey Respondents' Frequency of Meal Stops When Traveling (%)

How often do you stop for . . .	Breakfast?	Lunch?	Dinner?
Often	37	50	43
Sometimes	39	38	41
Seldom	18	10	13
Never	5	1	4

Table 3. Kinds of Businesses at Which Survey Respondents Buy Food When Traveling

Type of Business	Percentage of Respondents Who Regularly Buy Meals There
Fast food restaurants	67
Family style restaurant chains	63
Locally-owned restaurants	28
Truck stops	22
Convenience stores	18
Rest areas with vending machines	11

Survey questions 3 and 4 asked motorists to identify how they decide where to stop for meals and, more specifically, how often they use food logo signs in their decision making. Responses for those questions are summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Factors Influencing Motorists' Decisions About Where to Stop for Meals When Traveling

Factor Influencing Decision About Where to Stop	Percentage of Respondents Citing Factor
Where they can find a particular restaurant chain	39
Where there is a restaurant very close to the exit	57
Where there will be many restaurants to choose from	37
Where they can get food quickly	32
Wherever they are when they or passengers want to stop	26

Table 5. How Often Motorists Use Food Logo Signs to Decide Where to Stop for Meals

Frequency of Logo Sign Use	Percentage of Respondents
Always	48
Often	38
Sometimes	10
Seldom	2
Never	1

Proximity of a food business to an exit was clearly the most important factor influencing respondents' decisions about where to stop. Finding particular restaurant chains, having many restaurants from which to choose, and getting food quickly were all decision factors cited by about one third of the respondents. Although not shown in Table 4, a number of professional

truck drivers told research team members that the availability of truck parking was a significant factor in their decisions about where to stop. Some truckers went so far as to say they wanted logo signs to include information about the availability of truck parking at food businesses.

As Table 5 shows, the vast majority of respondents “always” or “often” use logo signs in making decisions about where to stop for food.

What Motorists Assume About Businesses Included on Logo Signs

This section of the report summarizes the findings about motorists’ assumptions about businesses included on logo signs. Specifically, in survey question 5, motorists were asked what serving hours they expected businesses on logo signs to have and how close to the exit they expected such businesses to be.

Eighty-two percent of respondents said they expected a food business listed on a logo sign to be open particular hours. Respondents were then asked to indicate what serving hours they expected a business shown on a logo sign to have. The serving hour question was asked in a fill-in-the blank format, so a variety of responses were given about expected opening and closing times. Those responses are summarized in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Motorists’ Expectations About Opening Hours for Businesses Included on Logo Signs

Opening Hour	Percentage of Respondents
24 hours per day	26
5 A.M.	2
6 A.M.	37
7 A.M.	20
8 A.M.	9
9 A.M. or later	6

Table 7. Motorists’ Expectations about Closing Hours for Businesses Included on Logo Signs

Closing Hour	Percentage of Respondents
9 P.M. or earlier	12
10 P.M.	17
11 P.M.	29
Midnight or later	41

Two thirds of the respondents expected businesses on logo signs to be open by 6 A.M. (combining those that expected 24 hour-per-day operations and those who expected opening hours by 6 A.M.). As Table 7 shows, a similarly large percentage of respondents expected late closing hours—11 P.M. or later.

Motorists’ expectations about serving hours of businesses included on logo signs correspond to the program’s hours of operation requirement for participating businesses. Their

expectations about how close to the exit participating businesses should be were very similar to the program requirements, as Table 8 shows.

Table 8. Motorists' Expectations about Logo Program Businesses' Proximity to Interstate Exits

Proximity to Exit	Percentage of Respondents
Less than 2 miles	14
Less than 3 miles	81
Less than 6 miles	4
Less than 10 miles	0.4

What Motorists Assume About Breakfast Foods Available at Logo Sign Businesses

The last section of the survey focused on breakfast: what kinds of breakfast foods respondents buy most often and what kinds of breakfast food (if any) they expect to find at chains whose names do not necessarily suggest the availability of traditional breakfast foods (e.g., Pizza Hut).

Table 9 summarizes survey respondents' breakfast food preferences. Two thirds of those who stop for breakfast said they most often buy "full breakfast" foods—eggs, sausage, bacon, pancakes, etc., while one fourth prefer light breakfast food. The remaining small percentage of respondents don't stop for breakfast or want other kinds of food on breakfast stops.

Table 9. Motorists' Most Frequent Breakfast Food Purchases on the Road

Type of Food	Percentage of Respondents
Light breakfast (donuts, pastries, danish)	24
Full breakfast (eggs, sausage, pancakes)	61
Other kinds of food	7
Don't stop for breakfast	8

Table 10 summarizes respondents' expectations about the kinds of breakfast foods they would find at several well-known restaurant chains, some fast food and some family style. Large percentages of respondents did not expect any kind of breakfast food, even light breakfast food, to be available at a Subway or Pizza Hut listed on a logo sign. Approximately half (48%) of the respondents expected to find full breakfast food available at a Western Sizzlin' restaurant included on a logo sign, while nearly that many (44%) did not expect to find any breakfast food available there. Respondents clearly did not assume that all businesses included on logo signs served some type of breakfast food.

Table 10. Motorists' Expectations About Breakfast Foods Available From Chain Restaurants Included on Logo Signs

Restaurant Name	Percentage of Respondents Expecting Chain to Serve		
	Full Breakfast	Light Breakfast	No Breakfast
Subway	3	17	80
Pizza Hut	4	8	88
Western Sizzlin'	48	8	44
Cracker Barrel	88	7	5

CONCLUSIONS

Survey respondents reported that they very frequently relied on logo signs to make decisions about where to stop for food on the road. Proximity of restaurants to an interchange had the most influence on where they decide to stop, so the logo program's requirements about how close businesses must be to an interchange are consistent with the respondents' expectations. The results also suggest that most motorists expect businesses listed on logo signs to have long serving hours, opening by 6 A.M. and staying open until 11 P.M. or later. Program requirements also address serving hours for participating businesses. Interestingly, though, the sample did not expect all businesses listed on logo signs to serve breakfast foods (even light breakfast foods). So, when our survey respondents want to buy breakfast on the road, they may look at a logo sign and identify the businesses likely to have the kinds of breakfast foods they prefer.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX A: MOTORIST LOGO SIGN SURVEY

VDOT FOOD LOGO SIGN SURVEY

Purpose: The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) wants your opinions about the blue food logo signs that show restaurants or food stops available at interstate exits. Please check your answers below, or write them in as indicated.

1. When you are traveling on the interstate, how often do you stop for
Breakfast? Often Sometimes Seldom Never
Lunch? Often Sometimes Seldom Never
Dinner? Often Sometimes Seldom Never

2. Where do you regularly buy meals when traveling? (check all that apply)
 Fast food restaurant chains (McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, etc.)
 Family style restaurant chains (Shoney's, Pizza Hut, Western Sizzlin, etc.)
 Locally-owned restaurants
 Truck stops
 Convenience stores or gas stations with stores (7-11, Amoco Food Stop, etc.)
 Highway rest areas with vending machines
 Other (please write in): _____

3. How do you decide *where* to stop for meals when you are travelling on the interstate? (check all that apply)
 Where I know I can find a particular restaurant chain (McDonalds, for example)
 Where I know there is a restaurant very close to the exit
 Where I know there will be many different restaurants to choose from
 Where I know I can get food quickly
 Wherever I am when my passengers or I want to stop
 Other (please write in) _____

4. When you are traveling in unfamiliar areas, how often do you use the blue food logo signs to decide where to stop for meals?
 Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

5. If a food business is listed on a blue food logo sign...
(a) Do you expect it to be open certain hours?
 No Yes What hours? _____
(b) How close to the exit do you expect it to be?
 Less than 3 miles
 Less than 6 miles
 Within some other distance _____ (miles)

6. When you stop for breakfast, what kind of food do you buy most often? (check one category)
 Light breakfast (donuts, pastries, danish, etc.)
 Full breakfast (eggs, sausage, bacon, pancakes, etc.)
 Other kinds of food (please specify: _____)
 I don't stop for breakfast

⇒ PLEASE CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE

7. Imagine a blue food logo sign with the businesses listed below. What kind of breakfast food, if any, would you expect each one to serve? (check all that apply)
- | | | | |
|----------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| a. Subway? | <input type="checkbox"/> Light breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> Full breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> No breakfast |
| b. Pizza Hut? | <input type="checkbox"/> Light breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> Full breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> No breakfast |
| c. Western Sizzlin'? | <input type="checkbox"/> Light breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> Full breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> No breakfast |
| d. Cracker Barrel? | <input type="checkbox"/> Light breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> Full breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> No breakfast |

About you and your trip today...

8. If you received this survey in one of Virginia's welcome centers, what were your reasons for stopping in a welcome center? (check all that apply)

- Restrooms
- To obtain a Virginia map
- To obtain brochures on Virginia attractions
- To ask welcome center staff questions
- To take a break from driving or picnic
- Able to park my tractor-trailer truck
- Other (please write in) _____

9. How often do you make trips of 200 miles or more (round trip) on the interstate?
_____ times per year

10. In what state do you live? _____

11. Are you traveling on business today? No Yes
[IF YES] Are you a professional truck driver? No Yes

12. Are you traveling today
with other adult(s) aged 18 or older? Yes No
with children 12 to 17 years old? Yes No
with children under age 12? Yes No

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP !

TO MAIL BACK YOUR SURVEY:

FOLD THE BACK OF THIS PAGE ON THE DOTTED LINES SO THE ADDRESS SHOWS. FASTEN WITH TAPE. POSTAGE IS PREPAID.

You can write any other comments you have about Virginia's information for travelers in the space below