

## Editorial

### **Transportation Commission opts to ignore our beautiful night skies**

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Not many places in this nation can claim to have the dark night skies and bright stars we have hanging over our heads. The Night Skies Protection Act ensured that when it was passed in 1999.

But the state Transportation Commission bowed to the wishes of big business last week by allowing electronic billboards along federal highways in New Mexico.

The commission did place some restrictions. For instance, the signs would have to be monitored by the businesses 24/7 and hooded to prevent light from glowing upright. They have to be 1,000 feet apart. And the signs can only be placed within the boundaries of municipalities.

This last requirement is where we hope our local leaders have more sense than the state Transportation Commission by prohibiting such signs along, say U.S. 64.

First, we don't buy the argument such signs are necessary to attract travelers to businesses. Tourists typically plan their trips ahead, using publications and the Internet to research interesting attractions.

(It's bad enough we still have printed billboards in Taos. Yes, no new ones can be installed but if people really want visitors to feel they are visiting a unique spot, they would voluntarily take them down.) The commission also doesn't appear concerned digital signs are a safety hazard. The purpose of such signs is to distract and attract drivers to stop at a business.

Drivers are already distracted texting and using cell phones despite local laws that prohibit their use. They certainly don't need another excuse to take their eyes off the road.

But we mourn the potential loss of dark skies — one of the reasons tourists come to New Mexico and why we treasure our state.

Even though these signs are supposed to be hooded that will not prevent all light from leaching upward. And frankly, who is going to enforce that digital signs meet those requirements?

We believe the state Transportation Commission was shortsighted in permitting digital signs. They will be blights on highways, and unfortunately our star-lit skies.