

New road signs may be hard on old eyes

New highway signs — with symbols instead of words — are coming in the U.S., but 18 million drivers over 65 may have difficulty seeing them.

So an Oakland University researcher is working on ways to make the signs more legible and help older drivers by testing for eye problems.

Highway signs and drivers over 65 were subjects of a recent colloquium at the National Academy of Sciences. OU psychologist Frank Schleber gave one of the invited papers. It was sponsored by the National Transportation Research Board.

"Basically, the government is interested in the graying of America, both on the highway and in the workplace," Schleber said. Among the difficulties for older drivers is that new signs will test their ability to see

gray on white, not just black on white.

SCHLEBER DELIVERED a paper on the new technologies in vision testing and collaborated on a paper for a meeting on work place safety productivity.

The researcher said the government is concerned for the elderly because it has decided to shift to symbolic highway signs, replacing written instructions.

The highway changes will require drivers to adjust to new vision stimuli. These signs must give drivers — both young and old — time to respond.

Schleber said vision testing varies from state to state, and the new technologies prove that these tests are "terribly inadequate and are not sensitive to the problems of vision and aging."

SCHLEBER SAID current tests measure only the ability to see black on white — not how we can see in the real world. He said several people who tested 20-40 on a driving test were in serious danger of hurting themselves or others when tested under the new procedures.

Within a decade, Schleber said, drivers no longer will look at letters but at stimuli that are striped patterns. A driver must be able to see grays on grays or grays on whites. Drivers also must be able to see under dim conditions, a common problem for older drivers.

The researcher says "these tests will be able to show us things like the need for cataract surgery and other problems. Many of these problems will be correctable once a driver knows they exist, or at least they will be problems a driver can com-

penate for, like lack of perception of motion.

"The goal is not to get people off the road but to improve the safety of people who are on the road."

RESEARCHERS are trying to help the transportation board come up with symbolic signs that will give added response time to a 70-year-old eye, the target viewing goals based on population figures.

Schleber reasons that, if the 70-year-old eye sees the sign in time to respond, the 20-year-old eye certainly will.

Previously, there were only 26 letters and 10 numbers, so it was hard to come up with a formula saying that a 70-year-old can see a sign of X dimensions at X number of feet.

But now, with pictorial and sym-

bolic signs, there are infinite combinations. The symbols may be too small, the distance too great, the stimulus too vague to comprehend, he said. "There are some poor symbolic signs on the road already," Schleber said.

Schleber has developed a computer-based model that may help designers generate signs that are well suited to the limitations of the older visual system.

SCHLEBER AND others are working on vision-testing devices that could be installed in Secretary of State Offices that will accomplish the desired tests in two minutes — a critical factor when the state is testing hundreds of thousands of drivers a year.

He has suggested to the transportation board that one key problem —

driving at night — could be lessened for older drivers if "illuminated corridors" could be created.

These would be major arteries leading to and from a shopping area or other essential route that would receive additional lighting. These areas could be coded on maps for drivers to recognize, Schleber says.

Schleber also consults with the American Association of Retired Persons and is on a National Institutes of Health study panel.

Schleber holds an undergraduate degree from St. Joseph College (Philadelphia) and master's and doctoral degrees in experimental psychology from the University of Notre Dame, with heavy emphasis on engineering and computer technology. Before coming to OU, he was in research and development for a computer company.

Workers turn militant in anti-union climate

AP — American unions are threatened by an anti-union climate and bad-faith bargaining on the part of many unionized businesses, United Auto Workers President Owen Bieber warned.

"There is . . . a real danger that the kinds of changes we need to see in terms of new roles and responsibilities for hourly workers will not in fact take place because union workers feel so threatened and put off by management's attitude and by the hostility they face in the larger society that they decide their only defense is traditional militant union-

ism," Bieber said.

In speeches to the third annual Michigan Governor's Labor-Management Conference, Bieber and Ford Motor Co. Chairman Donald Petersen agreed that worker involvement is critical in improving the quality of any company's products.

But they differed in their emphasis on the marketplace partnership.

WHILE PETERSEN lauded the cooperation among Ford, the UAW and workers that has helped turn the once-troubled company around, Bieber warned against company at-

tempts to "sideline unionism" and "chronic bad faith" on the part of unionized companies.

Bieber told the conference that "union-busting and union-avoidance strategies are still in the ascendant."

"It would be completely untrue and Pollyannaish to say that American manufacturers as a whole have adopted a fundamentally new attitude toward unions and union workers," said Bieber. He warned of a "sustained attack on the American trade union movement."

"I can assure you that de-unionization will not serve the cause of strengthening U.S. manufacturing

through worker participation," he said.

Bieber criticized large executive salaries, benefits and special privileges, while at the same time companies are "asking workers to make sacrifices and to entertain new ways of doing things."

"If nothing else, the Japanese-owned transplants in this country have provided an example of a more modest and constructive style of management compensation and conduct than our traditional U.S. managers are accustomed to," he said.

Bieber said he takes "some consolation

from the fact that corporations — at least some of them — are waking up to their responsibilities and waking up as well to the success enjoyed by competitors who do treat their workers properly and who do view trade unions as an ally in a competitive sense."

PETERSEN SAID Ford is a "clear example of how companies and unions can dramatically improve their relationships, and of the marvelous things that happen when they do."

Petersen said the company, which had a record \$1.5 billion in losses in

1980, reshaped its structure and relationship with the UAW. "Today, the company is healthier than it has ever been, and so is the state of our labor-management relations," he said.

"Corporate success and good employee relations indeed go hand-in-hand," he said.

"Where there was confrontation and mistrust, there is candor and honesty and cooperation on matters of mutual concern. Now, we have been able to recognize in so many ways that we are all playing on the same team, rather than wasting our time arguing about who will carry the ball."

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