# Appendix E: Signage & Wayfinding

## SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING

Major arterial systems and retail corridors, in particular, must provide effective signage and wayfinding systems for motorists and visitors in order to encourage commerce and highlight community destinations and key features. The Manchester Road Great Streets project carefully examined the current conditions for signage and wayfinding along and near the corridor, and the Summary Document provides a number of recommendations for the five communities to implement in the future.

### Existing Conditions: Observations

Clutter and Visual Noise: Along many stretches of the Manchester Road corridor, the significant number of signs fronting the street can cause confusion and create a virtual “blur” of too much information. At prevailing speeds of 40 mph and greater, drivers often have trouble locating the names of individual businesses and may become disoriented. Vital directional, regulatory and informational signs may get overlooked in the sea of sign clutter.

Too many tenant names on one sign: In some cases, the presence of too many tenant names on a single sign for a shopping center can actually reduce the effectiveness of the signage—the opposite of the intent of the functionality for such signs. Note: the industry standard for the quantity of tenants per sign is four, based on speed of travel and amount of time possible to view the sign.

*CLUTTER & VISUAL NOISE: An example of the layering of excessive signage in the streetscape along Manchester Road.*

***Quality of Signs:*** The use of low quality materials and fabrication techniques is also apparent in specific areas along the corridor, resulting in a negative perception for these segments. Strategies to improve the overall quality of signage in terms of design, materials and overall visual quality would improve retail viability.

***Gateways:*** The recently completed bridge along Route 141 over Manchester Road helps provide a more effective gateway to the historic portion of the City of Manchester and the other communities to the west and creates a strong sense of arrival to the corridor. On the contrary, no other gateways exist from major entry points like Baxter, Clarkson Road and the west end of the study area at Highway 109.

***Community Wayfinding:*** The lack of awareness of and sufficient wayfinding systems for civic amenities and destinations is apparent to those visiting the corridor study area. Signage along Manchester Road does not clearly identify most parks, notable historic sites, and other destinations. Building Addresses: Currently the regional Fire Protection entities require a four inch height and contrasting colors for address numbers on buildings along the corridor. However, there is significant

variety in how addresses are currently displayed throughout the corridor. Furthermore, city officials along Manchester Road tend to prioritize other violations over address compliance in their annual fire code inspections. In some cases the commercial buildings are set so far back from the street that address numbers appear illegible to drivers and passersby. However, monument signs at select locations along the street include addresses or address ranges that significantly help visitors in locating desired destinations. Many cross street and Manchester Road Street Identification Signs are too small for the speed of travel and too small to provide sufficient decision-making time for drivers.

### Overview of Existing Challenges

- The presence of too many signs along the corridor creates confusion for drivers.
- Inconsistencies in commercial sign codes between the five cities creates confusion for business owners and developers.
- Aging and lower quality signs detract from retail viability and the overall perception of the corridor.
- Poor quality signage detracts from the overall quality of the streetscape along Manchester Road.
- The city limits between different communities are currently hard to decipher. Drivers may be uncertain of their actual location (in Manchester, versus Ballwin, etc.). Certain communities along the corridor have entrance signs along Manchester Road, but they are generally under-scaled.
- Addresses for businesses (street numbers) are hard to find, and are often under-scaled or not visible at all.
- In some locations, cars, plants and foliage are blocking signs from view.

### Overview of Opportunities for Improvement

- Community Wayfinding signs can help draw attention to and provide awareness of the locations of key amenities in the five communities such as parks, civic buildings, and cultural destinations as well as enhance civic pride. Currently certain civic destinations are identified with individual standard brown State Highway signs. These signs for individual destinations could be consolidated onto new, higher quality signs that include a maximum of four messages.
- Augmenting Manchester Road Street signs with address range information would help visitors to the corridor find their way.
- Adding address markers at each “block” where the 100 numbers change (15000, 15100, etc.) would also help visitors find their way.
- Specific recommendations for updates to sign codes would assist in providing for better quality signs, reduced confusion and more effective guidelines for future development.

### Corridor Branding and Identity

A brand is not exclusively a logo or a name. Instead it is the broader accumulation of impressions in the mind of an individual. Branding is the process of building a clear, positive recognition and understanding in order to build the brand.

While the five cities that make up the Manchester Road corridor study area may not be in the business of branding the corridor study area, there are specific actions that can be implemented to enhance the corridor’s identity, brand and perception. Implementation of Community Wayfinding provides the best platform for creating an enhanced Community and Corridor identity.

The following paragraphs on Community Wayfinding, Commercial Address Wayfinding and Commercial Sign Code conclude with clear recommendations intended to improve the corridor’s visual perception, functionality and accessibility.

## Community Wayfinding

Hundreds of cities in the United States are developing or have implemented Community Wayfinding programs for their downtowns and highway corridors. Not only are these programs vital for tourism, they also provide a sense of civic distinctiveness and community pride. While there are no specific statistics available concerning their benefits, wayfinding signs are an undeniable aid in increasing awareness of cultural and civic destinations, such as historic sites, and buildings and parks. For Manchester Road, effective Community Wayfinding, including the use of distinctive logos and colors, could also help to differentiate the five cities.

In the past it has been a challenge on some State Highways to implement wayfinding programs. However, in 2009, the U.S. Department of Transportation updated the MUTCD (Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices), including a section of guidelines for Community Wayfinding on State Highways. While States have two years to adopt the new guidelines, MoDOT has agreed that an enhanced Community Wayfinding program would be acceptable for the Manchester Road corridor.

Corbin Design recently designed a new wayfinding program for Downtown St. Louis. MoDOT suggested that the consultant team explore incorporating a similar design for Manchester Road that would help to promote consistency in community wayfinding across the region.

During the February 2010 public meetings, 63 percent of respondents preferred implementing a consistent corridor design for Community Wayfinding while 36 percent preferred a program tailored for each city. Based on the public polling results, the Design Workshop team created the following criteria to guide the development of improved community wayfinding for Manchester Road:

- The St. Louis Arch symbol is not an appropriate image for the West County corridor.
- Signs for Manchester Road should be customized with City logos.
- Signage and wayfinding should utilize an overall color scheme appropriate for the corridor. The color red should not be considered since it conflicts with Stop signs.
- The wayfinding program for downtown St. Louis employs construction methods that would be too costly for a corridor of significant length such as Manchester Road.

## Recommendation

Plans for the Manchester Road corridor should implement new wayfinding signs in the near term (the next few years) and can utilize relatively affordable construction methods.
Note: Although MoDOT has conceptually approved the design and implementation of a Community Wayfinding system for Manchester Road, each city will assume all liability and maintenance for the signage. The cities will need to coordinate with MoDOT in determining final locations for signs along the corridor.

*GATEWAYS: The recently completed bridge along Route 141 over Manchester Road.*

*WAYFINDING: Examples of standard brown State Highway destination signs.*

## Commercial Address Wayfinding

Based on questions presented at the February public meetings, 22 percent of respondents indicated that they use building addresses as the most common way to navigate Manchester Road. A total of 43 percent use the commercial monument, multi-tenant and storefront signs. However, a significant proportion indicated that the addition of freestanding address signs that demarcate the upcoming range of address numbers (example: 15000-15900) would help them find their destination. Furthermore, 90 percent said adding the street address number to the Manchester Road street identification signs would also help them find their destinations.

## Recommendations

- Improve the visibility of street addresses to improve the ability of businesses to attract customers and ease navigation.
- Add freestanding address range markers to block corners.
- Replace Street Identification signs with new larger signs (6” cap height minimum for the street name) and add address range numbering to these signs.

*BUILDING ADDRESSES: An example of commercial tenant building address on Manchester Road.*

*UNDERSCALED STREET SIGNS: An example of the cross street signs that are hard to read along Manchester Road.*

## Commercial Sign Code

During the February public meetings, half of the participants preferred more consistent and improved commercial signage for the corridor. Some of the cities along the corridor, such as Ellisville and Wildwood, periodically enhance their sign codes to improve the suggested quality of materials for commercial signs and have completed efforts in the past to improve their sign codes. Wildwood has developed an image-based guide (dated March 30, 2009) for their Sign Code. Providing specific visual examples, in addition to the code language, makes it easier for commercial tenants to implement signs that are best for their particular location and does not require numerous review cycles to adhere to the code. Sign types included in the revised Wildwood regulations include Wall Signs (Storefront), Window Signs, Sandwich Board Signs, Arm and Post Signs (for more rural areas in Wildwood only), Major and Minor Projecting Blade Signs, Awning Signs and Temporary Banners.

In response to the public polling, Design Workshop researched existing Model Sign Codes from around the country to determine if a singular and consistent code would be appropriate for the entire Manchester Road corridor and each of the five municipalities. The cities may use specific aspects of the model sign code document in providing guidance for the redevelopment of key areas along the corridor such as town center districts. Wildwood is the only city along the corridor that has specific signage guidelines for town center areas and the other four municipalities could leverage the model sign code and Wildwood's code to create guidance for town centers in their own communities.

## Recommendations

Requiring higher quality design and materials and keeping sign codes up-to-date is essential to improving perceptions of the corridor.

Using the Wildwood image-based guide as an example of signage required in future Town Centers, the other communities should augment their existing codes to include such regulations (with the exception of Winchester, an area that does not anticipate the creation of town centers going forward). Furthermore, the consultant team recommends the use of image-based examples for the sign code.

*The example shown above is the proposed St. Louis Regional Wayfinding System created by Corbin Design. Installation is pending.*

*Wayfinding for Charlotte's "Uptown North" by TwoTwelve Associated, installed in 2009.*

*The example shown is the Glenwood Springs, Colorado Wayfinding System installed February 2010. Designed by Design Workshop.*

*The example shown above is the installed "L.A. Downtown Walks" Wayfinding System installed in 2005 in Los Angeles. Designed by Hunt Design and Corbin Design.*