



From the Director's Desk

Is Not Funny Safer?



Investigative reporting lives!

Recently, a gumshoe reporter from the Wall Street Journal scoured the Federal Highway Administration's 1100-plus page Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices released in December of 2022 and discovered on page 519 unsettling guidance to state officials who program Variable Message Boards (VMB). Traffic Manual to VMB programmers – no more jokes.

Apparently, seeing and attempting to process signage can be dangerous, especially if you don't get the joke. According to the WSJ, "[Feds to Highway Signs: You Have Two Years to Stop Being Funny](#)" the risk is that VMB humor "might be misunderstood or understood by only a limited segment of road users" and can cause people to pull over to take photos. Oh my!

This is a significant blow to public Dad Jokes and a hallmark of misguided bureaucratic risk assessment. Laughing ourselves to crash is not a problem on our roads today. Data indicates our problem is our unconsciously aggressive selves and unhinged behavior in shared spaces like highways. Today, Drivers are more aggressive and less inhibited than before March 2020. Traffic fatalities have spiked since COVID. This past week in the New York Times Magazine, William Laurance opined on this boomerang problem of vehicle safety in the recent trend in vehicular aggression, reversing decades of highway safety progress. From Ralph Nader in the 1970s (seatbelts, airbags, and helmets) and laws forcing safer vehicle design (airbags, ABS brakes, now road sensing technology), Americans enjoyed decades of downward trending highway deaths and more sober drivers. All that is in the rearview mirror now as we've become uninhibited, inattentive, angry drivers.

Messages like "Fasten Your Seat Belts" or "Accident Ahead, Stay Left" can easily blend into the background. Kitchy VMB humor is intended to draw a driver's attention—wake their senses, perhaps surprise, and delight in disarming one's instincts against compliance. How better to soften serious advice than with some Fred Flinstonian jokes from the big bad government? Lettering on the large VMB black box signs channel a distinctly 1980s-era alarm clock vibe, clearly not to be mistaken for high-resolution jumbotron billboards one sees screaming in bright, flashy lights. If humor were driving us to distraction, indeed, we should also ban cheeky (and these days primarily creepy) bumper stickers, human sign spinners, and dancing tube things.

Only a humorless bureaucrat at FHA would bother to unearth scientific evidence that VMB messaging "might be misunderstood." When critics speak of bureaucrats in "the deep state," those unelected administrators acting without direct authorization from Congress or some Dictate from the President-- this is what

is actually occurring: well-intentioned, perhaps data-driven, boring rulemaking that doesn't make sense.

Threatening to withhold federal funding over federal highway policy is no joke. States that ignore federal laws can be punished. As the Atlantic reported in [“Four Times the Government Held Highway Funding Hostage,”](#) federal edicts enforced uniform adoption of 21 as the national drinking age in 1984, and 1975 mandated motorcycle helmets. During the 1974 Oil Embargo, Interstate speeds were limited to 55 MPH to save energy and lives.



Then, in 1995, speed limits and the helmet law were repealed under President Clinton—who enjoyed traveling by the seat of his pants. That is when Montana famously removed numeric speed limits instructing drivers to be “reasonable and prudent” (until citizens sued). Those safety laws and regulations had significant data behind their reasonableness and lack of humor. This one, not so much.

The WSJ article notes a 2022 New Jersey campaign that flashed “Hold on to your butts, help prevent Forest Fires,” as well as “Slow Down! This ain't Thunder Road,” which were so popular drivers (mostly Dads who couldn't take a cell phone photo quickly enough from behind the wheel) were pulling over to take pictures. Don't worry, bureaucrats; today's drivers are already watching funny Tic Toc videos and tweeting on X.

Are we really worried about those few drivers who are actually paying attention to signage when they are driving?

There is a lot of freaky messaging to take in while driving these days. We need more humor, not less. As ominous as many vehicles' messaging has gotten – AR 15 silhouettes, desecrated dystopian black flags, and an infinite proliferation of skull images, doesn't it seem like we could use more “Dog is my Co-Pilot” or “Dick Cheney Wears Jeans” type humor from public VMB?

State governors, starting with our own in Colorado, should stand up and protest this edict. Please! Make a lot of terrible jokes doing it. Levity is a salve for these times. In this coming election year of 2024, I can safely predict that we will need MORE, not LESS, shared humor to survive our far-too-serious selves on and off the roads.

Free the VMB.

Jon Stavney

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Area Agency on Aging Caucus

On January 18th,
many of the



state's sixteen Area Agencies on Aging descended upon the Colorado Capitol to host 2024's first Aging Caucus and meet with legislators to advocate for older adults and caregivers.

Hosting this legislative

session's first Aging Caucus required an extra early get-up, but the Capitol looked lovely and imposing in the crisp winter air.

The meeting was held in a packed room, and over 60 individuals joined via Zoom. Several Area Agency on Aging Directors spoke about the needs of older adults and funding gaps. Senator Ginal and Representative Young lead the Caucus, and Senator Danielson spoke passionately about supporting older Coloradans through her bill, [SB24-040](#), which would provide \$5M for the AAAs, adjust for inflation annually, and require review of the adequacy of the appropriation every three years.

If you missed the first Aging Caucus, there are three more in February, March, and April that you can join in person or virtually. [You can find out more here](#)

*By: Erin Fisher, Director Vintage
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4th from left, front row standing*

NWCCOG IN THE NEWS

The 2023 Workforce Housing Report has been getting a lot of press. Here is a sample of some of the news articles on the report:

HighCountryNews



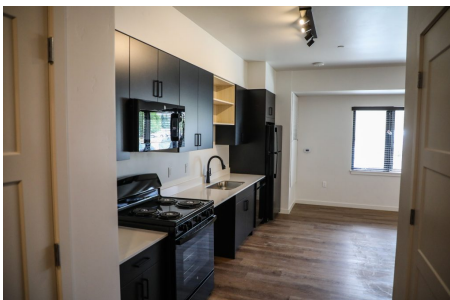
Mountain towns are trying all sorts of solutions to the housing crisis.

Mountain Towns are trying all sorts of solutions to the housing crisis – New Report details how high-altitude communities are battling ballooning housing costs.

Cross the West, desirable communities high in the mountains are bound. Well-to-do people can afford to buy property, but where is everyone else supposed to live — especially the seasonal and low-income workers who provide the goods and services that those well-to-do homeowners want?

[Read High Country News Article](#)

VailDaily



New housing efforts in Eagle County still leave large gaps for locals

Here's the good news: There's been a lot of progress since 2019 on workforce housing in Colorado's mountain communities. Here's the bad news: We're still falling behind.

The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments and the Colorado Association of Ski Towns, along with the U.S. Economic Development Administration, recently [released a report](#) on the status of workforce housing throughout the region.

[Read Vail Daily Article](#)



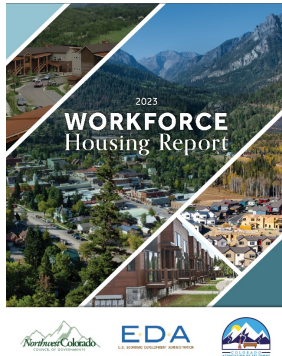
More than two-thirds of Aspen's occupied homes are deed-restricted

Seventy percent of the full-time occupied units in Aspen are deed-restricted – the second-highest rate among 38 rural and resort communities in Colorado and five out-of-state ski towns inventoried in a recent survey.

The [2023 Workforce Housing Report](#) from the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) and the Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST) was released Nov. 3 and shows a wide range of policies and outcomes among the 43 jurisdictions inventoried, which include 36 cities or towns and seven counties.

[Read Aspen Times Article](#)

Gunnison Country TIMES



Resort towns lean into affordable housing with new vigor

A recent report shows that since 2020, the Mountain West has been aggressively pushing for the policies and legislation it needs to address the worsening affordable housing crisis. Its writers believe Colorado resort towns, including Gunnison and Crested Butte, have made remarkable headway as middle class residents fight to stay in their communities.

This past November, the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments and the Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST) released a regional workforce housing report — a thorough overview of affordable housing projects underway in more than 40 rural resort communities.

[Read Gunnison Times Article](#)

Upcoming Board Meetings

Thursday, January 25, 2024: Full Council, EDD Board & NLF Board Meeting

Location: Zoom Conference Call, On-Site Location Silverthorne

Time: Council 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., EDD Board 12:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Primary Agenda Items: Introduction of new members/representatives; annual NLF Board meeting, approve January 2023 NLF Minutes; approve December meeting minutes, preliminary 2023 Financials, elect CHP representative; EDD Board meeting

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