

# **Class 4f ~ Gateway Signs**

## **Background**

The function of this sign type is to welcome visitors to specific towns or cities and to reflect something of the character and attractions of each town. It should be one of the most important elements in each and every town or city's gateway zone which are normally classified as an urban area of maximum control.

### **Urban Gateways – Areas of Maximum Control**

The gateway or entrance to any town or city plays a crucial role by creating first impressions and by attracting or repelling the potential visitor psychologically. It may be seen as an important mechanism to convince the traveller to spend some time and money at that specific locality.

Urban gateways therefore need to be attractive landscaped areas with appealing signs welcoming visitors. For this reason it should normally be zoned an area of maximum control in accordance with SAMOAC's guidelines on [areas of control](#). In most cases exactly the opposite is established, namely urban gateways consisting of untidy areas overgrown by weeds, crowded by advertisements with a dilapidated sponsored gateway sign trying its utmost to welcome the visitor while at the same time trying to convince him of the merits of the one or other commercial product.

It is quite ironic that in most cases almost every owner of an enterprise in town will be trying his utmost best to convince visitors of his sole existence by means of a bigger, brighter or better sign at the entrance of the town. In meantime the visual blight resulting from this proliferation of signs will actually be discouraging visitors from visiting any enterprise at all. Even if a local authority succeeds in erecting an attractive gateway sign it may not be noticed by anybody since it will normally be obscured by masses of other signs and advertisements. Untidy entrances, with masses of dilapidated signs, create impressions of bedraggled towns and depressing places with nothing worthwhile to offer the visitor.

### **No Commercial Advertising**

Very often the need for gateway signs is exploited due to this sign type's optimal location at the entrances of towns. Many less affluent communities have been duped by sponsors into displaying a welcome sign which are actually nothing more than an advertising sign promoting commercial products or services. All gateway signs should be free of any commercial advertising. If insufficient funds are available for erecting a decent gateway sign a sponsorship may be obtained for such a sign by providing the prospective sponsor with an advertising opportunity somewhere else in town.

## Basic Design Principles

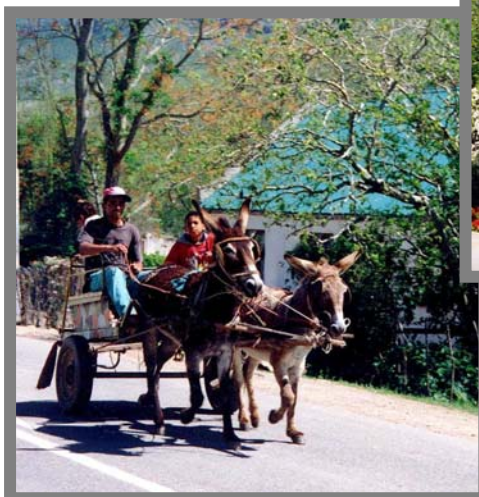
By creating first impressions gateway signs have all the potential to contribute to local sense of place. This potential must be utilised to its fullest by reflecting something of local culture, history or attractions or something of the natural environment. Over-elaborated signs, both in terms of sign contents and structure, should be avoided. Simplicity and visual appeal may be obtained by using natural materials and subdued colours and by displaying gateway signs in uncrowded environments. It may be enhanced even further by means of landscaping.

### Town Names & the Southern African Road Traffic Signs System

The SADC Road Traffic Signs Manual also makes provision for signs indicating the names of towns and cities as part of the Southern African Road Traffic Signs System (SADC RTSM, Vol. 1, par. 4.6.6, page 4.6.7). These signs have quite a neat appearance. However, it seems as if it is not often favoured by local authorities. This might be due to a preference for more 'elaborate' signs reflecting something of the nature of the town or due to a lot of sponsored signs being passed off on uninformed local communities.

### Unsolved Issue

Signs announcing the traveller's entrance to a specific province do not always have the visual appeal it should have. Can it play a role in contributing to the sense of place of a specific province? What about signs indicating geographical features or regions? Should it be included in this class or should we suffice with the provision made for such signs in the SADC Road Traffic Signs Manual? (See SADC RTSM, Vol. 1, par. 4.6.8 – 4.6.9, page 4.6.8).



**Welcome to the joys of Coke drinking and Suurbraak – a small village near Swellendam in the Western Cape with a unique character and a huge tourism potential. This village actually deserves a much better and more attractive sign which could have been provided for by the sponsor for the right to advertise his product at the point of sale in Suurbraak.**



A cellphone advertisement welcoming the visitor at the entrance to Beaufort West (left). In spite of its commercial wrapping, this 'friendly' sign is putting up a brave appearance amongst crowds of other commercial signs (bottom), which conspires together to destroy the visitor's appreciation of everything beautiful or enjoyable that might be offered by this town.



A very striking marble gateway sign at Parys, Free State Province, reflecting something of the town's stonemasonry history (above). Unfortunately, this sign's contribution to local sense of place is neutralised by a proliferation of signs at the entrance to the town (right).



A tourism information sign may be found among the proliferation of commercial signs directing the visitor to a tourism information centre 3,7km down the road (right). This is quite an irony – all the information the tourist needs has already been provided at the entrance of the town by this clutter of signs and there should really be no need for any more information further down the road.

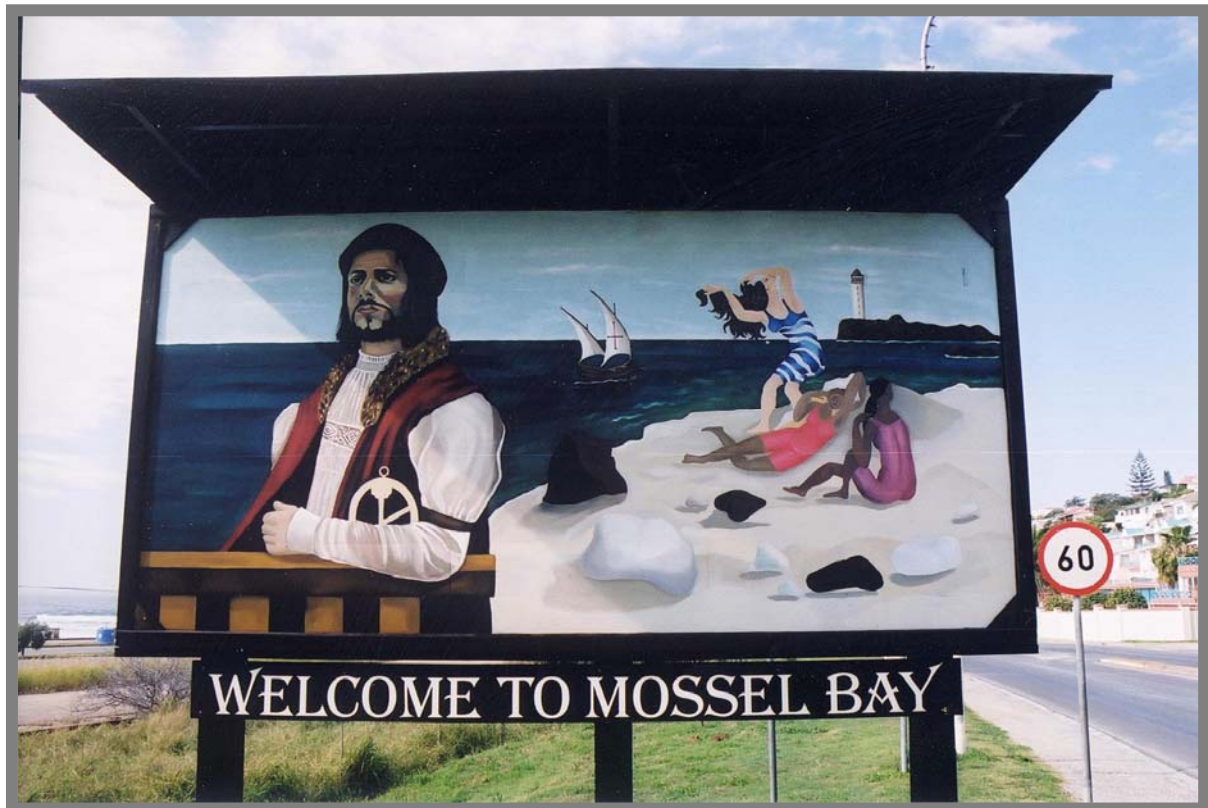


Bothaville in the Free State Province – gateway signs creating a sense of neglect and dilapidation. The previous sign, erected during Bothaville’s centenary in 1991, has become shabby and was supplemented by a sponsored sign. A third sign, advertising a town festival, contributes even further to the general sense of shabbiness.



All is not negative. A very unique and attractive sign welcoming the visitor to St Goar, Germany – reflecting something of local tradition and character (right).

Mossel Bay in the Western Cape. This attractive sign reflects something of the towns history and attractions and contributes to local sense of place.



Compiled by Frans Jordaan