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Date: 2-13-19
 Submitted in Tran Committee
 Council File No: 19-0104
 Item No.: 11
 Deputy: CD3

OPINION

Setting the record straight, why digital mobile billboards must go



A taxi driver smokes a cigarette in his cab while waiting to pick up a fare in downtown Los Angeles, Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2011.

By **BOB BLUMENFIELD** |

PUBLISHED: February 13, 2019 at 8:00 am | UPDATED: February 13, 2019 at 8:00 am

Re: A proposal to ban rooftop advertising will harm L.A.'s taxi drivers

They are already illegal. In November 2018, the City Attorney's Office formally told Firefly that installation and operation of its DMS devices in the City is illegal under State and City law. Disregarding that admonishment, Firefly continues to place its DMS devices on rideshare vehicles operating in the City. State law authorizes vehicle digital advertising in only one setting: a pilot program on buses operated by the Antelope Valley Transit Authority, City of Santa Monica, and University of California Irvine. At the time the Legislature authorized the pilot program, it stated its intent to study and identify any adverse impacts on pedestrians and drivers resulting from the use of illuminated signs on the exterior of moving buses.

Industry lobbyists are pretending that we are banning mobile billboards out of the blue- this isn't true. I know because when I served in the State Assembly I wrote the State law that allowed local governments' to ban or regulate mobile billboards. The LA City Council then approved two local ordinances regulating It is wrong to use and abuse the public right of way for private advertising. mobile billboards that were the subject of first amendment litigation. The courts ruled for the City and against the blight merchants stating that the "advertising displays prohibited by the mobile billboard regulations detract from the cities' overall appearance; the outright ban directly serves this stated interest."

As I know all too well from my, almost decade long, fight with mobile billboard companies, they will go to great lengths to profit at the expense of the public. They will find any nook and cranny in our community to display ads, including in traffic on congested intersections, outside parks, schools and any place people might be gathering. It is no accident that public parks, schools, and neighborhood streets are not locations where traditional billboard companies can legally advertise; it defies all logic that we would open up these areas for new billboards simply because they are mobile.

If we don't formally prohibit them now, they will spread like the virus that they are. Nobody, whether you are a ride share driver or not, should profit by using the public right of way to spread blight and endanger others. This is about enhancing public safety, enforcing established law, preventing blight and making sure that companies aren't abusing our public space.

Bob Blumenfield represents the 3rd council district on the Los Angeles City Council