

# **Federal Aid Urban Boundaries And** **Functional Classification**

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

Fred P. Patron  
Federal Highway Administration  
Oregon Division

### **1. Question:**

**What determines urban/rural for federally funded projects? MPO planning boundary, Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) or Federal-Aid Urban Boundary (FAUB)?**

*Answer:*

*The Federal-Aid Urban Boundary. Roadways inside the FAUB have urban classifications while those outside the FAUB have rural classifications.*

### **2. Question:**

**It is our understanding that the Federal Functional Classification is used to determine design standards on federally-funded projects even if the local community calls the road something else in their Transportation System Plan (TSP). Is this correct?**

*Answer:*

*Yes, however our expectation is that consistency will be maintained between the functions of roadways shown in local TSPs and the approved federal functional classifications. If the desired function changes in the TSP, ODOT and FHWA should be asked to approve corresponding changes to the federal functional classification as part of the TSP update. Keeping the two consistent will help reduce conflicts in the selection of design standards for federal-aid projects.*

**3. Question:**

**If a federally funded project is inside the Metropolitan Planning Organization boundary but outside Urban Growth Boundary and/or the Federal-Aid Urban Boundary. Do urban design standards apply to the project or can rural design standards be used?**

*Answer:*

*Urban design standards would typically apply inside the FAUB. Conversely, rural standards would typically apply outside. However, FHWA, ODOT and/or local agency staff, as appropriate would decide the design standards used on a case-by-case basis.*

**4. Question:**

**Does FHWA approve the design standards used for all Federal-aid projects?**

*Answer:*

*No*

*FHWA requires the use of AASHTO design standards (or greater) only on National Highway System (NHS) projects.*

*FHWA does not have an approval role for design standards used on non-NHS projects (ODOT approved design standards are used on non-NHS projects).*

**5. Question:**

**What design standards does ODOT require for non-NHS routes?**

*Answer:*

*Currently, ODOT requires the use of AASHTO design standards for non-NHS new and reconstruction projects on routes under local jurisdiction.*

*ODOT standards are specified on non-NHS new and reconstruction projects on routes under ODOT jurisdiction.*

*3-R design standards are required for non-NHS 3-R projects.*

*ODOT can approve other design standards for use on non-NHS projects if warranted.*

**6. Question:**

**Are design standards rigid?**

*Answer:*

*No.*

*Case-by-case design exceptions are allowed on all NHS and non-NHS projects if properly justified and documented.*

**7. Question:**

**Are there financial incentives or penalties for a rural city (under 5,000 pop.) to merge with an adjacent small urban city (5,000 to 49,999 pop.) and form one urban area?**

*Answer:*

*There are no significant financial incentives or penalties. Boundaries should be fixed to “smooth” out irregularities, maintain administrative continuity of peripheral routes, and encompass fringe areas having residential, commercial, industrial, and/or national defense significance.*

**8. Question:**

**Can two adjacent rural areas merge their boundaries and become a small urban area if their combined population is 5,000 or greater?**

*Answer:*

*No. Census data determines when an area’s population is sufficient to qualify as “urban”. Urban boundaries can be “smoothed” to better reflect corporate boundaries, terrain, special traffic generators, etc. They can not be adjusted in order to change the area’s designation from rural to urban.*

**9. Question:**

**What does “smoothing” mean?**

*Answer:*

*“Smoothing” is a way of expanding census defined boundaries to better reflect local conditions. In addition to reflecting corporate boundaries, terrain, and special traffic generators, boundary locations should be selected to include logical transportation control points such as interchanges and major cross roads. Also, boundaries should include airports and seaports if they lie within a reasonable distance of the Census boundary and must include the entire area defined by the census.*

**10. Question:**

**Does Functional Classification affect federal funding on individual roads?**

*Answer:*

*Most FHWA funds can be used on any functionally classified roadway except “local roads” and “rural minor collectors”.*

*FHWA’s bridge program covers bridge replacement or rehabilitation on any functionally classified public roadway.*

*Functional classification played a key role in defining the National Highway System which is made up primarily of “principal arterial” routes.*

**11. Question:**

**Does this functional classification system cover only the existing facilities, or does it also apply to planned facilities and the like?**

*Answer:*

*While functional classification applies to both existing and planned facilities, the focus should be on the existing system and near-term improvements. There may be situations where adding a new facility might change the function (and the classification) of existing roadways.*

**12. Question:**

**FHWA has told us that rural/urban boundaries should be on one side of the road or the other, not down the middle. Does this also mean that the same design standards must be used on both sides?**

*Answer:*

*Yes, the same design standards should be used on both sides of a road. We cannot envision a situation where different roadway designs would be used. Appurtenances (e.g., sidewalks, landscaping) might be different.*

**13. Question:**

**From a local perspective, what is the incentive to review and update the FAUB and FC?**

*Answer:*

*Eligibility for most FHWA roadway and bridge funding is based on the federal FC. Federal FC defines which roadways are eligible for FHWA’s Emergency Relief Program vs. FEMA assistance.*

*Design standards for FHWA funded roadways are based, in part, on the federal FC.*

**14. Question:**  
**What pitfalls should a local agency watch out for?**

*Answer:*

*Keep the focus on how a given roadway is intended to function.*

*Don't forget about how road segments fit into the local system and interface with roads in adjacent communities.*

*Remember that the higher FC routes make up a small percentage of total roadway mileage but carry the bulk of VMT.*

**15. Question:**  
**The 1990 Federal Aid Urban Boundary is in some cases larger than the 2000 Census boundary and the UGB. Can an Urban Area opt to match the 1990 boundary without having a specific reason or justification?**

*Answer:*

*Yes, however the FAUB should reflect the Census boundary expanded and smoothed to include features such as entire city limits, the UGB, large traffic generators, etc.*

*Therefore, it is recommended that the 1990 FAUB be adjusted if conditions have substantially changed since the last boundary update.*

**16. Question:**  
**Can FAUB updates be made between Census years? For example, if a UGB is updated, could an urban area request to make corresponding changes in the FAUB?**

*Answer:*

*Yes. However, there were no FAUB changes requested between the 1990 and 2000 Census. Because the Census boundary is updated on a 10-year cycle and the FAUB is adjusted after each Census, it is not anticipated that more frequent adjustments would be warranted.*

**17. Question:**  
**Can FC updates be made between Census years?**

*Answer:*

*Yes. It is highly recommended that federal FC updates be considered as part of local Transportation System Plan updates and other planning studies in order to maintain consistency.*