

Policy briefs call attention to important statewide policy considerations, relationships, and guidance for use by planners, engineers, implementers and community members.



Route Designations and Classifications

This policy brief helps people understand the purpose and specifics of route designations and classifications, how they relate across statewide plans, and how those designations work together to shape planning, design, maintenance, and funding prioritization of transportation projects.

The policy framework for route designations and classifications

Roadway classifications and designations are categorizations given to a roadway by the federal, state, or local government to help delineate differences in roadway purpose and design. There are a variety of Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) roadway classifications and designations in different statewide plans. ODOT classifies roadways in order to group them according to the type of service intended, function and/or the amount of vehicle traffic the facility is designed to carry. Designations are more reflective of roadway function than motor vehicle volume. A corridor can have many different roadway classifications or designations to capture its range of purposes.

The Oregon Highway Plan classifies the state highway system into four categories to provide direction for the management of and investment in the highway system. For example, I-5 is classified as an interstate because it provides travel between the west coast states. Highway 101, which connects coastal communities along the Pacific Ocean, is an example of a state highway. In comparison, 99W running west of Salem is a regional highway. District highways are often spurs from regional or state highways to serve a smaller community such as District Highway 206 serving Harney County.

Designations further reflect transportation goals, and help implement other policies in statewide plans. Statewide plans define and identify characteristics of different designations and classifications which may be adopted at a later time. For example, the Highway Plan denotes statewide highways that link major economic and geographic centers as the “Access Oregon Highway System.” Specific highway segments may be given this designation through adoption of a plan amendment. Similarly, the Oregon Highway Plan also designates a system of freight routes, which can include roadways that are classified as state and interstate highways. New routes may be added through plan amendments if they fit the criteria laid out in the Highway Plan.

Oregon Highway Plan Action 1A.1 calls for decision makers to use the following categories of state highways, and the list in Appendix D: Highway Classification by Milepoint, to guide planning, management, and investment decisions regarding the state highway facilities:

- Interstate Highways (NHS)
- State Highways (NHS)
- Regional Highways
- District Highways

What is the National Highway System (NHS)?

The NHS is a network of highways within the United States, including the Interstate Highway System and serving strategic economic, defense and transportation facilities such as airports, ports, rail or truck terminals, railway stations, and pipeline terminals. The NHS was designated by Congress in 1995 and the federal government encourages states to focus federal highway funding on maintaining the NHS network in a state of good repair.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has its own federal functional classification that overlaps with, but does not necessarily match Oregon’s state classification system. Federal functional classifications describe how a road operates today. Table 1 illustrates the differences and overlap between the two systems.

What are the different classifications and designations on Oregon roadways?

Oregon Roadway Classifications

ODOT developed the State Classification System to act as a long-range planning tool that recognizes the future desired function of the roadway. Considerations for classifications include speed, throughput, and roadway function (e.g. local versus regional connections). Federal functional classifications describe how a road operates today, and may differ from the state classifications.¹ Table 1 illustrates the overlap between the federal and state classification systems. ODOT also provides an index of all Oregon State Highways and their corresponding FHWA functional classification within the Highway Design Manual [Appendix A Functional Classification](#).

Table 1 Oregon Classification System

State Classification System (SCS)	Description	Corresponding FHWA Functional Classification
Interstate Highways	Provide connections to major cities, regions or other states; regional trips within metro areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urban or Rural Interstate
Statewide Highways	Provide connection to larger urban areas, ports and recreational areas that are not directly served by interstate highways	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Principal Arterial – Other• Urban Principal Arterial – Other Freeway Expressway• Urban or Rural Other Principal Arterial
Regional Highways	Provide links to regional centers, statewide or interstate highways or economic or activity centers of regional significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urban or Rural Minor Arterial
District Highways	Facilities of county-wide significance function largely as county and city Arterials or Collectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urban or Rural Minor Arterial• Urban or Rural Major Collector• Rural Minor Collector

The National Highway System (NHS) represents a federal designation of roadways across and inclusive of differing functional classifications. The NHS includes the interstate highway system, principal arterials that connect to major ports, airports or other intermodal facilities, and the Strategic Highway Network – highways important to national defense, and intermodal connectors which can be state highways connecting major intermodal facilities. A full map of the NHS is available on the [FHWA website](#).

Oregon Roadway Designations

ODOT has a set of roadway designations to reflect different key characteristics on roadway corridors. Although all ODOT roadways have a classification, only some receive additional designations. The Oregon Transportation Commission approves designations. Designations may change the applicable ODOT design standards, mobility standards or access management standards for the designated roadway segment.

¹ Department of Transportation, Guidelines for Updating Federal Aid Urban Boundaries and Functional Classification, July 2003
<https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Data/Pages/Functional-Class.aspx>

Table 2 Oregon Roadway Designations

Designation	Description	Links to Additional Information
Freight Routes	Routes are designated under the Oregon Freight Plan if annual truck tonnages are moderate to high and if they provide connectivity to significant freight generating areas of Oregon. The designation of a freight route has implications for roadway design and mobility standards, and may override exceptions granted from other designations such as a Special Transportation Area.	Oregon State Highway Freight System
Special Transportation Areas (STA)	A designated district located on a state highway within an urban growth boundary, in which the need for appropriate local access often outweighs the considerations of highway mobility.	Guidance on Special Transportation Areas, Urban Business Areas, and Commercial Centers
Urban Business Area (UBA)	A highway segment designation that may be applied to existing areas of commercial activity or future nodes or various types of centers of commercial activity.	
Commercial Centers (CC)	Large, regional centers or nodes with limited access to the state highway. Commercial Centers include a high level of regional accessibility and connections to the local road network and accommodates pedestrian and bicycle access and circulation and, where appropriate, transit movements.	
Seismic Lifeline Routes	Routes are roadways and bridges that play a critical role in emergency response and evacuation in the event of a seismic event.	Oregon Seismic Lifeline Routes Identification
Safety Corridors	Safety corridors are stretches of state and local highways with an incidence of fatal or injury traffic crashes higher than the statewide average for that type of roadway.	Safety Corridor Guidelines
Oregon Scenic Byways	Byways include All American Roads, National Scenic Byways, Oregon State Scenic Byways, and Oregon Tour Route designations. They are informational and directs tourists and recreationalists to roadways that are scenic, historically significant, or offer recreation opportunities.	Discover Oregon Scenic Byways

Designation	Description	Links to Additional Information
Expressways	Expressways are a subset of Highway Plan highway classifications to provide for high speed, high volume travel between cities and connections to ports and major recreation areas with minimal interruptions.	Expressway Classifications
Reduction Review Routes	Reduction Review Routes are ODOT facilities that requires review of during planning, project development, development review, and maintenance to examine any “hole in the air” capacity.	Map of Reduction Review Routes

Why the policy framework matters

The policy framework of classifying highways shapes the infrastructure throughout its lifecycle. The classification or designation of a roadway impacts the planning, design, operation, and investment decisions for the maintenance, repair, and construction of roadways.

When to consider prioritization policies

Planning and Development Review

Roadway classification or designations affect long-range planning decisions for ODOT facilities. Classifications and designations impact planning for development and redevelopment located along the roadway. A commercial, residential, industrial, or other type of development will plan access management (e.g. the ingress and egress driveways or roads) according to roadway classification. Roadways with a functional focus on higher speed travel (mobility) – such as a state or district highway – will limit the number of driveways accessing the roadway to reduce conflict points with vehicles moving at high speeds.

During the development review process, local permitting offices will review access management and other planning decisions to ensure they meet the standards applied to the adjacent roadway.

Design

Classifications and designations impacts roadway design (and construction) through the applications of standards tied to designations or classifications. ODOT publishes a [Highway Design Manual](#) to provide design guidance on new construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation projects. Guidance includes standards for facility dimensions (i.e. width of travel lanes, sidewalks and shoulders). Intersection and driveway spacing are closely tied to classification as each relates to the design speed of the roadway. Roadways designated or designed for higher speed travel generally feature wider travel lanes and less driveways. In contrast, roadways designated or designed for lower speeds will often use design tools to slow the movement of vehicles to safely accommodate pedestrians, people riding bicycles, and vehicles and public transportation vehicles entering and leaving establishments. A roadway that is not designed to standards associated with the roadway classification or designation must seek a design exception. For more information, see the [Roadway Engineering page on ODOT's website](#).

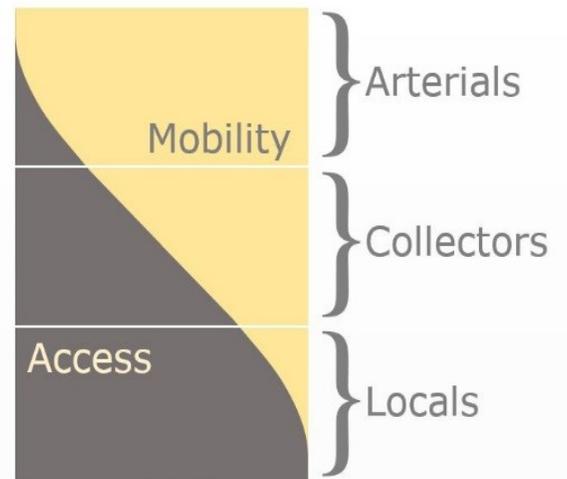


Figure 1 Higher classifications generally prioritize the free flow of movement, or mobility. Lower level classifications prioritize access and permeability of the system to enable people to reach their homes, work, and commercial areas.

Operations and Maintenance

Classification and designations are often useful for operations and maintenance prioritization. ODOT maintains an asset management program and roadway classification is one of several factors considered when deciding which assets to address first. Classifications and designations may also influence operations such as roadway sweeping schedules and repaving cycles. They may also influence snow or ice removal during inclement weather, as a higher classification or designated evacuation route will have the highest priority.

Applicable plans and policies

Plan	Policy
Oregon Highway Plan	<p>1A: It is the policy of the State of Oregon to develop and apply the state highway classification system to guide ODOT priorities for system investment and management.</p> <p><i>*See Table 1 for overview of Oregon highway classifications</i></p>
	<p>1B: It is the policy of the State of Oregon to coordinate land use and transportation decisions to efficiently use public infrastructure investments to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Maintain the mobility and safety of the highway system; *Foster compact development patterns in communities; *Encourage the availability and use of transportation alternatives; *Enhance livability and economic competitiveness; and *Support acknowledged regional, city and county transportation system plans that are consistent with this Highway Plan.
	<p>1C: It is the policy of the State of Oregon to balance the need for movement of goods with other uses of the highway system, and to recognize the importance of maintaining efficient through movement on major truck freight routes.</p>
	<p>1E: It is the policy of the State of Oregon to provide a secure lifeline network of streets, highways, and bridges to facilitate emergency services response and to support rapid economic recovery after a disaster.</p>
Oregon Freight Plan	<p>Policy 1.1: Establish a Strategic Freight System building on the system defined by the commodity flows of Oregon’s major industries. This system should include those elements of the transportation infrastructure that best support the state’s key industries. This system should be multimodal, when viable, and exist in both urban and rural areas as appropriate.</p>
	<p>Policy 1.2: Support freight access to the Strategic Freight System. This includes proactively protecting and preserving corridors designated as strategic.</p>
	<p>Policy 2.4: Coordinate freight improvements and system management plans on corridors comprising the Strategic Freight System with the intent to improve supply chain performance.</p>
	<p>Policy 3.2: Partner with local government agencies and tribal governments to identify intermodal connectors that provide “last mile” connectivity to freight-generating businesses or locations and are not currently classified as NHS Connectors. Use this information to update the NHS connector list, when requested by the federal government, and to establish an additional list of secondary connector routes as appropriate. Highlight the importance to local governments of the role they have in making the freight system function effectively for businesses across the state.</p>

Plan	Policy
	Policy 12.1: Work with elected officials, carriers, shippers and other stakeholders to study the potential for, and implications of, a statewide freight fund. The fund would have a selective, criteria-driven process to prioritize and fund projects in all modes of freight transportation. The process would be needs-based and focus on projects located on the Strategic Freight System.
	Policy 12.3: Advocate establishing sources of funding for improvements on intermodal connectors.

Other helpful guidance and tools

ODOT hosts a statewide interactive map that allows users to view the function and classification of roadways throughout Oregon. This allows the users to see roadway classification as well as other designations applied to the road through a series of map layers. The map is available at <https://gis.odot.state.or.us/transgis/>.