

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

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

2020 Census

**Question: Why are Federal Aid Urban Boundaries (FAUB) and Federal Functional Classifications (FFC) being updated now?**

Answer: After each U.S. Decennial Census, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) requires states to review and update their FAUB and FFC. It takes several years for the Census Bureau to prepare the urban boundary data from the Census that is required in order to update FAUB and FFC. Urban boundary data from the 2020 Census was released in late 2022.

**Question: When are updates to the FAUB and FFC required to be completed?**

Answer: FHWA is asking jurisdictions to complete adjustments to Federal Aid Urban Area Boundaries by December 29, 2023 (this means that the adjusted boundaries have been approved by ODOT and the FHWA). FHWA will consider all urban area boundaries final as of April 15, 2025, and will use the original 2020 Census boundaries for all urban areas that have not been adjusted. Updates to the Federal Functional Classifications should be completed and approved by ODOT and FHWA by December 29, 2025.

**Question: What are the practical implications of updating the FAUB and FFC?**

Answer: Eligibility for most FHWA roadway and bridge Federal Aid funding is based on the Federal Functional Classification, which is determined in part by the Urban boundary for the Minor Collector. FFC also defines which roadways are eligible for FHWA's Emergency Relief Program and which are eligible for FEMA assistance. Design standards for FHWA funded roadways are based, in part, on the FFC and its Urban or Rural location.

**Question: What determines urban/rural for federally funded projects? The 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.

**Question: How is the Federal Aid Urban Boundary (FAUB) determined?**

Answer: Census data determines when an area's population is sufficient to qualify as "urban". FAUBs must include at a minimum the entire urban area defined by the Census Bureau and have a minimum population of 5,000. The census-defined boundaries can be "smoothed" to incorporate local conditions such as the UGB, terrain, and special traffic generators. Boundary locations should be selected to include logical transportation control points such as interchanges and major crossroads. Also, boundaries should include airports and seaports if they lie within a reasonable distance of the Census boundary. Additional information can be found in the FHWA's Census Urban Areas and MPO/TMA Designation [FAQ Topic 2: 2020 Urban Area Delineation](#).

**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. Only Census data determines when an area's population is sufficient to qualify as "urban". The listing of Oregon's 2020 Census defined urban areas can be found here:

[https://www.oregon.gov/odot/Planning/Documents/2020\\_Census\\_Federal\\_Aid\\_Urban\\_Areas\\_list.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/odot/Planning/Documents/2020_Census_Federal_Aid_Urban_Areas_list.pdf)

**Question: The 2010 Federal Aid Urban Boundary may in some cases be larger than the 2020 Census urban boundary. In these cases, can a local government opt to use the 2010 boundary without having a specific reason or justification?**

Answer: Theoretically yes, however the FAUB should reflect the 2020 Census urban boundary expanded and smoothed to include features such as entire city limits, the UGB, large traffic generators, etc. Therefore, it is recommended that the 2010 FAUB be adjusted if conditions have substantially changed since the last boundary update.

**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: The latest information from the Census Bureau and FHWA is that it will not be possible to make changes to FAUBs until the 2030 Census data is released.

**Question: Is the Federal Functional Classification 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)?**

Answer: Yes, however the 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.

**Question: If a federally funded project is inside the Metropolitan Planning Organization boundary but outside the 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.

**Question: Are design standards required for all Federal-aid projects?**

Answer: Yes, AASHTO design standards (or greater) are required to be used on all Federal-aid projects. Please see Section 105 of the [ODOT Highway Design Manual](#) for more information.

**Question: Are design standards flexible?**

Answer: Yes. Case-by-case design exceptions are allowed on all projects if properly justified and documented.

**Question: Does Federal 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”. FFC defines which roadways are eligible for FHWA’s Emergency Relief Program vs. FEMA assistance. FHWA’s bridge program covers bridge replacement or rehabilitation on any functionally classified public roadway.

**Question: How does the Federal Functional Classification affect the National Highway System (NHS) designation?**

Functional classification plays a key role in defining the National Highway System which is made up primarily of “principal arterial” routes. Adding or removing a principal arterial route does not mean an automatic change to NHS status. Changes to the functional classifications are approved by the Oregon Division of FHWA, whereas a

change to the NHS goes to FHWA Planning Headquarters in DC. See the [FHWA NHS Update procedures](#) for more information.

**Question: Does the Federal Functional Classification system cover only existing facilities, or does it also apply to planned facilities?**

Answer: While functional classification applies to both existing and planned facilities, the focus is on the existing system and near-term improvements. A planned road may be included in the functional system if it is using federal funding, identified in the Statewide Improvement Program (STIP), and will be under construction within 4 years. There may be situations where adding a new facility could change the function (and the classification) of nearby existing roadways. If this does occur, then a functional class change request should be submitted.

**Question: FHWA requires that rural/urban boundaries should fall on one side of a road or the other, not in the middle. Does this also mean that the same design standards must be used on both sides of a road?**

Answer: Yes, the same design standards should be used on both sides of a road.

**Question: What should local governments consider when determining Federal Functional Classifications for their road system?**

Answer: Local governments should focus on how a given roadway is intended to function. Consider how roads and other transportation facilities fit into the local transportation system and how they connect to adjacent communities. Remember that routes with a higher classification (e.g. Principal Arterials) make up a small percentage of total roadway mileage but carry the bulk of VMT. Also, remember that [Federal FC definitions](#) are sometimes different than the FC system a local agency uses in their TSP.

**Question: Can Federal Functional Classification updates be made between Census years?**

Answer: Yes, they may be submitted at any time, as they should reflect how the transportation system is currently functioning. FFC updates should also be considered as part of local Transportation System Plan updates and other planning studies in order to maintain consistency.