

# Access Control on State Highways Within City Boundaries

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Controlling traffic movements onto and off of the state highway system minimizes conflicts and increases traffic flow. Access controls preserve a highway's safety and capacity. Typical access management techniques include minimum spacing between intersections and driveways, dedicated turn lanes, roundabouts, and median treatments. Access management can reduce accidents by as much as 50 percent and increase road capacity by as much as 45 percent.<sup>1</sup>

In Washington, state highways are classified as either limited or managed access. The basic policy for limited access highways was established in 1951 and is based on the purchase of access rights from the owners of property abutting the highway.<sup>2</sup> There are three levels of control for limited access with progressive restrictions. Approaches to all limited access routes, except interstates, must be approved by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Interstate approaches must be approved by the Federal Highway Administration.

Managed access legislation was enacted in 1991 to address the portion of the state transportation system that was not established as limited access.<sup>3</sup> Managed access is based on the premise that the access rights of a property owner are subordinate to the public's right and interest in a safe and efficient highway system. A property owner has a right to reasonable access to a state highway, but not a particular means of access.<sup>4</sup> Direct access to state highways may be restricted if reasonable access can be provided to another public road.

In 1992 and 1993 WSDOT implemented the managed access legislation, consulting and cooperating with local and regional governments during the process as required by statute. WSDOT developed access design standards, adopted permitting procedures, established a five-tier classification system, and assigned particular highway segments to those classifications. By default, WSDOT's assignment of a highway segment to a managed access classification is retained, even when the local government with jurisdiction over the highway changes. However, local and regional governments can at any time request WSDOT to revise the classification.<sup>5</sup> WSDOT will consider the request and the standards and criteria defined in its administrative rules when deciding whether to reclassify the highway segment.

In unincorporated areas, the WSDOT region offices administer permits for managed access highways. However, state law establishes cities and towns as the permitting authorities for the state managed access highways within their boundaries.<sup>6</sup> Cities and towns are required by statute to adopt access permitting standards for the state managed access highways within their boundaries.<sup>7</sup> The initial deadline for adoption was July 1, 1993. Locally adopted standards must meet or exceed WSDOT standards. If cities fail to adopt the required standards, WSDOT standards may be used as a default.<sup>8</sup>



## Managed Access Highway Classifications

### Class One:

- Mobility is primary function
- Speeds of 50 to 65 mph
- 1,320 ft. minimum access spacing
- No direct access if alternate public road is available
- Restrictive median for some multi-lane configurations

### Class Two:

- Mobility favored over access
- Speed of 35 to 50 mph in urban areas and 45 to 55 mph in rural areas
- 660 ft. minimum access spacing
- No direct access if alternative public road is available
- Restrictive median for some multi-lane configurations

### Class Three:

- Balance between mobility and access in areas with less than maximum build out
- Speeds of 30 to 40 mph in urban areas and 45 to 55 mph in rural areas
- 330 ft. minimum access spacing
- Restrictive median may be warranted

### Class Four:

- Balance between mobility and access in areas with near maximum build out
- Speeds of 30 to 35 mph in urban areas and 35 to 45 in rural areas
- 250 ft. minimum access spacing
- Non-restrictive medians

### Class Five:

- Access needs generally have priority over mobility needs
- Speeds of 25 to 35 mph
- 125 ft. minimum access spacing
- Non-restrictive medians

WAC 468-52-040

1. Access Regulation - A Balancing Act Between Access and Mobility. WSDOT. 2005.

2. RCW 47.52

3. RCW 47.50.010(2)

4. RCW 47.50.010(3)

5. WAC 468-52-070

6. RCW 47.50.020(3)

7. RCW 47.50.030(3)

8. WAC 468-51-010

## For More Information

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