

Managed Access in Washington - A Preliminary Report to the Legislature

January, 2008

The 2007 State Legislature tasked the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) with reporting the progress of local jurisdictions toward fulfilling their responsibilities under current highway access management statutes. WSDOT is working with a number of stakeholders to complete this task, including the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED), the Association of Washington Cities (AWC), and the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC). Our intent is to help local governments successfully demonstrate to the Legislature their commitment to protecting the safety and capacity of the state highway system through good access management.

What is Access Management? Access management regulates traffic movements onto and off of roadways to improve system performance, minimize traffic conflicts, and increase traffic flow. Typical access management techniques include minimum spacing between intersections and driveways, dedicated turn lanes, and median treatments. Access management preserves a roadway's safety and capacity, reducing accidents by as much as 55 percent and increasing road capacity by as much as 30 percent.¹

How are Limited and Managed Access Highways Different? In Washington, state highways are classified as either limited or managed access. The 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.² Managed access legislation was enacted in 1991 to address the portion of the state transportation system not established as limited access.³ State law declares two policies that form the basis for managing access. First, the access rights of a property owner are subordinate to the public's right and interest in a safe and efficient highway system. Second, a property owner's direct access to a state highway may be restricted if reasonable access can be provided to another public road.⁴

Who is Responsible for Managed Access Permitting? In unincorporated areas, access permitting is the responsibility of the WSDOT region offices. Within municipal boundaries, access permitting is the responsibility of the city or town.⁵ State law requires cities and towns to adopt access permitting standards for state managed access highways that meet or exceed WSDOT standards.⁶ The initial deadline for adoption was July 1, 1993. If cities fail to adopt the required standards, WSDOT standards may be used as a default.⁷

Did WSDOT Consult Cities on its Permitting Standards? Yes, WSDOT consulted and cooperated with local and regional governments to develop access standards, permitting procedures, and an access classification system. The City Design Standards Committee, consisting of the state aid engineer and six AWC appointees, participated in crafting the state's initial access management code and formally concurred with it in 1992. Additionally, about half of cities and towns officially concurred with the access classifications assigned to the managed access highways within their city boundaries.



This preliminary report describes WSDOT's implementation of the managed access proviso with partners AWC and WSAC and shares what we have learned so far from cities and counties.

The Legislative Request

The Legislature's 2007 transportation budget included a proviso directing WSDOT to require local jurisdictions to confirm they have adopted access permitting standards for state managed access highways that meet or exceed WSDOT standards. The proviso also directed WSDOT to submit a final report to the Legislature in 2009 detailing local jurisdictions' progress toward adopting the standards.

The Managed Access Proviso:

"By December 1, 2008, the department shall require confirmation from jurisdictions that plan under the growth management act, chapter 36.70A RCW, and that receive state transportation funding under this act, that the jurisdictions have adopted standards for access permitting on state highways that meet or exceed department standards in accordance with RCW 47.50.030. The objective of this subsection is to encourage local governments, through the receipt of state transportation funding, to adhere to best practices in access control applicable to development activity significantly impacting state transportation facilities. By January 1, 2009, the department shall submit a report to the appropriate committees of the legislature detailing the progress of the local jurisdictions in adopting the highway access permitting standards."

ESHB 1094, Sec 222 (4)

1. Transportation Research Board. *Access Management Manual*. (Washington, D.C.: Transportation Research Board, 2003), 19.

2. RCW 47.52
3. RCW 47.50.010(2)
4. RCW 47.50.010(3)

5. RCW 47.50.020(3)
6. RCW 47.50.030(3)
7. WAC 468-51-010

How Did We Approach Cities About the Legislative Request?

During the first week of October, 2007, WSDOT and AWC mailed a joint letter to the 211 cities that contain managed access highways. We provided each city with a list of the classifications assigned to the managed access highways within its boundaries, WSDOT's access permitting standards, and a folio summarizing the proviso request. We also asked each city to submit a status form either confirming its adoption or describing its progress toward adopting the required access permitting standards. Cities that had not yet concurred with the access classifications assigned to the highways within their boundaries were asked to sign an additional form. Responses were requested by November 30, 2007.

How Did We Encourage Cities to Respond? WSDOT and its partners followed up with cities in a number of ways. Information about the proviso was included in newsletters published by CTED and AWC. WSDOT staff also distributed proviso information at three of the four quarterly planners' forums held around the state. AWC sent a reminder e-mail to cities in December. The WSDOT region offices and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations also assisted in the outreach effort.

What Was the Cities' Response to the Request? The legislative managed access proviso caught the attention of at least 57% of cities containing managed access highways. Some of these cities submitted a status form reporting their progress toward adopting the required access permitting standards (43%). Others contacted WSDOT by phone or e-mail with questions or informal updates (14%). About one quarter of respondents reported previously adopting the required standards. Over half of the respondents were prompted by the managed access proviso to adopt or begin the process of adopting the required standards. A list of each city's response can be viewed at www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/LandUse/accessonstatehighways.

Why and How Were Counties Involved? In addition to contacting cities, WSDOT collaborated with WSAC to survey counties with managed access highways within their unincorporated areas. Although WSDOT is the permitting authority for these highways, the county development permitting office is often a point of first contact for developers who may require a state access permit. The survey addressed how counties coordinate with the state on development permitting for properties adjacent to state managed access highways. The electronic survey was distributed in mid-October and responses were requested by November 30, 2007. WSAC followed-up with non-responding counties several times in November.

What Was the Counties' Response to the Survey? The counties were very responsive to the managed access coordination survey with 35 of 38 counties completing it.⁸ Most counties reported notifying WSDOT of development proposals adjacent to managed access state highways (97%), informing developers that state access permits may be required (89%), and requiring documentation that state access permits were granted prior to development approval (91%). Some counties also reported providing early notification to WSDOT during regularly scheduled meetings, at the conceptual stage of a private development project, or during the pre-application process (35%). Fifty-five percent of responding counties were satisfied or very satisfied with WSDOT's access permitting standards, permitting process, and coordination efforts. The most commonly cited suggestions for change were to give more timely responses (13%), coordinate more effectively with local agencies (9%), provide better contact and procedural information (9%), and direct access to local roads before allowing state highway access (9%).

What's Next? Prior to our final report to the 2009 Legislature, WSDOT will analyze the county survey in more detail. Additionally, we will work with AWC to encourage cities to respond to the proviso and adopt appropriate access permitting standards for state managed access highways.

8. San Juan County was excluded from the survey because it does not contain state managed access highways.

Managed Access Proviso Preliminary Results

City Response Rate (211 Cities Contacted)

Response	Number	Percent
Submitted Status Form	90	43%
Made Other Contact	31	14%
Total	121	57%

Progress of Responding Cities Toward Adopting Access Permitting Standards

(121 Responding Cities)

Progress	Number	Percent
Previously Adopted Standards	33	27%
Adopted Standards in Response to Proviso	15	12%
Intend to Adopt Standards	53	44%
Not Yet Reported	20	17%

56%

County Response Rate

(38 Counties Contacted⁸)

Response	Number	Percent
Completed Survey	35	92%

Counties Report Coordinating with WSDOT on Managed Access Highway Permitting

(35 Responding Counties)

Type of Coordination	Number	Percent
Notify WSDOT of proposed developments adjacent to managed access highways	34	97%
Inform developers when state access permits may be required	31	89%
Require documentation that state access permits are granted prior to development approval	32	91%

For More Information

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www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/LandUse/accessonstatehighways