

Managed Access in Washington - A Progress Report to the Legislature

September, 2007

In its 2007 transportation budget, the legislature tasked the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) with reporting the progress of local jurisdictions toward fulfilling their responsibilities under the highway access management statutes enacted in 1991. WSDOT is working with a number of stakeholders to complete this task, including the Community, Trade and Economic Development Department (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.

Access Control on State Highways

Access control manages traffic movements onto and off of state highways 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 control preserves a highway's safety and capacity, reducing accidents by as much as 50 percent and increasing road capacity by as much as 45 percent.¹

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.² There are three levels of limited access control with progressive restrictions. Approaches to all limited access routes, except interstates, must be approved by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Interstate approaches are 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.³ 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's direct access to a state highway may be restricted if reasonable access can be provided to another public road.⁴

WSDOT consulted and cooperated with local and regional governments to implement managed access legislation. WSDOT developed access design standards, adopted permitting procedures, established a five-tier classification system, and assigned specific highway segments to those classifications. The City Design Standards Committee, consisting of the state aid engineer and six AWC appointees, participated in crafting the new access management code and formally concurred with it in 1992. Additionally, about half of cities and towns officially concurred with the access classifications WSDOT assigned to the managed access highways within their boundaries.

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)



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

State law splits the responsibility for state managed access highway permitting based on the location of the state highway. In unincorporated areas, access permitting is the responsibility of the WSDOT region offices. Cities and towns are the permitting authorities for the state managed access highways within their boundaries.⁵ Cities and towns are required by statute to adopt access permitting standards for the state managed access highways within their boundaries 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

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. The standards must meet or exceed WSDOT standards, as required by statute. The proviso also directed WSDOT to submit a report to the legislature detailing local jurisdictions' progress toward adopting the standards.

A work group of stakeholders met in July and advised WSDOT to seek confirmation from all 205 cities that contain managed access highways. WSDOT will contact the public works directors of these cities by mail, provide them with a description of the managed access highways within their boundaries, and request them to submit:

- either a statement confirming their adoption of the required access permitting standards or a description of their progress toward adopting the standards,
- a statement concurring with the managed access classifications assigned to the highways within their boundaries, if applicable, and
- a copy of their access permitting standards ordinance.

The 76 cities that do not contain managed access highways will not be contacted.

In the interest of providing the best possible information to the legislature about the status of access management in Washington, the work group also decided 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's intent is to help us understand how counties coordinate with the state on development permitting for properties adjacent to state managed access highways. The electronic survey will be distributed to county engineers by e-mail, except in San Juan County which does not contain any managed access highways.

WSDOT is requesting city and county responses by November 30, 2007. This allows ample time for cities that have not yet adopted appropriate access permitting standards to do so prior to the December, 2008 final deadline. This will also allow WSDOT, CTED, and AWC time to provide additional technical assistance to cities and towns that have not yet adopted the required standards.

WSDOT will summarize the information provided by the cities and counties in a preliminary report to the 2008 Legislature and a final report to the 2009 Legislature.

The Legislative 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)

For More Information

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5. RCW 47.50.020(3)

6. RCW 47.50.030(3)

7. WAC 468-51-010