

Seven Metro County Functional Classification Review: FAQs

DRAFT – for discussion only

Q: Why is a functional classification review being done in the seven metro counties?

A: A statewide review was triggered by new functional classification guidelines issued by the Federal Highway Administration in 2013 and by new urban boundaries released by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2012. MnDOT completed the greater Minnesota functional classification review – and FHWA approved the review – in 2015. Due to timing issues with the Thrive MSP 2040 and Transportation Policy Plan updates, the Metropolitan Council requested the seven metro counties be excluded from the statewide review.

Q: Why doesn't MnDOT wait until 2022 when the U.S. Census Bureau releases new urban boundaries? Won't another review be required?

A: Due to the process used for the greater Minnesota review, FHWA has determined MnDOT does not have to undertake a functional classification review for greater Minnesota when the new Census urban boundaries are released. As part of the 2018-2021 STIP approval, FHWA recommended MnDOT “lead an effort to reclassify roads in the metro area in coordination with the Met Council but also work directly with cities and counties where applicable.” More recently, FHWA prohibited any changes to arterial classifications in the metro area until a functional classification review is completed. Waiting for the new boundaries to be released may also result in other timing issues.

Q: The counties and cities follow the Metropolitan Council's functional classification guidelines. The counties are within the FHWA guidelines in system percentages. Why does MnDOT need to conduct a review?

A: FHWA has stated a review of the seven metro counties must be completed.

Additionally, until recently, MnDOT did not realize that the Council's data does not include all functionally classified roadways. The Council does not review the collector system. While changes may be made to the collector system, it is at the local community's discretion on whether these changes are brought to the Council for review and approval. MnDOT's functional classification data will be updated to reflect the collector system. A review is required to ensure consistency in how collectors are identified.

MnDOT reports functional classification changes to FHWA annually. As part of the annual report, MnDOT compares the state's classification system to FHWA guidelines. The comparison is made at a statewide level, not a regional or county level. There are instances where a county and/or region is above/below the classification guidelines.

Q: Why doesn't the Council – or the counties – conduct the review? What authority does MnDOT have regarding functional classification?

A: 23 CFR 450.105(b) gives state transportation agencies the primary responsibility for functional classification. FHWA provides guidance and criteria.

Q: Does a change in functional classification affect a county or city's state aid allocation?

A: State aid allocations are not affected by functional classification changes.

Q: Functional classification is a factor in the regional solicitation process, i.e., eligible projects must be classified as an A-minor arterial or higher. How will the functional classification review impact the regional solicitation process?

A: According to 23 USC 101(a)(6), federal-aid highways are all highways except those classified as local or rural minor collector. Federal functional classification guidelines do not identify different types of minor arterials. Metropolitan Council policy has identified different types of minor arterials and limited eligibility to A-minors and principal arterials. The functional classification review will not affect the current and upcoming Regional Solicitation.

Q: Metro counties review functional classification regularly. Counties do not expect to see major changes. If there are major changes, there will be conflict.

A: For the greater Minnesota review, the changes from current (i.e., pre-review) to final FHWA-approved classification were:

- Interstate: No change
- Principal arterial – other freeway/expressway: Increased 83. Miles
- Principal arterial – other: Decreased 221.7 miles
- Minor arterial: Decreased 1.9 miles
- Major collector: Decreased 431.4 miles
- Minor collector: Increased 724.6 miles
- Local: Decreased 156.8

As part of the greater Minnesota review, MnDOT completed a review of the National Highway System. MnDOT identified inconsistencies in how principal arterials were identified in greater Minnesota. The review reclassified principal arterial stubs and principal arterials primarily serving local traffic to a lower classification.

As part of the greater Minnesota review, MnDOT also focused on adding minor collectors to the urban system. This resulted in the reclassification of both major collectors and local roads.

Local partner feedback influenced the final classifications. Based on local partner feedback, the classification originally proposed by MnDOT changed as follows:

- Interstate: No change
- Principal arterial – other freeway/expressway: Increased 2.1 miles
- Principal arterial – other: Increased 59.2 miles
- Minor arterial: Increased 148.8 miles

- Major collector: Increased 48.1 miles
- Minor collector: Decreased 117.5 miles
- Local: Decreased 140.7 miles

MnDOT’s review of greater Minnesota focused on data and what the data showed. MnDOT knew there were instances where the data was either missing or incorrect. Local partners added their knowledge of what was actually occurring on the ground when they review the proposed changes. The partners identified segments/areas where a change was needed and explained why the change was needed. Comments were shared between MnDOT and the local partner until consensus was reached.

Q: If the review identifies the need for a Principal Arterial, will MnDOT add the Principal Arterial?

A: Yes, as long as the road is currently functioning as a principal arterial.

Q: How will MnDOT review the functional classification?

MnDOT will perform a desk review of the functional classification. This review is imperfect which is why MnDOT will draft “proposed” changes and look to its local partners to review those proposals.

Two key components of the desk review are traffic volume and spacing. There are instances where traffic volume data is either missing or incorrect. For example, road construction may have influenced a traffic count resulting in either under- or over-reporting of typical volumes. Likewise, new development/redevelopment may have occurred along or near the roadway since the last count.

In terms of spacing, MnDOT will look to see that the system is balanced. As noted in the FHWA’s *Highway Functional Classification Concepts, Criteria and Procedures (2013)*, assigning the same functional classification to parallel routes should be avoided whenever possible. The more important route should be assigned the higher classification while the other route(s) should be assigned a lower classification. There are exceptions to spacing, particularly in central business districts.

MnDOT will also look for:

- Instances when functional classification changes at municipal boundaries. Functional classification does not automatically change at a boundary.
- System continuity. In general, this means avoiding “stubs.” Not all stubs are eliminated. System continuity is important, however, roadway segments should not be over-classified for the sole reason of system continuity.