

Functional Classification Virtual Public Meeting

Held via Zoom on November 14, 2024

Below are questions we received from meeting attendees and their responses. Questions have been edited, paraphrased, and categorized for clarity and ease of reading. If you have any comments on this document, please reach out to DOT&PF project manager, Lisa Idell-Sassi, at lisa.idell-sassi@alaska.gov.

To view the recording of the meeting, please visit our website at dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/fclass

Emergency routes

How does functional classification impact the designations of critical evacuation and access routes related to emergencies like wildfires?

The status of a particular route within a community as a critical evacuation or access route can be used as a qualitative factor when considering the functional classification of that route because it is a function that route serves.

Local roads

Why would a road be classified as local when it is a continuation of a minor collector, provides a loop connection to an arterial, and is used routinely as a bypass when the arterial road has localized closures? The road functions as a farm-to-market route and has traffic counts in the hundreds.

This is an example of a road that may need to change to a higher classification during our review process. If there are particular roads like this one that you think warrant a change, you can submit that comment on our mapping tool when it becomes available in early 2025.

What is the process DOT&PF uses to determine which local roads are maintained?

The roads DOT&PF maintains are designated in state statute or through cooperative agreements with other agencies, local governments, and tribes. Most local roads in Alaska are owned, maintained, and prioritized by local entities. For the local roads that DOT&PF maintains, maintenance is prioritized by functional classification, with higher priority given to arterials and collectors.

Interstates and highways

Will the Richardson Highway's interstate designation change?

No, interstate designations will not change as a result of the functional classification update. Interstates are designated through a separate process by the Federal Highway Administration.

Could the speed be reduced on the Richardson Highway, which has a high volume of access roads in the Lost Lake and Birch Lake area? This is a busy subdivision and recreation area. How can this be addressed?

Speed limits are set through a separate process and will not be immediately affected by functional classification designations. Speed limit ranges are one factor we examine when determining functional classifications because the speed at which traffic moves along a route often relates to its function. However, speed limit range is only one factor of many, and does not in itself determine the functional classification of a route. For DOT&PF to change the speed limit of a segment of the Richardson Highway, for example, a specific process must be followed including conducting a speed study. For more information about how speed limits are set, please visit our [speed limit website](#).

The interstate classification is not adhered to in Alaska. How is this possible and why?

Alaska does have interstates, which is a designation determined by the Federal Highway Administration. There are lots of reasons Alaska's interstates look different than those in the contiguous United States, but a primary reason is that our interstate designations were applied to roads that already existed. In the Lower 48, many interstates were designed and built to function as interstates with high access control from the start. Modifying all our interstates to conform to the same standards would be expensive and require a lot of disruption to existing land use and properties.

Given that the Richardson and Alaska Highways are an international access route and the sole link between the US and Canada, how do you intend to address the broad use shared by industrial, commercial, and private users?

The Richardson and Alaska Highways are both classified as interstates, a designation determined by the Federal Highway Administration through a separate process. Functional classification takes traffic volumes into account, and while industrial and commercial use corridors tend to have higher volumes and higher functional classifications, the type of traffic on a roadway is not specifically a criterion for functional classification. The functional classifications of interstates will not change as a result of this project.

Planned/future roads

How do proposals to build new roads through wilderness, like Ambler Road and West Susitna, fit into this process?

How are planned/future roads that are included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) handled in the functional classification update?

Future roads will be classified if they are included in the state's approved Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and are expected to be built within four years. However, these future roads won't affect the classification of existing roads until they are constructed. According to [Federal Highway Administration guidance](#) (2023) functional classifications should be assigned based on how the roadway is functioning in the current year.

Is the Fairbanks Municipal Planning Organization (FAST Planning) boundary legally recognized as extending nearly to Eielson Air Force Base by state government yet?

The latest proposed FAST Planning boundary has not been approved yet. Please [reach out to FAST Planning staff](#) for more information about the boundary designation.

Criteria for rural and remote roads

If a road is unpaved, but functions as an essential access for a small population, how does that fit into the criteria?

We have developed three sets of criteria for urbanized and small urban areas, rural connected areas, and rural disconnected areas that consider essential access. For example, the criteria for rural disconnected areas specifically addresses access to rural airports, landfills, and sewage lagoons. Routes that provide access to landfills and sewage lagoons will not be functionally classified lower than a minor collector.

Rural and remote roadways often don't meet quantitative thresholds to reach functional classifications other than local or minor collectors. One innovative approach in other countries is to make population a factor or ratio of the quantitative data elements. Is a different approach like this possible when creating criteria (for example, weighting criteria based on purpose and population)?

We have developed different criteria for rural areas that are connected to the contiguous road system, and those that are not connected, to address the unique needs of communities with small populations. For example, a route that serves a remote rural airport that provides the only link to the state transportation system for communities of at least 500 permanent year-round residents without other reliable access will be designated no lower than a major collector.

How is functional classification influenced by many driveways directly entering the arterial, which is common in non-urban Alaska?

The criteria states that access may be partially controlled or uncontrolled for arterials, and generally there are few access points like driveways. The criteria relating to access points are one factor we consider among several when determining functional classification and they do not determine the functional classification in themselves.

Quantitative criteria

Shouldn't speed limit changes be an output of a well thought out functional classification update? Why is this a quantitative input?

The only output of the functional classification update process is a functionally classified roadway dataset. That dataset may then be used as a tool to inform decisions like speed limit changes or capacity expansion needs for future projects, but this project is only reporting on the existing function of the road network. The functional classification process does not include making any changes to the road network.

Speed limit can be one indicator of how a road functions, but does not determine functional classification on its own. When looking at speed limits as a quantitative input, we are looking at ranges. In urbanized areas, for example, we expect principal arterials to have a speed limit of 45-55 MPH and we expect minor arterials to have a speed limit of 35-55 MPH. But, for a particular road segment, if we find it is functioning more like a principal arterial based on the other quantitative and qualitative criteria despite have a speed limit of 40 MPH, we would most likely classify it as a principal arterial. Further, if a road segment's classification changes through this process, it may warrant our traffic engineers taking a closer look at the speed limit and potentially making a change. For more information on how DOT&PF sets speed limits, please [visit our website](#).

Routes with uncontrolled access encompass a broad spectrum of facilities. Could the number of access points per mile serve as a better quantitative measure?

We will be looking at both access control and the number of access points as part of our criteria. That said, data on smaller access points like commercial or residential driveways are not readily available. Access is one piece of a larger, full-picture view we will take of each route to determine its functional classification.

Safety

I would like to see the criteria include public safety and livability of surrounding spaces.

While public safety and livability of surrounding spaces are essential components of roadway planning and design, they are not factors we consider when looking at how a road is used, or its function in the larger network. We are looking at where people are going and which routes they use to get there, which does not include crash data. We do, however, look at the locations of recreation destinations and community spaces to determine how roads function.

In Anchorage, the high-speed arterials are our high injury network, where most collisions, injuries, and deaths occur. How are the criteria factoring in safety (not just traffic volumes) to change functional classifications to allow for safer speeds, lane reductions, etc.?

Safety on our urban roads is an essential component of planning and design, but it is not part of the criteria used when determining the function of a road or how it is used within the context of the larger road network. Speed limits are part of our quantitative criteria, but are only one component of many and a route's speed does not in itself determine functional classification. Conversely, functional classification can influence the design speed of a road, but speed limits are set through a different process and can be changed based on high crash rates.

Currently, a safety task force that includes DOT&PF, the Municipality of Anchorage, and AMATS (the Anchorage area municipal planning organization) is considering speed and lane reductions as tools to improve safety. For more information about DOT&PF's safety initiatives, please visit our [Partners in Safety website](#) or email dot.besafe@alaska.gov.

Current classifications

Where can I find the current classifications of roads in my area?

You can view current functional classifications on DOT&PF's website [here](#).

Can you identify who maintains roads (summer and winter snow removal), whether DOT&PF, municipalities, or users?

You can find out which roads are maintained by DOT&PF by viewing our [Winter Road Maintenance Priority Map](#). Every road with a color code is maintained by DOT&PF. For roads not maintained by DOT&PF, please contact the local city, borough, or tribe.

Is there a plan to update maps across Alaska? For example, the Division of Community and Regional Affairs maps are from the '80s and '90s. Can we request a map directly from DOT&PF for use in long-range transportation planning?

We will provide a new interactive online functional classification map through this project. We have additional online mapping available now at the [Alaska DOT&PF GeoHub](#). For other mapping needs, please contact our GIS group at dot.gis@alaska.gov or contact the Division of Community and Regional Affairs at DCRAREsearchAndAnalysis@alaska.gov. The Division of Community and Regional Affairs has recently updated many of their maps, which are available on their [Community Database website](#). For assistance with long-range transportation planning, you can find the contact information for your area planner on our [regional area planners map](#).

Non-motorized travel

How do non-motorized modes fit into or inform functional classification? In other words, how does nonmotorized use of roads, or of paths immediately adjacent to roads, affect functional classification?

Non-motorized travel does not affect functional classification and is not part of the criteria used to determine how a road functions in the larger network.

High speeds, high volumes, and high density of access points for vehicles are all very dangerous for people using nonmotorized modes, so please include nonmotorized safety and usability in the classification criteria.

Safety for nonmotorized travelers is an essential component of planning and design, but it is not part of the criteria used when determining the function of a road or how it is used within the context of the larger road network. If you're interested in learning more about what DOT&PF is doing to improve safety for all travelers on all routes using the Safe System Approach, please visit our [Partners in Safety website](#) or reach out to Partners in Safety team at dot.besafe@alaska.gov.

Can the need for non-motorized permeability across, and non-motorized use along, a corridor be weighted in classification criteria?

Nonmotorized travel is not a component of the functional classification criteria but is an essential component of roadway planning and design. (For more information on how we approach nonmotorized travel in planning and design, you may be interested in our [Complete Street webpage](#).) Likewise, the types of nonmotorized facilities that are constructed along or across a route may be influenced by functional classification, but there is no classification that would preclude the existence of a nonmotorized facility. Functional Classification is applied to public roads that can be traveled by a passenger car so it does not apply to non-motorized travel.

Industrial traffic

How does industrial use of our roads, such as heavy haul ore transport, affect how we classify roads? Does very heavy, frequent use of public roads for industrial only purposes enter into how roads are classified, in particular with safety in mind?

Safety is an essential component of roadway planning and design, but it is not a factor used when determining functional classification or how a road is used in the context of the larger network. Industrial use of a road in the context of the location of industrial destinations (like a mine or factory) and traffic volumes do factor into functional classification designations.

Is there a designation for routes that serve industrial use that doesn't provide commercial services to communities?

There is no special functional classification designation for routes that primarily serve industry. The Dalton Highway, for example, is currently classified as a principal arterial.

Industrial use must be considered and accommodated considering this year is the beginning of industrial hauling operations that will continue statewide for decades.

We will be considering industrial use in the context of the location of industrial destinations (like a mine or factory) and traffic volumes to determine how a road functions within the larger network. Roads that are designated as interstates, however, will not change since that is a designation determined by the Federal Highway Administration. The Richardson Highway, for example, is designated as an interstate.

Functional classification impact on land use and development

How does functional classification affect adjacent land use development? For example, how does functional classification impact building setback requirements? Functional classification has a direct impact on the way local jurisdictions permit driveways for new housing developments, what kinds of roads private developers are forced to construct to build housing, and many others impacts to private industry that extend beyond transportation planning.

When updating Alaska's functional classifications, we will be looking at how adjacent land is currently being used (for example, the existence of housing developments, airports, and recreational opportunities), but this project will not prescribe future land use. The regulations and processes governing land use, including driveway permitting and subdivision planning approval, are determined by the borough, city, tribe, or state agency with jurisdiction in that area. For information on specific requirements like building setbacks, please contact the local government or agency with jurisdiction over that area.

Functional classification update review process

What role does Michael Baker have in the functional classification update? How were they selected as a consultant?

DOT&PF is the owner of this project and provides complete oversight. Michael Baker International was selected by DOT&PF through a competitive selection process (request for proposals) to perform the functional classification update under DOT&PF's direction. The Michael Baker team is working closely with DOT&PF and the larger functional classification team, which includes the Federal Highway Administration and municipal planning organizations, to develop Alaska-specific criteria, review existing functional classifications, propose adjustments based on the criteria, and ensure public involvement is central to the process.

When will the mapping review tool be available to use?

We expect the mapping tool will be available in early 2025.

Public engagement

Would the team be willing to arrange an in person meeting with a regional planning organization (RPO)?

Yes! DOT&PF is happy to meet with existing and future RPOs either in person or by video call to discuss functional classification more at length. Please contact DOT&PF project manager Lisa Idell-Sassi at lisa.idell-sassi@alaska.gov to set up a meeting.

The best way to engage with the public is to provide a clear and easily accessible public site where public questions are answered by DOT&PF. It's important for us to see everyone's questions and DOT&PF's responses.

Thank you for this feedback. We will be updating the [project website](#) throughout this project's development. We will post FAQs and summaries of questions received and the responses (including this one) on that website.

Please post notices of meetings on the Alaska Online Public Notice System, the formal statewide website that provides notice of state department activities.

We plan to post notices for all public meetings on the [Alaska Online Public Notice System](#), just as we advertised [this one](#). We will also post all meeting notices on our [website](#), social media, and via the project email list.

Who can we speak to for one on one questions?

Please send your questions to DOT&PF project manager Lisa Idell-Sassi at lisa.idell-sassi@alaska.gov.

Can you post the criteria, stakeholder groups, and outreach materials and activities to the website?

Yes! We plan to post the criteria to the [website](#) as soon as it has been reviewed by the Federal Highway Administration. We will also be posting questions and answers, outreach materials, and additional information on our website.

What unique involvement does Anchorage, Mat-Su, and Fairbanks have in this project as a result of their municipal planning organization (MPO) status?

Representatives from Alaska's three MPOs are part of the core project team. This means they are invited to the every-other-week team check-in meetings and have the opportunity to review and comment on materials before they are released to the general public, including the public participation plan and Alaska-specific functional classification criteria.

Can this team clarify how public involvement can be most meaningful in this process? The July to November 2025 timeframe for outreach related to functional classification changes seems close to when the proposed functional classifications will be submitted to the Federal Highway Administration for finalization in December 2025.

The most effective ways you can participate in the project are to attend meetings, reach out to us with questions or comments, and review the proposed functional classifications of roads you're familiar with after our interactive mapping tool becomes available in early 2025. The best way to stay informed about all the opportunities to participate is to sign up for the project email list on the DOT&PF [website](#).

The July to November 2025 timeframe for targeted outreach about proposed changes to functional classifications is the last step in refining all classifications prior to submittal to the Federal Highway Administration. During those five months, we will be reaching out individually to road-owning municipalities, tribes, and agencies with proposed changes to functional classifications within their jurisdictions to gather input and make sure we're getting it right. We believe this will be enough time to conduct that targeted outreach and allow time for proper community reviews. If we find, at the end of that period, that we need more time, we can extend our outreach period as needed. Our current schedule does allow some flexibility if we decide an extension is needed.