

Regulating Access on Washington State Highways

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What is access? Access is the ability to enter or leave a public street, roadway or highway from an abutting property or another public street, roadway or highway.

Why regulate access? Regulating access provides safer, more efficient travel.

Regulating highway access means to plan the number and location of driveways and intersections to help maintain safe, efficient movement of traffic and to provide safer access to and from adjacent property. It is a tool to help keep highways from becoming too congested to move traffic safely while still providing adequate access to adjacent lands.

Regulating access helps keep things moving.

Everyone has experienced the frustrations and dangers of driving on a highway where driveways are too close together. Vehicles turning onto and off of a highway can create safety hazards for both through traffic and for the turning vehicles themselves. While growth and development are usually good for area economics, they often result in too many access points located too close together. This increases the likelihood of traffic WSDOT Staff Photo congestion, conflicts between land use and highway traffic growth, and collisions.

Highway users and owners of abutting businesses and properties become frustrated and property values may fall as some owners move away. Speed limits may have to be lowered to allow traffic to flow more smoothly.

Ultimately, the highway may even have to be relocated as the only way to restore safe and efficient operations and well-spaced highway access. Regulating access can help prevent such costly changes.

All Washington State highways are designated as either Limited Access or Managed Access.

Highways and access to them are regulated through one of two processes:

1. Acquisition
2. Permitting

The Acquisition process is used for regulating access on state highways that have been designated as Limited Access Highways. On these types of highways, access to the state highway is a property right of each abutting property owner (unless previously acquired pursuant to RCW 47.52). Acquisition of these property rights (from abutting property owners), by gift, devise, purchase, or condemnation is



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necessary before their access can be regulated by means of Limited Access regulation.

The Permitting process is used for regulating access on state highways designated as Managed Access Highways, as well as those designated as Limited Access Highways where access rights have not yet been acquired. This process requires that the abutting property owner obtain an access connection permit application from the appropriate permitting authority, complete the application, and process it (including appropriate fee) to the permitting authority for review and approval determination.

Within unincorporated areas, the permitting authority for Managed Access designated state highways resides in the respective WSDOT Region Office.

Within incorporated areas, the permitting authority resides in the respective city in which that portion of the highway is located.

Purchasing limited access rights:

When a new construction project requires additional right of way, access rights may be purchased to regulate the points of access to the state highway. At times access rights are purchased from parcels adjacent to the highway even though no land is being purchased.

Regulations – Further Reference

Limited Access Highways:

RCW 47.52 – Statutory authority

WAC 468-58 – Rules

WAC 468-54 – Hearings

Managed Access Highways:

RCW 47.50 – Statutory authority

WAC 468-51 – Administrative process

WAC 468-52 – Classification system and Standards

Everyone benefits from regulating access to highways:

- Drivers making both local and through-trips travel on highways that are not congested and complicated by unplanned access.
- The owners and users of adjacent properties have safer access to and from those properties.
- Developing areas benefit when the need for access to adjacent property is balanced with the need for movement of through traffic.
- Taxpayers save money because the existing highways are able to carry more traffic, often eliminating or delaying the need for construction of additional lanes or a relocation of the highway.



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Proper regulation of access can:

- reduce collisions and collision potential
- preserve roadway capacity and the useful life of roads
- decrease travel time and congestion
- improve access to properties
- coordinate land use and transportation decisions
- improve air quality, and maintain travel efficiency and related economic prosperity

Training gladly provided by WSDOT:

If you would like to schedule access training for your organization, we'd like to provide it! Call the HQ Access and Hearings Office:

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