

About the Functional Classification System

The FHWA concept of highway functional classification is the key data item in all records. Functional classification of streets and highways groups the facilities into classes according to the character of service they provide.

Characteristics of Functional Classes

Principal Arterials

Rural: A principal arterial serves corridor movements having trip length and travel density characteristics indicative of substantial statewide or interstate travel.

A principal arterial provides service to all, or virtually all, urban areas of 50,000 and over population and a large majority of those with a population of 25,000 and over.

Principal arterials provide an integrated network without stub connections except where unusual geographic or traffic conditions dictate otherwise (e.g., international boundary connections and connections to coastal cities). Rural principal arterials include:

- Interstate System

- Other principal arterials

Urban: A principal arterial carries the major portion of trips entering and leaving urban areas, as well as the majority of through movements desiring to bypass the central city.

Principal arterials serve significant intra-area travel, such as between major inner city communities, central business district and residential areas, or between major suburban centers. They include:

- The Interstate System

- Other freeways, expressways and major conventional highways

Minor Arterials

Rural: Link cities and larger towns (and other traffic generators, such as major resort areas) and form an integrated network of arterial highways providing interstate and intercounty service served by rural collector or local roads.

Urban: Interconnect and augment the principal arterials and provide service to trips of moderate length at a lower level of travel mobility.

Distribute travel to smaller geographic areas than principal arterials.

May carry local bus routes and provide intra-community continuity but not penetrate identifiable neighborhoods.

Spacing of about 1/8 - 1/2 mile in central business district to 2 - 3 miles in suburban fringes, but should normally be not more than 1 mile in fully developed areas.

Collectors:

Rural: Routes generally serve travel of primarily intracounty rather than statewide importance and constitute those routes on which predominant travel distances are shorter than on arterial routes.

Major Collectors: Provide service to county seats and larger towns not served by arterials and to other traffic generators of equal intracounty importance, such as consolidated schools, shipping points, county parks, important mining and agricultural areas. They link places with nearby larger towns or cities, or with routes of higher classification.

Minor Collectors: Serve the more important intracounty travel corridors and developed areas within a reasonable distance of a major collector road.

Provide service to remaining smaller communities.

Link the locally important traffic generators in the rural hinterland

Urban: System provides both land access service and traffic circulation within residential neighborhoods, commercial and industrial areas

Local Streets and roads:

These roads are not functionally classified.

Rural: Provides access to adjacent land. Provides service to travel over relatively short distances as compared to higher service facilities.

Urban: Primarily provides direct access to abutting land and access to higher service facilities.

Offers the lowest level of mobility and usually contains no bus routes.

Service to through traffic movement usually is deliberately discouraged.

The descriptions of the roadway functional classifications given above are what CALTRANS uses when submitting a recommendation to the FHWA for approval of the official functional classification maps. Local agency designations or other road classifications may not always coincide with the FHWA approved maps. If a local agency wishes to change a roadway functional classification, the CALTRANS District Local Streets and Roads Engineer should be contacted for referral to the district contact responsible for roadway functional classifications.