

Right-of-Way and Functional Classification

Introduction

Right-of-way preservation and functional classification are valuable tools utilized by local and State governments to protect and preserve roadway facilities for their intended purpose. Establishing future right-of-way needs, for example, is a key element in long-range roadway planning. Without measures in place to preserve needed rights-of-way, acquiring it in the future can involve costly condemnation proceedings that can add significantly to the overall cost of the road construction project. Functional classification involves the assignment of roads into categories according to the character of service they provide in relation to the total road network.¹ These categories determine appropriate regulatory controls and roadway design criteria (e.g., setbacks, driveway connections, truck route restrictions) necessary for the facilities to operate as planned. Categorizing roadways by functional class also prioritizes their importance to the traffic circulation system and, as such, affects their eligibility for State and Federal funding.

Right-of-Way Preservation

With the broad police powers to “guide and control future development” provided by the Growth Management Act (Chapter 163, F.S.), local governments are enabled to secure right-of-way needed to serve the projected expansion of the traffic circulation system as identified in their respective comprehensive plans. The Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan details the future right-of-way needs for State and major County roads within Pinellas County. Since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 1989, Pinellas County has reserved future right-of-way, as it is currently identified in the Transportation Element, through the site plan review process. The County’s municipal jurisdictions also ensure that County and State right-of-way needs are accounted for through their own site plan review processes. Future needed right-of-way for County and State-maintained roads is shown in Figures 3-1, 3-1A, 3-1B, 3-1C and 3-1D. The right-of-way widths in these Figures are based on specifications set forth in the Site Development and Platting Section of the Pinellas County Land Development Code.

Changes in Right-Of-Way Needs

Issues associated with neighborhood concerns, environmental preservation, and financial limitations have precluded or forestalled the construction of roadway facilities identified in prior versions of the Transportation Element and the Traffic Circulation Element that was adopted in 1989. This has required changes to the future right-of-way designations on the affected facilities. With this version of the Transportation Element, there are changes to the right-of-way designations of the 118th Avenue Expressway and 126th Avenue to provide for the construction of planned improvements on these facilities. Additional changes to the maps were primarily related to correcting and updating the jurisdictional designations.

Vacating of Right-Of-Way

On occasion, petitions are filed requesting the County to vacate future road rights-of-way under its jurisdiction. The request is reviewed by several County agencies including the Planning and Public Works departments. If it concerns roadway facilities identified in the Comprehensive Plan, the vacation request is reviewed to determine the impact of the proposal on the future transportation system. Prior to the approval of the request, it must be determined that removal of the right-of-way will not adversely affect the surrounding traffic circulation system, or that it is not needed for a future transportation facility such as a bicycle or pedestrian facility or as a utility easement.

Functional Classification

Urban area roads within the State of Florida governed by the Comprehensive Planning Process are functionally classified as Principal Arterial, Minor Arterial, Collector Roads, and Local Roads. In 1995, Chapter 335.04, F.S., which defined the State of Florida functional classification criteria, was repealed. FDOT District 7 subsequently directed local governments within its jurisdiction, including Pinellas County, to use the Federal Highway Administration guidelines in assigning functional classifications to roadways. The State criteria were based primarily on roadway capacity, traffic volume, and operational characteristics. The Federal criteria recognize that while physical and operational characteristics of roads affect travel patterns, the purpose these roads actually serve (e.g., travel to and through urban areas, interstate and regional commerce, access to major public facilities), should be the basis for their classification.²

Generally defined, arterial roads rank highest in terms of importance, providing service that is relatively continuous with longer trip lengths. Collector facilities serve average trip lengths while collecting and distributing traffic between local and arterial roads. Local roads provide service involving short trip lengths, minimal through traffic and frequent access to adjacent properties. Under Federal functional classification guidelines, these facilities are further defined based on criteria recognizing 12 significant trip purposes. These include the following:

- 1) Travel to and through urbanized areas;
- 2) Travel to and through small urbanized areas;
- 3) National defense;
- 2) Interstate and regional commerce;
- 3) Access to airports, seaports, and major rail terminals or intermodal transfer facilities;
- 6) Access to major public facilities;
- 7) Interconnection of major thoroughfares
- 8) Access to minor public facilities;
- 9) Interconnection of minor thoroughfares;
- 10) Access to concentrated land uses;
- 11) Access to diffuse land use areas; and
- 12) Travel between home, work, entertainment, and shopping destinations and the nearest road on the primary road network composed of arterial and collector roads.³

Roads serving at least two of the purposes numbered 1 through 7 are classified as *Principal Arterials*. Roads serving only one of the purposes numbered 1 through 7 are classified as *Minor Arterials*. Facilities serving the purposes numbered 8 through 11 are classified as

Collector facilities. Roads serving the purpose identified in number 12 are classified as *Local* streets. Figures 3-2, 3-2A, 3-2B, 3-2C and 3-2D show the classification for all principal arterial, minor arterial, and collector roads in Pinellas County. This map series represents the existing and future functional classification of the major road network.

Pinellas County utilizes functional classification to define access management requirements for site development and to set minimum standards for construction of roads classified as arterial or collector roads. The Access Management Section of the Land Development Code is designed to minimize driveway connections on arterial roads in order to protect their traffic-carrying capacity while allowing for more efficient operation. In the County's site plan review process, driveway connections are directed more toward collector roads and, to a greater degree, toward local roads, where protecting capacity and efficient traffic operations is less of a concern. The Site Development and Platting Section of the Land Development Code contain provisions for minimum design speeds and acceleration/deceleration lanes on collector and arterial roads. The Access Management and Site Development and Platting Sections of the Land Development Code are applied through the application of the Site Plan Review Process.

Endnotes

Chapter Three

1. Chapter 334.03(11), Florida Statutes.
2. Florida Transportation Commission, Functional Classification of Roads in Florida, October 1989, p. 11.
3. Federal Highway Administration, US Department of Transportation, Federal Functional Classification, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, June 1992), pp. 2-5.