

## Highway System Modification Process

The Primary, Secondary, and Urban Highway designation processes are guided by Montana law, Montana Transportation Commission policy, and MDT guidelines. Because these are Montana systems, the Federal government has no direct involvement in these system designations. There are specific federal laws, procedures, and guidelines for designation of the National Highway System (includes Interstate).

### ***Eligibility Requirements***

The designation of eligible routes must adhere to the following principles:

- In each system, routes shall be designated on the basis of a planned connected system (MCA 60-1-102(3)).
- System mileage should be distributed on a reasonable and fair basis within the geographic area the system is designed to serve.
- All systems should be properly integrated with each on-system route connected to another equal or higher on-system route.

National Highway System: The route must be functionally classified\* by MDT as a principal arterial.

Primary System: The route must be functionally classified\* by MDT as either a principal or minor arterial.

Secondary System: The route must be outside a designated urban area and must be functionally classified\* by MDT as either a rural minor arterial or major collector.

Urban System: The route must be within a designated urban area and must be functionally classified\* by MDT as either an urban arterial or urban major collector.

*\*By Federal law, all public roads must be functionally classified in accordance with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines. Functional classification is the classification of roads based on their function in the overall highway system based on an analysis of the type of traffic carried, the amount of access to adjacent development, and the nature of the areas served. The Montana Transportation Commission and the FHWA must approve changes in functional classification.*

### ***System Designation Process Summary***

1. Requests for new route designations or changes in existing designations are usually initiated by local governments. Requests must have the support of local elected officials and local transportation committees if applicable.
2. MDT staff reviews request to determine whether the route meets eligibility requirements. Also reviews project commitments if any.
3. If route does not meet functional classification eligibility requirements, MDT staff advises the local government about the need for a formal review of the route's functional classification.
  - a. Coordination occurs with local government, FHWA, and MDT Districts and Maintenance staff.
4. If necessary, MDT staff advises the local government about the Montana Transportation Commission policy that requires no significant net changes in the Secondary and Urban Highway mileage within the affected county or urban area as a result of designation changes.
5. Local governments must adopt and provide a resolution accepting jurisdiction for routes to be removed from the system. MDT staff are available to assist in developing resolution.
6. If proposal meets all eligibility requirements and complies with Transportation Commission policy, MDT staff seeks Transportation Commission approval (contingent upon final approval by FHWA for changes to functional classification or changes to the National Highway System).
7. MDT submits formal request for approval to FHWA.
8. MDT notifies locals of outcome and adjusts maps/data bases if changes are approved.

## Relevant Montana Code Annotated Sections

**60-1-102. Legislative policy and intent.** (3) that the state have integrated systems of highways, roads, and streets and that the department of transportation, the counties, and municipalities assist and cooperate with each other to that end.

**60-1-103. Definitions.** Subject to additional definitions contained in this title that are applicable to specific chapters or sections and unless the context otherwise requires, in this title, the following definitions apply:

(13) "Federal-aid highway funds" means those funds made available for expenditure by the department pursuant to Title 23, U.S.C., or other federally available funds for highways

(21) "National highway system" means the system of public highways designated by the commission and approved by the secretary of transportation, as provided in Title 23, U.S.C., including interstate highways.

(22) "Primary highway system" means those highways that have been functionally classified, in accordance with federal requirements, as either principal or minor arterials and designated by the commission as being on the primary highway system.

(26) "Secondary highway system" means those highways that are outside department-designated urban boundaries and that have been functionally classified, in accordance with federal requirements, as either minor arterials or major collectors and designated by the commission, in cooperation with the boards of county commissioners, as being on the secondary highway system.

(27) "State highways" means the highways throughout the state that are not located on a commission-designated highway system but that are on the state maintenance system.

(28) "Urban highway system" means the highways and streets that are in and near incorporated cities with populations of over 5,000 and within urban boundaries established by the department and that are functionally classified, in accordance with federal requirements, as either arterials or major collectors, and designated by the commission, in cooperation with local government authorities, as being on the urban highway system.

**60-2-126. Designation of public highways -- apportionment of funds.** (1) For the purpose of apportioning state and federal-aid highway funds, the commission shall designate the public highways and streets to be placed on the following systems:

- (a) the national highway system;
- (b) the primary highway system;
- (c) the secondary highway system; or
- (d) the urban highway system.

(2) The commission shall consult with the board of county commissioners of the county in which a highway is located prior to designating a public highway to be placed on the secondary highway system.

(3) The commission shall consult with the appropriate local government authorities prior to designating a highway or street to be placed on the urban highway system.

(4) The commission may designate public highways not placed on the systems listed in subsection (1) as state highways.

## Relevant Federal Guidance

Appendix D to Subpart A of Part 470 – Guidance Criteria for Evaluating Requests for Modifications to the National Highway System.

-----  
For more information contact:

Carol Strizich, Supervisor  
Statewide & Urban Planning Section  
444-9240  
[cstrizich@mt.gov](mailto:cstrizich@mt.gov)