



## Washington's Safe, Healthy, and Active Streets Program

### Program overview

The Washington State Department of Transportation wants to leverage the use of our public roadways and resources to better support Washingtonian's health, safety and economic recovery efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. This program includes a partnership approach to implementing **temporary lane reallocations** on state roadways to provide pedestrians, bicyclists, and residents more access to public space, goods, and services.

Dramatic decreases in vehicle volumes on many roadways create an opportunity for WSDOT and local governments to **temporarily reallocate travel lane space** – *closing some traffic lanes to vehicles* – where deemed appropriate and safe for all users. The Safe, Healthy and Active Streets program may have immediate, positive effects in the following areas:

- Physical health
- Mental and emotional health
- Equitable, safe mobility
- Economic recovery

Temporary lane reallocations can help create safer, lower-stress roadways that also reduce crowding at gathering points, especially in areas where it is difficult to meet physical distancing guidelines. As the state gradually reopens under Gov. Inslee's [4-phase 'Safe Start' plan](#) to keep Washingtonians healthy throughout the summer, it may become more important to temporarily reallocate some public space for residents and businesses along state routes. Examples include increased sidewalk space or outdoor seating/sales space, or more room to walk or bicycle in portions of existing roadways.

WSDOT will work with requesting agencies to identify, plan, design, install and maintain the temporary reallocation of public roadway space to meet the immediate needs of residents and businesses. Clear messaging and expectations regarding use will need to be effectively communicated to all roadway users and adjacent property owners and stakeholders will need to be involved in determining how to make reconfigured roadways work well in their communities.

The **temporary nature of this initiative** (deploying construction-type traffic control devices, barriers and delineators) will keep it flexible and responsive to changing needs, recommendations and requirements from the Governor, state agencies and local jurisdictions.

### Physical health

Travel lane reallocations will help provide space for physical distancing and safe use of active transportation. Full lane closures along a corridor make walking or bicycling more appealing and safer, particularly for families with children, older people, and those with disabilities.

Applications may address, for example, locations where users are stepping into roadways in order to physically distance themselves, since many sidewalks are not sufficient in width



to accommodate people passing each other at a distance. Other examples include locations with barriers to those who use wheelchairs or areas where residents want to do physical activities near their homes rather than cluster at recreational trailheads or overwhelm existing trail facilities and parks. This is particularly important as some locations in the state have less access to green space and parks, and playgrounds and normal recreational destinations are closed or have restricted access.

In short, this effort is a proactive way to give people opportunities to circulate and allow them to physically distance over a geographic area, giving people the opportunity to be active in a safe and responsible manner.

### **Mental and emotional health**

Physical distancing can be difficult for some people who are accustomed to being with friends and family and can overwhelm some who are experiencing mental health issues. This extra public space will be critical for people to practice physical distancing and reduce exposure to COVID-19, while still enabling them to be outside and participate in the social realm. Utilizing our public roadways in this manner promotes emotional well-being along with physical health.

### **Equitable, safe mobility**

Washington's unemployment continues to increase. As transit service is reduced (and people remain apprehensive about riding transit), many essential workers may need alternate ways of getting to destinations. This Safe, Healthy, Active Streets program will help provide an opportunity to more safely access critical destinations (transit, grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.) without being reliant on an automobile or transit. This effort will drastically improve pedestrian and bicyclist mobility and safety. Since past investment decisions often resulted in having fewer sidewalks and bike lanes in lower-income neighborhoods that may also be those divided by state routes, WSDOT will partner with local agencies to provide equitable access to safe active transportation connections.

Many people in more urban areas live in apartment buildings or homes with limited indoor and private outdoor space. This program will allow city/county partners to pursue projects that intentionally link socially and economically diverse neighborhoods so people can easily get to services and resources.

### **Economic recovery**

Washington's communities seek to re-establish commerce in a safe, healthy manner. In response, cities, counties and business owners are developing creative new ways of considering public space and utilization of public right of way. Restaurants, outdoor retail, and street vendors can all make use of sidewalk and roadway space to provide access for transactions, maintain physical distance, and allow sidewalk use if sufficient right of way is dedicated to these purposes. Temporarily repurposing travel lane space can create a clear division between the traffic world and the social world and allow the establishment of continuous safe networks for people using all modes to access goods and services.

### **Program summary**

This effort includes various levels of government and private organizations coming together to collaborate on issues in a moment of crisis. It will help maximize the use of public roadways and resources to protect public health and safety while also encouraging economic activity where applicable. Efforts like this will make it safer and easier for



Washington residents to remain physically active and mentally healthy, while practicing recommended physical distancing guidelines and participating more fully in the social and economic life of their communities.

### **Process**

As the lead agency in the Safe, Healthy, and Active Streets program, WSDOT supports the effort by a city or county to **temporarily reallocate lanes** on appropriate and agreed upon state roadways wherever feasible, thereby providing low-stress, people-friendly access and public space for active transportation and commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout this temporary program, WSDOT will participate with local partners in evaluating and monitoring several key elements and outcomes. These elements and outcomes may include, but are not limited to, unsafe behaviors that put the lives of residents and users at risk, changes to the stay home orders, and/or vehicle traffic volumes returning to pre-pandemic levels. As a partner with local agencies, we can act quickly to make refinements to locations, length, and/or extent of the program installations. This process is intended to be flexible and responsive to public health and safety needs and to support multimodal transportation.

WSDOT regions will work collaboratively with requesting cities or counties for the following temporary highway lane reallocation:

- *Partial highway lane reallocation* – temporarily reallocates a portion of highway lanes to provide access and public space for active transportation, and retain a minimum of one lane for through vehicles in each direction.
- *Full highway lane reallocation* – temporarily reallocates a full highway lane to provide access and public space for active transportation, and retain a minimum of one lane for through vehicles in each direction.
- *Complete highway reallocation* – allows complete active transportation accessibility and removes vehicle traffic from a section of the entire roadway. Complete reallocations should be limited in duration, such as for weekend closures, and Saturday or Sunday partial or full day closures, and may require a signed detour route.
- *On-street parking removal* – temporarily removes on street parking to provide access and public space for active transportation while retaining full highway movement.

### **Criteria and requirements**

In an effort to maintain user safety and mobility, WSDOT developed the following criteria and requirements to be used when evaluating a temporary lane reallocation request:

- Lane reallocation does not apply to full-control, limited-access highways.
- Eligible roads include state highways:
  - Located in population centers or other locations where there is inadequate physical distancing access to destinations.
  - With existing speed limits posted 35 MPH or lower. The lane reallocation may result in a temporary speed reduction on the highway.
  - With a maximum of five traffic lanes, not including parking lanes. Locations with more than five lanes may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Requested temporary lane reallocation duration to be specified in the agreement of



up to 90 days, potentially longer or shorter, depending on the duration of the health emergency and other conditions. Duration may be adjusted after further review. Either party may request adjustment.

- Temporary lane reallocation may not be feasible on all highways. There may be constraints related to traffic volumes, freight mobility, accessibility and transit that prevent this from happening. WSDOT will work closely with local agencies when considering the above conditions.
- The requesting city/county will agree to:
  - Develop a traffic control plan, and is able to implement the plan and manage traffic controls over the duration of the temporary reallocation.
  - Conduct a community engagement/public notice process so that adjacent property owners are informed of the proposed temporary reallocation plan.
  - Work with emergency management and law enforcement to develop a contingency plan to open the roadway in the event of an emergency.
  - Communicate with adjacent property owners about how vehicle driveway access is controlled within the temporary reallocation section.
  - Actively monitor the temporary reallocation zone for the first day, and periodically thereafter, to ensure the operations for all users remain acceptable.
  - Submit weekly reports to WSDOT addressing any operations issues and effectiveness of the temporarily reallocated section.

WSDOT region traffic offices will work to develop an agreement for regional administrator and city official concurrence.

The length of these temporary reallocations may vary. Depending on operations issues, increased active transportation or vehicle volumes, or other related factors, the reallocated section may end sooner than requested or be extended beyond the initial approval period. Either party may initiate a request for adjustment or termination based on the Governor's [Safe Start](#) phased reopening process, traffic volumes, safety, and other considerations.

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