State highway classification Q&As (June 2011)

Development of the state highway classification

Q. What is state highway classification?

A. It categorises roads in the state highway network based on their function. Function refers to the road's main purpose, such as moving freight to and from a port, or people between main centres. The categories are: national strategic; national strategic (high volume subset); regional strategic; regional connector; regional distributor. Highways are sorted into categories according to criteria such as size of population centres, traffic volume, freight volume and tourist numbers. Thresholds have been created for each criteria.

Q. Why do we need to have a state highway classification?

A. Classifying the state highway network will help guide investment decisions for the ongoing management and future development of the state highway network. The government's top priority for land transport is to help boost New Zealand's economy by moving people and freight more safely and efficiently. The more we know about how our main roads are used, the more effective we'll be at achieving this. It's also a single approach which will give us more clarity across the whole state highway network, and will help make sure that these highways best serve the needs of all road users.

Q. What do the categories mean?

A. *National strategic* are state highways that make a significant contribution to social and economic well being by connecting major population centres, international ports or major airports. They must meet threshold levels for 'national strategic' for at least three criteria.

National strategic (high volume) – a subset of nationally strategic state highways that also have higher volumes of heavy commercial vehicles or general traffic. These high volume highways in and around our major centres comprise 6.5 percent of the state highway network and less than one percent of the country's total roading network, but they carry 36 percent of the total vehicle kilometres travelled on state highways (or about 17 percent of total vehicle kilometres travelled on New Zealand roads). They also carry about 28 percent of total heavy vehicle kilometres travelled on the state highway network.

Regional strategic are state highways that contribute to the social and economic well being of a region and connect regionally significant places, ports or airports. They are also major connectors between regions. They must meet threshold levels for 'regional strategic' for at least two criteria.

Regional connector are regional highways that link different regions, economic areas or tourist spots and contribute to community well being. They must meet threshold levels for 'regional connector' for at least one criteria.

Regional distributor are all other regional highways that generally distribute people within a region (and in a few instances between regions).

Q. How have the criteria been set for the classification?

A. The criteria and their threshold levels have taken into consideration the following:

- received feedback during the engagement period earlier this year
- international best practice approaches
- the government's objectives for the state highway network including boosting economic growth and productivity
- past road classification work.

Q. Does the classification include local roads?

A. No, only state highways are within the classification.

Q. Why is there only a value criteria for airports for national strategic routes?

A. We recognised that in terms of air freight it's the value, not the volume that is important. Therefore we looked at value rather than volume for the National Strategic criteria.

Q. Do other countries operate their highways within a classification system?

A. Many countries plan, develop and manage their national road networks using a classification system (or hierarchy) according to their function at a national, regional and local level. These countries include the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Canada and Australia.

Q. Have international experience and advice been taken into account when classifying our state highway network?

A. Yes. International approaches have been considered when developing the process and criteria to determine our classification.

Q. Has state highway classification been considered before?

A. Yes. The most recent work to classify the state highway network was released in June 2007 in the National State Highway Strategy.

Post engagement

Q. How much feedback did you receive during the engagement period?

A. In February and March, the NZTA undertook extensive external engagement on the classification. The majority of the 65 submissions were received from regional and local government, including Auckland Transport. Other submitters included Local Government NZ, Road Transport Forum, Automobile Association, Bus and Coach Association, IPENZ, NZ Council of Infrastructure Development, port companies, walking and cycling advocates and some individuals.

The submissions revealed a consensus on the concept of classifying the state highway network with 38 (58%) confirming their support for the system. No submissions opposed the system. The majority of comments suggested additional ideas for improving economic activity and value in the criteria and to ensure that the system uses future projections.   No substantive issues were raised by submitters that necessitated a change to the classification criteria or the thresholds.

Q. Have you made any changes to the classification as a result of the engagement?
A. Yes, we re-categorised 13 state highways in the final classification because errors were identified in the draft classification and/or reflected the NZTA's acceptance of the submitter's rationale for change. The amendments made to the classification are set out in the following table:

Map Ref.	State Highway	Area	Draft	Final
1	SH25A (Kopu & Hikuai)	Waikato	Regional distributor	Regional connector
2	SH26 (Hamilton to SH27 intersection)	Waikato	Regional distributor	Regional connector
2	SH23 (Hamilton to Raglan)	Waikato	Regional distributor	Regional connector
3	SH34 (Kawerau to SH2)	Bay of Plenty	Regional distributor	Regional connector
4	SH46, SH47, SH4 (Tohunga Junction to National Park), SH49	Waikato & Manawatu/Whanganui	Regional distributor	Regional connector
5	SH56 (from Palmerston North to SH57 at Makerua)	Manawatu/Whanganui	Regional distributor	Regional connector
6	SH2 (Melling to Upper Hutt)	Wellington	Regional strategic	National strategic
6	SH58 (Paremata to Haywards)	Wellington	Regional connector	Regional strategic
7	SH71 (SH1S to Rangiora)	Canterbury	Regional distributor	Regional connector
8	SH75 (Christchurch to Akaroa)	Canterbury	Regional distributor	Regional connector
9	SH78 (SH1S to Port of Timaru)	Canterbury	Regional distributor	National strategic
10	SH6 (Five Rivers to Invercargill)	Southland	Regional distributor	Regional connector
11	SH1S (Invercargill to Bluff)	Southland	Regional distributor	Regional strategic

Q. What are the final criteria and their thresholds that are now applied to state highways?
A. The criteria and thresholds specified in the draft Classification have not been changed for the final Classification of state highways. They are set out in the attached word document.

Q. Will the classification ever change now that it has been set?
A. We will review the State Highway Classification every three years in advance of the National Land Transport Programme (NLTP).

The classification of state highways and associated service levels

Q. Is there a connection between classification and levels of service?
A. Yes. The development of classification has involved categorising highways based on their function. Deciding the level of service or road-user experience (like travel time, reliability and safety features) that a particular category of highway should offer users, and then deciding the design of the road needed to deliver that level of service, are considerations that will be informed by this classification.

Q. Will you engage on levels of service?
A. Yes. The classification is now being used in the development of the NZTA's State Highway Network Strategy. This Strategy will provide the thirty year direction for managing the state highway network. The Strategy will include proposed levels of service for each category of the classification. These service levels will indicate the experience road users can increasingly expect over time, over the next thirty years. The NZTA intends to engage with stakeholders on the Strategy including service levels, later this year.

The classification and its relationship to other NZTA activities and funding

Q. Will classification affect funding?
A. Not directly. Current investment processes will remain the same. These are outlined in our Investment and Revenue Strategy which gives a strategic framework for every funding decision. Activities are prioritised according to their 'strategic fit' (the extent to which they address key opportunities from a national perspective); 'effectiveness' (how well they achieve particular outcomes identified in the 'strategic fit'); and 'economic efficiency' (how efficiently they use resources).

The classification approach is another tool to help determine 'strategic fit'. In time, each category of state highway will have a corresponding level of service or road user experience. Some funding will over time target roads that need to be brought up to those agreed levels of services.

Q. What's the relationship between classification and the Government Policy Statement on transport?
A. The Government Policy Statement (GPS) sets out the government's top priority for land transport to make sure our transport system boosts New Zealand's economy by moving people and freight more safely and efficiently. The engagement document released by the Ministry of Transport on the 2012/13 – 2021/12 GPS includes a reference to the classification system within the context of the roads of national significance (RoNS).

Q. What is the relationship between the classification approach and the KiwiRAP star ratings?
A. KiwiRAP rates sections of the state highway based on crash history. It is primarily an information tool for drivers to encourage safe driving. It is separate to classification which sets out to define the key functions of state highways. However KiwiRAP will provide useful information when setting levels of service for each category of highway.

Q. How does the classification fit with Safer Journeys road safety strategy?
A. One of the priorities of the Safer Journeys strategy is the development of a classification system for the roading network, including state highways. Safety is an important component of the road user experience of state highways and over time this should be improved over the network. Classifying the highways and over time delivering a consistent user experience for each category of highway will help deliver safer journeys.

Q. What is the relationship between classification and the NZTA's functional strategies?
A. Classification will provide a foundation for the State Highway Network Strategy, which in turn is one of the four functional strategies guiding the work of the NZTA. The other three are Investment and Revenue Strategy; Integrated Planning Strategy; and Network Access and Use Strategy.