

Urban and Rural Area Definitions

Urban and rural areas have fundamentally different characteristics as to density and types of land use, density of street and highway networks, nature of travel patterns, and the way in which all these elements are related in the definitions of highway function.

Experience has shown that extensions of rural arterial and collector routes provide an adequate arterial street network in places of less than 5,000 population. Hence urban classifications as discussed herein are considered in the context of places of 5,000 population or more.

Urban areas are defined in Federal-aid highway law (Section 101 of Title 23, U.S. Code) as follows:

"The term 'urban area' means an urbanized area or, in the case of an urbanized area encompassing more than one State, that part of the urbanized area in each such State, or an urban place as designated by the Bureau of the Census having a population of five thousand or more and not within any urbanized area, within boundaries to be fixed by responsible State and local officials in cooperation with each other, subject to approval by the Secretary. Such boundaries shall, as a minimum, encompass the entire urban place designated by the Bureau of the Census."

"Urban area" includes urbanized areas (population of 50,000 and over and urban places (population of 5,000 or more and not located within any urbanized area). For clarity and simplicity, the FHWA uses the term "small urban area" as a substitute for "urban place".

Rural areas comprise the areas outside the boundaries of small urban areas and urbanized areas.