

Functional Classification

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) "Functional Classification Guidelines" state that Functional Classification is the process by which streets and highways are grouped into classes or systems, according to the character of service they are intended to provide.

Basic to this process is the recognition that individual roads and streets do not serve travel independently in any major way. Rather, most travel involves movement through a network of roads. It becomes necessary then to determine how this travel can be channelized within the network in a logical and efficient manner.

Functional classification defines the nature of this channelization process by defining the part that any particular road should play in serving the flow of trips through a highway network. Allied to the idea of traffic channelization is the dual role the highway network plays in providing (1) access to property, and (2) travel mobility. Mobility can be provided at varying levels, usually referred to as "level of service." It can incorporate a wide range of elements (e.g., riding comfort and freedom from speed changes) but the most basic is operating speed or trip travel time. The four major functional classifications are:

- Principal arterial is a major highway intended to serve through traffic where access is carefully controlled, generally highways of regional importance, with moderate to high volumes of traffic traveling relatively long distances and at higher speeds.
- Minor arterials are highways that interconnect with and augment the principal arterial system. Minor arterials distribute traffic to smaller geographic areas providing service between and within communities.
- Collector is a highway that provides land access service and traffic circulation within residential, commercial, and industrial areas. The collector system distributes trips from principal and minor arterials through the area to the ultimate destination. Conversely, collectors also collect traffic from local streets in residential neighborhoods and channel it into the arterial system.
- Local streets/roads comprise all facilities that are not collectors or arterials. Local streets serve primarily to provide direct access to abutting land and to other streets.*

Functional Classification of State Highways

Information on the process for establishing a functional classification for a new road or for changing the functional classification for an existing highway is available on the VDOT web site at [Functional Classification](#). Maps identifying the functional classification of all state highways are also presented on this web site.

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