

Reasons for Highway Shoulders

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Before the 1971 "Bike Bill" was passed, and the terms "shoulder bikeways" or "bike lanes" were commonly used, the Oregon Highway Division advocated (1) building paved shoulders when constructing roads and (2) adding paved shoulders to existing roads. These were often referred to as "safety shoulders." There are good reasons for this term.

The following reasons are what AASHTO (American Association of State Highway Officials) says about the benefits of shoulders in the areas of safety, capacity and maintenance. Most of these benefits apply to shoulders on rural highways and to marked, on-street bike lanes on urban roads. See other side for other benefits specific to urban areas.

Safety - highways with paved shoulders have lower accident rates, as paved shoulders:

Provide space to make evasive maneuvers;

Accommodate driver error;

Add a recovery area to regain control of a vehicle, as well as lateral clearance to roadside objects such as guardrail, signs and poles (highways require a "clear zone," and paved shoulders give the best recoverable surface);

Provide space for disabled vehicles to stop or drive slowly;

Provide increased sight distance for through vehicles and for vehicles entering the roadway (rural: in cut sections or brushy areas; urban: in areas with many sight obstructions);

Contribute to driving ease and reduced driver strain;

Reduce passing conflicts between motor vehicles and bicyclists and pedestrians;

Make the crossing pedestrian more visible to motorists; and

Provide for storm water discharge farther from the travel lanes, reducing hydroplaning, splash and spray to following vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists.

Capacity - highways with paved shoulders can carry more traffic, as paved shoulders:

Provide more intersection and safe stopping sight distance;

Allow for easier exiting from travel lanes to side streets and roads (also a safety benefit);

Provide greater effective turning radius for trucks;

Provide space for off-tracking of truck's rear wheels in curved sections;

Provide space for disabled vehicles, mail delivery and bus stops; and

Provide space for bicyclists to ride at their own pace;

Maintenance - highways with paved shoulders are easier to maintain, as paved shoulders:

Provide structural support to the pavement;

Discharge water further from the travel lanes, reducing the undermining of the base and subgrade;

Provide space for maintenance operations and snow storage;

Provide space for portable maintenance signs;

Facilitate painting of fog lines.

Benefits of Urban Bike Lanes to Other Road Users: Urban streets have to satisfy many needs: various modes use them, and they provide local access to a community as well as mobility for through traffic. Many of the benefits of shoulders listed on the first page also apply to bike lanes in urban areas, whether they were created by restriping or by widening the road. Some street enhancements cannot be measured with numbers alone, as they offer values (e.g. trees) that simply make a community better. The following discussion should be viewed in this context. Bike lanes can provide the following benefits:

For Pedestrians:

Greater separation from traffic, especially in the absence of on-street parking or a planter strip, increasing comfort and safety. This is important to young children walking, playing or riding their bikes on curbside sidewalks.

Reduced splash from vehicles passing through puddles (a total elimination of splash where puddles are completely contained within the bike lane).

An area for people in wheelchairs to walk where there are no sidewalks, or where sidewalks are in poor repair or do not meet ADA standards.

A space for wheelchair users to turn on and off curb cut ramps away from moving traffic.

The opportunity to use tighter corner radii, which reduces intersection crossing distance and tends to slow turning vehicles.

In dry climates, a reduction in dust raised by passing vehicles, as they drive further from unpaved surfaces.

For Motorists:

Greater ease and more opportunities to exit from driveways (thanks to improved sight distance).

Greater effective turning radius at corners and driveways, allowing large vehicles to turn into side streets without off-tracking onto curb.

A buffer for parked cars, making it easier for motorists to park, enter and exit vehicles safely and efficiently. This requires a wide enough bike lane so bicyclists aren't "doored."

Less wear and tear of the pavement, if bike lanes are restriped by moving travel lanes (heavier motor vehicles no longer travel in the same well-worn ruts).

For Other Modes:

Transit: A place to pull over next to the curb out of the traffic stream.

Delivery vehicles (including postal service): a place to stop out of the traffic stream.

Emergency vehicles: Room to maneuver around stopped traffic, decreasing response time.

Bicyclists: Greater acceptance of people bicycling on the road, as motorists are reminded that they are not the only roadway users;

Non-motorized modes: An increase in use, by increasing comfort to both pedestrians and bicyclists (this could leave more space for motorists driving and parking).

For the Community (Livability factors):

A traffic calming effect on arterials when bike lanes are striped by narrowing travel lanes.

Better definition of travel lanes where road is wide (lessens the "sea of asphalt" look).

An improved buffer to trees, allowing greater plantings of green canopies, which also has a traffic calming effect.