Policy

It is in the national interest to preserve and enhance the Interstate System to meet the needs of the 21st Century by assuring that it provides the highest level of service in terms of safety and mobility. Full control of access along the Interstate mainline and ramps, along with control of access on the crossroad at interchanges, is critical to providing such service. Therefore, FHWA's decision to approve new or revised access points to the Interstate System under 23 U.S.C. 111 must be supported by substantiated information justifying and documenting that decision. The FHWA's decision to approve a request is dependent on the proposal satisfying and documenting the following requirements.

Considerations and Requirements

1. An operational and safety analysis has concluded that the proposed change in access does not have a significant adverse impact on the safety and operation of the Interstate facility (which includes mainline lanes, existing, new, or modified ramps, ramp intersections with crossroad) or on the local street network based on both the current and the planned future traffic projections. The analysis should, particularly in urbanized areas, include at least the first adjacent existing or proposed interchange on either side of the proposed change in access (23 CFR 625.2(a), 655.603(d) and 771.111(f)). The crossroads and the local street network, to at least the first major intersection on either side of the proposed change in access, should be included in this analysis to the extent necessary to fully evaluate the safety and operational impacts that the proposed change in access and other transportation improvements may have on the local street network (23 CFR 625.2(a) and 655.603(d)). Requests for a proposed change in access should include a description and assessment of the impacts and ability of the proposed changes to safely and efficiently collect, distribute, and accommodate traffic on the Interstate facility, ramps, intersection of ramps with crossroad, and local street network (23 CFR 625.2(a) and 655.603(d)). Each request should also include a conceptual plan of the type and location of the signs proposed to support each design alternative (23 U.S.C. 109(d) and 23 CFR 655.603(d)).

2. The proposed access connects to a public road only and will provide for all traffic movements. Less than "full interchanges" may be considered on a case-by-case basis for applications requiring special access, such as managed lanes (e.g., transit, HOVs, HOT lanes) or park and ride lots. The proposed access will be designed to meet or exceed current standards (23 CFR 625.2(a), 625.4(a)(2), and 655.603(d)). In rare instances where all basic movements are not provided by the proposed design, the report should include a full-interchange option with a comparison of the operational and safety analyses to the partial-interchange option. The report should also include the mitigation proposed to compensate for the missing movements, including wayfinding signage, impacts on local intersections, mitigation of driver expectation leading to wrong-way movements on ramps, etc. The report should describe whether future provision of a full interchange is precluded by the proposed design.

Application

This policy is applicable to new or revised access points to existing Interstate facilities regardless of the funding of the original construction or regardless of the funding for the new access points. This includes routes incorporated into the Interstate System under the provisions of 23 U.S.C. 103(c)(4)(A) or other legislation.

Routes approved as a future part of the Interstate System under 23 U.S.C. 103(c)(4)(B) represent a special case because they are not yet a part of the Interstate System. Since the intention to add the route to the Interstate System has been formalized by agreement, any proposed new or significant changes in access beyond those covered in the agreement, regardless of funding, must be approved by FHWA.

This policy is not applicable to toll roads incorporated into the Interstate System, except for segments where Federal funds have been expended or these funds will be used for roadway improvements, or where the toll road section has been added to the Interstate System under the provisions of 23 U.S.C. 103(c)(4)(A). The term "segment" is defined as the project limits described in the Federal-aid project agreement.

Each break in the control of access to the Interstate System right-of-way is considered to be an access point. For the purpose of applying this policy, each entrance or exit point, including "locked gate" access, is considered to be an access point. For example, a diamond interchange configuration has four access points.

Ramps providing access to rest areas, information centers, and weigh stations within the Interstate controlled access are not considered access points for the purpose of applying this policy. These facilities must be accessible to vehicles only to and from the Interstate System. Access to or from these facilities and local roads and adjoining property is prohibited. The only allowed exception is for access to adjacent publicly owned conservation and recreation areas, if access to these areas is only available through the rest area, as allowed under 23 CFR 752.5(d).

Generally, any change in the design of an existing access point is considered a change to the interchange configuration, even though the number of actual points of access may not change. For example, replacing one of the direct ramps of a diamond interchange with a loop, or changing a cloverleaf interchange into a fully directional interchange would be considered revised access for the purpose of applying this policy.

All requests for new or revised access points on completed Interstate highways must closely adhere to the planning and environmental review processes as required in 23 CFR parts 450 and 771. The FHWA approval constitutes a Federal action and, as such, requires that the transportation planning, conformity, congestion management process, and the National Environmental Policy Act procedures be followed and their requirements satisfied. This means the final FHWA approval of requests for new or revised access cannot precede the completion of these processes or necessary actions.[1]

[1] State Departments of Transportation (State DOTs) may assume FHWA environmental review responsibilities under 23 U.S.C. 326 (Categorical Exclusion assignment program) or 23 U.S.C. 327 (Surface Transportation Project Delivery Program). FHWA retains final approval authority of the Interstate System Access change request once the project receives safety, operational, and engineering acceptability and environmental review.

To offer maximum flexibility, however, any proposed change in access can be submitted by a State DOT to the FHWA Division Office for a determination of safety, operational, and engineering acceptability.[2] This flexibility allows agencies the option of obtaining this acceptability determination prior to making the required modifications to the Transportation Plan, performing any required conformity analysis, and completing the environmental review and approval process. In this manner, State DOTs can determine if a proposal is acceptable for inclusion as an alternative in the environmental process. This policy in no way alters the planning, conformity, or environmental review and approval procedures as contained in 23 CFR parts 450 and 771, and 40 CFR parts 51 and 93.

An affirmative determination by FHWA of safety, operational, and engineering acceptability for proposals for new or revised access points to the Interstate System should be reevaluated whenever a significant change in conditions occurs (e.g., land use, traffic volumes, roadway configuration or design, environmental commitments). Proposals may be reevaluated if the project has not progressed to construction within 3 years of receiving an affirmative determination of engineering and operational acceptability (23 CFR 625.2(a); see also 23 CFR 771.129). If the project is not constructed within this time period, then FHWA may evaluate whether an updated justification report based on current and projected future conditions is needed to receive either an affirmative determination of safety, operational, and engineering acceptability, or final approval if all other requirements have been satisfied (23 U.S.C. 111, 23 CFR 625.2(a), and 23 CFR 771.129).

Implementation

State DOTs must submit requests for proposed changes in access to their FHWA Division Office for review and action under 23 U.S.C. 106 and 111(a), and 23 CFR 625.2(a). The FHWA Division Office will ensure that all requests for changes in access contain sufficient information, as required in this policy, to allow FHWA to independently evaluate and act on the request.

Effective Date

This policy replaces the August 27, 2009 policy "Access to the Interstate System", published at 74 Federal Register 43743. The changes in this policy are made to ensure this policy focuses on safety, operational, and engineering issues. The considerations of social, economic, and environmental impacts discussed in the 2009 policy are removed from this policy. However, the removal from this policy does not eliminate the need to consider those matters. Those issues will be addressed under the National Environmental Policy Act and other statutes and regulations applicable to the approval process.

This policy is effective as of May 22, 2017.

[2] FHWA may delegate approval authority for some Interstate access justification reports to State DOTs pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 111(e). See https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/design/interstate/160426.cfm. FHWA retains final approval authority of the Interstate System Access change request once the project receives safety, operational, and engineering acceptability and environmental review.