



# FOUR- TO THREE-LANE CONVERSION

A four- to three-lane conversion, sometimes referred to as a “Road Diet,” involves restriping a four-lane road as a three-lane road. One lane is provided in each direction with a continuous two-way left-turn lane down the center. The new lane configuration leaves room in the roadway for enhancements such as wider parking and bike lanes. When combined with a roadway resurfacing project, this conversion is completed with very little additional cost. Four- to three-lane conversions are one of the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA’s) top proven safety countermeasures to reduce crashes.



*Evaluation of Lane Reduction “Road Diet” Measures on Crashes, FHWA-HRT-10-053, (2010)*

## “Road Diet” Benefits

- Focuses more on a community-friendly environment that better accommodates the needs of all road users.
- Reduces the number of lanes pedestrians must cross.
- Eliminates the issue of a vehicle in one lane stopping for a pedestrian while the other lane does not, potentially causing a serious accident.
- Presents opportunities to install pedestrian refuge islands, bicycle lanes, and better on-street parking.
- Calms traffic with more consistent speeds.
- Reduces rear-end and left-turn crashes due to the dedicated left-turn lane.
- Reduces right-angle crashes as side street motorists cross three instead of four travel lanes.

## When should a four- to three-lane conversion be considered?

Many factors are considered before implementing a four- to three-lane conversion, including the following:

- Traffic volume
- Number of intersections
- Type and location of access points
- Corridor crash history

Many communities in Montana have had success implementing three-lane roads in urban and rural locations, including Sidney and Fairview in the Glendive District.

# MYTH

vs.

# FACT

## ABOUT FOUR- TO THREE-LANE CONVERSION



Drivers will be diverted from the area



For most four- to three-lane conversions, traffic volumes remain about the same. Also, three-lane roads are generally more efficient than four-lane roads because vehicles no longer need to stop in the through lane to make left turns.



Economic development will be stifled



Converting a four-lane road to a three-lane road can positively impact property values and businesses because features added in the unused space, such as better parking and bicycle lanes, can improve livability and transform the corridor into one people want to drive versus just get through. Improved parking can benefit businesses and the center two-way left-turn lane improves access.



Traffic will back up



Studies have consistently shown that, for roads with less than 20,000 vehicles per day, four- to three-lane conversions will not worsen congestion. In fact, operations and safety improve on a three-lane road because left turns are shifted into the center turn lane, allowing traffic to flow more freely in the through lanes.



Large vehicles like farm equipment cannot be accommodated



Impacts to large vehicles, such as farm equipment, are minimal. Because the width of the pavement does not change, large vehicles can continue to use the road as they have in the past.



Emergency response times will increase



Contrary to popular belief, a four- to three-lane conversion does not increase emergency response times. In fact, response times usually improve because emergency vehicles can use the center turn lane when responding to an incident. This helps alleviate bottlenecks that can occur on four-lane roads when drivers have little room to maneuver in the middle lanes when trying to move over for the emergency vehicles.

### For more information, see these FHWA links

<https://highways.dot.gov/safety/proven-safety-countermeasures/road-diets-roadway-configuration>  
<https://highways.dot.gov/safety/proven-safety-countermeasures>

This document is printed at state expense. Information on the cost of producing this publication may be obtained by contacting the Department of Administration.



Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided on request. Persons who need an alternative format should contact the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Transportation, 2701 Prospect Avenue, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620. Telephone 406-444-5416 or Montana Relay Service at 711.