

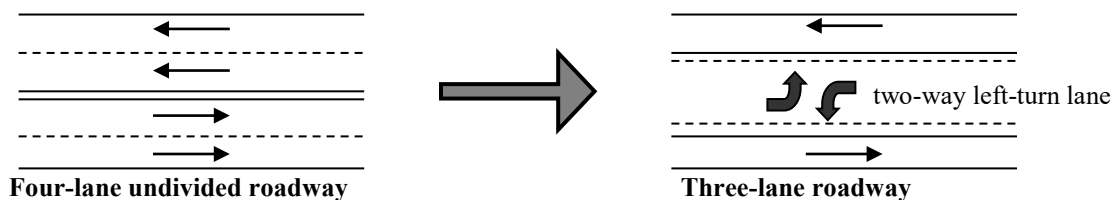
TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #21

Did you know that converting a four-lane street to a three-lane street can improve safety without increasing congestion?

Four-lane undivided roadways are known for their lack of safety. One reason for this is that the left lanes (the inner lanes) tend to carry both through traffic and drivers who need to slow down and possibly stop to turn left.

The alternatives

There are alternatives to four-lane undivided roadways that are safer—and that may not sacrifice speed or cause congestion. For example, four-lane roadways can be converted into three-lane roadways whose middle lane is a two-way left-turn lane. This conversion removes left-turning vehicles from the through lanes, which helps traffic flow more smoothly. The number of lanes that need to be crossed by left-turning and cross-street vehicles also decreases.



How is safety improved?

Changing from four-lane undivided roadways to three-lane roadways can result in a reduction in the range of speeds being driven, a decrease in traffic disruption, and improved visibility for drivers turning left. Speeding is also reduced. These improvements decrease the probability of crashes along the roadway. Data from a study in Minnesota indicate that three-lane roads have a crash rate 27 percent lower than four-lane undivided roadways.

What about speed and traffic flow?

Three-lane roadways are not necessarily more congested than four-lane roadways. If designed properly and implemented in the right locations, any decrease in average speed can be minimal. Delays at intersections may increase, but proper signal timing can minimize the impact.

What is being done

Two cities in Iowa, Storm Lake and Muscatine, have had positive experiences with three-lane roadways that have been converted from four-lane undivided roads. Other cities in Iowa and cities in 12 other states have also implemented this strategy. The public response has been positive, and city officials are pleased with the resulting traffic flow and increased safety.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.