What is a 4- to 3-lane conversion?

A 4- to 3-lane conversion (sometimes referred to as a road diet) involves restriping a 4-lane road as a 3-lane road. One lane is provided in each direction with a continuous left-turn lane down the center. When combined with a roadway resurfacing project, a 4- to 3-lane conversion can be completed without any additional cost. This often leaves room for enhancements such as on-street parking or bike lanes. 4- to 3-lane conversions are one of the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA’s) proven safety countermeasures. To learn more, watch the video at: https://iowadot.gov/traffic/3-lane-roads

What are the benefits of a 4- to 3-lane conversion?

- Reduces crashes by about half.
- Decreases left-turn and rear-end crashes because of the dedicated center turn lane.
- Opportunity to provide enhancements such as parking or bike lanes.
- Improves walkability because there are fewer lanes for pedestrians to cross, and traffic is located farther from the sidewalk.
- Improves access to homes, schools, and businesses.
- Regulates speeds and calms traffic. Speeds are more consistent with just one lane in each direction.

When should a 4- to 3-lane conversion be considered?

There are many factors that should be considered before implementing a 4-to 3-lane conversion. Some of the key factors include traffic volume, number of intersections, type and location of access points, as well as a corridor’s crash history.

Many communities in Iowa have had success implementing 3-lane roads in urban, suburban, and rural locations.

To proactively identify where future conversions might be considered, the Iowa DOT recently conducted a statewide screening. This effort provided a snapshot of potential locations where a conversion would be successful.

For additional information visit https://iowadot.gov/traffic/3-lane-roads
4- to 3-Lane Conversion MYTHS

MYTH | Drivers will be diverted from the area.
FALSE. For the majority of 4- to 3-lane conversions, traffic volumes remain about the same. In addition, 3-lane roads are generally more efficient than 4-lane roads because the vehicles waiting to make a left turn will no longer block the through lanes.

MYTH | Traffic will back up.
FALSE. Studies have consistently shown that, for roads with less than 20,000 vehicles per day, 4- to 3-lane conversions will not make congestion worse. In fact, operations and safety improve on a 3-lane road because left turns are shifted into the center turn lane allowing traffic to flow more freely in the through lanes.

MYTH | Large vehicles like farm equipment cannot be accommodated.
FALSE. 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. Tractors and combines that are wider than one lane can extend in to the center lane, as needed, for travel through town.

MYTH | Economic development will be stifled.
FALSE. Converting to a 3-lane road can positively impact property values and businesses. When converting a 4-lane road to a 3-lane road, additional features can be added such as parking and/or bicycle lanes. These features can improve livability and transform the corridor into one people want to drive on rather than drive through. Additional parking can provide a benefit to businesses and the center left-turn lane improves access.

MYTH | Emergency response times will increase.
FALSE. A 4- to 3-lane conversion does not increase emergency response times. In fact, response times usually improve because emergency vehicles can utilize the center turn lane when responding to an incident. This avoids bottlenecks that can occur on 4-lane roads when drivers in the middle lanes try to move over for the emergency vehicle, but can’t.

For additional information visit
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