

## RURAL ROADS

***For low-volume rural roads, retain the narrow widths, natural edges, and scenic winding character of the traditional roads, rather than imposing wider, suburban-scale standards into the countryside.***

Older roads in rural areas are often 16 to 18 feet wide. However, modern road standards routinely require wider specifications in response to increased speeds and liability concerns. Local roads are straightened and widened, clearing away all vegetation, destroying stone walls and other historic features, and making unnecessary rock cuts and uniform slopes. Even off of narrow, naturally graded roads, new driveways are often required to be much wider than the main road, with curbing and storm drains that are out-of-place in rural areas.

The results of wider roads in rural areas tend to be faster vehicle speeds, more serious crashes, and higher construction and long-term maintenance costs. Excessive speeds help make the death rate per vehicle mile for rural areas much higher than the rate for urban areas. Rural roads should be context sensitive, designed to reflect the character of the surrounding countryside, and compatible with slower farm equipment, nearby vegetation, and crossing wildlife.



*Unique roadside features, such as stone walls and farm fences, add to the scenic qualities of rural roads and entice drivers to slow down and enjoy the views.*



*Wide vegetation clear zones are unnecessary on lower volume rural roads - 10 feet is desirable for all-purpose rural roads or at curves, and 2 to 5 feet for low-volume access roads under 40 mph.<sup>1</sup>*

### Rural Road Guidelines

*(especially where traffic is under 400 vehicles per day<sup>1</sup>)*

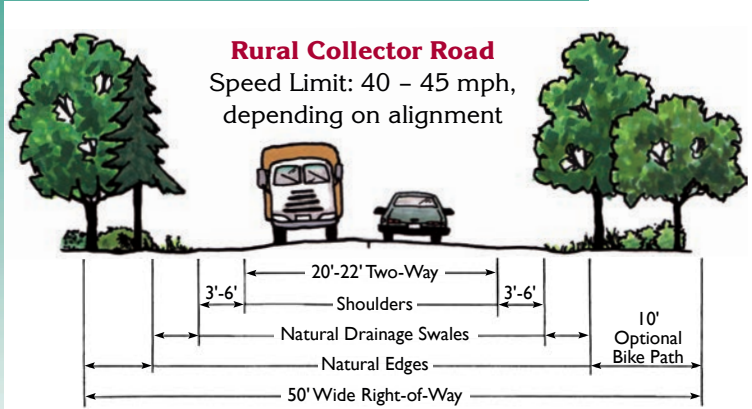
- Adopt road standards that are consistent with local rural conditions, not imported from suburban areas;
- Maintain natural and cultural roadside features, such as rock outcroppings, stone walls, and rows of trees;
- Limit grading and clearing to the minimum necessary, based on traffic volumes and visibility at curves;
- Only use curbing when natural drainage is not feasible;
- Minimize road width, except for roads with significant truck use;
- Reduce access points by promoting shared driveways;
- Use wooden or box beam guide rails, where appropriate, rather than standard galvanized models;
- Consider alternatives to standard asphalt, such as porous paving, chip seal, or gravel;
- Designate local scenic roads and establish standards for long-term protection and maintenance.

# Rural Road Guidelines

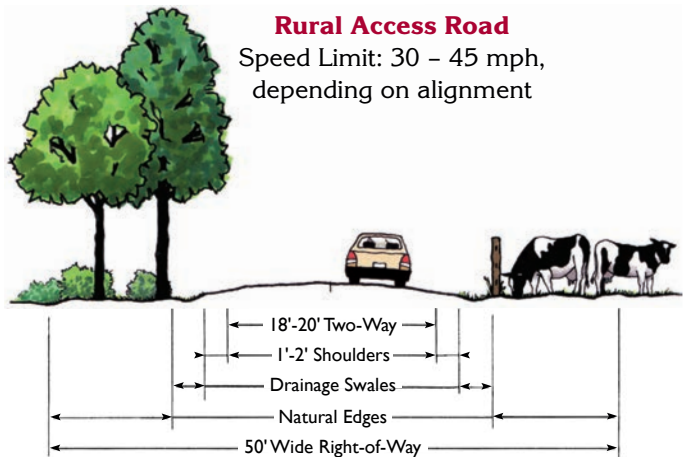
(especially where traffic is under 400 vehicles per day<sup>1</sup>)



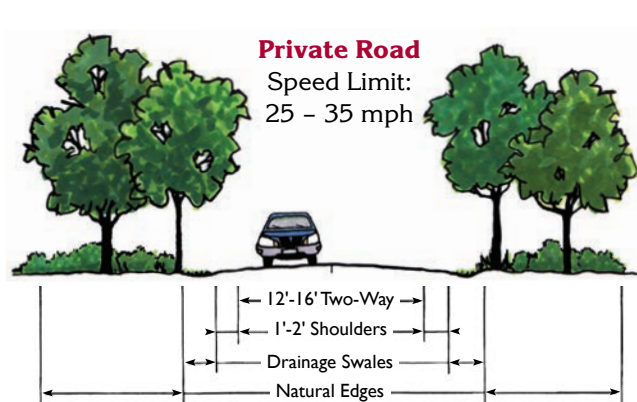
Rural Collector Road, 22 feet wide plus shoulders



Rural Access Road, 16 feet wide



Private Road with pull-outs, 13 feet wide



*\*For guidelines on a wider range of road types, including roads with separated walking or bike paths, see Design Guide for Rural Roads.<sup>2</sup>*

**Sources:**

<sup>1</sup>Cornell Local Roads Program, *Highway Standards for Low-Volume Roads in New York State*, 2008

<sup>2</sup>Dutchess Land Conservancy, *Design Guide for Rural Roads*, 1998