

March/April 2010

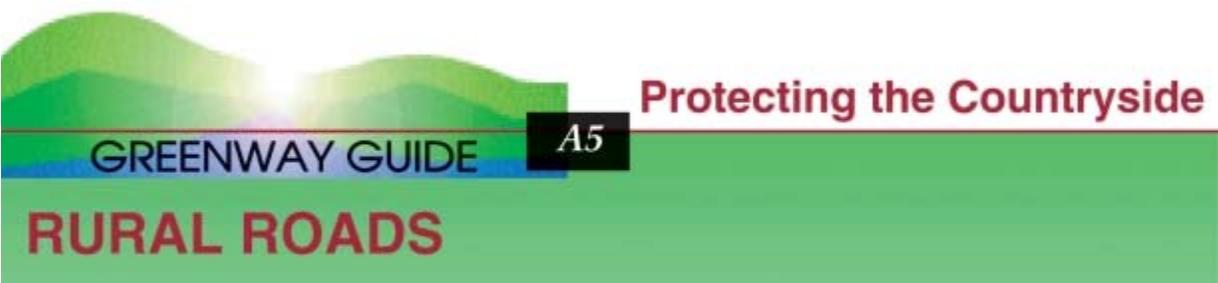
## New Greenway Guide: *Rural Roads*

By: John Clarke, Development & Design Coordinator

*Greenway Connections*, which initially included 18 Greenway Guides, was completed in 2000 and has since been adopted as a voluntary compact program of land use policies and guidelines by the County and 29 out of 30 Dutchess County communities. Designed as a three-ring binder, *Greenway Connections* was always intended to be a living document with additional guides adopted in response to changing circumstances and needs. The Greenway Compact is entirely voluntary, respects local home rule, and relies on incentives and guidelines rather than any requirements.

This eNewsletter introduces the fourth of several draft Greenway Guides for public review, comments, and eventual adoption by local municipalities. The proposed “Rural Roads” guide presents design recommendations for low-volume local roads, especially those under 400 vehicles per day. It suggests narrower road widths and vegetation clear zones to slow down traffic speeds and to maintain natural and rural roadside character. Overbuilding low-volume roads with wider suburban specifications can lead to higher-speed accidents, as well as inflated construction and maintenance costs for local governments.

**DRAFT**



*For low-volume rural roads, retain the narrow widths, natural edges, and scenic winding character of 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)**

- 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 corrugated 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.

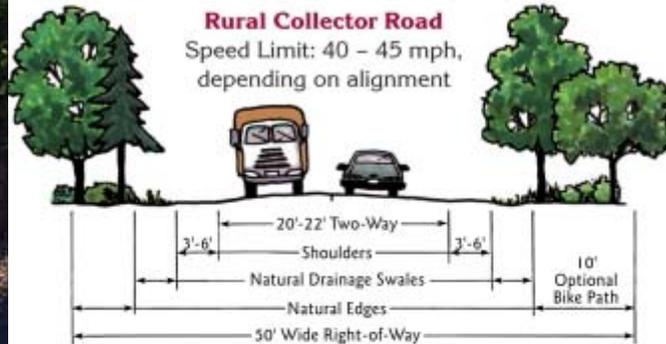
*This guide is intended for local roads, not higher volume state or county thoroughfares.*

# Rural Road Guidelines

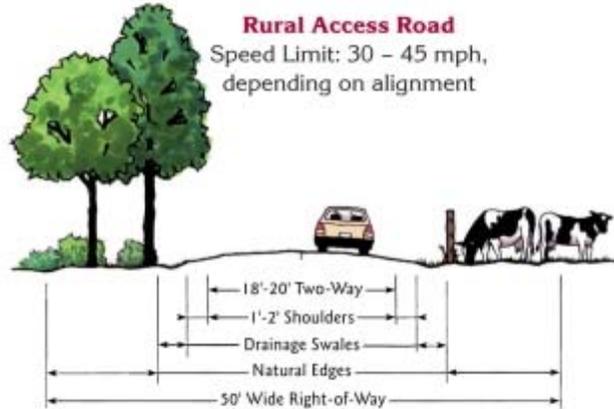
(especially where traffic is under 400 vehicles per day<sup>1</sup>)



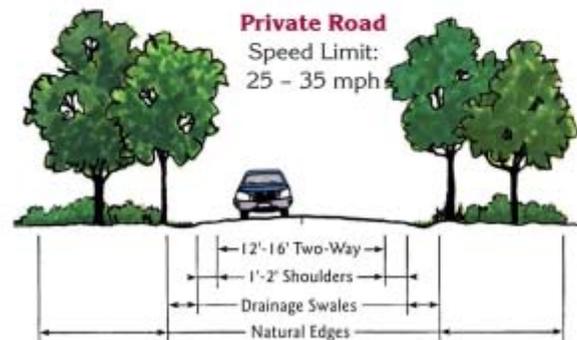
Rural Collector Road, 22 feet wide plus shoulders



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

## Share Your Feedback & More Information

The Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development is accepting public comments on this draft Greenway Guide. Please email your thoughts by March 31<sup>st</sup> to:  
DCPlanningFederation@co.dutchess.ny.us

Visit the [Planning Department's website](#) for information on the Greenway program.

View the December 2009 eNewsletter issue which presented a draft Greenway Guide on [Slower, Safer Streets](#)

[CLICK HERE](#) to view past issues of the DCPF's newsletter, *Plan On It*.

This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

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