

Des Moines Register

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

[Teresa Kay Albertson](#), Des Moines Register Published 5:03 p.m. CT Jan. 29, 2019

Is DOT pushing Iowa towns to adopt 'road diets'? House bill would limit state agency.

Rep. Sandy Salmon, R-Janesville, says the DOT is pushing Iowa cities to reduce lanes on highways.

The Iowa Department of Transportation would be barred from recommending that cities reduce vehicle lanes on Iowa highways within city limits under legislation proposed in the Iowa House.

State Rep. Sandy Salmon, R-Janesville, said she is sponsoring House File 41 to rein in the DOT, which she says is pushing cities to adopt so-called road diets.

"I'm not saying that cities can't change roadways from four lanes to three," Salmon told the Des Moines Register. "They can. But I don't think the state government should be pushing a top-down, bureaucratic idea on communities."

City officials, however, said they rely on DOT recommendations to make decisions about highways that pass through their towns.



The east end of Iowa Highway 346 is located near New Hampton. (Photo: Jeff Morrison/Special to The Register)

Waverly, the largest city in Salmon's district, reduced a portion of Highway 3 to three lanes last fall. Indianola is considering doing the same to a portion of Highway 92.

In both cases, the DOT presented the lane reduction to city officials as a way to improve driver safety.

"I think having a collaborative approach is a valuable thing," Indianola City Manager Ryan Waller said. "Having open lines of communication with our transportation partners and other governmental entities certainly helps us with these projects."

In Indianola, DOT data showed nearly three times as many accidents on Highway 92 where it is four lanes, compared to the portion of the road that is three lanes.

The DOT has been sharing information about lane reductions with Iowa communities since 1999, agency officials said.



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A rider rolls down a section of highway outside Greene, Iowa, in 2014. (Photo: Charlie Litchfield/The Register)

Road diets have become an issue across the country.

A November Los Angeles Times article suggested that narrowed roadways near the town of Paradise, California, contributed to residents' inability to escape wildfires that killed 85 people.

In January, the Wall Street Journal ran an opinion piece calling road diets into question.

Iowa DOT Director Mark Lowe said he is aware of the negative publicity.

“But we certainly haven’t experienced that here in Iowa,” he said. “When we present this information to cities and towns, it is still the city’s decision to consider this solution or not. This certainly isn’t something we are forcing on folks.”

Matt Schneider, the owner of Neighborhood Home furniture store in Waverly, heads up a group called Keep Waverly Moving that opposes the lane reduction on Highway 3. The group's Facebook page has 1,153 followers in a town of 9,874 people.

Schneider said studies, including one conducted by WHKS & Co. for the DOT, have shown that reducing lanes increases road congestion, which can prevent effective emergency services.

Jim Atty, the CEO of Waverly Health Center, said his staff hasn’t seen any delays in ambulance response times, but added the hospital is not tracking numbers specific to the lane reduction.

“If we saw something glaring, obviously, we would look into it,” Atty said. “But at this point, the roadway is already stripped to three lanes, so it’s a moot point.”

Schneider's group is asking the city to restripe Highway 3 back to four lanes, which he said would cost around \$125,000.

But the issue is not limited to just Waverly. “We are trying to figure out what the DOT is up to,” he said.

House File 41 has been referred to the Transportation Committee. The Iowa Bicycle Coalition has declared its opposition to the bill.