

# ROAD DIET



Safety | Livability | Low Cost

## MYTH BUSTERS

### Road Diets and Emergency Response: Friends, Not Foes

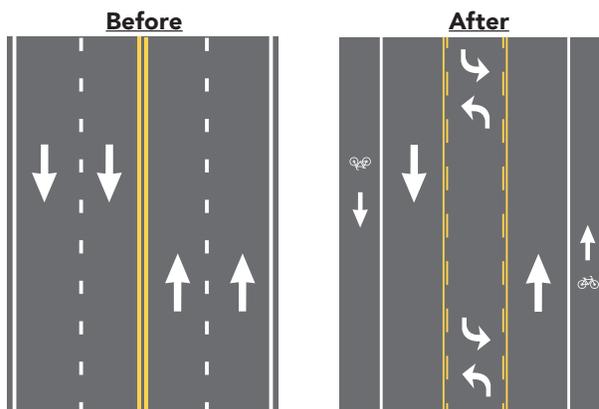
A typical Road Diet converts two-way, four-lane roads to two travel-lanes with a center two-way left-turn lane (TWLTL). Although studies have shown that this conversion can reduce motor-vehicle crashes by 19 to 47 percent,<sup>1</sup> emergency response personnel sometimes express concern that reducing the number of through lanes could increase emergency response times.

#### **Myth: Road Diets Lead to Slow Emergency Response Times!**

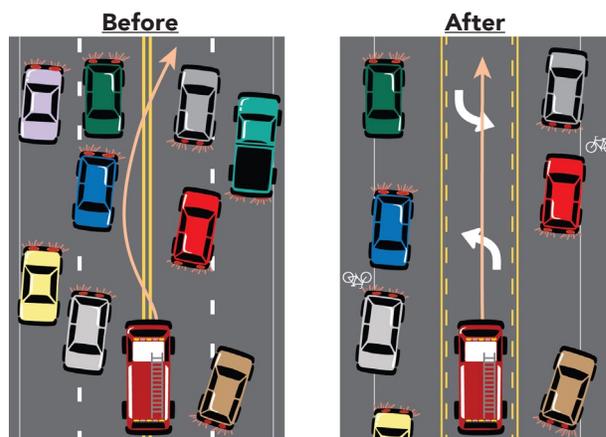
Contrary to popular belief, Road Diets do not degrade response times for law enforcement and emergency services. Instead, one simple Road Diet feature can actually improve response times: the two-way, left-turn lane.

Multi-lane undivided roads can be problematic for police and EMS responders, as drivers may not be aware of protocols for allowing emergency vehicles to pass. While drivers in the outside travel lane are typically able to pull over to the right edge, drivers in inside lanes often seem uncertain about where to go. Emergency responders may struggle to pass through traffic as they thread a path somewhere along the center of the roadway, leading to longer response times and increasing the opportunity for secondary incidents during response.

In contrast, three-lane roadways (including those in Road Diets) provide clarity in the event of an emergency. Road Diets can significantly improve response times by allowing emergency vehicles to bypass traffic by using the TWLTL. Drivers in through lanes can remain in place, leaving the TWLTL solely for emergency response vehicles.



Two travel lanes are removed to reallocate space for a TWLTL and bicycle lanes.



A fire truck struggling to find a path.

An easily navigable two-way left-turn lane.

*A Road Diet design opens a more predictable and practical path for emergency responders.*

<sup>1</sup> Evaluation of Lane Reduction "Road Diet" Measures on Crashes. FHWA Report No. FHWA-HRT-10-053. Washington, D.C. 2010. Accessible at: <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/10053/>.

## Case Studies

Two cities in New Jersey shared their experiences with emergency response vehicles and Road Diets. Each saw an improvement in emergency response operations and safety due to the Road Diet.

### West Avenue – Ocean City, New Jersey

Ocean City, New Jersey, is a tourist-centric community with a population approaching 150,000 during the height of the travel season. West Avenue, located along the shoreline, was once a four-lane facility with on-street parallel parking and heavy bicycle and pedestrian use. It also served as the main thoroughfare for emergency vehicles. To improve road user safety, the city installed a Road Diet on West Avenue, reducing the number of lanes to three (one travel lane each way and a center TWLTL).

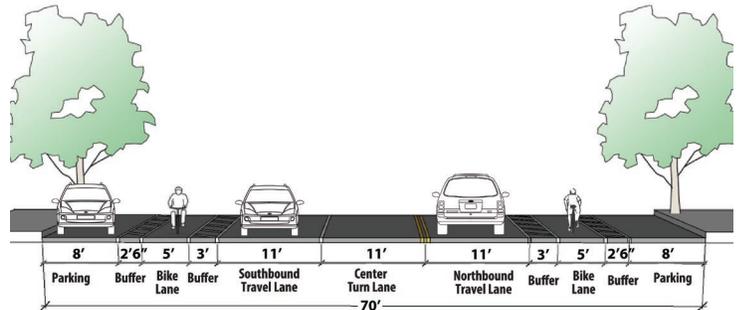
Despite skepticism from emergency responders and the public prior to the Road Diet, the Ocean City Police, other first responders, and the community have embraced the results. Responders no longer have to try to predict driver behavior to navigate the corridor or wait for a lane to clear. Drivers can use the extra shoulder width to pull over, allowing emergency vehicles to use the TWLTL.

*“The new configuration is leaps and bounds safer.”*

Brian Hopely  
Police Traffic Sergeant, Ocean City Police



West Ave., Ocean City, NJ before the Road Diet.



Source: Department of Public Works, Ocean City, NJ

Plan for Road Diet Reconfiguration on West Ave., Ocean City, NJ.

### South Broad Street – Woodbury, New Jersey

South Broad Street in Woodbury, New Jersey – a two-way, four-lane roadway – was plagued with excessive speeding, little opportunity to make left turns, improper lane changes, parking difficulties, and safety concerns as pedestrians crossed at unmarked crosswalks.

When the city suggested Road Diets as a possible solution, Woodbury Police were initially opposed, citing concerns over potentially slower emergency response times. When other safety measures did not reduce excessive speeding or improve safety along the corridor, the city implemented a mile-long Road Diet.

After installation, emergency service providers have become more comfortable with South Broad Street’s configuration. The Road Diet enabled emergency vehicles to travel more directly and safely using the TWLTL. When drivers become aware of the response vehicles, they pull to the right to let emergency vehicle pass, and then return to their movement. In addition, the Road Diet reduced crashes and vehicle speeds. Pedestrians also feel safer and more confident while crossing the street.

*“The Road Diet did not affect emergency vehicle response times. Responders feel it is now easier and safer to reach their destination.”*

Reed Merinuk  
Retired Police Chief, Woodbury PD