



Washington State
Department of Transportation

Instant Tow



This new program in partnership with WSP was implemented in August 2006 to expedite response and removal of blocking disabled vehicles in Seattle and Tacoma. This program dispatches a tow and a trooper at the same time, eliminating the verification process and saving an average of 15 minutes of lane blocking congestion each time it is used. WSDOT traffic engineers have calculated the societal cost savings for each Instant Tow deployment to be approximately \$20,000 to 35,000, depending on the location and traffic conditions. Eliminating verification inevitably results in “Dry Runs” for tow companies which can negatively affect participation. To resolve this issue, WSDOT began paying a fee of \$25 for dry runs in April 2007. On July 15, 2007, the program was expanded to cover all state and interstate highways in King County (Seattle). Future expansion is also being considered in Pierce County (Tacoma).

Impact of Incidents on Highway Capacity

Percentage of Lost Capacity *

Number of Lanes	Shoulder Blocked	Lanes Blocked		
		One	Two	Three
2	19%	65%	100%	N/A
3	17%	51%	83%	100%
4	15%	42%	75%	87%
5	13%	35%	60%	80%
6	11%	29%	50%	74%

Source: 2000 Highway Capacity Manual

*Different studies report slight variations in these numbers

How much capacity is lost with a vehicle blocking one lane?

