

Understanding Roadway Clear Zones

The Maine Turnpike occupies a right of way that is generally 300 feet wide. This leaves about 105 feet from the edge of pavement to the edge of Turnpike property in most locations. Maine is the most forested state in the nation. Trees inevitably grow on Turnpike property over time.

Although trees can be beautiful, the periodic clearing of trees to create clear zones along the highway is essential to assure the safety of motorists for three key reasons:

1. Fewer Deadly Fixed Objects
2. Less Shade Means Less Ice & Salt
3. Better Visibility Means Fewer Wildlife Crashes



Tree shading on Turnpike before clear zone improvements

Key Safety Reasons for Roadway Clearing

Fewer Fixed Deadly Objects

Regrettably, motorists sometimes leave the roadway. They may slide on black ice, hydroplane during rain storms, fall asleep late at night, veer off to avoid an animal, or careen off in a collision. Whatever the reason, hitting a tree can turn an inconvenient accident into injury or death. Running into trees and other “deadly fixed objects” is the number one cause of traffic accident deaths in Maine.



Less Shade Means Less Ice & Salt

Obviously, one of the great benefits of trees in the summer is shade. In the winter, however, shade creates ice. All Maine drivers know how treacherous ice is, but they may not think about how effective simple sunlight can be to melt it. Without sunlight, more salt is required, which is costly and detrimental to the environment.



Mile 53 Maine Turnpike after clear zone improvements

Better Visibility Means Fewer Crashes with Wildlife

A wider clear zone along highways gives motorists a better chance to see moose, deer, and other animals before they enter the road. On a high-speed Interstate like the Turnpike, this can make a life and death difference for both animals and drivers.

