

Dear Road Wizard: I thoroughly second the suggestion made by S.B. on April 20. I have seen the rock mosaics on the interstate near Salt Lake City. I agree they would be exactly right for Wye Interchange landscaping. They are indeed beautiful. M.C., Boise

And thanks, S.B., for confirming your sightings in the Orem/Provo area. I plunged into the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) telephone network, press 1, press 2, and landed happily in the office of Lars Anderson, a UDOT landscape architect and the man who designed the mosaics.

The mosaics are at interchanges for Provo, (installed in 2000), Orem (2002), and Pleasant Grove (2002). The rock is sandstone from Nephi. Different sizes yield different colors and texture effects. A 2004 project is planned for 123rd Street South.

As Anderson spoke, I detected three sources of inspiration. 1. **Common sense:** xeriscaping, aka "let's not be water gluttons when we live in a desert." 2. **Politics:** beauty AND low-cost maintenance. 3. **Artistic technique:** Peter Lassig, the (recently retired) landscape architect responsible for Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

Lassig's technique is called "skeleton, tendon, flesh." The skeleton is a series of trees. The tendons that link them are drought-resistant shrubs. Together they make up about 20 percent of the design. At Temple Square, flowers make up the flesh. At interchanges, stone becomes flesh -- a full 80 percent of the territory needing simple weed control and no water.

The Wye Interchange landscape design is still an open file. If you'd like to share your enthusiasm for this sort of landscape thinking, send a note -- perhaps with a copy of this column -- to your favorite Boise mayor, council members, or parks department. My note will quote Lars Anderson: "It can be great with less money."

Dear Road Wizard: When people exit Federal Way onto southbound Broadway Avenue, there is no instruction as to how they are to merge with Broadway traffic, most of which is in the right-hand lane preparing to enter I-84 West. People coming from Federal Way seem to feel as if they have equal rights to Broadway's pavement. Shouldn't merging traffic be restrained by a yield sign? And perhaps have a longer merge lane? S.M.@

In Europe, princes rank higher than dukes. In great kitchens, butter ranks higher than margarine. In traffic engineering, merges rank higher than yields.

Merges allow high-speed blending of two streams of traffic. The ramp from Federal Way is long enough for drivers to accelerate, match Broadway's 45 mph, and blend in.

Yields are lower forms of life, the choice when sight distance is poor or if merging drivers don't have accelerating distance. For overall efficiency, yield situations involve more stopping and slowing down than merges.

In merges, ramp drivers technically must yield to traffic already on the highway. If your question is "I'm on Broadway, shouldn't I be boss?" Technically, yes, but here's an alternative question: "I'm on Broadway, how can I assist Federal Way drivers?"

You can be a prince and modify your speed ever so slightly -- a tad slower or faster -- to promote a little gap into which a Federal Way driver can slide like butter.

The *Idaho Driver's Manual* says that when traffic is heavy and gap-less, ramp drivers should stop far enough back to leave room for accelerating when a gap

does appear. Personally, I find this advice difficult to execute during the main-road-is-backed-up phase of rush hour. Speeds are much lower than normal. Gaps appear only by virtue of drivers already on the highway who think life is better lived by taking turns in such situations.