



Division of Public Works  
Department of Engineering and  
Construction Management  
355 Montevue Lane, Suite 200  
Frederick, Maryland 21702

# STANDARD PROCEDURES

Effective  
Date:

March 6, 2017

Subject:

Gravel Road Program Practices

Division Director Signature:

## Description/Purpose

Surface conditions on gravel roads are dynamic and change quickly depending on the weather, traffic conditions, and maintenance practices. Maintenance activities must address road serviceability and the needs of the travelling public within the limits of available time and money.

The purpose of this document is to define the basic maintenance that Frederick County road users can expect on gravel surfaced County roads, and the frequency and extent of that maintenance. This document will also establish a protocol for addressing specific complaints and/or maintenance problems that are not adequately addressed by the "Gravel Road Maintenance Grading Policy".

## Maintenance Practices

Gravel road maintenance is divided into several types. Gravel roads can be expected to require some maintenance on an annual basis, and additional maintenance may be required to address issues caused by inclement weather or other unexpected events.

### A. Annual Maintenance

The typical annual cycle includes the following operations, listed by season. These activities are subject to limitations such as available funding and available resources. Activities marked with an asterisk (\*) are typically the first to be reduced or eliminated when funding levels drop.

#### **Annual Maintenance Summary:**

<u>Season</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Winter	
Snow Removal	As needed
Application of anti-skid	As needed
Application of deicing product	Only under special circumstances, limited extent
Spring	
Grading, which includes:	Once per season or as needed due to storm damage
Pull shoulders	As necessary
Clean pipes	As necessary
Cut out potholes	As necessary
Consolidate aggregate	As necessary



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Add aggregate

\*Dust Control

As necessary

Once per year as needed if funding is available, includes grading

Summer

\*Mowing

2-3 times per year total

\*Weed Control at guardrails

2 applications to affected areas per year

Fall

Grading, which includes:

Once per season or as needed due to storm damage

Pull shoulders

As necessary

Clean pipes

As necessary

Cut out potholes

As necessary

Compact aggregate

As necessary

Add aggregate

As necessary

Detailed description of annual maintenance activities:

- **Snow Removal:** Snow removal operations on gravel roads vary according to weather conditions. Standard snow plows attached to dump trucks are damaging to gravel roads and are not typically used. Instead, motor graders and pickup truck mounted plows are used. These plows are positioned at the road surface when the temperature is low and the road surface is frozen solid. When conditions are warmer, the blade is lifted slightly above the road surface and some snow is left behind. This technique minimizes the damage caused by the plow blade when it comes into contact with the road surface.
- **Anti-skid:** Deicing agents such as sodium and magnesium chloride are not suitable for regular use on gravel roads. The chemicals in these products infiltrate the stone aggregate and attract and retain moisture over long periods of time, weakening the road base. If ice is a problem on a gravel surfaced road, anti-skid or stone chips will be applied as needed to provide additional traction. Note that anti-skid is a stone quarry product and is not related to cinders, which are no longer available. Under extreme circumstances deicing agents may be used, but only in limited areas.
- **Grading operations:** Grading operations are performed to correct surface failures on gravel roads. The motor grader operator uses a stinger blade to dig into the road surface, eliminating shallow ruts, potholes, and corrugations, while re-mixing the aggregate. Material that has been pushed to the side and onto the shoulders by passing vehicles is "pulled" back into the road and reincorporated into the road. The road surface is reshaped to form a "crown". A crowned road is higher in the center and each side slopes to the outer edge, draining surface water to the sides of the road. After the road is reshaped, the aggregate may be compacted with a roller. During the grading process other maintenance issues can be





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identified and addressed, such as blocked pipes and ditches. In some cases other equipment is required to achieve positive drainage. For example, hydraulic excavators (Gradall machine) are used to clear ditch lines of debris near headwalls where graders cannot reach. Additional aggregate may be applied as necessary to replace material lost through erosion or snow removal activities, or to address areas with weak subbase that are prone to be soft and wet.

- **Traffic Control Devices on Gravel Roads:** Traffic control devices, specifically regulatory and warning signs, will be used on gravel roads where appropriate according to the standards established by the Maryland Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MD MUTCD). Gravel roads typically have few roadside signs due to the lower speeds and volumes encountered compared to asphalt roads. One should not expect the same size, types, or number of signs on a gravel road as one would expect on an asphalt road. Sign size and frequency of use may be reduced to the minimums allowed by the MD MUTCD. Regulatory speed limit signs will not be posted at speeds lower than 25 miles per hour, and will be posted only where necessary. Signs that are not necessary for traffic control or safety will not be used so that the rural and scenic nature of the road is preserved.
- **Weed control:** Herbicidal agents are used only in places that are impossible to mow with a side mounted mowing machine and too inefficient to mow with hand held devices. Typically this activity takes place most often around the base of guardrail posts.
- **Mowing:** Gravel roads are generally mowed according to the same schedule as tar and chip and asphalt roads. Mowing activities are focused on managing roadside vegetation to maintain or improve visibility for road users, and prevent encroachment of vegetation into the travelled way. Vegetation is usually cut further back at intersections to improve sight distance when possible.
- **Dust control:** Dust control activities seek to reduce the quantity of airborne dust produced by vehicles on gravel roads. Loss of rock fines (dust) leads to loss of larger sized aggregate over time, requiring tons of replacement aggregate if not controlled.

Dust control is usually accomplished by adding calcium chloride to the road surface. The calcium chloride attracts moisture and keeps the road surface damp, which tends to keep dust particles from becoming airborne. Dust control efforts may be reduced or eliminated when funding levels decrease. Dust in some quantity must be expected on gravel surfaced roads, even when aggressive dust control methods are in use.

## **B. Special Maintenance**



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Minor reconstruction and tree trimming are performed as needed. Maintenance cycle or service life is generally several years for these items.

Detailed description of special maintenance activities:

- **Minor Reconstruction:** the road is reformed, similar to regular grading, but additional aggregate is added in significant quantities at this time if not enough was recovered from the sides and ditches. The additional aggregate will be quarry stone that meets current County standards and specifications for use on gravel roads.

Changes to the shape of the crown may be made during this process to address drainage issues. A center crown may be replaced with a super elevation, in which one side of the road is higher than the other and the entire road surface slopes to one side.

Since the road is completely re-graded from shoulder to shoulder it may look as if it was widened, but this appearance is usually caused by the removal of vegetation that has colonized the road shoulder area.

- **Tree Trimming:** trees, tree limbs, and foliage that presents a potential hazard to road users must be trimmed back to maintain a clear travel way and adequate sight lines. This work is typically performed in the Fall, Winter, and early Spring when trees are dormant. This work is more involved than roadside mowing and involves removal of limbs and whole trees where necessary.

Trees that have been damaged by vehicle impacts, storms, insects, decay, stream erosion, etc. and are in danger of falling into or otherwise blocking the roadway may be removed at any time.

#### C. Emergency Maintenance:

The following maintenance activities may be necessary to reestablish road serviceability after a storm event or other unforeseen emergency. Emergencies may include severe storms (microburst, tornado, etc.), hurricanes, sinkholes, flood waters, severe vehicular crashes, landslides, etc.

- Removal of downed trees/flood debris
- Application of additional aggregate
- Grading, consolidation, erosion control, etc.
- Repair or replacement of damaged guardrail
- Other repairs as needed





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### D. "Spot" Maintenance:

Special maintenance to address resident complaints or staff identified issues. Response based on conditions, stipulations of the Rural Roads Program, and available funding/resources.

#### Protocol

1. Problem identified by staff or brought to Department's attention by resident
2. Problem logged into "on-line work request system"
3. Staff investigate conditions in field and develop solution(s)
4. Proposed work is scheduled and/or prioritized based on severity and extent of problem
5. Specific work is performed as soon as possible if problem is urgent, extensive, or severe; or problem is addressed during next round of regular maintenance if it is less extensive or severe.

Urgency based on problem's potential as a safety hazard to road users or its ability to lead to additional road degradation if left unaddressed.

#### Attachments

- Attachment 1: Resolution No. 02-23 Rural Roads Program
- Attachment 2: Gravel Road Maintenance Grading Policy

#### Reference Materials and Locations

- Reference 1: *Gravel Roads Maintenance and Design Manual*. South Dakota Local Transportation Assistance Program (SD LTAP), November 2000.
- Reference 2: *The Pennsylvania Dirt and Gravel Road Maintenance Program, Annual Conference and Workshop, June 6-8, 2005*. Pennsylvania State Conservation Commission/Center for Dirt and Gravel Roads Studies.
- Reference 3: *Field Guide for Unpaved Rural Roads*. Wyoming Technology Transfer (T2) Center, March 1997.
- Reference 4. *Maryland Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*. Federal Highway Administration, 2006, with modifications by the Maryland State Highway Administration, July 2009.