



FACT SHEET – Unsealed Roads



The Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup (Shire) is responsible for over **400km** of unsealed roads.

The condition of unsealed roads can change quickly, with the biggest contributing factors being weather conditions, traffic type, traffic volume and traffic speed. Unlike sealed roads, permanent speed limit signs are not used on unsealed roads because the condition of the roads cannot be assured and **vehicles must always be driven to suit the conditions.**

The Shire continuously looks for ways to improve its service, but due to budget constraints, sealing unsealed roads is, in the majority of cases, not economically viable.

Maintenance Grading

The Shire owns two graders. One is predominately used for maintenance grading and the other for construction work. At times, graders are hired from contractors to supplement the Shire's fleet.

Unsealed roads are maintained by periodic maintenance grading undertaken throughout the year. Some roads are graded more frequently than others depending on traffic volumes and use (ie school bus route), however as a rule, the Shire's budget and program allows for two maintenance grades per year, being a summer grade and a winter grade on formed gravel roads.

The main purpose of winter maintenance grading is to provide a good running surface and to form cross-falls in the road (pulling gravel to the middle of the road), so that water can run off and does not pool. Water pooling on roads causes potholes when vehicles drive through them. Rubber tyre rollers are also used to compact the road during winter grades. Moisture is a critical component in maintenance grading, which is best done just after light rainfall, however, the weather cannot be controlled.

Summer maintenance grading is often done to remove corrugations and improve the running surface (by pushing gravel off the middle section of the road), **however summer grading is only ever partially successful at this, and it is not good for the overall road integrity, as there is little or no moisture in the gravel.** Grading with insufficient moisture in the gravel loosens hard sections of the road which cannot be compacted with a roller until winter grading is done with the required moisture to achieve compaction.

Requesting a Road to be Graded

The Shire has a Maintenance Grading Program, however, from time to time, a request to grade a road is received. The road will be inspected and **if required, the road will be scheduled for grading, in consideration of the Shire's Maintenance Grading Program.**

Gravel Resheeting

Unsealed roads lose gravel over time and require the placement of additional gravel. This process is called “gravel resheeting”, and involves placing an additional 100mm of compacted gravel on top of the existing road. These works are planned within the Shire’s Capital Works Program.

Changing Road Conditions

Over time, unsealed roads become corrugated, potholed, rough, slippery, muddy and/or dusty. **All of these are normal and unavoidable conditions that change often, and drivers must remain vigilant when driving on unsealed roads *ie travel at lower speeds and expect the unexpected.***

It is also important to note that road conditions can, and do, change after grading; unsealed roads are often more slippery after they’ve been graded than they were before grading. During dry periods, grading tends to spread loose gravel over the road and in wet conditions, (until the road surface has formed a dense crust), moisture can penetrate the gravel layer.

What You Can Do to Help

1. Slow down.

Travelling quickly on unsealed roads causes more dust, more potholes and more corrugations.

2. If possible, keep heavy vehicles off the road when it has been raining.

Roads are more vulnerable when saturated and heavy vehicles can cause significant damage to a wet road, especially one that has just been graded. In wet conditions, try to postpone truck movements until the road has dried out.

3. Understand the nature of unsealed roads.

They will be rough and muddy or dusty at times; does the road really need grading now?

4. Drive to suit the conditions.

Drivers are responsible for their own safety and that of other users of the road. If a road is known to be rough or slippery, drive at an appropriate speed.

5. Expect the unexpected.

Never assume an unsealed road is going to be the same as it was the last time you drove on it, even if it is on the same day.



The Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup appreciates road users working with us to maintain our gravel road assets.