

ASSET SUSTAINABILITY

Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan

6.4.

Prepared by: Brendan Slattery, Acting Manager Asset Maintenance
Meeting Date: Thursday, December 15, 2022

Executive Summary:

Council's Operational Plan committed, through Initiative 21, to provide improvement in unsealed roads service.

In late 2021, Council engaged Shepherd Services to review current operational and management techniques against best practice. Shepherd Services have significant experience in providing advice to Local Government, particularly in the area of unsealed roads. The scope of the review included:

- On site and off site training
- Review of materials
- Review of management and budgets
- Benchmarking of key measures
- Workshop with field staff to identify improvement opportunities

Shepherd's report was heavily utilised in the development of a 'draft' Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan.

In September 2022 Council endorsed the release of the 'draft' Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan for community consultation for a period of four weeks and requested that Officers provide a further report detailing the community feedback and a recommended final Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan for adoption.

Immediately following, Council invited residents to have their say on the 'draft' Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan through Council's Your Say Platform. A paper version of the survey was also provided on request.

Council was particularly focused on receiving feedback regarding the initiatives outlined in the Improvement Plan. Council encouraged the community to review these initiatives and provide feedback as to whether any should be changed, reprioritised, or removed. A summary of this feedback is provided herein and an amended plan that reflects feedback provided is attached.

Recommendation:

"That Council adopt the attached Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan for implementation."

Background:

In April 2022, Council invited residents of the Cassowary Coast to have their say on the performance of Council through the Cassowary Coast Community Scorecard. This scorecard highlighted areas the community wanted to prioritise with the highest priority being given to improvement in local roads, footpaths, trails and cycleways. A significant amount of the commentary in this area was focused on improvements to the region's unsealed road network.

In August 2022, Council adopted a Stage One response to the Community Scorecard by adopting 18 initiatives. One of these initiatives is to undertake public consultation on Council's Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan. The need for improvement was also identified in the current Operational Plan to provide improvements to Unsealed Roads Service. At a higher level, Unsealed Road Improvement is aligned closely with the strategic objectives of the Corporate Plan:

- A safe, reliable and financially sustainable transport network throughout the Cassowary Coast to facilitate movement of goods and people throughout our community;
- Sustainable asset management to effectively deliver services in a consistent and financially sustainable manner representing value to the community; and
- Provide leadership that supports creative thinking and innovation as well as desired values and organisational culture.

In Late 2021 Council engaged Shepherd Services to review current operational and management techniques against best practice. Shepherd Services have significant experience in providing advice to Local Government, particularly in the area of unsealed roads. Mackay Regional Council has been working with Shepherd Services since 2008 in this area and has seen significant improvement in the services to their community through this period. The review included:

- On site and off site training
- Review of materials
- Review of management and budgets
- Benchmarking of key measure
- Workshop with field staff to identify improvement opportunities

Shepherd's report was heavily utilised in the development of a 'draft' Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan, that was presented for consultation.

In September 2022, Council invited residents to have their say on the 'draft' Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan through Council's Your Say Platform. A paper version of the survey was also provided on request.

Council was particularly focused on receiving feedback regarding the initiatives outlined in the Improvement Plan. Council encouraged the community to review these initiatives and provide feedback as to whether any should be changed, reprioritised, or removed. A summary of this feedback is provided herein.

Consultation was open for a four-week period and closed on 27 October 2022.

Consultation outcomes and key findings

In total, eight unique contributions were received by paper submission and through the Your Say Platform whereby respondents provided their selections, opinions, and additional comments on the report.

The following key questions were asked to understand whether Council's Improvement Plan aligned with the community's vision, and whether the initiatives outlined should be changed, re-prioritised or removed.

1. Which of the initiatives in the Improvement Plan do you strongly support?
2. Are there initiatives that you do not support?
3. Are there initiatives that you would propose that have not been identified?
4. Would you recommend any modification to the timeframes suggested in the report?

The following summary for each question is provided.

There was strong support for:

- adoption of a communications strategy
- establishment of a pothole response crew
- road reclassification review- prioritised 'hotspot' upgrades
- road width review as per QLD Functional Classification
- more emphasis and prioritisation on improving drainage

There was a lack of support for:

- road width review as per QLD Functional Classification
- unsealed road network review

Initiatives that would be proposed that have not yet been identified are:

- sealing of unsealed roads (there exists a recommendation to develop a policy to govern this)

The following recommendations to the timeframes in suggested in the report were:

- gravel properties and drainage provision to be given a higher priority

This feedback has been considered by Council and the following changes are recommended:

1. Move the initiative 'improve drainage management' as a long-term initiative to a medium-term initiative, now to be completed by June 2024.
2. Postpone a 'Unsealed Road Network Review' now to be undertaken by June 2025 rather than by June 2024.

Whilst there were several contributions suggesting that unsealed roads be sealed, Council will not be adopting this approach, rather continuing with the initiative to develop a policy for prioritisation of such.

Whilst there was one submission in support of a road width review and one submission against a road width review, Council proposes to uphold the long-term initiative to undertake the review as per Qld Functional Classification.

Council does not recommend any additional changes to the Unsealed Roads Improvement Plan.

While the improvement plan includes a significant amount of technical detail, the final actions and respective timing can be summarised as follows:

Short Term (by June 2023):

1. Adopt a standard procedure and QA auditing processes needs to occur, including increasing the frequency of testing of materials that to go site.
2. Adopt a strategy to communicate unsealed road management, including educational material should be developed.
3. Identify short, unsealed road sections that are over-represented in our maintenance expenditure (Hotspot) and recommend prioritised upgrades. Council has allocated \$400K in the current capital budget.
4. Improve Vegetation Management to bolster maintenance productivity. Better programming of our grading program will allow for vegetation management prior to the grading team establishing on site. There are anticipated productivity and gravel loss benefits.
5. Consider the purchase of a water truck with greater carrying capacity. Effective grading is a water intensive activity and better access to water when required during the day is expected to improve productivity.
6. Develop a Road Enquiries Flowchart and Process document. Internally focused to better provide clarity throughout the organisation on how unsealed roads are managed.

Medium Term (by June 2024)

7. Once Item 1 (above) is implemented publication and review of this data will provide opportunity for accountability to improvement plan.
8. Providing opportunity to increase the skills of CCRC day labour staff will provide improved succession planning and potential for significant improvements in utilisation of our plant.
9. Council consider the establishment of a separate crew of minor plant (Skid Steer/Backhoe + Truck) to complete high priority defects repairs (potholes etc.) so less pressure is applied to service whole segments of roads. This approach is anticipated to result in less over servicing and reduced costs.
10. Council currently uses the ARRB Unsealed Road Material Specification for unsealed road material. Consider amending specification that provides a less slippery surface while avoiding pavements that ravel and corrugate. Consider adding a requirement for a soaked CBR test to ensure material strength above 35 to avoid rutting when the material is wet.
11. Maintenance Crews quarterly review of current QA and productivity data and progress of Improvement Plan and other initiatives.
12. Council use the newly developed deterioration modelling tools to help identify roads for grading and to ensure roads are maintained appropriately while in a locality. Council prioritises maintenance on a risk-based matrix on condition and hierarchy. Known condition historical with data often months old Deterioration modelling will allow for highlighting of roads we should expect require grading now, and at set periods into the future.
13. There is significant community support for expending the sealed road network. Developing a policy for prioritisation of sealing unsealed roads will allow for improvements in the network balanced with an understanding of whole-of-life costs.

14. Improve Drainage Management. The majority of Council's Maintenance Program is driven by roughness and associated safe driving speeds, however it is anticipated that a greater prioritisation on drainage management will have significant benefits to our pavements.

Long Term (by June 2025)

15. Review road widths with Classification as per Qld Functional Classification. Current unsealed road widths in the Cassowary Coast are generally wider than accepted standards. A reduction in width of roads will provide significant opportunities for a reduction in costs.
16. Develop map of current water locations to highlight areas of deficiency. As per 5 above, water is a key requirement to road maintenance, long hauls from a water source can significantly impact on productivity of a standard grading team. This initiative will lead to identification of areas where new water access sites could provide significant productivity gains, or areas where it may be beneficial to engage an additional water truck to improve productivity.
17. A recommendation out of the review was to move to a heavy grading technique to improve road performance, by increasing the compaction through more depth of material and consistent moisture contents. This method has the potential to increase road performance efficiency by 20% over existing techniques. The concept is better quality grading that performs better over time, requiring less regular grading.
18. Improve quality of asset data, particularly with regard gravel depths. Will provide better benchmarking of gravel coverage and better inform gravel re-sheet capital programs.
19. Council currently classifies its unsealed roads into six classes from A through to F which is determined by traffic count. It has been identified however that many roads are deteriorating significantly faster than other roads in like classes. These roads should be identified to either conform or change classification.

Link to Corporate Plan:

INFRASTRUCTURE - OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT

What we want to see by 2025

Regional infrastructure that delivers levels of service supported by the community and is financially sustainable.

Strategic Objectives

- I3 Sustainable asset management to effectively deliver services in a consistent and financially sustainable manner representing value to the community

Consultation:

1. Your Say Platform updated to inform the community of the outcome of this public consultation.
2. Correspondence sent to all registered participants acknowledging their investment of time and effort.
3. Updates to the Your Say Platform and potential engagement principles will be initiated to inform all stakeholders of the project commencement and duration.

Legal Implications (Statutory basis, legal risks):

Compliance with *Human Rights Act 2009*.

Human Rights Act 2019 - Considerations

The *Human Rights Act 2019* provides that it is unlawful for a public agency to act or make a decision in a way that is not compatible with human rights, or to fail to give proper consideration to a human right. This necessitates understanding the human rights that are protected. When making decisions or taking actions, consideration needs to be given to how that may impact on a person's human rights. Where there is a restriction on a person's human rights the restriction must be no greater than is justifiable to protect the rights of others or the community at large.

The contents of this report do not infringe upon the *Human Rights Act 2019*.

Policy Implications:

Nil

Risk Implications (Corporate, Operational, Project risks):

Nil

Financial & Resource Implications:

Some of the initiatives recommended in the improvement plan have the potential to require significant expenditure. In considering these initiatives a business case must be assessed and budget amendments may need to be considered at that time if implementation is recommended.

Report authorised by:

David Goodman, Director Infrastructure Services

Supporting Documents:

1. CASSOWARY COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL - UNSEALED ROADS IMPROVEMENT PLAN - NOVEMBER 2022