



Eaton County Road Commission FAQ Sheet

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Q. My property taxes go up every year, so why doesn't the Road Commission fix my road?

A. The Road Commission does not receive any property tax funds. Most property tax revenue goes to the State of Michigan and local school districts to pay for school operations, while small amounts go to fund general County and Township government administration, with special voted millages going to fund certain functions like the County jail, township libraries, Central Dispatch (911), among others. The only tax money the Road Commission receives for road maintenance comes from the Michigan Transportation Fund administered by the State of Michigan. State collected fuel taxes, license fees, and vehicle registration fees, including all of those that you may pay, make up most of this fund, which is divided by law among the 83 counties and 534 cities and villages, with the State keeping about forty percent for their programs. Currently the Eaton County Road Commission's share of that fund is about 4 tenths of one percent, or about \$2800.00 total for each mile of rural Local County Road last year. While these funds help us provide basic services such as grading on gravel roads, pothole patching, and snow plowing, this level of funding doesn't allow us to make significant improvements on most County Local Roads. The Road Commission actively seeks State and Federal grant funds whenever available, and encourages participation in road improvement projects by other agencies and local Township Government. Unfortunately for most local roads, most grant programs target their funding to the main Primary County Roads, which in most cases are already paved and in fairly good condition, and most Township governments operate on a modest budget that can not provide the large amount of funds necessary to upgrade or pave many roads.

Q. People are always speeding on my road. How can I get the speed limit lowered and some signs put up to slow them down?

A. The Road Commission is the agency that installs and maintains all traffic signs on county roads. State law requires that the Road Commission must follow the requirements of the Michigan Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MMUTCD) or risk losing state funding for road maintenance. In order to install Regulatory type signs like no parking signs and speed limit signs, the Road Commission must initiate a traffic study of the road in conjunction with the Michigan Department of State Police (MDSP). The study includes a review of traffic counts, accident history, speed studies, the character of the area along the road, and any other information available regarding the problems in the area. While the Road Commission is a participant in the traffic study and analysis, the guidelines of the MMUTCD and judgment of the Michigan Department of State Police largely determine what speed limit will be adopted. At the conclusion of the study the MDSP issues a written Traffic Control Order directing the Road Commission to install specific signs at specific locations on the road, and to record the completed Traffic Control Order at the County Clerk's office.

Q. Why is my road always the last one plowed after a snowstorm?

A. The Road Commission organizes snow plowing operations to service the most heavily traveled roadways first during and after a winter storm. About 370 miles of County Primary Roads and certain high traffic local roads in the urban area are plowed and/or salted first. After those roads are passable, crews move on to clear local paved roads throughout the county. Typically, local subdivision streets and rural gravel roads are cleared after all other higher traffic roads within about two days after the storm. Although our crews may begin plowing/salting several hours before the morning peak traffic, and continue operations into the night, extended winter storms or continuing winds may



require crews to continually plow the main high traffic roads and prevent them from reaching subdivision streets or rural gravel roads for several days.

Q. Do I need a permit for a new driveway even if I do the work myself?

A. Yes, a permit from the Road Commission is required anytime work is performed in County road right of way. When you apply for a permit you are helping the Road Commission maintain safety for both yourself and the traveling public. Most traffic accidents occur at intersections or where vehicles are entering or leaving the roadway. The Road Commission inspects each proposed drive location to assure that adequate sight distance is available, to determine what drainage improvements might be necessary, and to review the site for other potential safety problems before a permit is issued. Although there is a charge for a residential driveway permit, there is no permit fee for most other minor work in road right of way, although we require that all contractors follow accepted traffic safety procedures and furnish adequate insurance coverage to protect both the homeowner and the public.

Q. Why are you cutting down all the trees on my road?

A. The Road Commission has a ongoing program to regrade and regravels rural Local County Roads throughout Eaton County. The roadsides on many of the roads that are being worked on in this program have become overgrown with brush and trees over the years to the point that fairly extensive trimming and cutting is necessary to restore safe sight distance for motorists along the road and to help prevent vehicle collisions. As a part of the required work the Road Commission is creating a minimum 20 foot wide gravel surface with a 6 foot wide clear zone on each side free of fixed objects like trees that can cause serious injury if struck by a vehicle even at fairly low speed. In some areas trees and brush had to be cut just to obtain the 20 foot width for gravel surfacing. Although State law created a public right of way 66 feet wide for all county roads almost a century ago, the Road Commission is not seeking to clear, cut, or mow this entire right of way, and it is doubtful that we would cut all the trees on your road. We have adopted a uniform guideline for a minimum 6 foot clear zone as part of the road improvement projects now being worked on. We are also removing dead trees wherever possible to prevent them from falling into the road, and may remove additional trees outside the minimum clear zone at the property owners request or with their approval.

Q. How can I get my road paved?

A. Most paved local roads in Eaton County were improved using private development funds, contributions from Township government, or by special assessment charges on the properties that access a particular road. The level of funding provided to the Road Commission by law is not sufficient to pay for the initial paving of a road. Although Township government has no responsibility for road maintenance or improvement, and does not receive any road tax money, they have been very supportive of county roads over the years, and you may wish to contact them to see if they have any plans to improve your road in the future. You can also obtain a Petition to set up a special assessment district to improve your road from the Road Commission. When signed by the owners of 51 percent or more of the frontage on a road such a petition authorizes the Road Commission to set up an assessment district, prepare plans and estimates of the work needed to pave the road, and hold public hearings regarding the proposed project. All properties accessing the road would share in the expense of the project, which could be spread over a period of up to ten years.



Q. Can I fill in the ditch and plant trees in front of my property?

A. If there is a ditch along the road in front of your property you should not fill it in even if it doesn't drain water along the road. The purpose of most roadside ditches is to prevent water from pooling on the roadway during or after a storm, to provide an area for snow storage from snowplowing operations, and to lower the water table beneath the roadbed. Filling in even a fairly shallow roadside ditch can cause serious damage to the road and pavement from frost heave and, of course, shrubs and trees planted in that area are exposed to damage from traffic, snowplowing, and sweeping operations. Please do not plant any trees or shrubs that may become a vision obstruction or that may grow into a large fixed object that presents danger to motorists anywhere inside the road right of way. Trees and ornamental plantings should be set back at least 33 feet from the center of the road, which in most cases will place them outside of the road right of way and protect them from traffic damage.

Q. I don't want you to spray my roadside with herbicides. What can I do to prevent this from happening?

A. You can have the Road Commission exempt your frontage from our spraying program by contacting our office and obtaining a "No Spray Permit". As a condition of the permit, however, you will need to cut and trim the brush along your frontage back away from the road at least to the ditch line and perhaps farther near road intersections and on curves or near driveways. The Road Commission encourages residents to maintain their own roadsides for safety, and can assist you in removing any larger trees near the road that may be a problem. Unfortunately, we are not able to use labor intensive hand trimming methods on the many miles of county roadside that we maintain.

Q. What are "all season" roads?

A. So called "All Season" roads are those that have been designed and built with additional strength and durability to withstand truck traffic loads all year long, and thus they are not subject to the reduced loading restrictions that are placed on most roads during the early spring in Michigan. All residential subdivision streets, most rural sealcoated roads, and all gravel surfaced roads in Eaton County are subject to a 25 percent reduction in allowable loading during the period each spring when thawing of the ground below the roadbed softens the roadbed and makes the surface susceptible to damage from heavy loads.

Q. How can I get a Children Playing sign put up to protect my children?

A. The Road Commission no longer places or maintains Children Playing signs, although there are still several of these signs scattered throughout our road system. Prior to the revision of the Michigan Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MMUTCD) in 1983, these signs were acceptable for use on county roads. Studies done nationally leading up to that revision demonstrated conclusively that, while these signs may make parents and children feel safer, they have absolutely no effect on driver behavior, and do not slow traffic speeds as might be expected. To the extent that the signs might make parents or children think they are safer when the danger is still present, these signs can actually reduce safety. The best policy is still to be sure to keep children as far away from the road as



possible, and don't allow even older children to play in or near the road. Although we do not encourage their use, the Road Commission will issue a permit to a resident to install their own children playing sign near their home. There is no charge for the permit but the resident must agree to accept responsibility to place and maintain the sign in a safe manner.

Q. Why do you spread all that tar and gravel on the paved roads? There was nothing wrong with the road and now it is a mess?

A. The process you are referring to is sealcoating which most road agencies in Michigan use as a relatively low cost method of preserving existing pavements. The tar is actually an emulsion of water and liquid asphalt which penetrates and seals small cracks in the existing pavement. Sealing these cracks on a regular basis prevents water from seeping into and softening the base of the road and over time causing potholes to form. The peastone that we use for cover material sticks to the emulsion and, after rolling and sweeping, provides a slightly roughened skid resistant surface to improve safety. Although sealcoating can preserve and extend the life of the pavement, it is only a surface treatment and does not fill any existing bumps, holes, or irregularities and thus does not improve the ride quality. For this reason it is important to apply sealcoat to a road BEFORE this deterioration occurs, which leads us to sealcoat roads that are in generally good condition rather than waiting for them to deteriorate to the point that extensive patching is necessary.