

Polk County Road FAQ's

Q. Is my road a county-maintained road?

Many of the roads within Polk County are not maintained by the county. These would include roads within city limits, ODOT state highways, forest roads, and privately owned/maintained roads. A County Road is defined as "a public right-of-way that has been formally accepted by the County Commissioners into the County Road System". Polk County Public Works Department maintains roads within the County Road System, but generally is prohibited from spending road funds on any road that is not a public road.

Q. How many miles of roads does Polk County maintain?

In round numbers, Polk County maintains approximately 230 miles of gravel roads and another 250 miles of paved roads.

Q. What is considered a gravel or unpaved road?

Roads that do not have a hard surface are "gravel," meaning they are constructed and maintained with some mineral aggregate or rock.

In contrast, the county's "hard surface" roads are generally built with an aggregate sub-base, "paved" with asphalt concrete pavement or oil mat chip seals, or a combination of both.

Q. How is the road department funded?

Oregon road funding comes from multiple shared state and federal transportation revenue streams which include fuel/gas taxes, vehicle registration fees, and a small amount of Federal Highway Administration transportation improvement dollars. **County property taxes are not spent on roads or road services.**

Within Polk County's 500-mile road system, monies are spent for year-round maintenance services such as culvert cleaning, vegetation management, grading, chip seals, repaving etc. With this large road system, we welcome and value your thoughts and input on how we might be able to do a better job of keeping our roads safe!

Q. Does Polk County budget funds to convert existing gravel roads to hard surface roads?

The level of funding provided to the road department is not sufficient to pay for the paving of the more than 230 miles of gravel roads within its jurisdiction. The County's Transportation Plan prioritizes road maintenance funding, with major roads as the highest priority and local roads as the lowest. Even minor improvements to major roads are higher priority than general maintenance of local roads.

Gravel roads that are converted to paved roads are selected based on several factors, including the physical condition of the road, the average daily traffic, the physical ride quality, and the amount of money that local residents are willing to cost share with the road department. Cost Shares are requests/petitions from the owners of the frontage on a road. Such a petition (if over 51 percent of landowners agree) authorizes the road department to set up a special 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 three years.

Q. What is the estimated cost per mile to upgrade a gravel road to a paved road?

At today's prices, it would be approximately \$250,000 up to \$600,000 per mile to convert a gravel road to a paved road. Costs include an engineering review with a safety study; evaluation of existing road bed materials; rebuilding or adding to the road base, if necessary; possible drainage and safety improvements (pavement markings, signage, guardrails, etc.); and, the possible requirement to purchase additional right-of-way.

Q. How does Polk County know which roads are in need of maintenance?

Throughout the year Polk County Public Works' staff, supervisors, heavy equipment operators, road maintenance crew, and other county employees regularly check the conditions of the roads and report back to the department supervisors. In addition, roads are inspected when reports/service requests are received from citizens.

Q. What is road grading and why do you do it?

Road grading is the process of restoring the driving surface of a gravel road to a desired smoothness and shape by removing irregularities such as corrugations and pot holes and redistributing gravel. This is done by blading the existing side berm materials back across the road, reshape the crowns and traffic lanes for safe travel, re-smooth the road surface, reinstate good drainage, and address encroaching shoulder vegetation.

Q. When are gravel roads graded?

Generally gravel roads are normally graded twice per year, usually in the spring and fall. However grading is moisture dependent, and there is no set schedule for weather. Grading cannot be accomplished without appreciable moisture. Subsequently, grading does not occur during the normally dry summer months.

During grading season, our motor-grader operators have established routes which cover the entire gravel or unpaved road system. Some roads have more traffic or have unique environmental or topographical elements, which may require more frequent grading and maintenance. Our road crew continue to revisit roads to redistribute, reshape, and smooth the aggregate across the road.

Q. What is "washboarding" and what causes it?

Washboarding usually occurs on gravel roads near curves, hills, or steeper road grades. It is when the surface is bumpy like an old "washboard," causing the vehicle to hop. It is caused by motorists driving too fast and spinning their tires. Once the wheel-spinning rutting begins, it cannot be reversed. The only remedy is grading the road.

Q. How can I report a pothole or a rough road?

Polk County Public Works offers a number of ways to report a pothole or rough road. Call the Public Works office at (503) 623-9287, submit an online service request at <https://www.co.polk.or.us/pw/road-repair-request/inquiry>; or, e-mail us at publicworks@co.polk.or.us

Q. When is additional rock or aggregate added to a road?

Over time, traffic and repetitive grading will break the rock down to smaller dimensions and dust. This is why roads need to have rock added. Local conditions and the volume of traffic will dictate how often a road needs to have rock added.

Polk County does re-gravelling on an as-needed basis. The county recognizes it is essential to properly "rock" each road and has budgeted accordingly to ensure the gravel roads are as safe as possible. While the County does try to maintain a road by grading and adding gravel periodically, it doesn't take long for the road to return back to its prior condition. Gravel roads with the highest traffic volumes are generally maintained with a higher level of effort than ones with lower traffic volumes.

Q. People are always speeding on my road. How can I get signs put up to slow them down?

Based upon a review of engineering research, attempting to control speed through sign placement is ineffective. This is true for "Deer Crossing" signs as well. Further, the Public Works Department is responsible for placing signs only, not enforcement. We recommend that private citizens report speeding to the Polk County Sheriff at 503-623-9251.

Q. I live along a County road and was wondering if the County would apply dust oil to it?

For property owners who live adjacent to a gravel road, dust from vehicles traveling too fast for road conditions can become a significant problem, especially during the dry summer months. We recognize that in the summer there is a great deal of dust across our entire 230 mile gravel road system. As fiscal resources are quite limited the scope of our program is focused on the safety of the traveling public, and the County does not dust oil gravel roads. However, we do have a no-fee permit system that allows landowners to hire a licensed firm to apply approved dust oil (lignin and other soil stabilizers) to their roads.

When applied to gravel roads, soil stabilizers coat the individual road particles with a thin adhesive-like film that binds the particles together. Water evaporates as it dries and the dust particles are trapped by the high-viscosity, naturally sticky material. In general, the product can be very effective when first applied and gradually loses some effectiveness with the passage of time, traffic, and the amount of summer rainfall that occurs. Because water will break it down, it must be applied yearly to be effective.

There are some guidelines that need to be followed, which are explained during the dust oil permit process. Please visit the Public Works website at www.co.polk.or.us for more information.

Q. I am in the process of building/renovating a property. What permits do I need?

Building construction FIRST requires permits from the Polk County Community Development Department. They can be reached at 503-623-9237 or found on the second floor of the Courthouse at 850 Main Street, Dallas, OR 97338. Community Development will refer you to Public Works in the event that a Driveway Access Permits and/or an Addressing Application is required for your project.

Q. I live along a County road and desire to cut trees that are located within the County right of way, what do I need to do?

We require that you contact the Public Works office at 503-623-9287 and obtain a no-fee application to conduct work in the County right of way. The application spells out guidelines that allow you the ability to work in the right of way. This permit in no way give permission to cut trees that are not within your own land boundaries.

Q. I live along a County road, can I plant trees or build a fence in the right of way?

By law, Polk County has a responsibility to maintain the County right of way. This involves trimming shrubs and trees that limit sight distance and constitute an obstruction in the roadway clear zone. The County's regular maintenance work will likely destroy any plants or trees that are planted in the right of way, and the County will not replace vegetation that is damaged in the County right of way due to normal maintenance procedures.

If you wish to build a fence, all landowners are required to put fences outside of the County's right of way. The best way to determine your property boundary, is to contact the Surveyor's office to see if a survey has been done on your property. The County Surveyor is located within the Public Works office, and can be reached at 503-623-9287.

Q. The County has a weed control program. What does this mean?

Polk County completes vegetation management throughout the County. In addition to spraying weeds, the County mows and cuts roadside brush. Roadside spraying occurs at various locations along most County roads within the County's right of way.

Landowners can choose to opt out of County Vegetation Management and complete this work themselves by contacting Polk County Public Works at 503-623-9287 or stop by our office at 820 SW Ash Street, Dallas, OR 97338. Landowners must complete forms explaining the responsibility of maintaining the weeds, brush, and trees within the right of way. "No spray" signs will be installed, which are the only acceptable signs to avoid County application of herbicides. The cost of the signs and installation is the responsibility of the landowner.

Q: It snowed last night, when will my road be plowed?

Snow removal is done on a priority system. Arterial and connector roads have the highest priority, followed by local roads. When your road gets cleared depends on the type of road you reside on. Please be patient with us during these weather events, our crews work tirelessly to get roads cleared and the transportation system up and running again as quickly as possible.

Q. There is a dead animal in the road in front of my property, will the County pick it up?

Polk County contracts with local disposal companies to pick up dead deer and elk due to health reasons. Please call Polk County Community Development at 503-623-9237 to report the carcass. However, Polk County does not have available resources to pick up other dead animals. Domestic animals must be disposed of by the pet owner.

Q. What can I do about illicit dumping or other illegal activity along county roads?

All illegal activities should be reported to law enforcement, which for most of the county's road system is the Polk County Sheriff. If it is an emergency, please call 911. The non-emergency number is (503) 623-9251.

Illegal dumpsites can be reported to the Public Works office at (503) 623-9287 or submitted via an online service request at <https://www.co.polk.or.us/pw/road-repair-request/inquiry>
We will pass the information along to the County's dump-stoppers work crew for clean-up.

Q. Who can I call for more information?

There are several ways to contact Polk County Public Works, including:
Public Works Office: (503) 623-9287
Web messages: <https://www.co.polk.or.us/pw/road-repair-request/inquiry>
Public Works email: publicworks@co.polk.or.us
Mailing and office location address: 820 SW Ash St., Dallas, OR 97338