

# STAFF REPORT

**TO:** Chairman and Members, Engineering Services Committee

**FROM:** Peter Thomson, Engineering Manager

**DATE:** 24 March 2009

**REFERENCE:** R874

**SUBJECT:** **LOW TRAFFIC ROAD SEALING POLICY REVIEW**

---

## 1 PURPOSE

This report provides a review of Council's "Low Traffic Road Sealing Policy" with the intention of allowing for isolated seal extension sections of rural roads.

## 2 BACKGROUND

The Council has had a longstanding policy to allow for the sealing of low traffic roads which would not have otherwise been sealed under the Government's subsidised road funding. Originally this policy was to allow for seal extension from the end of the sealed network to provide dust relief for horticultural growers and was subsequently extended to other low traffic roads where dust nuisance was a problem.

The current policy invites adjoining landowners to dust-prone unsealed roads to contribute up to 50% of a defined amount of the sealing cost. The balance of the cost has been paid for through Council's non-subsidised roading activity. Council has provided a total budget of \$120,000 per annum for this activity and in recent years generally this budget has been fully utilised with applications from private landowners.

Over this timeframe Council has also had an active programme of subsidised seal extensions to its roading network which have been economically justified as individual projects through the road funding agency.

## 3 COMMENT

A number of factors have now combined to make it more difficult for landowners to get relief from dust nuisance along unsealed rural roads.

- Subsidised funding for seal extensions is now more difficult to obtain with the shift in government funding policy;
- Several years ago Council's Engineering Department held a global consent for the application of oil as a dust suppressant on its roads. At the expiry of this consent a new process was put in place whereby landowners were obliged to apply for individual consents to undertake the activity of oiling gravel roads. The effect of these new consents over time is likely to increase the costs and performance standards for the activity.
- The cost of any dust suppressants continues to be an expensive and short term option for adjoining landowners. In particular, landowners who live a significant

distance from main centres will find application materials and methods even more costly because of their remoteness from contractor's resources.

In summary, there are few, if any low cost options that Council can offer or assist landowners with in dust-prone areas. The effects of dust, while often described as "nuisance" can, in fact be much more severe particularly where heavy traffic is involved. It is in these locations where other, more permanent dust suppressant measures are considered highly desirable and have prompted a review of this policy.

#### **4 REVISED POLICY**

Attached is the proposed revised low traffic road sealing policy that will allow for sealing of isolated sections of unsealed rural roads. The underlying purpose of the policy remains unchanged and the basic funding cost-sharing arrangements between Council and adjoining landowners also remains unchanged.

The provision for isolated seal sections can be considered but should meet specific criteria such as a minimum length of 200 metres and ensuring the isolated seal section is no less than 500 metres from the end of the existing sealed network. These lengths are an attempt to ensure that there is reasonable continuity of either sealed or unsealed road surface along the travel length of a trafficked route.

One other revision to the policy is the proposed use of a 5 metre sealed road width where previously a 4.5 metre sealed road width was used for the cost assessment. In practice, 5 metres is the minimum sealed width that Council uses in forming seal extensions and will meet the reasonable expectations of the New Zealand Transport Agency in terms of ongoing subsidy for maintenance activity. Therefore, the landowner's assessed 50% contribution is proposed to be based on a 5 metre sealed road width.

The \$45/m<sup>2</sup> assessed cost for sealing has not been changed but it is important to note that the landowners' contribution is recalculated on the actual physical works cost and that if the amount is below the assessed cost then this benefit goes to the landowner.

In its Draft Ten Year Plan, Council has continued to provide an annual budget at a present day value of \$120,000 per year for funding its low traffic road sealing policy work. It is expected that this level of funding will continue to meet the demand from private landowners under the revised policy. In recent years there has been a slight drop-off in applications under this policy but there is still interest with the likes of Moore Road being completed in the current year. It is unlikely that this revision to the policy will create a significant new demand on the budget. However, this will be monitored and reported to Council as part of subsequent Draft Annual Plan review processes.

#### **5 RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the revised Low Traffic Road Sealing Policy attached to this report be approved and adopted with effect from 1 July 2009.**

Peter Thomson  
**Engineering Manager**