

# Review of Road Maintenance Extents Policy

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**TO** Thames-Coromandel District Council  
**FROM** Scott Summerfield - Policy and Planning Manager  
**DATE** 23 November 2017  
**SUBJECT** **Review of Road Maintenance Extents Policy**

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## **1 Purpose**

This paper presents a revised Road Maintenance Extents Policy Council approval. Should Council approve the policy, this will form the basis for consultation on extension of Council's level of service for roading as part of the 2018-2028 Long Term Plan.

## **2 Background**

Since the 1990s Council has had a policy to only maintain roads it owns where there is a clear public benefit to do so, and has held a list of roads which won't be maintained as a result. The current policy is included as **Attachment A**. Maintenance of these unmaintained roads has been undertaken by ratepayers whose access is from the road, to varying levels of quality. As these are public roads there is an expectation that the public is able to use them for access. In some cases these roads provide access to DOC land, for use by WRC, access to telecommunications and power infrastructure, or to community water supplies. Irrespective of these additional uses, ratepayers connected to the road have been expected to carry the cost of their maintenance.

Council generally only maintains roads which are already at the required minimum standard to qualify for subsidy from the New Zealand Transport Agency.

In recent years ratepayers on some of these roads have pressed Council to reconsider this policy, usually in response to a weather event which has put the road into a near unusable state and/or damaged integral infrastructure on the road which has put the health and safety of the public at risk. In some cases the cost of repairs to the unmaintained roads are prohibitive and the ratepayers have sought Council support.

Staff discussed this policy and the approach to unmaintained Council roads with the Council at their workshop on 31 October 2017. Since that meeting, a further five roads have been identified and added to the list, included as **Attachment C**. Of these five additional roads, only one includes a structure (Cemetery Road, Kuaotunu).

## **3 Issue**

Council is requested to consider a change to the Road Maintenance Extents Policy to clarify that Council is responsible provision of safe to use roads around the district, to set out formally that roads without a broad public benefit will not be maintained by Council and the process by which unmaintained roads can become roads maintained by Council. Each of the three options beyond 'do nothing' set out in the discussion section are an extensions of Council's roading level of service and have a significant amount of work required to give effect to this policy over the life of the Long Term Plan. As a result, public consultation on this matter is likely as part of the 2018-2028 Long Term Plan.

## 4 Discussion

The current position of Council not taking responsibility for any maintenance on some formed Council roads in the District is considered untenable. Public roads are to be available for public use, regardless of whether Council formed the road itself, inherited a formed road or allowed a road to be formed on its land. Ensuring that roads are safe to use is considered a minimum for any formed Council road.

Some ratepayers on unmaintained Council roads would like to Council to upgrade their roads generally and undertake all future maintenance, no different to Council maintained roads throughout the district. While this is possible, the costs associated with bringing many of this unmaintained roads up to a higher standard is significant, as is the ongoing cost of maintenance on the roads. There is however a valid point for Council to consider in that some ratepayers have their roads maintained by Council and other ratepayers do not - any policy must provide a reasonable justification for this differentiation.

Staff consider the following options to be viable responses to this situation. These options have been prepared following an assessment of each road by Opus who has provided cost estimates.

### ***A. Upgrade all roads to meet NZTA standard for ongoing maintenance subsidy***

This first option includes upgrading all 24 of the roads, including structures and upgrades to the road surface, to a level likely to meet the standard required by NZTA to receive their 40% subsidy towards ongoing maintenance. The benefit of this option will be that the ongoing maintenance cost will be lower for a higher standard road, and that this will likely attract subsidy. It is however the most expensive option. The cost of upgrading all 24 roads to this standard is estimated at \$14 million. Some of the 24 roads may not justify this level of upgrade given their current low level of use.

### ***B. Upgrade all roads to meet a lower standard (will not qualify for NZTA subsidy)***

An alternative option is to upgrade all roads and maintain them on an ongoing basis but to do so to a lower defined standard which will meet the use needs for those roads but likely not qualify for subsidy from NZTA. The estimated cost of upgrading to this lower standard is \$10 million. The annual maintenance costs for these roads will likely be higher though than if the NZTA standard was met, as the baseline quality of the road would be lower.

The lower standard would allow for 125mm layer of metal, drainage, removal of vegetation, minor road widening where required, and grading.

### ***C. Upgrade structures and culverts only (recommended option)***

Council could elect to only upgrade the culverts and other structures necessary to have safe access on these roads, including bridges and retaining walls. This option has a much lower cost, estimated at \$3.4 million across all 24 roads. This option gives ratepayers who use the road access to well-constructed major assets which would be particularly unaffordable for ratepayers to develop, while expecting connected ratepayers to provide maintain the road at a level they determine is most suitable for their needs.

This option is significantly cheaper for Council, however some of the 24 roads should be considered for maintenance as they may provide a public benefit on the basis of the number and type of properties they serve, and what infrastructure the road may provide access to. Provision is made in the policy for a process to include currently unmaintained roads on Council's maintenance program if a public benefit can be determined.

Guaranteed public access on those roads would not be a given as they may not be suitable for all vehicle types however the risk to public health and safety from using the road arising from substandard structures would be greatly diminished.

Structures to be covered by the policy would include culverts, fords, bridges, rock spalls,

and retaining walls, plus costs of consenting.

The revised policy included as **Attachment B** reflects the direction of Council to only undertake responsibility for maintenance of the structures on these roads, thereby giving effect to Option C.

#### **D. No change**

Maintaining the status quo is not considered a medium to long term solution. However, Council could continue with its current position until a substantial challenge to the existing policy arises, either from ratepayers, a traffic accident on an unmaintained road caused by substandard structures, or a natural threat to the functioning of an unmaintained road. This is not considered a viable option.

#### *Policy incorporation into 2018-2028 Long Term Plan*

It is proposed that each of the upgrades within these options is spread over a medium-long term period (5-10 years, so as to be contained within the life of the 2018-2028 Long Term Plan). This will not only spread the increased rating burden but will make the programme achievable as the level of work involved in some of these upgrades will be significant, both internally and for roading contractors.

If a staggered programme of upgrades on all 24 roads is chosen, then the risk posed by the structures on the road and the road itself, as well as the number of people/businesses serviced by the road would drive prioritisation. Should Council determine to upgrade and take on maintenance for these roads, a prioritised programme of works which considers risks and benefits will be collated and presented as part of the LTP process.

Where some roads are prioritised lower than others and therefore are to be upgraded at a later stage, Council should undertake maintenance of the existing road to a level to ensure it remains useable until the upgrade occurs.

It is also possible to focus just on the structures on these roads in the first year of the programme, which will ensure that health and safety risks are addressed first across all roads, followed by upgrades to improve useability in later years should Council select an option for the policy beyond the structures only option.

Any change to the policy which would see Council take on greater responsibility for these 24 roads at the expense of the ratepayer at large constitutes a change to the level of service which Council offers as a part of its roading activity. As such, public consultation would be required through the 2018-2028 Long Term Plan. Some or all of the options presented here would likely be the basis for Council's consultation document on this point.

Council will also be able to consider requests to take on responsibility for currently unmaintained roads and the rationale provided as part of this consultation.

Lastly, the policy provides for Council to enter discussions with ratepayers aimed at closing the legal road and vesting the road in a legal body, made up of the interests of connected ratepayers to the road, which would then take on responsibility for all maintenance in future. This would include all structures. The roads would no longer be public and public access would not be guaranteed. This approach however would require the consent of all ratepayers connected to the road, and would likely only be taken up in situations where the ratepayers would prefer to have their access on a private road and the cost of on-going maintenance would not be expected to be high.

## **5 Suggested Resolution(s)**

That the Thames-Coromandel District Council:

1. Receives the 'Review of Road Maintenance Extents Policy' report, dated 23

November 2017.

2. Approves Option C for consultation as described in the attached proposed Road Maintenance Extents Policy included as **Attachment B**.
3. Resolves to consider public submissions on the Road Maintenance Extents Policy through consultation on the 2018-2028 Long Term Plan consultation document before adopting the policy in June 2018.

### **References-Tabled/Agenda Attachments**

**Attachment A** *Road Maintenance Extents Policy (current)*

**Attachment B** *Road Maintenance Extents Policy (proposed)*

**Attachment C** *List of unmaintained Council roads*

Road Maintenance Extent Policy

*Attachment A*

Proposed Road Maintenance Extents Policy

**Attachment B**

**Attachment C List of unmaintained Council roads**