

Late Report

Strategy & Policy Committee Meeting – 11 April 2013

Item 5.4. District Mowing Review and Update – 2013-14 Season

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HURUNUI DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING REPORT



To: Strategy and Policy Committee

Date: 11/04/13

Significant Decision: No

Maintenance and Operations Contracts 10/42, 10/43 - District Mowing Review and Update for Season 2013-14

Recommendation

After considering all issues, options and the known views of those affected, as well as giving consideration to the level of significance and the legal and financial implications, the recommendation of this report is:

That the Committee review and make itself aware of the information provided below and recommend that the Roothing Department carry out a more in-depth and costed review culminating in a submission to Council of at least three options in which a decision then be made as to the future Levels of Service (LoS) for the mowing of local roads within the District.

Executive Summary

- This report has been prepared so Councillors may be informed as to what is happening in other Districts, within our Region, with specific regards to rural roadside mowing (mowing beyond urban township boundaries) and how adopting alternative Levels of Service (LoS) may potentially lead to greater effectiveness and resultant cost savings that could then be passed on to other maintenance, operations and renewal activities with better defined value-for-money and return on investment.
- The report also intends to impress upon the Councillors the Roothing Department's future financial concerns regarding the FAR (Financial Assistance Rate) review that is currently being carried out by NZTA (discussion document with submissions due 03 May 2013) and ongoing reduced three-year National Land Transport Fund (NLTF) programmes. It's widely believed that a 'One Roothing Network Classification System' is the strategic preferred option of NZTA, which could well mean less future NZTA subsidy funding for the District's lower-classified local rural roads. One of the areas that would be most likely targeted for reduced subsidy funding would be Mowing (Environmental Maintenance) of local roadsides, particularly given the varied investment and LoS discrepancies between the other Local Authorities (Road Controlling Agencies) within our region.
- The information below complies with the LGA.

Background

The current reasons for mowing roadsides on our roading network is to meet the safety outcomes of visibility, sight distances and reduced fire hazard to road users; and to meet aesthetic outcomes related to the district's image and ensuing encouragement to attract economic growth through potential investors.

Currently, GSL Contracting is employed as a sub-contractor to Downers Ltd to mow the roadsides of Hurunui District's local roads. The contract specifies that the roadsides are to be mowed 1.2m from the edge of seal or road edge (in the case of unsealed roads) and that sight distances are to be maintained around all intersections. The specified intervention heights are as follows, with no more than 10% of an identified area to exceed the maximum (out of specification).

- Greater than 300mm on Collector and Arterial Roads
- Greater than 400mm on other Local Roads

The current budget to carry out roadside mowing on all the district's roads to this specification is approximately \$180,000/annum (total cost).

Assessment in summary:

Hurunui District Council – approx. 1500km roading - \$180,000 mowing p.a.

Waimakariri DC – approx.. 1500km roading - \$92,000 mowing p.a.

Selwyn DC – approx.. 2500km roading - \$30,000 mowing p.a.

The Waimakariri District Council (WDC) currently mows Strategic, Arterial and Collector Roads only. There is an expectation that owners with property boundaries bordering the local road reserve will maintain the road verges, including for mowing (and weed spraying). Their current accepted specification for roads outside the urban township boundaries are:-

- 50 - 100mm on Arterial Roads
- 50 - 200mm on Collector Roads

*N.B. – There are some local road exceptions that are deemed to be significant enough to the WDC to warrant mowing, such as local road approaches to townships and intersections. These are mowed to the Collector Road specification. The mowing of these sections is currently being reviewed by the Waimakariri Roading Unit to determine if any cost savings can be made within this work activity.

The budget to carry out this limited roadside mowing of all the WDC's rural roads (those roads outside urban township boundaries) to this specification is a maximum \$92,000/annum, and any additional work is carried out on an "as instructed" basis by their Service Manager.

Selwyn District Council (SDC) currently does not mow their local or collector rural roadsides. It is the responsibility of the adjacent landowners to maintain the roadside verges. Only some Arterial Roads are mowed, as well as a number of identified high-profile intersections on local roads and these are only mowed twice a year regardless of growth.

The budget to carry out roadside mowing of all the SDC's rural roads (those roads outside urban township boundaries) is approximately \$30,000/annum, and the work is carried out on an "as instructed" basis.

Discussion

From the background information supplied above, it is clear that there is a differing and varied acceptable LoS prevailing between compared districts. From the three districts discussed above (Hurunui, Waimakariri and Selwyn) the Hurunui District is unique in its current approach to roadside mowing and offers a LoS to local roads where the other Road Controlling Authorities don't. Currently, the Financial Assistance Rate (FAR) is being reviewed by the NZTA and it is widely anticipated that they will seek to classify the 'One National Roothing Network', largely based around comparable usage and benefit returned. With this significant identified variation of service level within our own region, it is highly likely that this area will be targeted as one that could face a reduction of future funding.

If a reduced LoS can be agreed upon (whatever this may mean), then the possible and potential savings may be able to be redirected to other roading work categories that could (arguably) be of greater benefit to the district.

Desired Outcome

Provide the most efficient, effective and acceptable mowing specification that will meet the district's ratepayers/road users expectations and bring our district in-line with other local authorities to demonstrably show the districts commitment to the Government Policy Statement (GPS) of doing "more for less".

Financial Considerations

Potential to greatly reduce expenditure in one roading work activity that could then be saved or targeted for beneficial expenditure elsewhere.

Legal Considerations

None

Policy and Plan Implications

Any changes in the current LoS with respect to mowing within the district would require a specification change and this would need to be captured in a review of our endorsed Activity Management Plan (AMP).

Risks

Risks to be considered would include for possible criticism from ratepayers and other road users with regards to the reduced LoS on local roads.

Typical criticisms and perceived risks may include;

- Reduced visibility
- Increased potential fire risk
- Poor aesthetics – gives the district a poor image

Feedback from other districts where mowing isn't carried out on local roads suggests that visibility and potential fire risks are negligible – there is no significant variation in CAS (Crash Accident Statistic) data to suggest a lack of roadside mowing contributed to accidents within these districts.

*N.B. In all three districts discussed, *intersections* with a perceived visibility risk are mowed.

There is no evidence that mowing a 1.2 - 1.5m strip has reduced fire risk. Smouldering events and fires have been attributed to roadside mowing in all three districts.

Māori Considerations If any option involves a significant decision in relation to land or a body of water, take into account the relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral land, water, sites, waahi tapu, valued flora and fauna, and other taonga.

If there are no Māori implications delete this section.

Other Considerations This concept and principle could be applied to other work categories as well, if we are to align to greater efficiencies and effectiveness in the utilisation of our approved road subsidy funding (NLTF) and reduced consideration of unsubsidised local share funds.

Consultation The Roading Departments of both the Waimakariri and Selwyn District Councils have been consulted in preparation of this report.



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Authoriser's Designation: Manager Roading and Utilities

Officer in Attendance: An officer will be in attendance to speak to their report.
