



Citizens Want to Know

ROADS

For years, the No. 1 concern American Fork residents have expressed in citizen surveys is the condition of the city's roads, and for good reason.

Most of the roads were impacted by the installation of the pressurized irrigation system that voters approved in 2006. Even though there were patches put in place, the project led to a more rapid deterioration of the roadways as water infiltrated the cracks and the freeze/thaw cycle caused damage.



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Citizens Want to Know: ROADS

Some residents have complained that they don't see road work being done in American Fork. Like most of us, they may spend most of their driving time on the same roads day after day and may not be aware of the scope of projects being completed elsewhere throughout the city. Every year American Fork's road work plan includes improvements to roads in every part of the city to make sure every part of town is getting attention.

This year, American Fork performed various types of treatment to slightly more than 10 lane miles of our roads. That includes chip seals, slurry seals and full reconstructions. Those who want to see where that work took place may go to www.americanfork.gov/roads.

In the last few years, there was work on another 28.26 lane miles of roads and spent about \$9 million. The map of those projects can be seen at www.americanfork.gov/roads.

Yes, there is work being done, with more planned. But roads are not cheap. This year the City averaged \$327,000 per lane mile of road. As a comparison, American Fork can fully fund recreation programs throughout the city, including staff, for the same cost to repair two miles of road. But while the city does allocate millions of dollars to roads every year, that amount still falls short of what is needed.

In 2008, the City Council approved a property tax increase to allocated funds to road repairs. It was originally anticipated it would produce \$500,000 additional revenue annually, but with the downturn in the economy that same year that mark was not reached. Even today American Fork City estimates it collects about \$150,000 annually from the property tax increase approved in 2008. All those taxes, plus many other additional dollars, still go towards our road work today.

In an effort to get on top of our road funding needs another effort went to the voters in 2013. They turned down a plan to repair and replace a portion of the community's roads and bond to pay for them over a period of time.

In 2018 American Fork created a 10-year road plan, under which every city-controlled street in the community would be improved. Some of the major roads are state-owned and UDOT is responsible for their maintenance. It was a start, and a good one. The plan helped quantify the city's road needs, which totaled over \$26 million during the 10-year period. But it did not solve the funding shortfall. Additionally, several other circumstances slowed down the plan's implementation.

Construction costs were factored into the estimates, but the costs were unpredictable. Not only had they risen over the years, but sometimes unanticipated conditions increased the price tags.

"Every project needs some level of engineering, geotechnical investigation and inspection," said Scott Sensenbaugher,

American Fork's Public Works Director. Other conditions slowed down the work and added to the costs, but were money-saving in the long run.

"When you go to fix a road, you really need to address what is under the ground first," Sensenbaugher said. Water lines, sewer lines and others are best repaired before a road is repaved, ensuring a longer-lasting road surface.

"We do everything we can to make sure we don't cut brand-new roads," he said. "It is to keep the roads in good condition for as long as possible. A little bit of money goes a long way."

Another money-saving option sometimes has residents wondering. Occasionally, someone expresses concern that a particular road, that didn't appear to be in bad condition, was repaired sooner than ones that were much worse. The answer is based on a formula for road maintenance, one that maximizes the return for the tax dollars spent. There will be more about this in our next communication.

All in all, American Fork has averaged slightly less than \$1.7 million a year spent on maintaining and repairing its roads. In the current year, the funds expended are anticipated at \$3.28 million. "This year we will be completing several projects that will make our road funding the highest for several years," said city administrator David Bunker. To do this the city has had to use some fund balance and forgo other important capital projects.

This year the City is also setting out to accomplish another ambitious goal. The City will work to replace our previous 10-year road plan with a 5-year infrastructure plan. This plan, which the City hopes to complete by 2021, looks not only at the road surface but also at the utilities underneath the road. By coordinating all the needs in a given segment of road at the same time, the City can be more efficient in the road repairs we make. Unfortunately, it also means more money will be spent per lane mile of roads. But by taking a more comprehensive look at roads we hope to have more accurate data, which residents can use when deciding on the best way to fix our roads.

In American Fork City's next installment of "Citizen's Want to Know" we will dive deeper into our roads issue by examining road repair strategies, funding options, and other common questions related to the city's road infrastructure.



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