

DRAFT ROAD MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Report Author: Executive Officer Infrastructure Maintenance
Responsible Officer: Director Built Environment & Infrastructure
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

Council has legislative obligations to review its Road Management Plan (RMP) every four years. The RMP outlines Council's role and responsibilities in relation to maintaining Council roads.

This 2025 update is based on a thorough review of the current 2021 Plan, legal advice, internal audits, and benchmarking with other councils. It also follows guidance from the Ministerial Code of Practice and the MAV Insurance Road Management Plan documents.

Given Yarra Ranges' large rural and semi-rural road network, the updated RMP adopts a hybrid approach, combining the existing framework with a rural-focused model. This ensures a practical, cost-effective strategy for managing low-traffic roads in natural and hilly areas.

Key improvements include:

- Updated inspection frequencies and intervention levels to reflect the Yarra Ranges' road network characteristics
- Enhanced documentation and auditing of inspection processes.
- Clarified responsibilities for vehicle crossovers and shared paths.
- Integration of insurance claim data to inform risk mitigation strategies.

The proposed service levels are designed to be achievable within current budgets processes, with the improvements expected to enhance safety.

A period of community feedback is now proposed as part of the public consultation process, for a 28 day period commencing 27 August 2025, in line with legislative requirements, under Section 54(6) of the Road Management Act 2004.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Endorse the public consultation process for the Draft Road Management Plan 2025, in accordance with the Road Management Act 2004, Section 54(6) & Road Management (General) Regulations 2016 (Regulation 11) for the purpose of public exhibition.***
- 2. Receives a further report to consider public submissions ahead of finalising the Road Management Plan.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

- Council Meeting 23 November 2021 – Council endorsed the Road Management Plan 2021.
- Council Meeting 23 January 2018 – Council endorsed the Road Management Plan 2017.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

Yarra Ranges is serviced by an extensive network of sealed and unsealed roads and associated infrastructure. The vast size of the municipality, along with increasing intensity and severity of storm events and community expectations poses challenges in inspection and repair of defects within effective timeframes.

The *Road Management Act 2004* was introduced with a primary objective “... to establish a coordinated management system that will promote safe and efficient road networks...”

A Road Management Plan is an essential document to communicate how Yarra Ranges Council will effectively discharge its responsibilities for asset management and risks associated with road asset inspection, maintenance and repair. Council also provides a register of public roads within the municipality, as required by the Act. This register lists every road within the municipality that Yarra Ranges Council is responsible for maintaining.

The Road Management Act 2004 requires a road authority to conduct a review of its Road Management Plan at prescribed intervals. A review of the Road Management Plan 2021 has been completed in accordance with the Road Management Act 2004 and Road Management (General) Regulations 2016.

The organisation advising councils to adopt the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) Road Management Plan Template is MAV Insurance, which is part of the

Municipal Association of Victoria MAV Insurance provides public liability and professional indemnity insurance for local councils across Victoria and Tasmania.

The MAV Insurance Road Management Plan Template 2025 provides a structured and legally defensible framework to support Victorian councils in meeting their obligations under the Road Management Act 2004. The template is designed to reduce liability exposure by promoting clear, consistent, and reasonable standards for the inspection, maintenance, and repair of municipal road assets.

The MAV template encourages councils to adopt measurable and achievable service levels, benchmarked against peer councils and tailored to available resources. It includes comprehensive guidance on:

- Road and asset hierarchies
- Inspection frequencies
- Defect intervention thresholds, and
- Repair response timeframes.

Separate benchmarks are provided for metropolitan and regional councils to reflect differing operational contexts and risk. The Metro (Urban) template is designed for councils with higher population density, traffic volumes, and resources, requiring more frequent inspections and faster response times. The Rural template accommodates larger geographic areas, lower traffic volumes, and limited resources, allowing for more flexible standards while still maintaining legal defensibility.

Council may choose to either fully adopt the MAV template or integrate its key components into the existing RMP. However, full adoption is strongly recommended by MAV Insurance to avoid inconsistencies and to maximise the benefits of standardisation. This process should include updates to asset management systems, internal reviews, stakeholder engagement, and formal endorsement of the revised plan.

Where deviations from MAV benchmarks are necessary, they should be clearly documented and supported by evidence, such as local risk assessments, engineering advice, or financial constraints.

A compliance audit has been completed on Council's Road Management Plan (RMP) by our internal auditors HLB Mann Judd (HLB) as part of the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan. The audit concluded that Yarra Ranges Council has an adequate and appropriate road management framework in place.

Review of Yarra Ranges Council's RMP

A review of Yarra Ranges Council's current Road Management Plan (RMP) against the MAV template was also undertaken. This review identified several areas where existing standards may be:

- Overly conservative, potentially leading to inefficient resource allocation,
- Ambiguous, creating uncertainty in operational implementation, or
- Inconsistent with industry benchmarks and legal expectations.

To enhance compliance, risk management, and operational efficiency, the following updates have been made to the 2025 RMP:

- Reduced inspection intervals (increase inspection frequency) for high-use footpaths to better reflect usage and risk,
- Shortened repair timeframes for common defects such as potholes and kerb/channel deterioration,
- Clear vegetation management standards established to address visibility and safety concerns.

The draft Yarra Ranges Council 2025 Road Management Plan (Draft) highlighted broader strategic and operational opportunities, including:

- The need for a standardised inspector manual to ensure consistency in defect identification and condition rating,
- Clarification on whether MAV's intervention levels are supported by engineering standards and legal precedent,
- The importance of understanding claims history and liability trends to inform service level decisions,
- The integration of non-road assets (e.g., shared trails crossing road reserves) into the RMP framework to manage interface risks.

The review identified most of the processes with respect to road management activities (i.e. planning inspection, recording outcome, reporting) are built into Council's current systems – YRConnect Enterprise System.

The specific controls that should be implemented and/or enhanced to address the identified areas for improvement and potential exposures are noted below: :

1. Template Alignment

The Draft 2025 Road Management Plan adopts a hybrid approach, combining elements of the 2021 Plan with an enhanced Rural Template. This reflects Yarra Ranges' extensive rural and semi-rural road network. The Rural Template provides practical, cost-effective standards for managing dispersed, low-traffic roads in natural terrain, including inspection frequencies, intervention levels, and response times. The updated framework offers a consistent and defensible approach tailored to local conditions.

2. Inspection Processes

The review recommends consistently documenting the current inspection and condition assessment activities undertaken by both Council Officers and contractors. This will provide clear evidence that proactive auditing practices are in place and support compliance with the Road Management Plan (RMP).

Operational practices should be regularly reviewed and aligned with the RMP to maintain adherence to inspection schedules and promptly resolve any deviations.

3. Hierarchy Simplification:

Road and pathway hierarchies remain simplified to two levels (Collector and Local), diverging from the MAV template's more detailed classifications.

Council has adopted a simplified road hierarchy consisting of Collector and Local roads to support consistent service delivery, operational clarity, and alignment with available resources. While some councils use more detailed classifications aligned with land use planning schemes, this approach can introduce complexity and ambiguity in applying inspection frequencies, intervention levels, and maintenance standards. The two-tier system used by Council reflects actual service delivery practices and asset usage patterns, enabling a more practical and cost-effective framework for managing road assets.

4. Inspection Frequencies:

New proactive and reactive inspection intervals are proposed for roads, footpaths, bridges, and other assets. Some intervals are shorter or longer than MAV recommendations, requiring Council confirmation.

5. High Use Footpaths:

Council has maintained a 3-year inspection cycle for general footpaths and increased inspections for high-use footpaths from 12 to 6 months. This proactive adjustment balances asset management needs with available resources.

6. Defect Intervention Levels:

Adjustments to thresholds have been made for potholes, edge breaks and depressions. These proposed defect intervention levels and response timeframes have been reviewed in detail and are considered both practical and technically sound, supported by engineering rationale and sector benchmarking.

7. New Defect Types:

The Draft RMP 2025 introduces the inclusion of previously unlisted defects such as loose pavers, missing tactile indicators, guardrails and damaged pit lids, with defined response times.

8. Vegetation Management:

Vegetation clearance is managed through Council's Tree Canopy Plan and Local Laws, rather than the Road Management Plan.

Council's Local Law 12.4 sets clear obligations for property owners regarding vegetation encroachment, and the Tree Canopy Plan outlines clearance zones and operational practices. This separation ensures clarity of responsibility, aligns with sector practice, and supports a risk-based, resource-efficient approach to vegetation management.

9.Shared and Bicycle Paths:

Shared and bicycle paths located within the road reserve and recorded in Council's Asset Management System as General Use or High Use footpaths will be included in the Road Management Plan (RMP). These assets will be subject to inspection frequencies and intervention levels that align with the standards outlined in the Paths and Trails Strategy, ensuring consistency across Council's operational framework.

Paths located outside the road reserve will continue to be managed under the Paths and Trails Policy supported by appropriate procedures. This integrated approach ensures clarity, legal defensibility, and alignment with sector practice.

10.Proactive Response Schedules for condition

Proactive inspections are conducted according to a structured, programmed schedule to assess whether road assets meet the service levels defined in the Road Management Plan. These inspections are carried out by a dedicated Plan Inspector, using a slow-moving vehicle for roads and on foot for other asset types.

To enhance responsiveness and community engagement, it is recommended that Council implement Proactive Response Schedules—such as targeted maintenance campaigns or the use of smart technologies to triage and prioritise works. These initiatives allow for early identification and resolution of emerging issues, particularly in high-risk or high-use areas.

Where recurring or widespread issues are identified—such as defects affecting areas greater than 10 square metres—these are flagged for condition monitoring under a “watch and act” approach. This ensures that such areas are tracked over time and addressed through strategic maintenance planning rather than reactive patching alone.

11. Vehicle Cross-over

Council considers the entire vehicle crossover, including the footpath infill, to be the property owner's responsibility. This position is supported by the Road Management Act 2004, which states that councils are not responsible for private driveways on road reserves or private roads.

To ensure clarity, Council publishes this information on its website using consistent language and diagrams. Council does not proactively inspect or maintain crossovers unless the footpath section is part of a high-use pedestrian corridor, or a hazard is reported that poses an immediate safety risk.

In such cases, Council may implement temporary risk mitigation measures and notify the property owner of their obligation to undertake permanent repairs. This

approach aligns with Council policy, local laws, and practices of other municipalities. While the footpath portion may serve a public function, maintenance remains the property owner's responsibility.

Recommended option and justification

The review and update of the Road Management Plan 2025 and advent of the MAV development of a standardised template has highlighted opportunities to improve a key risk management document to ensure it provides greater transparency to the community, clarity to staff to implement, and more efficient and responsive delivery of a high priority service.

A revision of the Road Management Plan 2021 is based on outcomes of an internal audit of the existing Plan that was deemed to be an adequate and appropriate road management framework and the MAV Rural Template that aims to align Council's Road management practices with sector benchmarks and legal standards has now been completed incorporating the findings and recommendations of the review.

A review of insurance claims indicates that a moderate increase in service levels would be the most appropriate path to balancing financial risk while improving safety.

It is recommended that Council support review process for the Draft Road Management Plan 2025 pursuant to the requirements of the *Road Management Act* and associated Regulations, leading to adoption by Council of an amended Road Management Plan.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The Draft Road Management Plan 2025 will deliver relevant services within Council's existing budget allocations and procedures. The proposed Levels of Service (inspection and maintenance) have been based on what Council is able to achieve within existing budgetary constraints and priorities.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

The Road Management Plan responds to the requirements of the *Road Management Act 2004* and conveys Council's commitment to the community in relation to the inspection, repair and maintenance of road and road related infrastructure.

RELEVANT LAW

In addition to the *Road Management Act 2004*, the Plan also considers the following Acts, regulations and codes of practice:

- *Local Government Act 2020*

- *Ministerial Codes of Practice*
- *Road Management (General) Regulations 2016,*
- *Road Management (Works and Infrastructure) Regulations 2015*
- *Road Safety Act 1986*
- *Wrongs Act 1958*

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

The economic impacts of the Road Management Plan relate most strongly to consequences of improving safety and reducing insurance claims, and setting minimum levels of service for the inspection, maintenance and repair of the roads Council is responsible for.

Tourism growth in the Yarra Ranges continues to place increasing pressure on local road infrastructure, particularly in high-traffic scenic and recreational areas. To ensure safe and reliable access for both visitors and residents, Council will strengthen its road asset management approach by identifying tourism-intensive routes, applying minimum service standards to these priority township corridors, and engaging proactively to forecast seasonal demand and align maintenance schedules accordingly. This targeted strategy will support economic development while preserving road quality and safety.

Social Implications

The increases to service outlined within the Draft Road Management Plan 2025 focus on community safety. The objective of the Road Management Plan is to help deliver a safe and efficient road network.

Environmental Implications

Climate change is accelerating road degradation through increased rainfall and extreme heat. The Road Management Plan (RMP) addresses this challenge by prioritising proactive inspections and timely maintenance to prevent costly rehabilitation.

To enhance road resilience and safety, Council will continue to strengthen road asset management by integrating asset condition assessments and defect reporting into inspection regimes and investing in predictive maintenance strategies to reduce long-term costs and improve service levels.

The RMP also acknowledges exceptional circumstances - such as floods, fires, and storms that may necessitate suspension or adjustment of inspection and maintenance schedules.

Implications for the RMP:

- Embed proactive planning for climate-related damage into asset management strategies.
- Expand the use of predictive maintenance and condition-based inspections to improve safety and cost-efficiency.
- Integrate climate resilience measures—such as improved drainage and surface treatments—especially for unsealed roads.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As part of the formal Gazette Process, it is recommended that the community is notified of amendments to the Road Management Plan and provided 28 days to comment as detailed in The Road Management (General) Regulations 2016 (Regulation 10). The Draft Road Management Plan consultation process includes:

- Advertised in the Victorian Government Gazette August 2025,
- Advertised in the weekly publication of the Star Mail online and in six printed editions,
- Printed copies of the Draft Road Management Plan were made available at all Community Link locations,
- A Shaping Yarra Ranges page is to be established to provide further information and enable collection of public submissions, and
- A notice to be published on the Council Facebook page on August 2025.

A summary of the Road Management Plan 2025 objectives has been provided in Attachment 2.

The schedule for Reporting is as follows:

Report Title	Meeting	Scheduled Dates
Final Draft Road Management Plan 2025	Council	26/8/2025
Gazette Road Management Plan 2025	Public Notification	28 days
Draft Road Management Plan Review Community Feedback	Forum	07/10/2025
Road Management Plan Review Endorsement	Council	28/10/2025

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Internal consultation from the audit of the Road Management Plan and benchmarking of other Council Road Management Plans was referenced for the review. A legal review of the Draft Road Management Plan was completed by

Special Counsel, at Russell Kennedy. They advised there were no concerns from a legal perspective.

RISK ASSESSMENT

A risk-based approach has been utilised to assess the possible impacts of changes to levels of inspection and maintenance regimes as part of the review and subsequent revision of the Road Management Plan.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Draft Road Management Plan 2025
2. Summary Road Management Plan 2025