



2024-25 GRAND JURY REPORT
EL DORADO COUNTY
FEBRUARY 4, 2025 – CASE #25-04

DOT MAINTENANCE – WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD

Assessing the public complaint process of the Department of Transportation's Road Maintenance Division for efficiency and transparency.

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Cover photo: Salmon Falls Bridge, Salmon Falls Rd. Courtesy: G. Kinghorn.

SUMMARY

Summary

"It is a rough road that leads to heights of greatness."

- Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Roman philosopher

HIGHLIGHTS

Road conditions are a common topic of discussion throughout El Dorado County (County). There have been concerns raised by El Dorado County residents on Nextdoor, Facebook, and in letters to the *Mountain Democrat*. Grand Jury members have also observed poor conditions at various locations on County roads.

Depressions, asphalt alligator cracking, pavement delamination, crumbling, and potholes have been noted throughout the County. The Board of Supervisors (BOS), responding to community input, has identified road maintenance as a necessary priority in 2024-2025. The BOS has yet to establish performance metrics or objectives. In addition, the County Department of Transportation (DOT) Road Maintenance / Projects Division (Maintenance) does not track or update any aspect of public-generated road complaints, including the number received, mean time for resolution, identified deferments, and repair costs. They cannot report these details to the BOS or any other public agency, which is shocking for a previously identified priority.

The County relies heavily on the public to identify immediate road hazards (primarily potholes). Residents can submit their complaints to DOT via webpage complaint form, email, phone calls, or in-person reporting at the DOT office. However, upon receiving public complaints, the department lacks clear, written procedures for guiding staff in the complaint handling process.

The software used by DOT for managing repair projects has not consistently worked since a July 2024 software update. As a result, the records must be printed and physically delivered to the employee responsible for investigating issues. Additionally, an auto-generated complaint resolution email feature has not always worked. This resulted in staff having to manually send emails to complainants with updates or a final disposition.

SUMMARY



*Alligator cracking on Wentworth Springs Rd. at Chipmunk Trail,
Georgetown, July 2024*

DOT Maintenance relies heavily on citizen input to identify road hazards but has made minimal efforts to engage the public. There are no DOT vehicle placards, no signage, and no County mail flyers encouraging pothole reporting. Many residents are unaware of how or where to report issues, leading to an underreporting of hazards. Resulting delays in addressing road safety concerns increase accident risks and road deterioration.

The Grand Jury reviewed the processes, procedures, and practices DOT Maintenance employs to maintain its roads and address public concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

The Grand Jury recommends DOT correct the issues with the software for processing of road complaints. We also recommend DOT implement a formal written procedure for receiving, processing, and responding to public requests for road repairs. Additionally, we recommend a formal process for reporting to the BOS metrics regarding public complaints. Finally, DOT Maintenance should raise public awareness about how to submit concerns about road issues.

BACKGROUND

Background

Road conditions in El Dorado County are a common topic of concern. Grand Jury members use County roads daily and have observed declining conditions. One of our members emailed a pothole complaint to DOT and did not receive an acknowledgement email or any subsequent email stating a completed repair or deferment of the repair. A review of social media complaints found that a Nextdoor user complained about potholes on County-maintained Mosquito Road. A writer to the *Mountain Democrat* complained about potholes in a letter to the editor dated January 18, 2023, which stated, "...Smith Flat Road at Broadway currently has potholes the size of the Grand Canyon." While this specific area is within the City of Placerville, all the above piqued our interest on how DOT is made aware of potholes and how quickly they are repaired.

The BOS has identified road maintenance as a priority issue for 2024-2025, but did not appear to have established key performance metrics, or even demand progress updates from DOT. Without an effective means of tracking and reporting road repairs, the Grand Jury was concerned that priority repairs could be delayed, there could be cost inefficiencies, and an unacceptable level of liability risk.

We investigated how DOT maintains and manages the roads under its authority. We also examined how the BOS, DOT, and the residents of the County rely on each other to identify road problems, infrastructure maintenance, and repairs.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

INTERVIEWS

During the investigation, the Grand Jury interviewed administrators, managers, and employees of the El Dorado County Department of Transportation, Information Technologies, and the City of Placerville.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

- NCE Report: *California Statewide Local Streets and Roads Needs Assessment Final Report April 2023* <https://savecaliforniastreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Statewide-Needs-2022-FINAL.pdf>
- *El Dorado County 2024 Strategic Plan*
<https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/files/assets/county/v/1/documents/government/cao/strategic-plan/2024-edc-strategic-plan.pdf>
- *El Dorado County Capital Improvement Project – 2024 CIP*
<https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/files/assets/county/v/1/documents/land-use/transportation/cip/2024/adopted-2024-cip-book.pdf>
- City of Placerville Public Works Department: *Pothole Report to City Council July 14, 2020*
[https://www.cityofplacerville.org/media/City%20Council%20Staff%20Reports/2020/07%2014%202020/15.3 SR%20Pothole-Asphalt%20Maintenance%20%20SR%20\(NS\).pdf](https://www.cityofplacerville.org/media/City%20Council%20Staff%20Reports/2020/07%2014%202020/15.3%20SR%20Pothole-Asphalt%20Maintenance%20%20SR%20(NS).pdf)

DISCUSSION

Discussion

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION – MAINTENANCE DIVISION

The County's Department of Transportation (DOT) employs 156 full-time and two part-time positions. DOT is responsible for maintaining approximately 1,100 miles of road on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and in the unincorporated areas of South Lake Tahoe. There are several divisions and units in the DOT, including Maintenance.

The primary concerns of DOT Maintenance are public safety on County-maintained roads and the preservation of road infrastructure. DOT Maintenance responsibilities cover a wide and complex range of tasks ensuring the safety and functionality of the transportation infrastructure, including:

- Roadway maintenance,
- Bridge maintenance,
- Guardrail maintenance,
- Drainage,
- Roadside ditching,
- Snow removal and ice control,
- Roadside spraying and vegetation control,
- Roadway emergency response,
- Erosion control and stormwater management,
- Traffic engineering,
- Traffic signals,
- Roadway striping,
- Signs and pavement marking,
- Brushing,
- Pavement,
- Curb, gutter, and sidewalk repair, and
- Dead animal removal.

DISCUSSION

THE CONDITION OF COUNTY MAINTAINED ROADS

Maintaining the County's roads requires a constant effort of monitoring pavement conditions, prioritizing limited resources, anticipating weather, and responding to public concerns. Insufficient maintenance results in poor road conditions, which in turn can lead to vehicle damage, accidents, and injuries. Deferred maintenance can result in increased road repair costs, adverse environmental impact, and reduced property values. Preservation of road infrastructure is vital for public safety and asset protection. Public perception is the County is not adequately maintaining its roads.

A 2023 [study](#) commissioned by the California Association of Cities of 2022 road conditions, using a scale of zero (failed) to 100 (excellent), described the statewide average pavement condition index (PCI) at 65 which is considered "at risk." El Dorado County roads, including the cities of Placerville and South Lake Tahoe, held an average weighted PCI of 63, also considered "at risk". The report from the California Association of Cities does not appear to use the standard PCI ratings from The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), which designates a PCI of 63 as "fair".

DOT logged 437 public-submitted complaints in 2023 and 314 in 2024. The complaints are classified under vegetation control, road signs and road hazards, including drainage and pothole complaints. The Grand Jury determined that actual complaints would be much higher if the majority of the public knew how to log complaints or that their input is required to determine DOT Maintenance priorities.

While the public may view a road issue as requiring urgent repair, DOT might classify it as a problem that can be deferred. When a complaint is submitted, a superintendent or supervisor evaluates, verifies, and prioritizes the issue. Potholes are considered safety issues and are typically repaired within 48 hours. If there are no perceived immediate threats to public safety and the road is stable, the repair may be postponed as part of a larger road improvement project well into the future.

DISCUSSION

OBSERVATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MAINTENANCE CREWS AND PUBLIC

DOT learns of urgent road hazards, including potholes, by two methods: observation by road maintenance crews and notifications from the public. Crews traveling to or from assigned jobs are responsible for documenting or promptly repairing any potholes they encounter. Most road maintenance trucks carry materials needed for immediate repairs. Less urgent issues are addressed at a later date. While this approach is effective on roads frequently used by maintenance crews, it leaves less-traveled roads largely unaddressed.

The less-traveled roads may not be inspected by DOT for 2-3 years as part of a regular condition assessment survey. If not reported to DOT by the public, many potholes go unaddressed for weeks, months or longer. The repair delay is a safety hazard and could result in vehicle damage or accidents, subjecting the County to liability claims, and even more damage to roads. DOT relies heavily on the driving public as the primary source for identifying urgent problems on many County roads although it is not clear to everyone how to file such complaints.

DOT receives public complaints of poor road conditions through several channels. It has a webpage which includes an online form for reporting problems. DOT requests the user's email address so that a complaint acknowledgement can be generated along with a subsequent update on problem resolution. The public can also report issues by email, phone, or in person at the DOT office.

COMPLAINT PROCESSING

When DOT receives a complaint, DOT staff acknowledges the complaint via email and manually creates a work order in the department's tracking system. The tracking system has capabilities to automatically email the work order and assign an employee to investigate the complaint, as well as update the complainant upon final resolution, but has not consistently functioned since a software update in July 2024. Staff work around these problems by printing work order records and handing them to the appropriate employee and upon complaint resolution by manually emailing complainants. This is time-consuming and inefficient and allows room for errors.

DISCUSSION

Finding 1: After a public complaint is received and logged by Department of Transportation staff, the software used to forward a work order to maintenance staff or to update the complainant has not worked consistently since mid-2024.

THE LACK OF PROCEDURES FOR PROCESSING COMPLAINTS

There are no formal written procedures for handling road complaints or repair requests. Although staff may informally share knowledge about processing these matters, management has not established official, written procedures that outline departmental expectations. As a result, there is no documented process for responding to complaints, no set timelines for replies, and no requirements for sending final resolution emails.

Finding 2: There are no documented Department of Transportation procedures for processing public-generated roadway complaints.

REPORTS ARE VITAL

The Grand Jury sought information on how the County responds to road maintenance concerns. We determined that the term “road maintenance” covers different transportation infrastructure assets including the planning of future projects and the response to road concerns.

A Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) from DOT includes future plans for road construction and maintenance. The primary purpose of a CIP includes assessing infrastructure needs, budget planning, and enhancing public accountability. The CIP is published on the County’s website.

Through interviews and research, we learned that there is no report specifically regarding DOT Maintenance’s response to public road concerns. By comparison, a Department of Public Works (DPW) “pothole” report from the city of Placerville summarizes street maintenance performed, including pothole repairs, and the method used for repairs. The Placerville report also summarizes the number of potholes fixed due to employee observations and, separately, by

DISCUSSION

phone calls and emails. Conversely, DOT does not provide the BOS with any performance metric reports involving maintenance issues either observed by staff or received from the public.

Finding 3: The Board of Supervisors does not request, and Department of Transportation does not provide to the Board of Supervisors, data on public-generated complaints, actions taken to address them, progress metrics, or the status of complaint-driven road maintenance repairs.

Despite its heavy reliance on citizen input for identifying immediate road hazards, DOT has made minimal efforts to solicit the public's help. Unless members of the public seek out DOT's Facebook page or website, they are unlikely to be aware their input is important. Moreover, our informal surveys suggest that, while most local residents are aware of significant problems with roads in their neighborhoods, few ever report them to DOT or understand how they would do so. This results in road hazards in many communities being underreported, which in turn leads to delays in addressing safety issues, increasing the risk of accidents, and further deterioration of roads.

Finding 4: The Department of Transportation relies heavily on public input to identify specific road hazards on the County's extensive road network. However, only a small portion of the public is aware that its input is important or even welcomed, and where to provide it.

FINDINGS

Findings

- F1.** After a public complaint is received and logged by Department of Transportation staff, the software used to forward a work order to maintenance staff or to update the complainant has not worked consistently since mid-2024.
- F2.** There are no documented Department of Transportation procedures for processing public-generated roadway complaints.
- F3.** The Board of Supervisors does not request, and Department of Transportation does not provide to the Board of Supervisors, data on public-generated complaints, actions taken to address them, progress metrics, or the status of complaint-driven road maintenance repairs.
- F4.** The Department of Transportation relies heavily on public input to identify specific road hazards on the County's extensive road network. However, only a small portion of the public is aware that its input is important or even welcomed, and where to provide it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

The El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury recommends The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors to direct the Department of Transportation to:

- R1:** Adopt and deploy a software package that will assist staff in fully electronic processing of roadway complaints by January 1, 2026.
- R2:** Adopt a formal, written procedure to receive, track and respond to residents' requests for road repairs by July 31, 2025.
- R3:** Establish goals and performance metrics which measure the efforts of the Department of Transportation and report them to the Board of Supervisors quarterly to track the effectiveness of complaint-driven road repairs by July 31, 2025.
- R4:** Submit a quarterly report on key metrics of County-wide road maintenance and repair requirements/efforts to the Board of Supervisors and to the public beginning by July 31, 2025.
- R5:** Increase efforts to encourage and facilitate public input by various means (such as truck signage, flyers and social media) by July 31, 2025.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Request for Responses

A Civil Grand Jury report details a single investigation. Each report lists FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS. The responsible organization is notified and is required to respond to the report.

The California Penal Code § 933(c) specifies response times.

- PUBLIC AGENCIES. The governing body of any public agency (also referring to a department) must respond within 90 days from the release of the report to the public.
- ELECTIVE OFFICERS OR AGENCY HEADS. All elected officers or heads of agencies/departments are required to respond within 60 days of the release of the report to the public.
- FAILURE TO RESPOND. Failure to respond, as required to a Jury report, violates California Penal Code Section 933.05 and is subject to further action that may include additional investigation on the subject matter of the report by the Jury.

The following responses are required pursuant to Penal Code § 933 and § 933.05:

From the following government bodies:

- El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
 - All Findings and Recommendations

For more information refer to [How to Respond to an El Dorado County Grand Jury Report](#) available on the El Dorado County Grand Jury webpage.

APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

Appendix and Related Information

GLOSSARY

Alligator Cracking - A type of pavement distress characterized by interconnected cracks that form a pattern resembling an alligator's skin.



Marble Valley Rd

Capital Improvement Program (CIP) - Identifies and prioritizes future transportation investments required to meet the County's existing and future transportation needs for the next 20 years. The CIP is updated every year with a major update approximately every five years.

Delamination/ crumbling - the separation or detachment of layers within a roadway structure, typically in asphalt or concrete pavements.



Marble Valley Rd

APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

Depressions - Localized low spots or sunken areas in a roadway surface.



Marble Valley Rd

PCI - Pavement Condition Index - a numerical rating system used to evaluate the overall condition of a pavement section based on the type, severity, and extent of visible surface distresses.

Pothole— Localized distress in an asphalt-surfaced pavement resulting from the breakup of the asphalt surface and possibly the asphalt base course. Under Department of Transportation's definition, a pothole must be bowl-shaped and have a dimension of at least six inches.



Old Bass Lake Rd