

# How Will You Get Home Tonight?



## Maintaining Road Access for Rural Communities

**OUR PRIMARY FOCUS IN THE ENGINEERING** team in the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (MFLNRO) is forest service roads accessing rural residences and communities.

Roads accessing rural residences and communities are of paramount importance in delivering emergency services, goods and supplies, transportation of friends and families, as well as industrial and commercial services. These residents depend on road maintenance that does not stop and rely on safe, dependable transportation for their daily lives. It's the kind of thing the vast majority of British Columbians don't have to worry about. However it's a responsibility not to be taken lightly.

For these rural access roads, the MFLNRO is the primary maintainer only when no industrial user is present. We use numerous tools to ensure that roads are cared for from environmental and safety aspects. These tools include memorandums of understanding, road advisory committees, along with the road use permitting process. These tools help us to work with other road users, prioritize issues, and schedule activities in an amicable fashion.

In an ideal situation where there is only one road user, such as residents or a single company, maintenance operations can be carried out cost efficiently, focusing on road user safety and protection of the environment. In an instance where there are multiple road users and, perhaps, some seasonal users, more elaborate systems must be used.

In instances with more than one user present, a primary user is designated with road

maintenance responsibilities. Secondary users must enter into road use agreements to fairly share road maintenance costs and coordinate road maintenance activities. This process involves individual road user's due diligence and honoring maintenance obligations. Good relationships and teamwork are essential.

Head Bay Forest Service Road is a local example of a successful Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). In the MOU, MFLNRO, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and Western Forest Products work together to ensure the road receives the care and attention it needs—structures are kept up and surface maintenance is maintained. Another example is the Road Advisory Committee for the Zeballos Forest Service Road. The committee ensures local concerns are communicated and proper seasonal planning is conducted.

As mentioned, my primary concern is rural residence/community access and this is where I focus the majority of my resources. However, other road classifications that we use include:

- Industrial roads, where the primary use of the road is for industrial purposes. These roads have maintenance completed through the issuance of Road Use Permits. (This work is mostly done by the other engineering team in our office that works through BC Timber Sales.)
- Wilderness roads, where the road doesn't fit into a set categories but needs to be held in a non-deactivated state. The maintenance focus on these roads is for environmental protection and access is not guaranteed.
- Recreational road, where roads access high value recreational sites and trails.

The maintenance focus on these roads is public safety and environmental protection.

- Deactivated roads, where a road is no longer required for any of the above-mentioned purposes. Deactivation, though never a popular choice, protects the environment, protects some form of the initial road structure investment and reduces safety and environmental liability. Challenges we face range from an aging workforce as our history and important relationships head out the door to greener pastures, to strained and reduced operation budgets, to seasonal storms that seem to be getting stronger each event. Public safety, worker safety and protection of the environment are at the forefront of our responsibility.

Clearly identifying specific road use is an important first step in planning and budgeting maintenance activities. Assessing who is obligated to do what activity ensures fairness in multi-user roads, ensuring all needed activities are completed. Keeping the road inventory lean through deactivation and transfer to road permit—where applicable—is important when it comes to identifying road maintenance issues with limited operational funds. Lastly, if weather and budgets permit, being proactive rather than reactive, improving known maintenance issues can be a big key to success. 🍌

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