



AGENDA ITEM

Woody Nook and Aspelund Roads

Vehicle Weight Restriction Review

January 31, 2022

BACKGROUND

At the December 7, 2021 Committee of the Whole meeting, Council discussed the current 90% road bans on the Aspelund and Woody Nook Roads. As a result of those discussions, at the December 16, 2021 Council meeting, Council passed a motion that the County Manger be directed to prepare a report regarding the impacts of lifting the road bans on the Woody Nook and Aspelund Roads.

ANALYSIS

Woody Nook Road is classified as a County Main Road. It is 9.6km in length and connects Highway 12 and the Aspelund Road. It has a 9.2 meter finished top and was just recently overlaid with 50mm of asphalt. It was designed and constructed to a non-banned status but currently has a 90% weight restriction for its entire length. The road is posted at 90km/hr with a section in the middle reduced to 60km/hr as there is a small residential community, church and cemetery located there.

Recent traffic counts on Woody Nook Road show the Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) just south of Hwy 12 to be 1,140 vehicles and the Average Summer Daily Traffic (AASD) to be 1,470 vehicles. Of these totals, 4.9% are tractor trailer units. Prior to the implementation of the year round 90% ban tractor trailer unit counts were as high as 11% of the average daily traffic.

The Aspelund Road is also classified as a County Main Road. It is approximately 17km in length and connects Highway 2 / Highway 597 to Highway 20. It too was designed and constructed to a non-banned status but currently has a 90% weight restriction from the west side of Rge. Rd. 27-4 west to Highway 20. The portion from Rge. Rd. 27-4 east to Highway 2 has no weight restrictions. The road is posted at 100km/hr for its entire length.

Recent traffic counts on the Aspelund Road just east of Highway 20 show the AADT 2,080 and the ASDT to be 2,440. Of these totals, 2.5% were tractor trailer units. Prior to the County implementing the 90% year round ban, 13% of the traffic was tractor trailer units. Conversely the counts west of Highway 2 show the AADT at 5,910 and the ASDT to be 6,560 with 5.5% of the vehicles being tractor trailer units. It was too hard to determine the difference in tractor trailer movements in this area due to the high industrial development over the last several years.

The reason for the decision, back in approximately 2009, to initiate year round bans on these two roads was primarily two-fold; 1) to protect County infrastructure, thereby saving maintenance and rehabilitation costs, and 2) safety concerns regarding heavy truck traffic. After significant upgrades to the Aspelund Road, regional traffic patterns changed drastically. Heavy industrial traffic from the north and central parts of Red Deer and Blackfalds areas could get access to Highway 20 via Aspelund Road much easier than the alternatives, being the traffic circle at Highways 11A and 20 or traversing Highway 12 through Gull Lake, negotiating the sharp curves and narrow roadway as well traveling through Bentley. There were also significant safety concerns regarding the major bridge over the Blindman River. The bridge had a very narrow travelling surface resulting at that time, in damage to the bridge, vehicle damage and even fatalities.

Although some additional regional traffic patterns were noted on the Woody Nook Road once it was upgraded with shoulders and constructed to a non-ban status, this was only a minor part in the decision to place year round restrictions. The primary purpose was to address the safety concerns and noise be it either tire, engine or retarder brakes as expressed by the residents and church users in the community that the road runs through.

While these roads are weight restricted, exemptions to allow loads to move at 100% can be made. This is done through our permitting agency, RoaData. There is a fee of \$25.00 for the application. The applicant identifies the routing, number of trucks, and duration of the haul. The information is then compiled and relayed to County staff for review. It is then authorized or rejected depending on the nature of the haul. This is all done electronically. Typically it takes about one to two hours to receive a decision from the first point of contact. The most difficult and frustrating part of the process for users is the initial point of contact. The first time a user makes contact they have to set up an account. Every time thereafter they only have to identify themselves and their information is on file. It should also be noted, area producers asking for an exemption are not charged a fee for this permit.

Since the time that the bans were imposed there have been many changes to the infrastructure in this area. The County made significant upgrades to the bridge over the Blindman River including widening it to 10 meters from 7.4 meters. Since that was completed we have not had a single reported vehicle contact with the bridge. More recently the paving of Rge. Rd. 27-4 from Aspelund Road to Highway 12 has given additional routing for larger trucks. Lastly, with the Province completing the realignment of Highway 12, bypassing the Provincial Parks, Summer Village of Gull Lake and Bentley, traffic movements have become smoother and safer.

1. The 90% road bans on Woody Nook and Aspelund Roads be removed.
(Administrative recommendation)
2. The road bans on Woody Nook and Aspelund Roads remain at 90%.
3. Take other action(s) as determined by Council.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no initial impacts to the budget in removing the road bans. Depending on future traffic patterns additional funds, may be required to accommodate a shorter road life span.

Currently we are contributing approximately \$159,000 and \$96,000 per year respectively for Aspelund (15 year cycle) and Woody Nook (20 Year cycle) Roads to the Main Road Reserve. If the cycles were decreased by one year, annual contributions to the Reserve for the Aspelund Road would increase to \$170,000 and Woody Nook Road to \$101,000.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Section 18(1) of the Municipal Government Act (MGA) states that subject to this or any other Act, a municipality has the direction, control and management of all roads within the municipality.
2. Section 3 of the MGA states the purposes of a municipality are: 1) to provide good government, 2) to provide services, facilities, or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the municipality, and 3) to develop and maintain safe and viable communities.
3. Section 180(1) of the MGA states that council may only act by resolution or bylaw.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council authorize the County Manager to remove the 90% road bans from the Woody Nook and Aspelund Roads effective immediately.

PREPARED BY: Bill Cade, Director of Operations

REVIEWED BY: Tim Timmons, County Manager

