

PA Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road Program

2016 Municipal Fact Sheet

Updated 4/2016

\$20 million available for public unpaved roads.

\$8 million available for public paved low-volume roads.

Summary for municipalities:

- Funding available for road improvement projects on unpaved roads and paved (& *tar-and-chip*) roads with less than 500 vehicles/day.
- Program focuses on water quality and road improvements, simple applications, and local control.
- ESM Training certification is required to apply for funding, and valid for 5 years.
- Contact your Conservation District for county-specific details.

ESM Trainings: Applicants must have been certified through the Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) training with in the past 5 years to apply for funds. The eligibility requirements for both Dirt and Gravel (D&G) and Paved Low Volume Road (LVR) funds are the same. Over 700 people attended the 10 trainings held in 2015. 11 additional trainings are currently scheduled around PA for 2015. For more details, or to register online, visit the “edu/training” page of the Center’s website: www.dirtandgravelroads.org.

Are you new to the Program?

The Program is administered through the State Conservation Commission (SCC) in Harrisburg. The SCC provides funding to Conservation Districts in each county. **After attending a two day ESM training**, municipalities can apply to their Conservation District to fund road projects. Road projects focus on environmental and economic benefits such as reducing stream pollution and reducing long term maintenance costs. More details: www.dirtandgravelroads.org (select “PA Program”).

If interested, you should:

- Familiarize yourself with the Program using the online information at the link above.
- Contact your local Conservation District.
- Register to attend one of the ESM training courses to become eligible to apply.

Previous experience with the Program?

Except for the funding increase and the eligibility of ESM projects on paved roads, much of the Program remains the same. **Municipalities still need to attend the two day ESM training**, apply to the Conservation District for funds, and complete the road work. Projects remain focused on environmental improvements. **ESM training course certifications remain valid for 5 years** and are needed for both the unpaved and paved portion of the Program.

If interested you should:

- Determine your eligibility status. A complete list of everyone currently certified is on the Center’s “[edu/training](http://www.dirtandgravelroads.org)” page described above.
- Register for an ESM training above if needed.
- Contact your Conservation District about applying.

Local Control: One of the main principles of the Dirt and Gravel Road Program since it began in 1997 is “Local Control”. This local control philosophy establishes guidelines at the state level, but leaves a large amount of freedom for those running the Program at the County level to customize the Program to fit their local situation and needs. As a result, many of the questions that applicants may have (such as funding priorities, local policies, application deadlines, etc.) will vary around the State. **For this reason, it is important to contact your County’s Conservation District to be aware of these local policies and priorities.**

**The Program's complete administrative manual is available online at www.dirtandgravelroads.org.
Be sure to contact your local Conservation District for county-specific policies.**

What is the Program's focus? The Dirt and Gravel Road Program has always focused on projects that provide long-term environmental benefits to Pennsylvania's streams while making improvements to the public road system. The funding increase and incorporation of paved LVRs does not change that goal. Program projects should have benefits to road owners and users, but must still focus on improving drainage and reducing the impact of public roads on streams and other water bodies.

When will funding be available? Funding is already available, and the first season of paved low-volume road projects hit the ground in 2015. Contact your Conservation District to determine their funding availability and application deadlines for both Dirt and Gravel (D&G) and Paved Low Volume Roads (LVRs).

How will this funding increase affect traditional "D&G" Program projects? Obviously a funding increase means that more projects can be funded in each county. Less obvious though, is that it will alter the type and scope of projects that can be funded. Many Districts have been scaling back projects in recent years as inflation cut into their buying power. With this new funding, some Districts might consider funding larger projects, or funding more complex or comprehensive projects that were previously not within their budget.

What LVR projects should I apply for? Each Conservation District will develop their own ranking criteria for both D&G and (paved) LVR Projects. LVR projects will still focus on drainage and environmental improvements related to stream impacts. Paved roads that are typically prone to drainage issues such as spring seeps, erosion, and washouts are likely candidates for LVR funding.

When can I apply for LVR funding? Each Conservation District establishes their own policies and application deadlines. Many districts have already started accepting applications, and both paved and unpaved projects will be hitting the ground in the spring of 2016. Contact your local Conservation District for details.

What about bridge replacements? A new Program policy limits the structural replacement of large culverts and bridges to areas where the existing structure is undersized and causing stream degradation. Full details of the policy are available in the Administrative Manual or through your Conservation District.

What about urban LVR projects? LVRs in urban areas may be eligible for funding. Urban projects represent a change in scope for the Program, and guidance on ESM practices for urban roads will continue to evolve.

What about traffic counts for LVRs? The law requires that a road have less than 500 vehicles per day in order to be eligible for LVR funding. It will be the responsibility of the applicant to provide or perform traffic counts before a contract can be signed. Simple traffic count policies have been established that allow for use of existing data, 2-hour hand counts, and 24-hour automated counts. Full guidance for these traffic counts is available at www.dirtandgravelroads.org and as part of the Program's Administrative Guidance Manual.

Can the Program fund the re-paving or re-"chip-sealing" of a currently paved or "tar-and-chip" road? The purchase of asphalt or tar & chip is not a primary purpose of the program. The decision on the purchase of asphalt (as part of a larger ESM project) will be left up to individual conservation districts. Many Conservation Districts have developed local policies that only pay for asphalt or chip-seal that is disturbed as part of a project (over pipes, underdrains, etc.). Districts will develop their own policies regarding the purchase of asphalt or chip-sealing. In all cases, drainage and base issues must be addressed first.

Can the Program fund the paving of a currently dirt or gravel road? Currently, the conversion of unpaved roads to asphalt or tar and chip roads will **NOT** be an eligible Program expense.

Can the Program fund the conversion of poorly paved road to gravel? The "unpaving" of a road has been, and will continue to be, an eligible program expense (at the discretion of individual Conservation Districts).

Contact information for all Conservation Districts: <http://pacd.org/your-district/find-your-district>
PSU Center for Dirt and Gravel Road Studies: www.dirtandgravelroads.org - 814-865-5355