COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
731 Harrison Ave., PO Box 3071
SALEM,VIRGINIA 24153-0560

Gregory A. Whirley
Commissioner

MAY 2012
RECEIVED
TOWN OF
CHRISTIANSBURG

May 17, 2012

Mr. Barry Helms
Manager, Town of Christiansburg
100 E. Main Street
Christiansburg, VA 24073

Dear Mr. Helms:

Constituents in your area may be contacting you this spring or summer with concerns about road maintenance being performed in their communities. Contractors hired by the Virginia Department of Transportation are applying surface treatment to various mid to low volume roads and neighborhood streets throughout the 12-county Salem District. I am writing to provide you with some information about this process, so you can help allay some of your constituent's concerns.

Although nothing may appear wrong with a road to drivers or residents, surface treatment is a routine maintenance activity to protect and extend the pavement life on low volume roadways. The purpose is to seal the pavement surface against weathering and the negative effects of moisture penetration.

VDOT tries to treat our roads every 5 to 7 years. Due to our current funding constraints many roads with lower traffic volumes such as secondary routes and subdivision streets that have not received surface treatment in the recent past are receiving surface treatment. Surface treatment is approximately one seventh the cost of plant mix asphalt pavement and can extend the life of the existing pavement by 5 to 10 years.

Surface treatment begins with liquid asphalt being sprayed directly onto the pavement surface. This is immediately followed by an application of fine stone, which is rolled and compressed into the roadway and partially embedded in the pavement. There is a period of time when loose stone and dust will be present on the road surface. This dust and fine stone is necessary to keep uncured liquid asphalt off of vehicles using the roadway. The presence of the very fine material is also necessary for the final cured surface to have as smooth as possible riding surface.

Residents sometimes think this loose stone is a result of poor work quality or suspect their road is being turned into a gravel road. The loose stone is normal and after a curing period will subside as it absorbs in the road surface or works its way onto the road shoulders. In addition, excessive stone or sand can be removed by sweeper vacuums in the cases where traffic and rain do not displace or wash the majority of the loose stone away from the road surface.

Many residents may prefer that their roads be asphalt paved instead of surface treated. VDOT determines what treatment a road receives based on traffic volume, pavement condition, and available resources. If our financial resources were unlimited, we would use plant mix asphalt in almost every setting. It does not have the cure time or dust or gravel issues that we have with surface treatment and it has greater structural capacity. However, in a limited funding environment we have to balance the condition and need of a large network of roadways and choose the options we are able to fund.

As a final note, I live in a small lot subdivision in southwest Roanoke County which has curb and gutter. My subdivision was originally constructed with and to this day has a surface treatment pavement. I am probably the only resident of my subdivision who is aware of this fact. Children ride their scooters and bicycles in our neighborhood. I run and walk there as do most of my neighbors. After a normal winter, it often takes a trained eye to recognize the type of pavement that is in place. I did not know that my own subdivision was surface treated until I looked at a small pothole one day and could see the cross section of the road. My purpose is sharing this is that although surface treatment and plant mix asphalt are two different products, in the long run, they serve the same purpose and when used appropriately, they both can provide very satisfactory results.

If you or one of your constituents has any questions about surface treatment in their neighborhood, please do not hesitate to contact me at (540) 387-5347.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Caywood, P.E.
District Administrator

Cc: Charlie Kilpatrick, VDOT Chief Deputy Commissioner