

FACT SHEET - SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

What is a Special Rate Variation?

A special rate variation allows a council to increase its general income above the rate peg, under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW).

Special variations can be for one or several years, and can be temporary or permanently retained in the rates base.

Each year, councils wishing to apply for a special variation make a formal request to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in February. The applications are assessed against criteria listed in the Office of Local Government's Guidelines

The Guidelines include undertaking long term financial planning, ensuring community awareness of the need and extent of the proposed increase in rates, and consideration of the impact on ratepayers as well as the community's capacity and willingness to pay. In addition, councils must meet criteria related to productivity improvements.

What is the Rate Peg?

Rate pegging has been in place since 1977. The rate peg determines the maximum percentage amount by which a council may increase its general income for the year.

For a small number of councils, general income also includes some annual charges such as drainage levies. The rate peg does not apply to stormwater, waste collection, water and sewerage charges.

Councils have discretion to determine how to allocate the rate peg increase between different ratepayer categories.

How the rate peg is set?

Councils have no say in how the rate peg is set. Prior to 2010, the Minister for Local Government set the rate peg. Since then, the rate peg is set by IPART and is mainly based on the Local Government Cost Index (LGCI).

The LGCI measures price changes over the previous year for the goods and labour an average council will use. IPART also look at productivity changes over the same period.

What is the rate peg for 2017-18?

For 2017-18, the rate peg has been set at 1.5% based on the change in the Local Government Cost Index (LGCI) and a consideration of a productivity factor.

When IPART set the 2017-18 rate peg, the LGCI was 1.47% and there was adjustment for productivity of 0.001%. The rate peg was rounded to 1.5%.

For more information on the 2017-18 rate peg, go to IPART's website at https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/Home/Industries/Local-Government/For-Ratepayers/The-rate-peg.

How the rate peg affects individual rates?

The rate peg sets the maximum increase in each council's general income for the

financial year. The rate peg applies to general income in total, and not to individual ratepayers' rates. As long as its general income remains within the set maximum increase, councils may increase categories of rates by higher or lower than the rate peg.

Individual rates are also affected by other factors, such as land valuations which can affect percentage changes to rates alongside the rate pegging process.

Under the Local Government Act, councils are able to seek additional increases in general income beyond the annual rate peg, by applying to IPART for a 'special rate variation'.

How are special rate variation applications assessed?

The Office of Local Government releases a set of guidelines each year for the preparation of an application for a special variation to general income. The guidelines outline how IPART will assess council applications.

IPART requires councils to actively engage residents in discussions about the proposed increase above the rate peg. Councils can do this by using community engagement tools that suit their population.

IPART will consider how effective each council's community engagement has been before determining its application to increase charges above the set rate.

As a component of IPART's assessment, councils need to show there is:

- Community awareness of their plans
- A demonstrated need for higher increases to charges
- A reasonable impact on ratepayers
- A sustainable financing strategy
- A history of well-documented council productivity improvements

In addition to council's evidence, IPART will assess any other information they consider relevant.

IPART can wholly or partially approve or reject a council's application.

What are the rate rise options for 2017-18?

IPART has determined that the rate pegging limit for 2017-18 is 1.5% and this is automatically applied. In considering a special rate variation, Council has adopted a Long Term Financial Plan (LTFP) that outlines strategies and programs to ensure the Council is financially sustainable.

The plan outlines a series a series of rate rises over a seven year period using an incremental approach. That is overtime, Council, in consideration of its community, will only apply for future special rate variations if the other financial sustainability strategies increase to savings and efficiencies do not provide the appropriate level of funding to assist in delivery of its LTFP and required infrastructure renewal.

Within that, a strategy for 2017-18 is the application of a special rate variation focussed on infrastructure. Council considered a report on 14 December 2016 <a href="http://www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au/sites/bellingen/http://www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au/sites/bellingen/http://www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au/sites/bellingen/http://www.b

%20ORDINARY%20MEETING%20COUNCIL %2014%20DECEMBER%20-%20NIL%20ATTACHMENTS.pdf

Council resolved as follows:

That Council:

- Notify the NSW Independent Regulatory and Pricing Tribunal of its intention to lodge an application for a Special Rate Variation for the 2017/18 Financial Year.
- Undertake the community engagement initiatives outlined within this report inclusive of amendments to Council's Integrated Planning & Reporting documentation (Delivery Program and Long Term Financial Plan) to support the Special Rate Variation application
- 3. Place on public exhibition the Integrated Planning & Reporting documents that articulate the special

rate variation for a minimum period of six (6) weeks from 15 December

This is the first step in the process and Council has advised IPART of its intention to apply for a special rate variation. Should any application for a special rate variation be made, and approved, it would be a permanent one-off variation to the general rate income.

How much additional revenue will each option generate?

The following summary outlines what each option will generate in additional revenue.

Option	Revenue Generated
1.5% (rate peg)	\$103,256 (general
	revenue)
6% (rate peg +	\$413,023
4.5%)	\$103,256 (general
	revenue)
	\$309,767 (road
	resurfacing program)

What will the additional revenue raised go towards?

Additional revenue raised, in excess of the rate peg of 1.5%, will go towards infrastructure renewal works, specifically, Council's sealed roads resurfacing program. A proposed list of works can be found at the end of this fact sheet, on the Special Rate Variation Information Page on Council's website and in the Long Term Financial Plan that is currently on public exhibition.

What does a Special Rate Variation mean to you?

The two possible increases in rate revenue have been apportioned to the different Council rate categories in Table 1. This shows the average annual dollar increase in rates for each of our rating categories.

Table 1: Rating Categories - Average Annual Dollar Increase

Rate Category	Weekly Increase 1.50%	Annual Increase 1.50%	Weekly Increase 6.00%	Annual Increase 6.00%	
Business	\$0.28	\$14.36	\$1.10	\$57.45	
Business - Bellingen	\$0.36	\$18.82	\$1.45	\$75.26	
Business - Dorrigo	\$0.23	\$12.10	\$0.93	\$48.42	
Business - Urunga	\$0.47	\$24.26	\$1.87	\$97.04	
Farmland	\$0.69	\$35.91	\$2.76	\$143.62	
Residential	\$0.29	\$15.08	\$1.16	\$60.31	
Residential - Bellingen	\$0.26	\$13.56	\$1.04	\$54.24	
Residential - Dorrigo	\$0.23	\$11.77	\$0.91	\$47.06	
Residential - Mylestom	\$0.30	\$15.78	\$1.21	\$63.11	
Residential - Rural	\$0.41	\$21.24	\$1.63	\$84.95	
Residential - Urunga	\$0.29	\$14.91	\$1.15	\$59.63	

In addition to the general rate, Council also applies water, sewer and domestic waste charges to properties that access those services. Table 2 provides an example of the projected pricing for 2017/18 for residential properties.

Note: Water pricing comprises an availability charge and a user charge.

Table 2: Projected Nett Rates for General Residential Properties

Average Typical Residential Rate	Estimate 2017/18 1.50% Increase	Weekly Increase 1.50%	Annual Increase 1.50%	Estimate 2017/18 6.00% Increase	Weekly Increase 6.00%	Annual Increase 6.00%
Residential						
Ordinary	\$917.54	\$0.26	\$13.56	\$958.22	\$1.04	\$54.24
Water & Sewer -						
Annual Charge	\$1,056.00	\$0.60	\$31.00	\$1,056.00	\$0.60	\$31.00
Domestic Waste	\$658.00	\$0.37	\$19.00	\$658.00	\$0.37	\$19.00
Total	\$2,631.54	\$1.23	\$63.56	\$2,672.22	\$2.01	\$104.24

^{*}Disclaimer: The above information is based on the current rating structure. Future financial years may be subject to changes in the rating categories and 3 yearly land revaluations. Please also note: These figures do not include the emergency services levy estimates forecast to be introduced by the NSW Government on 1 July 2017.

Local Government Reform

Four years of discussions with the State Government has resulted in the local government reform process. This encapsulates a number of different undertakings including a series of reviews and, in particular, the Fit for the Future program.

The Government released its Fit for the Future package in September 2014, in response to the findings of the threeyear Independent Review of Local Government. As part of the Local Government reform process, councils were asked to consider new ways of and structural working new arrangements. A strong focus of the Fit for program financial Future was sustainability and addressing the issues around the long term maintenance and the renewal of councils' infrastructure.

Bellingen Council was asked to submit a proposal by 30 June 2015 outlining its strategy to remain 'Fit for the Future' based against a specific set of criteria. IPART assessed all council submissions and Bellingen was ranked as 'not fit' due to not fully meeting two financial criteria – one of which was the infrastructure and asset renewals ratio.

IPART's assessment of Bellingen Council's original submission states, "Our analysis has not identified evidence for a better alternative to the council's proposal to stand alone".

Council was then provided with an opportunity to make a resubmission to the Office of Local Government and this was done in July 2016.

Hasn't Bellingen Shire Council has been declared as 'Fit'?

On 6 December 2016, Council was deemed 'Fit'. The Office of Local Government's assessment determination was dependent on a number of strategies contained in its Long Term Financial Plan being implemented. One of these requirements is the need to implement this special rate variation.

Why does Council need to raise rates?

Roads and bridges are vital infrastructure that connect and support our communities. Local Government has been subject to rate pegging for 39 years and, as a consequence, the majority of councils in NSW have not been able to generate sufficient income to renew its infrastructure on an ongoing basis.

Bellingen Shire Council is responsible for over \$0.5 billion worth of assets, of which a significant component is its aging transport infrastructure.

The proposed special rate variation will allow Council to attend to urgent road resurfacing works that has been prioritised. This will also allow a greater focus on the strategic management of its infrastructure while putting steps in place

to ensure that infrastructure renewal investment is being addressed.

What else is Council doing to raise money, improve productivity, reduce costs and advocate for its community?

Council has worked extensively over the past few years to deliver a significant improvement in its operating result. This was reported to Council in conjunction with its 2015-16 Annual Report. A summary is appended to this Factsheet.

The result is due to a focus over the past five years on organisational reform, asset management and financial sustainability as well as Council's Fit for the Future initiatives.

Council's overall operating result has improved from a deficit of \$9 million in 2014 to a deficit of \$0.9 million in 2016.

Significant achievements contributing to the improvement in results include:

- Asset Management Council is currently undertaking a review of its bridge and road infrastructure. This will assist in optimising its future infrastructure renewal investment program. Council is also in the process of updating its asset management plans and processes that will provide better methodology and management practices that assists with the long term sustainability of its infrastructure.
- Cost containment programs existing and ongoing cost containment programs are already delivering savings to the organisation. These have been reported to Council quarterly since 2014 through the SRVIPP Committee
- Service reviews Council has, and will continue, to undertake reviews on its services. This has already delivered savings in some areas including ranger services, finance, waste, water and waste water

 Shared service arrangements – Council has existing shared service arrangements in place including waste services, libraries, ranger services and online learning systems.

Council has committed to working with its neighbouring councils to evaluate the opportunities available from sharing services. Nambucca, Kempsey and Bellingen Shire councils have entered into a memorandum of understanding to guide the process and have agreed on a program of review that will operate over the next few years.

The initial focus is on putting in place a new corporate system designed to streamline and automate processes making customer service more efficient and effective.

In addition, the three councils are actively reviewing their Information Technology and HR services to identify areas for process improvement, procedural gains and opportunities for sharing.

Moving into 2017-18, the councils will review a broad range of services including procurement, financial management, water and waste water to mention a few.

- Staffing initiatives including monitoring of staff overtime and leave liabilities
- Review of accounting practices for example, capital works being posted to operational costs, Roads to Recovery funding
- Energy efficiency initiatives the introduction of the Bellingen Energy Efficiency Program (BERP) has provided Council with some significant energy cost savings. Council has accurately measured its energy consumption and associated CO₂-e emissions since the 2008-09 financial year to present. Notwithstanding the significant reduction in emissions,

reports show the performance of Council facilities in terms of the cost savings as having approximately \$100,000 annually. Council will continue to investigate the feasibility and cost effectiveness of implementing a range of other savings and efficiency measures

- Greater use of electronic communication channels – emailing rates notifications
- The Mid North Coast Region of Councils (ROC), at a regional level, has undertaken extensive work to develop a strategic plan and establish sub-groups that work across councils around key focus areas such as roads and bridges, work health and safety, and information technology. It is envisaged that much of the work of the ROC will transition into the Joint Organisations
- Joint Organisations Joint Organisations will be established in 2017 with objective of councils in the region working together around advocacy and collaboration
- Roads and Maritime Services (RMS)
 Council will continue to provide quality recoverable works to the RMS as a roads construction contractor

How long is the proposed special rate variation for?

If sought and approved, the special rate variation would be a permanent, single year increase.

Council stated in its 'Fit for the Future' resubmission that it would be applying for a seven (7) year rate variation? Why is Council only applying for one year?

Yes. Council has outlined seven (7) years of rate increases in its 'Fit for the Future' resubmission. Council is taking the approach that, if a rate rise is not needed, it won't apply year on year.

Council, in consideration of its community, will only apply for future special rate variations if the other financial sustainability strategies to increase savings and efficiencies (some of which are outlined above) do not provide the appropriate level of funding to deliver its infrastructure renewal investment program.

Community Engagement and Opinion

A community satisfaction survey was undertaken in September 2016, the results of which have been subject to briefings to both the 2012-16 and 2016-20 Councils. A consequent series of focus groups was undertaken which saw local asset infrastructure discussed as a focal point and in particular:

- The condition of local roads
- The perceived lack of a wellpublicised, long term infrastructure repair plan
- Themes of discontent regarding the state of local roads
- A perception of reactivity rather than proactivity around asset management
- Many participants felt that improved roads and bridges were a huge priority

When the focus group was asked about a SRV of *3.5% above the rate peg (2.5%) to fund improvements to roads and bridges, some of the following responses were provided:

- "I'm all in favour of it, actually, if it gets the roads fixed."
- "I think they should do that before, at the start of the year that they're going to use this extra 3.5%. They should say this is what we're going to do to the roads, which roads we're going to fix."
- "I think the concept of a special rate variation is a good one, provided you do all the consultation and have it for a specific agreed task."
- "If you're getting value for money you'd wear it, but there's no value

for money in any of the work the council does."

*It should be noted that initial modelling and information gathering/briefings were based on previous advice from IPART of an anticipated rate peg of 2.5%. On 1 December, IPART announced that the rate peg was set at 1.5%.

Why did Council choose to consult now – just before and during the Christmas holiday period?

The time frame has been set by the Office of Local Government not Council.

Applications for a special rate variation close mid February, 2017. In order for Council to consider feedback from the community as well as meet the criteria under IPART's assessment, consultation, feedback and engagement needs to occur now.

The guidelines for applying for a special rate variation were released by the Office of Local Government on Friday 16 December.

An outline of the timeline includes:

Activity	Timeframe
Council resolution notifying	14 Dec
intent to apply	
Community engagement	15 December –
	31 January 2017
IPART notification to apply	15 December
IP&R document exhibition	15 December –
period	31 January 2017
Council resolution - application to IPART	early Feb 2017
SRV application	Mid Feb 2017

How is Council consulting?

It is a requirement of IPART that any council making an application for a special rate variation undertake a program of communication and engagement with its community.

Council is currently engaging with our residents through a number of avenues including:

- Letterbox drops
- Newspaper ads

- Media releases
- Fact sheets
- Water notification inserts
- Community newsletters
- Council SRV Information centre
- Focus groups
- Stakeholder forums
- Documentation on public exhibition
- Question and Answer

Council will also holding three community drop in forums at:

- Dorrigo Community Hall on 24 January 2017 from 9am -12pm
- Urunga Literary Hall on 24 January from 2pm – 5pm
- Bellingen Memorial Hall on 25 January 2017 from 3pm – 6pm

How can I provide feedback?

Council is happy to receive feedback from its community as this helps to inform the process and understand the needs of our residents.

There are a number of ways in which feedback can be provided including:

- Community forums Q and A's
- Submissions
- Letters
- Emails
- Phone calls
- Letters to the editor
- Online survey

Asset Management

Bellingen Shire manages over \$0.5 Billion in assets of which its transport infrastructure forms a significant component.

Council embarked the has on implementation of advanced asset management practices including a risk based maintenance management system and full technical analysis of its timber bridges and road pavements. These systems will drive modern best value for money decision making processes. This information has been used to develop the current LTFP.

The condition assessment of the sealed road network has just been completed. One of the most significant findings from these assessments is that the condition of the rural sealed road network is well below satisfactory. It has identified that \$6.07M is required to be spent over the next 10 years to renew the rural roads sealed pavement surface and that an additional \$1.96M is required for the same period for urban streets. This represents a total sealed pavement resurfacing renewal investment of \$8.03M. (refer to LTFP Attachment 19)

The intention for the revenue generated from a proposed SRV of 6 per cent for 2017/18 is to undertake a targeted road

resurfacing program of works. This is based on the following:

- Limited grant funding available for road renewal projects
- While extremely competitive, funding to support timber bridge works is available
- If work is not undertaken to reseal the road network as a priority, it is at risk of needing a full reconstruction exponentially increasing the cost of works
- The proposed SRV for 2017/18 will enable the resurfacing program of works to be completed sooner than later minimising the risk of accelerated deterioration of the sealed road network

The 2016/17 resurfacing program outlined below is an example of the targeted program of work to be undertaken from 2017/18 with assistance from the proposed SRV.

2016/17 Resurfacing Program of Works

\$ 13,500.00
\$ 27,000.00
\$ 20,250.00
\$ 18,000.00
\$245,250.00
\$ 31,000.00
\$ 84,000.00
\$160,500.00
\$ 60,500.00
\$140,000.00
\$800,000.00

As a requirement of the application and assessment process, Council will need to identify the proposed program of works that will be undertaken as a result of an approved SRV.

A full list of all condition 5 bitumen seal surfaces will form part of the consultation process to be undertaken and as outlined in the engagement section of this report. These sections of pavement will be the first areas targeted in the resurfacing program.

What are the Priority Rural Roads?



Rural Resurfacing – Priority Roads (~109km) \$3.28M

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Beaumonts Road	0.22	Lower Bielsdown Road	2.50		Promised Land Road	2.69
Bowraville Road	5.00	Martells Road	5.33		Rigney Drive	0.27
Coramba Road	3.90	Maynards Plain Road	1.04		Roses Road	1.50
Darkwood Road	6.98	McGraths Road	0.20		Shepherds Road	1.00
Deer Vale Road	5.50	McIndoes Road	1.00		Slingsbys Road	2.50
Fernbrook Loop Road	1.50	Muldiva Road	4.48		South Arm Road	3.00
Gleniffer Road	6.00	Mylestom Drive	3.50		Summervilles Road	1.50
Gordonville Road	5.00	North Bank Road	8.00		Tyringham Road	3.35
Hungry Head Road	2.50	Old Brierfield Road	0.15		Valery Road	4.63
Hydes Creek Road	5.64	Old Coast Road	2.00		Wenonah Close	0.37
Kalang Road	4.50	Old Coramba Road North	0.61		Whisky Creek Road	6.34
Keevers Drive	1.00	Paddys Plain Road	0.67		Yellow Rock Road	3.57
		Prices Road	1.50			

What are the Priority Urban Roads?

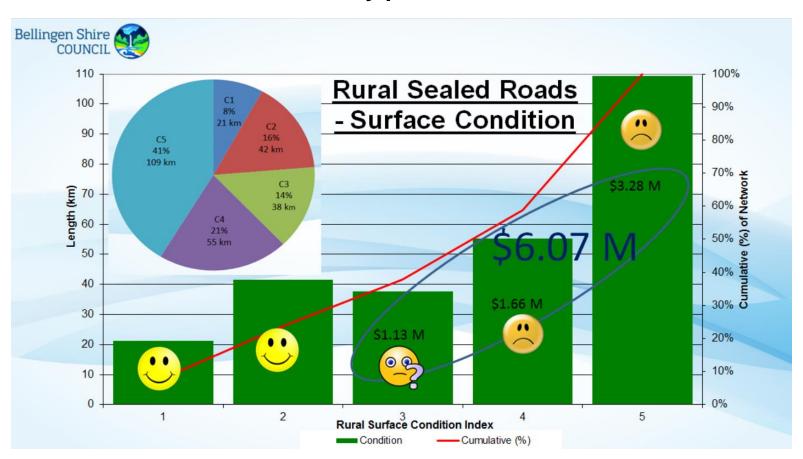


Urban Resurfacing - Priority Roads (~29km) \$1M

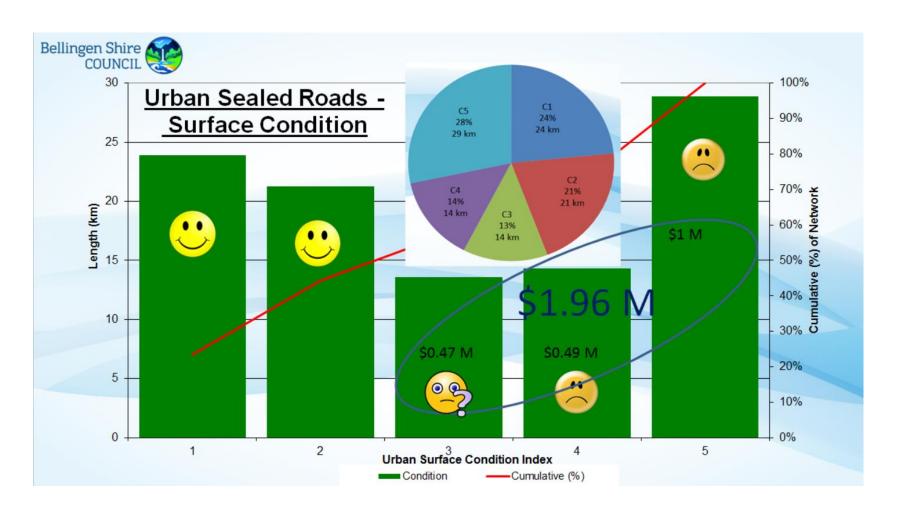
Acacia Street	0.05	Evans Street	0.17	Lourdes Avenue	0.25	Queen Street	0.25
Alex Pike Drive	0.25	Fern Street	0.05	Marina Crescent	0.22	Railway Street	0.21
Ash Street	0.25	Ferry Street	0.12	Marshall Place	0.09	Rawson Street	0.25
Bailey Street	0.25	Fitzroy Street	0.47	Mary Street	0.18	Repton Road	0.25
Baker Street	0.25	Ford Street	0.84	Minerva Lane	0.44	Robert Street Lane	0.14
Bangalow Street	0.33	Forest Drive	0.13	Morgo Street	0.70	Rosewood Street	0.25
Bayldon Drive	0.54	George Moore Lane	0.19	Mount Street	1.44	Scotchman Road	1.00
Bellingen Street	1.00	Gurney Street	0.75	Myrtle Street	0.64	Short Street	0.09
Bielsdown Street	0.25	Hammond Street	0.50	Nambucca Street	0.08	Short Street Lane	0.22
Bonville Street	0.12	Hayden Street	0.60	Newry Island Drive	0.75	South Street	0.22
Bowraville Road	0.58	Hickory Street	0.69	Newry Street	0.24	South Street East	0.21
Casey Lane	0.20	High Street	0.25	Newry Street (East)	0.34	Tyringham Road	1.75
Casuarina Street	0.24	Hill Street	0.44	North Street	0.65	Tyringham Street	0.44
Cedar Street	0.50	Hollibone Street	0.25	Old Coast Road	0.50	Vale Street	0.09
Church Street	0.25	Hunter Street	0.14	Old Pacific Highway	0.50	Vernon Crescent	0.20
Comlaroi Street	0.18	Hyde Street	0.35	Old Punt Road	0.15	Vine Street	0.52
Coopers Lane	0.25	Hydro Street	0.11	Pilot Street (East)	0.25	Walter Street	0.17
Crown Street	0.25	Island Place	0.30	Pilot Street	0.61	Wheatley Street	0.75
Dudley Street	0.09	Kurrajong Street	0.25	Pine Street	0.25	William Street Lane	0.35
Elliot Close	0.24	Kylie Street	0.14	Prince Street	0.45		

What is the condition of the rural sealed road surface?

Condition 1 = good surface conditions Condition 5 = extremely poor surface conditions



What is the condition of the urban sealed road surface?



What is Council's 10 Year Renewal Investment Program?

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	Total
Plant and Equipment											
Plant Replacement - Light/Major/Minor	1,879,148	1,631,606	2,001,076	1,680,558	2,829,052	2,195,559	3,628,077	3,283,609	1,416,155	1,416,155	21,960,995
IT Hardware and Software	607,047	159,243	72,510	93,756	79,716	91,471	93,617	96,139	67,054	65,606	1,426,159
Other Capital Purchases	220,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	760,000
Total Plant and Equipment	2,706,195	1,850,849	2,133,586	1,834,314	2,968,768	2,347,030	3,781,694	3,439,748	1,543,209	1,541,761	24,147,154
Roads and Footpaths											
Roads - Renewals	10,025,496	1,158,250	1,766,194	2,638,424	2,036,270	622,275	521,862	1,037,737	1,287,361	499,545	21,593,414
Roads - Heavy Patching and Resurfacing(Renewals)	1,400,000	591,220	753,508	699,979	717,478	735,415	753,801	772,646	791,962	811,761	8,027,770
Roads - Gravel Resurfacing (Renewals)	657,600	205,000	210,125	215,378	220,763	226,282	231,939	237,737	243,681	249,773	2,698,276
Roads - Shoulder Resurfacing Sealed Roads (Renewals)		51,250	52,531	53,845	55,191	56,570	57,985	59,434	60,920	62,443	560,169
Roads - Unsealed Roads Heavy Formation (Renewals)	200,000	205,000	210,125	215,378	220,763	226,282	231,939	237,737	243,681	249,773	2,240,676
Roads - Kerb and Gutter (Renewals)	60,000	61,500	63,038	64,613	66,229	67,884	69,582	71,321	73,104	74,932	672,203
Roads - Regional Roads (Renewals)	-	368,020	381,849	-			-	,	-	,	749,869
Main Street Renewal	950.000	253,000	-	_	_	_	-	_	_	-	1,203,000
Roads - New Assets/Upgrade	120,000	700,000	-	-	_	-	-		-	-	820,000
Total Roads	13,463,096	3,593,240	3,437,369	3,887,617	3,316,693	1,934,708	1,867,106	2,416,613	2,700,709	1,948,226	38,565,378
Bridges											
Bridge - Renewals	3,352,000	1,717,625	1,755,313	1,648,431	1,811,061	2,252,330	1,949,133	1,867,106	1,913,784	1,961,629	20,228,412
Total Bridges	3,352,000	1,717,625	1,755,313	1,648,431	1,811,061	2,252,330	1,949,133	1,867,106	1,913,784	1,961,629	20,228,412
TOTAL GENERAL FUND	19,521,291	7,161,714	7,326,268	7,370,362	8,096,522	6,534,068	7,597,934	7,723,467	6,157,702	5,451,616	82,940,944