

Compass Ratings - Frequently Asked Questions

Below are reminders, tips and interpretations regarding the annual Compass field rating process. Please contact Scott Bush, Compass Program Manager (608-266-8666 or scott.bush@dot.wi.gov), with questions regarding the information below or other field rating issues.

General Issues

- Safety is our primary concern when developing the field ratings. Remember to always wear a clean and compliant safety vest (and safety pants if appropriate), park your vehicle off of the traveled way with warning lights on to alert travelers of your presence along the roadway, use traffic control when/where necessary or conduct your ratings during off-peak hours, walk the right-of-way facing traffic, have one of the raters be a traffic spotter while in the field, never enter a storm sewer or culvert during ratings, and reject a segment (and rate a spare segment) if you can't safely rate the roadway segment.
- The Compass program rates the condition of highway features that are maintained with state maintenance dollars (through Routine Maintenance Agreements, Discretionary Maintenance Agreements and Traffic Maintenance Agreements). Highway features that aren't maintained with state funds (e.g. Connecting Highways) are not rated as part of the Compass program. If an organization other than WisDOT is responsible for the maintenance of any of the Compass elements, then the rater should reject the segment, identify the rejection reason in the Compass database, and go on to rate the next highest-numbered "spare" segment.
- The Compass program rates the condition of highway features that are located within state rights-of-way (ROW). The ROW defines the limits for rating features in the field. Please refer to DTD View on the WisDOT intranet (i.e. DotNet) for plats that identify ROW widths.
- Deficiencies should be identified based on how the existing roadway condition relates to the maintenance standards identified in the WisDOT Highway Maintenance Manual.
- Make sure that segments are 528 feet long. Use a DMI or measuring wheel to ensure the segment is 528 long. And remember to calibrate your DMI at regular intervals.
- Do not reject a segment if it overlaps with a segment you have rated in past years.
- The Compass program doesn't rate the condition of bridges, interchanges, ramps or rumble strips.

Hazardous Debris

- Hazardous debris should be viewed as any object that a driver would want to avoid if they attempted to pull onto the shoulder.
- Hazardous debris can include animal carcasses that are on the shoulder.

Paved Shoulder Cracking

- Cracks are counted if they are unsealed and greater than one-quarter inch. A pen can be used as a measuring tool to estimate the one-quarter inch threshold. If you can get the pen in a crack, the crack should be counted.
- Remember that the maximum amount of cracking that can be reported is 150 feet on undivided roadways and 300 feet on divided roadways.
- Don't count concrete joints as unsealed cracks.

Drop-off/Build-up on Unpaved Shoulders

- Drop-off is typically found near private driveways, mailboxes, intersections and inside curves (where traffic on the unpaved shoulder can push gravel away from the shoulder and create the drop-off).
- Remember that the maximum amount of drop-off/build-up that can be reported is 150 feet on undivided roadways and 300 feet on divided roadways.

Cross Slope of Unpaved Shoulders

- To measure cross slope with a smart level, put one end of the level on the edge of the pavement and the other end of the level on the unpaved shoulder. And remember to calibrate your smart level prior to developing the ratings.
- The typical cross slope is four percent or one-half inch per foot. Therefore, a deficient cross slope (more than twice the planned slope) for a four-foot shoulder would be a slope greater than 4”.
- On super-elevated curves, determine the planned slope of the unpaved shoulder by measuring the existing slope of the paved traveled way or shoulder. Then use this figure as the planned slope for the unpaved shoulder to determine whether the unpaved shoulder is deficient.
- Unpaved shoulders with significant drop-off problems typically have deficient cross slope (since cross slope is measured from the pavement).
- Remember that the maximum amount of cross slope that can be reported is 150 feet on undivided roadways and 300 feet on divided roadways.

Ditches

- There must be a back-slope within the ROW for it to be considered a ditch.
- The following are situations when a ditch isn't typically present: no back-slope in the ROW, a private driveway abutting the segment that doesn't have a culvert, and roadway segments with curb and gutter.
- For segments that have an intersecting local road, the ditch for the Compass segment ends at the ditch line for the intersecting road.

Culverts

- A culvert with an inlet is counted as part of a storm sewer system, not as a culvert.

Under/Edge Drains

- Counties typically paint a white dot or square near the edge of the pavement to identify the location of drains. But you need to walk the entire roadway segment since pavement markings are not always present to identify the location of some drains.

Flumes

- Flumes made of concrete, asphalt and rip-rap (rock) are rated in the Compass program.

Curb and Gutter

- The total length and amount of deficient curb and gutter should be measured by placing the measuring wheel in the flow line.
- Raters should use a measuring stick to measure the depth of debris buildup in the flow line.
- Measure curb to the end of the radius or to the end of the right-of-way line, whichever is less.
- Measure all around “pork chop” islands.

Storm Sewer

- Never enter a storm sewer system for the Compass program! Only visual, above-ground checks are used for the Compass program.
- Storm sewer is deficient if there are any broken or missing grates.

Litter

- Count litter that you see while driving at the posted speed limit. Do not count additional litter that you see while walking the segment.

Centerline Markings

- The reflectivity of pavement markings (centerline, edgeline and special pavement markings) is not reviewed in the Compass program, only the presence/absence of paint.
- Skips are typically considered centerline markings, though skips in intersections should be considered Special Pavement Markings.

Special Pavement Markings

- Yellow curbing at noses should be identified as a Special Pavement Marking only if there is opposing traffic.
- Count a special pavement marking that has multiple components (e.g. gores) as one special pavement marking.

Regulatory/Warning Signs and “Other” Signs

- Don't count temporary signs such as construction or detour signs. Only permanent signs are surveyed in the field.
- Don't count Type I signs typically mounted with steel I-beams. Funding for these signs come from improvement projects and not from Routine Maintenance Agreement (RMA) dollars.
- Don't count local signs (e.g. no parking signs), only count signs installed and maintained by WisDOT.
- Regulatory Signs give notice of traffic laws or regulations (i.e. you can be ticketed if you disobey the sign message). Regulatory signs include (but are not limited to) stop, speed limits, do not enter, wrong way, one-way and no parking. Warning signs give notice of a situation that may not be readily apparent. Warning signs include (but are not limited to) stop ahead, curve, turn, deer crossing and advisory speed limit. “Other” signs are those permitted signs in the state ROW that aren't Regulatory/Warning Signs.
- Count stop signs on intersecting local roads as Regulatory/Warning Signs.
- Specific Information Signs (SIS), Tourist Oriented Directional Signs (TODS) and Guidance Arrowboards are not counted as signs in the Compass program. These types of signs are permitted, though, so they aren't counted as litter either.
- If signs are separately mounted on a post, count each sign individually.
- Non-permitted signs in the state ROW are counted as litter.
- ROW posts and signs are not counted.
- Adopt-A-Highway signs are counted as “Other” signs.

Delineators

- If there are deficient delineators on beam guard, count it as deficient delineators (not deficient beam guard).
- If two buttons are located on a post, count it as one delineator (not two).
- Don't count culvert markers, or delineators and posts mounted on beam guard (for snow plow operators).