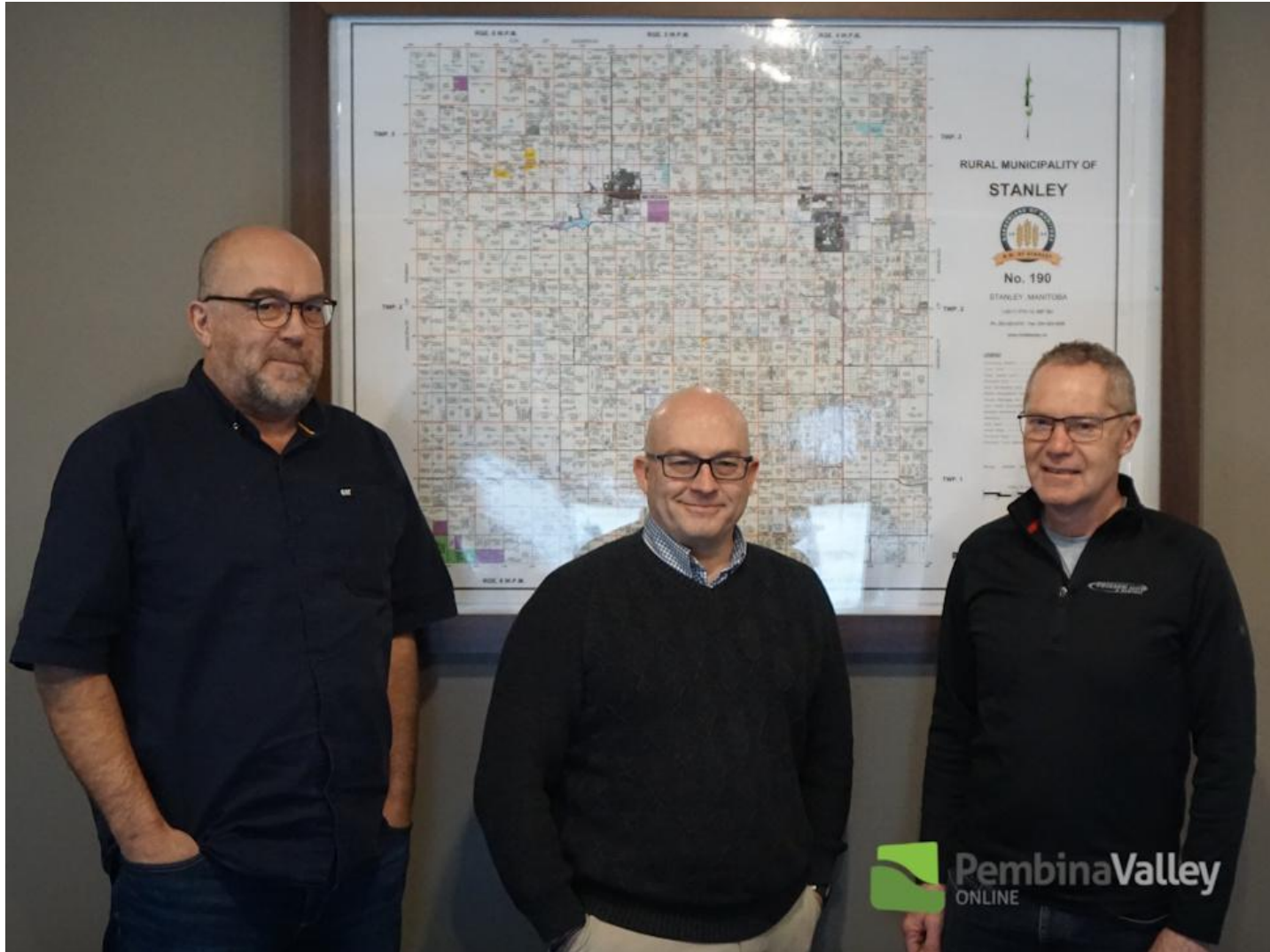


# Why Manitoba roads have it rough, and the RM of Stanley's approach on maintenance

Alexander Peters, PembinaValleyOnline.com | Tuesday, Jan 20 2026, 5:00 AM



*(left to right) Ken Thiessen - Public Works Supervisor, Luc Lahaie - Chief Administrative Officer, Reeve Ike Friesen*

The RM of Stanley stretches across just under 840 square kilometres according to Statistics Canada. The area has over 500 miles of roads. 25 of those are paved, with the rest being gravel or dirt.

And every spring, after months of snow and ice and constant freeze-thaw cycles, those roads get hammered.

At the centre of it, Ken Thiessen, Public Works Supervisor, supported by his team, is tasked with maintaining that nervous system year after year. Joined by Reeve Ike Friesen and Luc Lahaie, the RM's new Chief Administrative Officer, the three discussed what goes into keeping these roads traversable across the seasons.

## **The thaw**

When the snow melts, water starts moving. If it can't drain properly, it backs up and floods roads. Thiessen explains it like this: "Clogged drains lead to dangerous back flooding."

Then there are frost boils. Those are spots where moisture gets trapped under the road and weakens the base. "These frost boils don't discriminate between gravel or paved roads," Thiessen says. But, he adds, people expect paved roads to hold up better.

"This last year was probably our worst frost boil year in 20 years. There are many areas where we just had to close the road because it wasn't safe or even drivable for that matter."

## **Trying new things**

To deal with all this water and damage, the RM started installing drain tiles under the roads. These help keep moisture from saturating the road base during thaw. "We've done multiple miles like that, and it's mostly been effective," Thiessen shared.

But it's a juggling act. Roads need to last, and Thiessen says that in Manitoba, that's hard.

On top of that, the RM of Stanley has seen a lot of growth over the years.

Reeve Ike Friesen added, "As the region keeps growing, population grows, industry grows, traffic increases, so we're constantly working at doing more every year. Because it increases every year."



Thiessen agreed, saying, “Just in the last 25 years, our population has doubled. In the last 30 years, our crop production has pretty much doubled.”

That means more trucks, heavier loads hauling grain and supplies.

“It all adds traffic, and it all adds stress to the roads,” said Thiessen.

To protect the roads, the council put in place an aggregate hauling bylaw. It directs big trucks to use provincial roads built for heavy traffic instead of local roads.

They also encourage drivers to split lanes, slow down, and respect weight restrictions in the spring.

## **The financials**

The RM spends about \$4 million a year on transportation. Of that, \$1.2 million goes just to buying gravel.

They also have about \$8 million in equipment to maintain and 14 staff working on roads, ditches, waterways, and utilities.

Friesen says that they experiment with trying new materials, too. Rubber tire underlays, geo-cel grids are a few examples in recent years,

Lahaie sums it up: "We almost don't have a choice but to try to experiment. If you keep doing the same thing over and over and you're not getting the result that you want, you'll never get the perfect road."

### **The perfect road**

When asked what the perfect road would look like, Thiessen joked, saying, "We'll see that after we die."

Lahaie points out something important. Roads in quiet corners of the province might look perfect because there's hardly any traffic on them.

But in Stanley, with so much growth and heavy traffic, the roads see plenty of use.

An attainable goal, however, says Thiessen, is "a properly crowned, smooth road capable of handling Manitoba's tough conditions."

Lahaie added with a smile, "Just like the Romans 3,000 years ago, 'built the perfect road', they said. But could they take a Super B these days? Absolutely not."