

America's Greatest Depression

By: Dominick Robinson

Executive Summary:

I propose to fill a sizable road depression that exists in one of the entrances to my townhouse community (shown in **Figure 1**). Because it is difficult to spot, I worry that unsuspecting drivers may damage their vehicles, especially if they are “low-riding vehicles.” Furthermore, because the other two entrances have notable flaws to them, I fear that drivers who enter on this depressed road believing it to be totally safe are in for a rude, bumpy awakening. Not only does the depression create safety concerns, but it also indicates a rushed job shown little care and concern, which unfortunately leaves a stain on the community’s image as an well-maintained neighborhood. Because the solution to this problem appears to be relatively cheap (less than \$1000), I find this endeavor worthwhile.



Figure 1. Google Maps view of depressed road.

Problem:

Pavement Interactive defines road depressions as “localized pavement surface areas with slightly lower elevations than the surrounding pavement. Depressions are very noticeable after a rain when they fill with water.” Based on this definition, there is certainly a sizable depression in my neighborhood that, while difficult to spot, feels very impactful while driving, as evidenced by **Figure 2** and as shown by a video investigation I conducted.

My primary concern about this depression is that it endangers the vehicles that use that road. While there are two other entrances that drivers can use, these entrances are each dangerous to use for various reasons. For example, when crossing over the left-hand side of the road from the right-side to enter the main entrance, an elevation on the hill obscures oncoming traffic. As a result, drivers must gamble their safety in order to use this main entrance of the neighborhood. Alternatively, when crossing over the left-hand side of the road from the right-side to enter the second entrance, traffic behind the driver may fail to stop due to not realizing where the driver is intending to turn because this second entrance is obscure.



Figure 2 (February 2022, colorized). Photo of our country's greatest depression.

The third entrance to the neighborhood, which contains the depression I am proposing to fix, balances out the advantages of the main and secondary entrances. Of course, the depression creates a safety risk for drivers, but because this issue seems more feasible to fix than the issues with the other two entrances, I propose that we must fix this depression to offer drivers at least one properly maintained entrance to the neighborhood.

Implications:

Local:

Unsuspecting drivers who do not notice the depression may drive over it and damage their vehicles. Furthermore, according to Mid Atlantic Asphalt, “depressions can fill with rain, making them even more dangerous. If a driver or pedestrian is unable to see just how deep the depression is, they may think it’s safe to drive over or walk on, which can result in damage to the vehicle or injury.” Following a physical examination, the depression seems especially dangerous for low-riding vehicles that are more likely to damage their bumpers off of the ground.

Aside from safety concerns, the depression taints the community's well-maintained image. The depression is very deep and unnatural, which calls into question how a construction crew neglected to fill it while initially making the road. As a result, this road is highly uncomfortable

to drive along, which frustrates drivers and tarnishes our residents' perception about their neighborhood.

National:

This depression is representative of a much larger problem plaguing our country's infrastructure.

One recommendation by the Committee for Economic Development's "Fixing America's Roads & Bridges: The Path Forward" policy brief is to "encourage greater private-sector participation in road building and maintenance"

(as shown in **Figure 3**). Because my

neighborhood is private, it should take responsibility for maintaining its infrastructure, which includes fixing this depression.

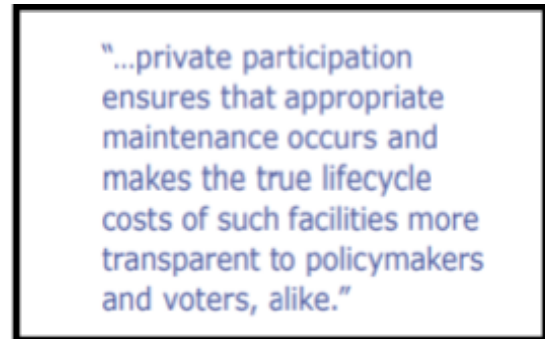


Figure 3. Quote by CED on private responsibility

Solution(s):

Investigating public opinion:

I have and will continue to observe the site of the depression. I have already distributed a survey to students in my Writing about Public Problems course at Carnegie Mellon University. I asked students to select options that describe how they feel about the road's depression when shown an image of it. Shockingly, while 9/16 students felt uncomfortable and 6/16 students felt distraught, confused, or disturbed, 0/16 students felt happy about the road depression. Clearly, this road depression is unwanted.

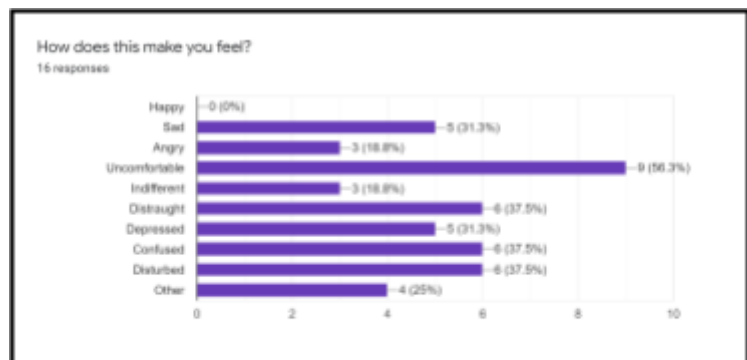


Figure 4. Survey investigates the emotional response of students from Carnegie Mellon University to an image of road depression. Notably, while 9/16 students felt uncomfortable, and 0/16 students felt happy.

Alternatively, I will conduct first hand research on my neighborhood's population by distributing a survey to discover their opinions on the road depression. I want to make sure that my

neighborhood shares sentiments similar to respondents from my sample population at Carnegie Mellon University before campaigning on their behalf, especially considering that my neighborhood residents' are actually affected by this problem. Further, I will also directly interview people in my neighborhood to gain a deeper understanding about their thoughts on whether they consider the depressed backroad to be dangerous.

Raising awareness:

Supplementary to my other solutions, I will place posters around the neighborhood to raise awareness about the depression and educate the neighborhood about what they can do to help fix it. I will also attend community board meetings in order to raise awareness about the road and plead my case to the stakeholders who can fix this problem.

Investigating and fixing the road:

According to Pavement Interactive, a depression must first be professionally inspected in order for a crew to determine the root cause of the issue. Some causes of road depressions are "subgrade settlement" or "frost heave." Then, according to Pavement Interactive, following inspection, in the case of subgrade settlement, a construction crew may need to "remov[e] the affected pavement," "dig out and replac[e] the area of poor subgrade," and "patch over the repaired subgrade. I find this solution to be most optimal not only because this method directly solves the issue at hand, but also because it shows accountability on the part of the neighborhood's committee and sets a good example for other communities to do their part in fixing our country's infrastructure, one road at a time.

Placing a road sign:

Albeit less desirable, the neighborhood's committee can institute a warning sign on the road. If they do, unsuspecting drivers may be better prepared for the depression. Given that road signs can cost less than \$100, this solution appears to be the cheapest, so it may also be the most feasible option if the neighborhood's committee does not deem fixing the depression worthy of financial support. However, because the road's depression is difficult to see, a sign might not adequately prepare drivers for the moment of impact. Furthermore, the insertion of a warning

sign displays a lack of accountability by the neighborhood's committee for a problem that should never have existed in the first place. Still, the implementation of a warning sign is a possible course of action.

Conclusion:

A road depression in one of the entrances to my neighborhood endangers the vehicles of unsuspecting or uncaredful drivers. Furthermore, this depression is indicative of a rushed or sloppy job, which taints the community's well-maintained image, in addition to frustrating and even disappointing drivers. While the least we can do is institute a road sign warning drivers of the sly depression, we must avoid this slippery slope of ignoring our country's ever-crumbing infrastructure by acting now, which means filling this depression.

Fixing this road is about more than just the road; it is about dignity, honor, and standing up for what we believe in.

References:

“Depression.” Pavement Interactive,

<https://pavementinteractive.org/reference-desk/pavement-management/pavement-distresses/depression/>.

“Fixing America’s Roads & Bridges: The Path Forward,” Committee for Economic Development, April 2017,

<https://www.ced.org/pdf/TCB-CED-Fixing-Americas-Roads-and-Bridges.pdf>.

“Does Your Asphalt Need Repairs?”, Mid Atlantic Asphalt, 2022,

<https://www.midatlanticasphalt.com/blog/2016/december/does-your-asphalt-need-repairs-/>.

1. What is "crystal clear" (i.e., makes sense and resonates with you) about the revisions you need to make on your proposal?
 - a. **I should revise and focus the tone of my proposal (i.e. find a more consistent middle ground between seriousness and humor).**
2. What is the "muddiest point" (i.e., you're still working through it or maybe a little confused) about what you need to revise in your proposal?
 - a. **I am not entirely sure about how to format my sections.**
3. How would you describe your "writing process," in this class and otherwise? (lots of ways to answer this question but I'm thinking here about the parts of writing you enjoy most/find most productive, e.g., brainstorming, conducting research, discovering your argument, revising and sharpening that argument, and many others)
 - a. **Before writing, I like to think about everything that I need to include. Then, I will write an outline that very nearly resembles a rough draft that is separated by bullet points. I like to do everything in one go because I want to make sure that my information flows naturally.**
4. How are your other classes going?
 - a. **Going quite nicely :)**

Proposal: 60 pts Though tongue-in-cheek, this is a well-written proposal. I can't wait to read your first script from your film class. **56/60**

Legwork and Reflection: 15 pts **15/15; 71/75**

Focus	Content	Organization	Style	Conventions
<p>A focused action item within a specific community is established.</p> <p>Includes all parts of the proposal (Executive Summary or Thesis), Contextualize/ Background of Issue/ Problem, Solution, Feasibility, Conclusion, citations that center on action item</p>	<p>All parts offer a critical approach to the action item, including clear exigence and connection to stakeholders</p> <p>Evidence is linked to action item and explained thoroughly</p> <p>Citations</p>	<p>Transitions within and between paragraphs</p> <p>Logical order</p> <p>Sections clearly lead from one to the other</p> <p>Make visuals more clear (minor)</p>	<p>Sentence Length (clear sentence)</p> <p>Precise and Concrete Vocabulary</p> <p>Concise</p> <p>Clarity</p>	<p>Grammar</p> <p>Punctuation</p> <p>Spelling</p> <p>Punctuation</p> <p>Usage</p>

Friday peer review by Kevin You:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iQNFdhvzf4ai3A-YLRjAq4uyzF20Nqdn/edit>

Monday peer review by Lohith Tummala:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1a09VK57-Z_ZR5Plu18IZE7IiwWRcY4MAHuY9wzwh2L8/edit?usp=sharing