

Highlights

Why We Did This Audit

Respondents to the city's annual citizen survey have repeatedly rated the maintenance of city streets as an important city service, but were dissatisfied with the city's delivery of this service. Street plates are one aspect of street maintenance.

Our audit focused on determining whether street plates are installed to minimize their negative impact on ride quality and safety.

Background

Street plates are used to cover excavations in paved driving surfaces. Any excavation left overnight on a street identified in the city's major street plan must be covered with a street plate. Excavations left overnight on residential streets must be back filled to the surface of the street or covered with a steel plate. Plates must be embedded in asphalt streets 22 days after the street plate permit is issued and when installed from December through February.

A street plate permit is supposed to be obtained before a plate can be placed in the roadway, or the next business day in case of an emergency. In fiscal year 2015, Public Works issued more than 1,000 street plate permits, with each authorizing the installation of one or more street plates. The Public Works Department also inspects street plates.

For more information, contact the City Auditor's Office at 816-513-3300 or auditor@kcmo.org.

To view the complete report, go to kcmo.gov/cityauditor and click on Search Audit Reports.

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Compliance with Street Plate Requirements Could Improve Ride Quality and Safety

What We Found

Ride quality and the safety of city streets have been diminished because street plates are not being installed and maintained according to city requirements. Contractors and utilities are not consistently pinning, ramping, or embedding street plates as required, and plates do not always cover the entire excavated area.

Compliance with the city's installation standards could improve the ride quality and safety of city streets. Compliance should result in smooth transitions between street and plate surfaces; prevent jolts, rocking, and noise when traveling over plates; prevent injuries, accidents, and vehicle and tire damage; and maintain traffic flow.



There is not a single source for all of the city's street plate installation requirements. The requirements are scattered in various city code sections and in Public Works Department standard drawings. Whether utility and contractor non-compliance is based on lack of knowledge, concern, or capability is uncertain.

What We Recommend

Current compliance efforts rely on contractor and utility knowledge and cooperation. To address non-compliance based on a lack of knowledge, we recommend that the director of public works make a complete copy of the city's street plate requirements available to everyone obtaining a street plate permit.

The Public Works Department primarily relies on a series of enforcement methods authorized by the city's ordinances, including site inspections, communicating, negotiating, and written warnings. With limited resources and recognizing that utilities or their contractors are major street plate installers, debarment or the removal of plates and restoration of the street surface are not typically employed as enforcement methods. To encourage and improve compliance with street plate installation requirements, the director of public works should assess the currently available street plate installation enforcement mechanisms and determine whether additional enforcement methods should be submitted for council consideration.

Management agreed with the recommendations.