

County roads best in Alabama

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Houston County roads are the best, so says the state highway department.

It is an honor the county has carried eight of the last nine years, based on annual maintenance inspections performed by the Alabama Department of Transportation. The inspection covers county roads constructed with federal or state funds. This year, 197 of the county's 807 paved roads were looked at.

On a 100-point scale, the county scored 96.54 on this year's inspection, the highest grade ever received by any county, and giving the county a

No. 1 ranking among the state's 67 counties. The county's five-year average is also ranked No. 1 in the state.

The county had no roads graded below 85. Sixty-eight roads graded in the 86 to 95 category and 129 received marks of 96 to 100.

"Houston County always scores well," ALDOT Division Engineer Mike Griffin said. "They do an excellent job on their roads with their maintenance. They have always done well and have a progressive county road department and a commission that supports their work."

The county uses all of its allocated funds each year, he said, because "they are well man-

aged, well staffed and ready for projects."

Ed Phillips, ALDOT's chief of county transportation engineer, said a point system is applied, as follows:

- Surface elements — 40 points;
- Shoulder condition — 16 points;
- Drainage — 16 points;
- Shoulder roadside — 14 points;
- Traffic control — 14 points;

Road surface, which carries the most weight on the grading, includes how level the roads are, if potholes are present, if there is cracking, patching or edge repairs are needed.

Grading for the shoulder also includes some thing engineers don't have full control of, such as encroachment.