iJRASET
International Journal For Research in
Applied Science and Engineering Technology

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 14 Issue: II Month of publication: February 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2026.77474

# The Use of Recycled Material in Road Construction

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***Abstract: The growing amount of waste materials, such as plastics, rubber, construction debris, and industrial by-products, presents serious environmental challenges because they do not break down easily and are hard to dispose of. Recycling these materials for road construction provides a sustainable and eco-friendly solution. It reduces pressure on landfills and conserves natural resources. By incorporating recycled materials like waste plastic, crumb rubber from old tires, reclaimed asphalt pavement (RAP), and fly ash into road construction, we can address waste management issues while improving pavement performance. These materials can enhance properties such as durability, deformation resistance, and water repellency, while possibly lowering construction costs. This process supports the idea of a circular economy, where waste becomes valuable resources and reduces the environmental impact of infrastructure development. Research and case studies have shown that roads made with recycled materials can equal or exceed the performance of traditional roads when designed and built properly. This method supports global goals for sustainable development and lowering carbon footprints, making it a promising option for future infrastructure projects. Overall, using recycled materials in road construction is a practical, cost-effective, and environmentally friendly innovation in modern civil engineering.***
***Keywords: Recycled materials, road construction, sustainability, plastic waste, RAP ,circular economy***

## I. INTRODUCTION

Road construction plays a vital role in the economic development and connectivity of any nation. With rapid urbanization, population growth, and expansion of infrastructure, the demand for roads is continuously increasing. However, conventional road construction materials such as bitumen, cement, and aggregates are extracted from natural resources, leading to environmental depletion, high energy consumption, and escalating construction costs. At the same time, the generation of waste materials such as plastics, construction and demolition debris, rubber tires, fly ash, and other industrial by-products is also rising at an alarming rate, creating severe challenges in waste management. These two pressing issues—scarcity of natural resources and accumulation of waste—have motivated researchers and engineers to explore innovative approaches to road construction by incorporating recycled materials.

The use of recycled materials in road construction has emerged as a sustainable solution to address environmental, economic, and engineering challenges. By utilizing waste products, it is possible to minimize the burden on landfills, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and conserve natural resources. At the same time, recycling offers potential cost savings and in many cases improves the performance and durability of roads.

For example, recycled waste plastics, when mixed with bitumen, have been shown to enhance the binding properties, increase resistance to water, and improve load-bearing capacity of roads. Similarly, the use of reclaimed asphalt pavement (RAP), industrial by-products like fly ash, and shredded rubber from waste tires has been successfully tested in various countries, demonstrating technical feasibility and long-term benefits. From a global perspective, the application of recycled materials in highways and rural road projects aligns with the principles of circular economy and sustainable development. Countries like India, Australia, and the United States have already incorporated such methods in pilot projects and large-scale road networks. In addition, 9 life-cycle assessment studies reveal that roads built with recycled content significantly lower energy consumption and carbon footprint compared to conventional methods. Beyond the environmental benefits, this practice also creates economic opportunities by lowering construction costs, reducing maintenance requirements, and encouraging industries that collect, process, and supply recyclable materials. Despite the promising advantages, certain challenges such as variability in material properties, lack of standardized guidelines, and initial processing costs need to be addressed. Continued research, supportive government policies, and awareness among engineers and contractors are essential to mainstream the practice of recycling in road construction. The integration of modern testing techniques, quality control standards, and performance evaluation frameworks can ensure reliability and acceptance on a large scale.

### *A. Applications*

Recycled materials are increasingly being used in different layers and processes of road construction. One of the most common applications is in bituminous roads, where waste plastics such as polyethylene and polypropylene are blended with bitumen to improve durability, flexibility, and resistance to moisture. Reclaimed Asphalt Pavement (RAP) is 10 another widely used material, obtained from old road surfaces and reused as aggregates in new pavement layers, which reduces both cost and the need for fresh stone. Industrial by-products such as fly ash, blast furnace slag, and silica fume are also applied as fillers or stabilizing agents in sub-base and base courses, enhancing the strength and longevity of pavements. Similarly, crumb rubber from waste tires is incorporated into asphalt mixtures to produce rubberized bitumen, which offers improved skid resistance, noise reduction, and extended service life. Construction and demolition (C&D) waste is crushed and reused as aggregates in sub-base layers, promoting circular use of materials. In rural and low-volume roads, recycled materials such as quarry dust, plastic-coated aggregates, and waste glass powder have proven effective in reducing construction costs while providing adequate performance. These applications not only improve road quality but also contribute to sustainable infrastructure by conserving natural resources, minimizing landfill waste, and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. 1.2 BENEFITS 1. Environmental Benefits One of the most significant advantages is the reduction of environmental pollution. Large quantities of waste such as plastics, rubber, fly ash, and demolition debris can be diverted from landfills and incineration, thereby reducing soil and water contamination. Incorporating waste materials into roads also lowers greenhouse gas emissions compared to conventional road construction, as less energy is needed for the production and transportation of virgin materials. Moreover, it reduces the exploitation of natural resources like stone aggregates, sand, and bitumen, conserving them for future generations. 2. Economic Benefits Recycling in road projects often results in substantial cost savings. The reuse of materials like reclaimed asphalt pavement (RAP) or crushed concrete reduces the need for new aggregates and lowers material purchase costs. Transportation and disposal costs of waste are also minimized when materials are repurposed locally. Additionally, recycled roads generally require less maintenance, which translates into long-term economic gains for governments and contractors. The practice also stimulates new business 11 opportunities in waste collection, processing, and recycling industries, creating local employment. 3. Technical and Performance Benefits Apart from cost and environmental advantages, recycled materials can improve the performance of pavements. For instance, plastic-modified bitumen enhances binding properties, increases resistance to rutting and moisture damage, and improves flexibility under varying weather conditions. Rubberized asphalt derived from waste tires reduces road noise, enhances skid resistance, and extends service life. Fly ash and other industrial by-products, when used in base layers, increase strength, stability, and load- bearing capacity. In many cases, roads constructed with recycled materials have shown higher durability than conventional roads. 4. Social and Policy Benefits The adoption of recycled materials supports national sustainability goals and aligns with international commitments to reduce carbon footprints. It promotes a circular economy by transforming waste into valuable resources, thereby raising public awareness about sustainable construction practices. Governments that encourage recycling in infrastructure projects also benefit from improved public perception and compliance with environmental regulations.

### *B. Limitations*

1) Variability in Material Quality Recycled materials often vary in composition and properties depending on their source and processing methods. For example, waste plastics may contain different grades of polymers, while reclaimed asphalt pavement (RAP) may have variable bitumen content. This inconsistency can affect the performance of roads, leading to concerns about long- term durability and uniformity. Without proper segregation and testing, recycled materials may compromise structural strength and reliability.
2) Lack of Standardized Guidelines In many countries, there are limited or no standardized codes and specifications for the use of recycled materials in highways. This creates hesitation among engineers and contractors who prefer conventional materials with well-established performance records. The absence of clear guidelines also leads to difficulties in ensuring consistent quality and acceptance by regulatory authorities. 12
3) Initial Processing and Costs Although recycling can reduce overall construction costs in the long run, the initial processing of waste materials requires investment in specialized equipment, segregation, cleaning, and treatment. In cases where proper recycling facilities are not available locally, the cost of transportation and processing may offset the financial advantages. Smaller contractors may also find it challenging to adopt these technologies without government subsidies or support.
4) Technical Performance Issues Not all recycled materials perform equally well in all environments. For instance, plastic-modified bitumen may show excellent performance in warm climates but may become brittle in cold conditions. Similarly, the use of fly ash or demolition waste may not be suitable for roads with very heavy traffic loads. Performance uncertainties reduce the confidence of engineers in relying solely on recycled materials for high-volume roads and highways.

### *C. Objectives*

The primary objective of using recycled materials in road construction is to promote sustainability by reducing the dependence on natural resources while managing the growing problem of solid waste disposal. Road networks are essential for economic development, but their construction traditionally consumes large amounts of aggregates, bitumen, and cement, which are becoming increasingly scarce and costly. By reusing waste plastics, reclaimed asphalt pavement (RAP), fly ash, rubber, and other industrial by-products, engineers aim to minimize the environmental footprint of road projects. Another important objective is to reduce the burden on landfills and mitigate pollution caused by non-biodegradable wastes such as plastics and rubber, which otherwise remain in the environment for hundreds of years. The approach also seeks to cut down greenhouse gas emissions by lowering energy consumption in the production and transportation of virgin materials. From an economic perspective, the objective is to make road construction more cost-effective by reducing material procurement costs, processing expenses, and long-term maintenance needs. On the technical side, incorporating recycled materials aims to improve road performance by enhancing durability, flexibility, skid resistance, and moisture resistance, thereby extending the service life of pavements. Furthermore, this practice supports the global vision of a circular economy by converting waste into resources and creating new opportunities for recycling industries. The objective also includes encouraging innovation in construction 13 practices, promoting awareness among engineers, contractors, and policymakers, and aligning road infrastructure development with sustainable development goals. Ultimately, the goal is to balance infrastructure growth with environmental protection, economic efficiency, and social responsibility, ensuring that future generations inherit a cleaner and resource-secure planet.

## II. RESULTS

The collective results from RAP, RCA, waste plastic, crumb rubber, and steel slag confirm that recycled materials can be effectively used in different layers of road construction. These materials not only reduce the consumption of virgin resources but also provide measurable improvements in durability, strength, and environmental performance. Key discussions center around the challenges of standardization, variability in waste material properties, and the need for long-term performance monitoring. Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) studies further support the claim that recycled materials reduce greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption, and landfill waste, aligning with sustainable construction practices.

1) PENETRATION TEST RESULT The penetration value of ordinary bitumen was observed to be around 70–75 (1/10 mm), while the modified bitumen containing waste rubber and plastic showed lower values ranging from 50– 60 (1/10 mm). This decrease in penetration value indicates that the binder becomes stiffer and harder when modified with waste materials. The reduction in softness improves the load-bearing capacity of the pavement and reduces the chances of rutting and bleeding under heavy traffic and high temperature conditions. The rubber particles increase elasticity, while plastic polymers enhance the stiffness and thermal stability of the binder. Therefore, the penetration test results confirm that waste rubber–plastic modification leads to improved binder performance, making it suitable for hot climate regions and heavy-traffic roads. Fig 8: Penetration Value VS Modifier Content 25
2) SOFTENING POINT RESULT The softening point of the conventional bitumen sample was found to be around 47–50°C, whereas that of the modified binders increased to 55–65°C depending on the percentage of waste rubber and plastic added. This increase shows that the modified binder can withstand higher service temperatures without becoming too soft. The rise in softening point is due to the polymeric nature of rubber and plastics, which improve the binder's resistance to temperature-induced deformation. This enhancement is particularly beneficial for tropical regions like Kerala or South India, where pavements are exposed to high ambient and surface temperatures. Hence, the results of the softening point test clearly indicate better temperature susceptibility control and improved high-temperature stability in rubber and plastic-modified bitumen. Fig 9 : Softening point VS Modifier Content
3) RUTTING TEST RESULT In the rutting test, conventional bituminous mixes showed rut depths of about 10–12 mm after repeated loading cycles, while the modified mixes withwaste rubber and plastic exhibited significantly lower rut depths of 4–6 mm under the same conditions. This reduction in permanent deformation is due to the enhanced stiffness, elasticity, and load distribution properties of the modified binder. Rubber improves flexibility and helps the pavement recover its shape after each load cycle, while plastic increases the mixture's high temperature stiffness, reducing lateral flow. The rutting test results demonstrate that rubber plastic modification effectively minimizes permanent deformation, leading to longer-lasting, stable, and rut-resistant pavements.. 26 Fig 10 : Rutt deoth VS Load cycle

4) FATIGUE TEST RESULT The fatigue life of the pavement mixes was determined by the number of load repetitions sustained before failure. Conventional mixes failed after approximately 5,000–10,000 load cycles, while rubber and plastic modified mixes could withstand up to 20,000–40,000 cycles, depending on the modifier percentage. This significant increase in fatigue life is attributed to the elastic and crack-healing nature of crumb rubber and the stiffening effect of waste plastics, which together enhance the binder’s flexibility and resistance to crack propagation. The improved fatigue resistance ensures that the pavement can endure more load repetitions without structural failure, thereby extending the pavements service life and reducing maintenance costs. Fig 11 : Fatigue Level vs Strain level
5) MARSHALL TEST RESULT The Marshall Stability Test is a widely used method for designing and evaluating bituminous mixtures in road construction. This test helps determine the optimum bitumen content by 27 analyzing key properties such as stability, flow value, bulk density, air voids, and voids filled with bitumen. In the test, cylindrical specimens of asphalt mix are prepared and compacted using standard procedures, then loaded until failure to measure the maximum load (stability) and the deformation at that load (flow). A good asphalt mix should have sufficient stability to resist traffic loads, adequate flow to prevent cracking, and proper air voids to ensure durability. Typically, the optimum bitumen content is selected at a point where the mix achieves high stability, acceptable flow (usually between 2 to 4 mm), and air voids in the range of 3 to 5 percent. The results ensure the bituminous mix has the strength, flexibility, and durability required for long-term pavement performance under varying traffic and environmental conditions. Fig 11 : Load VS Deflection
6) DUCTILITY TEST RESULT The ductility test is an important quality control measure in road construction, particularly for assessing the performance of bitumen used as a binder in flexible pavements. It determines the ability of bitumen to deform under tensile stress without breaking, which is crucial for ensuring the pavement can withstand temperature variations and traffic loads without cracking. The test involves stretching a standard briquette of bitumen at a specified temperature, usually 25°C, at a uniform rate until it breaks. The distance in centimeters that the bitumen stretches before breaking is recorded as the ductility value. A higher ductility value indicates better flexibility and resistance to cracking, which is essential for maintaining road durability, especially in colder climates. Typically, a minimum ductility of 75 cm is required for most penetration grades of bitumen, as per standard specifications. If the test result falls below the required limit, it may indicate that the bitumen is aged, oxidized, or contaminated, making it unsuitable for pavement use. Therefore, the ductility test plays a key role in ensuring the quality and longevity of road surfaces.

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## III.CONCLUSIONS

The findings given in this research led to following conclusions: The study highlights that recycled materials such as RAP, RCA, waste plastics, crumb rubber, and steel slag are highly effective in promoting sustainable road construction. Each material provides unique benefits—RAP conserves aggregates and bitumen, RCA reuses demolition waste in base layers, plastics improve durability and resistance to water damage, crumb rubber enhances flexibility and skid resistance, while steel slag offers excellent load-bearing capacity. Their use significantly reduces dependence on virgin raw materials, minimizes construction costs, and helps manage large quantities of waste that would otherwise pollute the environment. However, successful application requires proper processing, quality testing, and adherence to standardized methodologies to address variability in material properties. While long-term field performance data is still limited, the current evidence strongly supports the adoption of these materials in road projects. In conclusion, integrating recycled materials into pavement construction is not only technically viable but also environmentally and economically beneficial, representing a vital step toward sustainable infrastructure development.

## IV. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The satisfaction and euphoria of successful complement of any task could be incomplete without mentioning the people who made it possible, whose constant guidance and encouragement crown our efforts with success. First of all, we are grateful to GOD ALMIGHTY, for showering. His blessings upon us for enabling us to complete this seminar on time. I wish to express our sincere thanks to our beloved Chairman Er. TOM T JOSEPH, TOMS COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING, for providing excellent educational facilities. I wish to express our appreciation and gratefulness to our Director, G.VENUGOPAL, for his encouragement and sincere guidance. I express our indebtedness to our Principal Er. JOBY JOSEPH for his encouragement and sincere guidance. I wish to express our sincere thanks to our HOD Mrs. SIMI K RAVEENDRAN, Assistant Professor, Department of Civil Engineering for her able guidance and useful suggestions without which this project work would not have been successful. I wish to express our sincere thanks to our guide Mrs. SIMI K RAVEENDRAN, Assistant Professor, Department of Civil Engineering for her able guidance and useful suggestions without which this seminar work would not have been successful. I am also grateful to all the teaching and non-teaching staff for their valuable assistance. Finally, I am thankful to my beloved parents for their blessings and support, and also to my friends for their help and encouragement.

AKHIL U S

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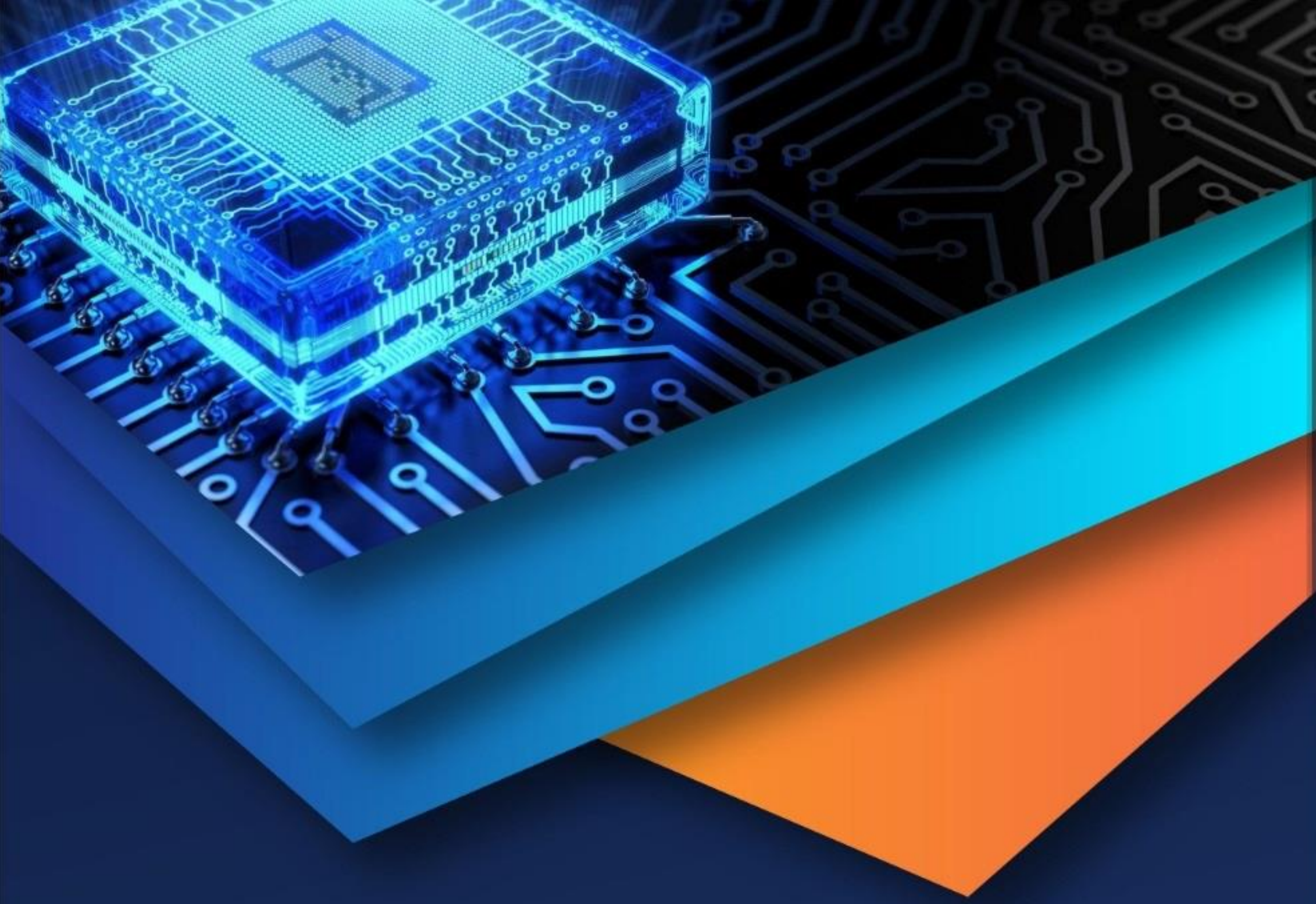


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