

MAKE YOUR MATTING BUDGET WORK HARDER:

A GUIDE TO MORE VALUABLE SITE ACCESS



True site access goes beyond just mats to protect what matters: your **people**, your **equipment**, your **site**, and your **bottom line**. Smart, well-designed site access helps you avoid safety shutdowns, prevent your equipment from getting stuck in muck, stay on schedule, and minimize the damage to your site.

Without a site access plan, equipment can tear up fields and destroy crops, or track debris into protected areas and roadways — all of which can require extensive and expensive restoration.

Each site is unique, with its own needs and challenges. There's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all site access plan. Some site access partners produce confusing quotes that overlook key elements or rely on hidden costs and change orders. To truly achieve the type of site access that saves money and boosts efficiency, you will need to work closely with potential providers and understand your options.

Before you begin your next project, invest some time to rethink your site access needs and consider what you'll need at every phase. By looking at the whole picture, you can compare quotes on your terms and make smarter site access choices that will deliver more value.



Think about matting as part of a complete access solution that includes logistics, site prep, restoration, and several other elements.

Carter Sterling, Chief Executive Officer, Sterling

SITE ACCESS CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVERY STAGE OF YOUR PROJECT

When you think about matting as part of a complete site access plan, you can better understand the true costs and actual value of different quotes. Consider what will be needed at every phase of your project, both in terms of mats and services.

PLAN:

Smart site access starts with a comprehensive plan. Make sure to allow plenty of time for this stage, as time invested in planning will pay off in efficiency later. Give your potential partner adequate time to develop a quote. Do a boots-on-the-ground walkdown of your site with them to assess overhead hazards, ground conditions, right-of-way issues, and ideal routing. An experienced provider may suggest a less obvious routing that proves safer or more efficient, and may propose different types of mats for specific applications on the job site.

PREPARE AND INSTALL:

Start executing your plan with any necessary site preparation, which may include fencing, straw, grading, gravel, culverts, bridges, or other elements. As you get closer to installation, you will be working closely with your site access provider to coordinate multiple crews and truckloads. This takes careful logistics planning to keep everyone safe and on time. Some types of mats can be installed faster than others or require more truckloads, so be sure you understand how your mat choice affects timelines.

MAINTAIN:

Your site access needs will vary throughout your project. Ask your provider how they plan to reallocate mats to different areas of your site, and how they'll handle any weather issues that affect the ground. Mats may degrade during long-term jobs — find out how your partner will handle picking up mat shards or bolts to help prevent injuries, tire punctures, and other hazards.

REMOVE AND RESTORE:

After your project, you need to remove all equipment and mats while returning the site to its previous condition. Depending on the site, your restoration needs can be extensive and may include removing and disposing of debris and spoils, seeding, sodding, and necessary environmental restoration.

HOW WILL YOUR JOB IMPACT THE GROUND BELOW?

Site access is also about protecting potentially fragile sites and the wildlife that lives there. A thorough site walkdown can help your matting partner develop a plan that minimizes the impact and helps with environmental compliance. For example, in a wetland area, a protective base mat can minimize the total necessary matting to limit the environmental impact.

On a farm field, strategic mat placement can limit regrading and mixing of topsoil, protect drain tiles from damage, minimize soil compaction, and prevent equipment from getting stuck in the mud.





Make sure your bid includes all the services you'll need for every phase of your project.

GO BEYOND A "TYPICAL" MATTING QUOTE

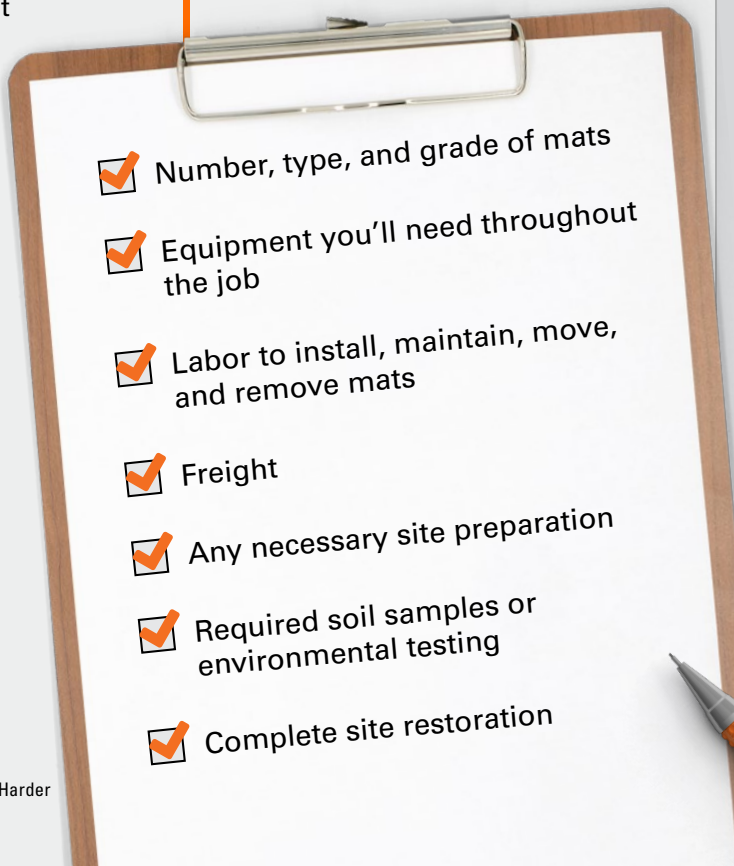
A typical matting quote may be woefully incomplete. Even a seemingly itemized quote can ignore many important elements that may end up costing you extra time and money. Many quotes aren't customized to your project and may overlook important site details or critical site access considerations.

Some matting partners use a "bid-to-win" strategy that relies on pricey change orders, rather than giving you a complete, accurate quote upfront. These partners seek to maximize their transaction rather than build long-term partnerships.

To ensure you get a fair quote, make sure your bid includes all the services you'll need for every phase of your project.

The quote may include several types of mats, and should specify the right mats in the right places with the right quantities. This quote may be higher upfront, but you'll avoid costly surprises.

Whether you rent, buy, or lease your mats, your quote should include:

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- ☒ Number, type, and grade of mats
 - ☒ Equipment you'll need throughout the job
 - ☒ Labor to install, maintain, move, and remove mats
 - ☒ Freight
 - ☒ Any necessary site preparation
 - ☒ Required soil samples or environmental testing
 - ☒ Complete site restoration

IF YOU RECEIVE A
DRAMATICALLY LOWER QUOTE,
ASK YOURSELF:

WHY IS THIS
QUOTE SO LOW?

Is there something being left out that will show up in a change order later?

Do they have the resources to meet power customers' outage requirements?

How are they able to offer this price? Are quotes the same as other matting companies?

What are the implications of a later-than-expected delivery?

JUDGING MAT QUALITY: BUYBACK, GRADING, AND ATTRITION

Mats inevitably wear out. Depending on the mat's material and usage, its lifespan can vary quite a bit. Learn how your matting partner handles buyback, grading, and attrition so you can set your expectations and budget accordingly.

If you rent or lease, your contract likely has an attrition clause that requires you to pay for any destroyed or lost mats. Your partner may also offer to buy back mats at the end of a project at a discounted rate that corresponds with the mats' final condition. This is where grading comes in.

GRADING rates how much life is left in a mat — and without an industry standard, grading is very subjective. A Grade A mat is new or lightly used, but Grade B or C mats can be trickier. Lower-graded mats may need to be replaced sooner, and as they break down, they may leave debris throughout your site that needs to be picked up. Don't settle for Grade C mats and be sure you understand what your matting partner considers a Grade B mat.

ATTRITION measures the percentage of your total used mats that must be replaced. Several factors can affect attrition. A wetter site, or one full of stumps or stones, will lead to faster mat degradation. Longer projects will typically put more stress on mats and more of them will be destroyed. However, some types of mats, such as cross-laminated timber or plastic, will result in lower attrition than traditional bolted mats.

How much attrition should you expect? It averages 10 to 18 percent on a typical project, which can quickly become expensive. For example, if you buy 1,000 timber mats at a cost of \$500 per mat, you've invested \$500,000 in mats.



AVOID SAFETY SHUTDOWNS

Proper planning can eliminate problems that might injure workers or delay your project. Make sure to consider:

The age and maintenance condition of your and your partner's equipment

Which mats you're using for which applications

Your partner's experience and safety record

If 18 percent of those mats are unusable by the end of the project, you've lost \$90,000.

Ask your partner the typical attrition rates for each type of mat you're using, and how they grade mats for attrition and buyback. Be realistic when you budget for buybacks at the end of the project to account for downgraded mats that may only be worth a fraction of what you paid.



TAKE A SMARTER APPROACH TO YOUR PROJECT

1. START WITH A WALKDOWN

Your matting partner can't give you a fair quote if they haven't seen your site. Start every project with a walkdown to fully review the site with your potential partner, who can then value engineer a proposal that saves you time and money. A walkdown can help your site access mat provider:

- Evaluate different access options and routings
- Determine special needs for sensitive landscapes
- Identify the right mats for the job
- Assess safety concerns
- Minimize environmental disturbance
- Reduce restoration costs

2. CHOOSE THE RIGHT MAT FOR THE JOB

Some matting providers may recommend using one type of mat for every aspect of your job. But different applications such as water crossings, platforms, access roads, cribbing, and air bridging can all involve different types of mats. Some mats are heavier than others, which adds sturdiness to

platforms but can cause greater damage to the ground below. Lighter mats can be great for access roads, and more will fit on a truck, leading to fewer truckloads and easier installation. Talk with your matting partner to find the right mix of mats for each job.

3. DEVELOP YOUR OWN SCOPE OF WORK

Don't just ask potential providers for their scope of work. Instead, develop your own and have each company respond to the same criteria. You'll be able to compare quotes equally and look for the one that delivers the most value.

For example, examine whether providers are using the same equipment. Choosing a skid steer over an excavator with a grapple may change how long the job takes or which crews are needed. Are they offering equivalent levels of site preparation and restoration? Is one matting provider proposing 20,000 mats, while another suggests using just 12,000 mats that get moved around the site as needed? Each may offer a viable option, but only you can determine which one provides the value you need.

Your scope may include:

- How many and what type of mats per job
- All the equipment you'll need
- Size of pull pads, platforms around utility poles, etc.
- Specifications for site entrances and exits
- Detailed site prep and restoration needs

4. CHOOSE THE RIGHT SUPPLIER

Once you have quotes in hand, look beyond the bottom line to identify the best supplier for your job.

Safety reputation:

Do they have the relevant certifications? What's their record and EMR rating?

Value engineering:

Can they help you think through your site's unique needs to deliver the most value?

Expertise: Have they worked on jobs like yours? How long have they been in business?

Large and varied inventory: Do they have the mats you need in sufficient quantities?

Integrity: Will they deliver as promised and stand by their quote? How do they handle emergencies?



IS BUYING REALLY BETTER? KNOW THE TOTAL COSTS OF OWNERSHIP

If you do a lot of projects, you might be considering buying your mats outright rather than leasing or renting. However, keep in mind that ownership comes with its own set of unexpected costs.

UPFRONT COSTS

Quality mats aren't cheap
— they're a significant capital expense

LABOR AND LOGISTICS

You'll need someone to handle inventory management and shipment scheduling

FREIGHT COSTS

Shipping mats both ways racks up high freight costs

STORAGE

Add in the cost of a large, secure yard or warehouse

MAT WASHING

Owners wash their own mats
— a labor-intensive task

DEPRECIATION

Owners have a depreciating asset sitting on their balance sheet

DISPOSAL

It costs money to discard mats responsibly when they reach end of life



CONCLUSION

Choose the site access that delivers the most value — not just the lowest cost.

Remember that mats are just one part of the site access equation. When you begin a project, determine what your complete site access must include, from planning through restoration, and compare quotes on your terms. And don't just look at the bottom line. Consider the actual value of your site access quotes to decide which option will keep your project running smoothly while protecting your people, equipment, and site.

ABOUT STERLING

Sterling is a leading provider of innovative site access solutions for companies that build our nation's energy infrastructure. We are America's largest manufacturer of CLT (cross-laminated timber) site access mats. Our TerraLam® CLT is an engineered matting solution that saves time and money, protects the environment, and ensures worker safety. TerraLam is manufactured on state-of-the-art automated equipment at our Illinois and Texas facilities for maximum consistency and quality. Our innovative matting products, combined with expert consultation and an array of turnkey services, deliver exceptional value on any size project and lay the groundwork for your success.

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