

ROAD REPORT

A publication of the Road Commission for Oakland County for public officials serving Oakland County

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Event signals official start of Northwestern Connector project

Top officials of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC), the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Charter Township of West Bloomfield, the City of Farmington Hills and Henry Ford Health System were joined by US Congressman Joe Knollenberg and other public officials on Oct. 24 to officially mark the beginning of construction on the long-anticipated Northwestern Connector project.

Congressman Knollenberg secured several critical federal grants to help fund the project.

The event took place at Henry Ford Medical Center - West Bloomfield on West Maple Road, just west of Drake Road in West Bloomfield Township. The first phase of the Northwestern Connector project includes widening the road in front of the medical center as well as constructing a modern roundabout at the Maple/Drake intersection.

"In addition to increasing safety and reducing congestion, investments in our roads are essential to improving commerce and livability in Oakland County," Congressman Knollenberg said. "I commend the Road Commission for Oakland County for its diligence and hard work in making this project a reality."

RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair concurred with Congressman Knollenberg. "The fact that we are here today is testament to the cooperation and diligence of many people and agencies, including the Michigan Department of Transportation, the City of Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield Township, as well as the financial support of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners," Bair said. "And, once again, Congressman Knollenberg has come through with funding for another critical Oakland County road project."

The Northwestern Connector Project, led by RCOC, in cooperation with MDOT, West Bloomfield Township and



Pictured are (left to right): RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair, Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital CEO Gerard van Grinsven, Farmington Hills Mayor Vicki Barnett, West Bloomfield Supervisor David Flaisher, RCOC Board Vice-Chairman Larry Crake, US Congressman Joe Knollenberg (who obtained more than \$10 million for the project) and MDOT Regional Engineer Greg Johnson.

the City of Farmington Hills, is intended to improve the flow of traffic on the highly congested roads around the area where M-10 (Northwestern Highway) dead-ends at Orchard Lake Road, and move that traffic towards M-5 four-and-a-half miles to the west. The project also is expected to enhance motorist and pedestrian safety.

In addition to the Maple/Drake roundabout and the Maple widening in front of Henry Ford, the project includes the construction of seven other modern roundabouts and the widening of Orchard Lake Road between 14 Mile and Maple.

The Road Commission has selected the low-bid construction firms that will build the Maple/Drake roundabout and widen Maple in front of the medical center.

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Check presented for Walton.



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Initial utility work will take place on both projects during the winter, with the majority of construction getting under way in spring 2007.

The Maple/Drake roundabout will be constructed by L. D'Agostini & Sons Inc. for a cost of \$1.8 million. The widening of Maple in front of Henry Ford Medical Center will be constructed by John Carlo Inc. for \$350,000.

The project also will include the widening of both 14 Mile and Maple roads between Orchard Lake Road and M-5, though that portion of the project is not yet funded. In all, the project is expected to cost approximately \$140 million.

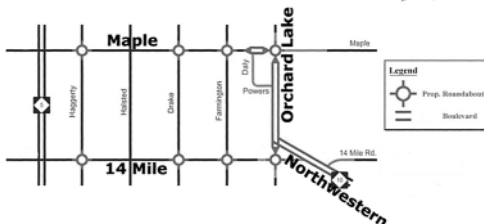
"This partnership of state and local officials is a perfect example of how to move Michigan forward in the 21st century," said MDOT Director Kirk Steudle. "State and local agencies working together improves our economic climate and provides increased safety for our residents."

"We welcome these much needed improvements," stated West Bloomfield Township Supervisor David Flaisher. "We expect that, when this is completed, our major roads will be less congested, safer and smoother than they have been for years, and that motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists and others will have an improved quality of life as a result of the improvements."

"The Northwestern Connector Project is a great example of how our city adapts to change," observed Farmington Hills Mayor Vicki Barnett. "Significant growth and development have led to traffic congestion. This project will help reduce these problems and provide a safer alternative for our residents and businesses."

"We are very pleased with the spirit of collaboration and support throughout this project in Oakland County," said Gerard van Grinsven, president and CEO of Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital, which will open in July 2008. "We plan to continue working with the community and do our part to assure that the project is completed on time and that everyone will be proud to be part of it."

Northwestern Connector Project Elements



**Drive MI campaign aims to explain
state's road funding problems**

A statewide coalition of businesses, associations and citizens has kicked off a campaign, known as "Drive Michigan," to raise awareness of the growing funding shortage for Michigan's transportation system.



\$100 million investment in highway and bridge improvements yields nearly 4,750 jobs across the economy, with more than 75 percent of those in non-construction fields.

The Drive Michigan coalition is committed to a communications program that raises awareness of and support for transportation-related issues with the citizens of Michigan, the media and all public officials. Among many others, the coalition includes the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, the County Road Association of Michigan, the Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan Association of Counties and the Michigan Sheriffs' Association.

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) strongly supports the group's efforts.

One of the key messages of the Drive Michigan effort is that Michigan's road system is deteriorating because of underfunding, and this is having a negative impact on both our economy and the safety of our residents. "System needs are growing, but funding is unable to keep pace," the organization's Michigan Transportation Facts 2006 publication states. "As a result, the state is losing mobility, losing jobs, and tragically, losing lives."

The organization backs up this statement with numerous statistics. For example, it notes that between 1990 and 2004, vehicle travel on Michigan's major highways increased 27 percent. At the same time, the total lane miles of roads increased only 4 percent.

It also cites Washington think-tank The Road Information Program (TRIP) which recently gave Michigan a "D" grade for the overall quality of its roads, with over two-fifths of major roads in poor condition. The report stressed these deficiencies were not a reflection of the effectiveness of state and local transportation agencies, but a direct result of the lack of adequate funding.

Drive Michigan also points out that not only are good roads critical for a strong economy, but investing in roads and transportation actually stimulates the economy. For example, the organization notes a

Further, Drive Michigan points out that the same \$100 million investment generates \$200 million in family income, \$54 million in federal income and social security taxes, and more than \$6 million in state and local tax revenues.

So what is the goal of Drive Michigan? Ultimately the consortium hopes to find a comprehensive solution for fully funding state and local transportation projects.

In the coming months, Drive Michigan will ramp up its effort to illuminate the transportation funding problem in Michigan. Stay tuned.

For more information about Drive Michigan, or to sign up to receive e-mail updates about the effort, visit the group's Web site, www.drivemi.org.



**Check for Walton work
presented to RCOC**

On Nov. 2, Road Commission Managing Director Brent Bair (left) received checks from the Michigan Department of Transportation to pay for the 2007 reconstruction of Walton Boulevard, Squirrel to Perry St. in Auburn Hills and the Walton bridge over I-75. The state funds were made available through the governor's Jobs Today program. Also on hand was Congressman Joe Knollenberg (right) who secured federal funds for the project. The state checks were presented by MDOT Director Kirk Steudle (center).

First-ever summit brings together road & business leaders

At the invitation of the Transportation Committee of Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson's Business Roundtable, and its spin-off organization, Businesses for Better Roads (BBR), representatives of business organizations and road agencies from nine of Michigan's most populous counties came together December 15 to discuss ways of addressing Michigan's worsening road funding crisis.

The summit, which took place at Novi's Rock Financial Showplace, focused on ways of addressing the critical underfunding of Michigan's roads, especially in its developed and developing urban areas. At the summit, Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Managing Director Brent Bair stressed that Oakland County has a serious traffic congestion problem, and that neither the state nor federal government can realistically be expected to step in and solve the problem.

"Nobody is going to bail us out of this problem," Bair said. He added the same is likely true of the funding shortages in the state's other large and developing counties.

"Even if the state were to raise the state-collected gas tax, that additional revenue would only allow us to be able to maintain the existing road system. It would not provide enough funding to expand the road system to address our congestion problem," he

explained.

Roundtable Transportation Committee Chairman Alan Kiriluk, chairman of Troy-based Kirco Development Company, hosted the event. He stressed that, while situations are somewhat different in the various counties, the underlying issue is the same: insufficient road funding. He added that the Transportation Committee believes the only solution is to identify local-option funding sources that counties can implement.

Participating counties, in addition to Oakland, included Wayne, Macomb, Livingston, Washtenaw, St. Clair, Monroe, Kent and Kalamazoo. Others are expected to join the effort in the future.

Kiriluk noted the summit was the first step in what he sees as the effort to create a regional - or potentially statewide - solution to the chronic problem of insufficient funding to address traffic congestion. He expects the representatives present at the summit to continue to work together in the coming months and years to formulate a long-term "self-help" solution that would allow counties such as Oakland and Macomb to address their congestion issues, while providing tools for counties such as Kent, Livingston, Washtenaw and others to address their congestion or other transportation needs.

Biennial process to start in January:

RCOC prepares to kick off Strategic Planning meetings

Top administrators, planners and engineers of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) soon will begin meeting with officials of virtually every city, village and township in Oakland County as part of RCOC's biennial Strategic Planning process.

Since 1985, RCOC officials have met every two years with the communities to ensure the community officials play an active role in setting the Road Commission strategy for coming years.

"This is a very time-consuming activity," explained RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair. "But it is one of the best investments of our time that we can make. Nothing else truly gives us such a clear understanding of what the important issues and priorities are for the communities." Bair noted the process involves almost 60 separate meetings.

"To our knowledge, we are the only road commission in Michigan that goes to this length to ensure our communities have input in our planning process. It's part of our philosophy of 'communicate, communicate, communicate'."

Bair explained the process allows RCOC to regularly take the pulse of the communities on large issues as well as

ensure the community officials have an avenue to discuss road needs and provide feedback on day-to-day road maintenance issues.

"Through these meetings, we keep abreast of what is happening in the communities. We learn about new developments, redevelopment efforts -- and related traffic problems -- and road needs," Bair noted. "It helps promote a better understanding of the issues on the parts of both the local communities and RCOC."

In addition to identifying current and future road needs and maintenance issues, during the process, RCOC asks the local officials to prioritize the needs on county roads within their communities. This information then helps RCOC prioritize projects in coming years.

"Since 1985, we have addressed many high-priority needs identified by community officials during the Strategic Planning meetings. We have also adjusted our road maintenance activities based on community concerns expressed during the meetings," Bair said.



RCOC Strategic Planning meetings, such as this one with the Village of Milford in 2005, typically generate very constructive conversations between the Road Commission and the community officials.

After the last round of Strategic Planning meetings in 2005, RCOC calculated the cost to address the current and projected needs on county roads identified by the communities. The total came to more than \$1.8 billion worth of needs expected between 2005 and 2015. Bair expects this figure to have increased since 2005.

The Strategic Planning meetings will take place from January through May. Once they are completed, RCOC will compile a report summarizing the information gathered at the meetings, and provide copies to each community.

Resolution pending?

As expected, recent speed limits law change angers residents

A recent amendment to the Michigan Vehicle Code approved by the state House and Senate, may offer a reprieve to the residents of gravel roads in Oakland County who, without the amendment, faced the loss of their 25 miles-per-hour residential speed zones.

As of press time, it was not clear if the governor would sign or veto the amendment, which would, essentially, "grandfather" the 283 "residence" zones on gravel roads in the county for two years.

The Legislature's December action on the amendment came in response to a previous change to the state law, adopted in March, in which the state Legislature changed the state speed limits law, eliminating the 25 miles-per-hour residential speed zones on gravel roads, and causing the speed limits to rise in many of these districts to the unposted "prima facie" speed limit of 55 miles per hour.

Not surprisingly, many residents living along those roads in Oakland County were less than pleased with this change, and many had asked the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) to ignore the revised law.

"Prima facie" is the Latin term used in the Michigan Vehicle Code to refer to roads where there is no "absolute" speed limit, established by a traffic and engineering study. Generally, the prima facie speed limit is applied only to unpaved roads, where the road surface is subject to change, or very rural paved roads. Where there is a prima facie speed limit, drivers are required to drive at a safe and reasonable speed based on the current road condition, not to exceed 55 MPH or the posted prima facie speed limit.

RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair noted the March change, which officially took effect in November, inadvertently cast the Road Commission as a "villain" in the eyes of some residents. "Over 25 years ago, as a service to residents and townships, RCOC decided that if a township requested it, qualifying sections of gravel roads would be posted as 'residential districts' with prima facie speed limit of 25 MPH, in accordance with the Michigan Vehicle Code," Bair stated. "We ended up with 283 such locations in Oakland County. When the law was changed, and RCOC realized it had to comply with the new

law, we were being viewed negatively by some for proposing that the signs come down because they no longer reflected the legal speed limit."

Bair pointed out that RCOC did not "establish" the 25 MPH zones - they were already prima facie 25 MPH. All RCOC did was erect signs reminding drivers of this. He added when it became clear that the Legislature was seeking a resolution to the problem, RCOC agreed to postpone removal of the 25 MPH signs until Jan. 1, to see if a resolution could be reached that would allow the 25 MPH speed limits to remain in place.

RCOC opposed the change to the law enacted in March.

"Before the original amendment was adopted in March, we recognized the problems this would create for Oakland County," Bair said. "RCOC staff even met with the Michigan State Police (MSP), which was the driving force behind the change, to try to work out a compromise. None could be identified that MSP would support. We then learned we were the only county that had posted the 25 MPH signs and, thus, could get no support in our opposition from the rest of the state."

He noted that if the latest amendment is signed by the governor, the 25 MPH signs will remain in place. If she vetoes the amendment, the signs will come down.

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Road Report is published quarterly by the Road Commission for Oakland County. Have a question or comment about Road Report? Call Public Information Officer Craig Bryson at (248) 645-2000, ext. 2302 or send him an e-mail at cbryson@rcoc.org.

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