

ROAD REPORT

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

www.rcocweb.org

State committee to review future of transportation funding

If you had the chance to reconfigure the way Michigan's transportation infrastructure is paid for and maintained, what would you do?

That broad question is the charge of a new task force established in February by Governor Granholm in accordance with a law she signed in 2007. The nine individuals named to the committee have less than a year to come up with answers to these daunting questions.

"This is one of the most important committees related to the future of Michigan's transportation system that we've seen in years," noted Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Managing Director Brent Bair. "It's critical that this committee gets this right."

Bair said the task force has a huge job -- a similar federal committee took 22 months to study the same issues, before concluding that a substantial federal gas tax increase is needed immediately.

The Michigan task force is expected to review a variety of topics, including an examination of the state law that governs

Task Force Appointees:

- **Cindy Elliott**, Dow Chemical
- **Dennis Gillow**, International Union of Operating Engineers
- **John James**, James Group International
- **Ann Jousma-Miller**, Delta County Economic Alliance
- **Mike Nystrom**, Michigan Infrastructure & Transportation Assoc.
- **Roger Salo**, Masco Corp.
- **Rich Studley**, Michigan Chamber
- **Peter Varga**, The Rapid (Grand Rapids transit partnership)
- **L. Susan Zehnder**, Zehnder's of Frankenmuth

how roads are funded (Act 51) as well as looking at potential transportation funding sources beyond the traditional fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees.

One of the concerns that spurred the legislation establishing the committee is that fuel tax revenues -- Michigan's largest source of transportation funding -- have continued to decline over time as

vehicles become more fuel efficient and alternative-fuel vehicles become increasingly popular.

"Most experts believe fuel taxes will eventually cease to be a reliable means of funding transportation," Bair explained. "For many years, fuel tax revenues have been declining in inflation-adjusted dollars. This trend is expected to accelerate."

At the same time, people are driving more and more miles while fuel-tax revenues decline. "The infrastructure is increasingly burdened, but the revenue stream is declining," Bair said. "Without some change, we expect to see an increasingly deteriorating and congested road system, not only in Michigan, but across the country."

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) documented that total miles traveled by motor vehicles in this country more than quadrupled between 1970 and 2005. Meanwhile, FHWA reports that average vehicle fuel efficiency rose from 12 miles per gallon in 1970 to nearly 17

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Crake re-elected chair of RCOC Board

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Board of Road Commissioners, at its Jan. 10 meeting, re-elected Larry P. Crake as Board chairman.

Crake has served on the RCOC Board since 1997. A resident of Waterford Township, Crake owns and operates the 300 Bowl in Waterford. Prior to his appointment to the RCOC Board, he served 10 years on the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, including four years as chairman of the county board.

The RCOC chairman's term is for one year. Traditionally, though, chairmen



Larry Crake

have been re-elected at the end of the first year, and serve for two consecutive terms. Crake served as chairman for 2007 as well. The position rotates among the three Board members.

"The RCOC Board is committed to sound financial management and providing the best customer service possible," Crake stated. "My goal as chairman is to ensure that the agency continues to meet those objectives."

Board member Richard G. Skarritt was re-elected vice-chairman. He was first appointed to the Board in 1996. A

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Local-option funding program expands, changes name

The effort to create local-option transportation funding tools in Michigan has changed its name and expanded to include counties across the state.

Previously known as Businesses for Better Roads (or BBR), the organization recently changed its name to Businesses for Better Transportation (BBT) to reflect that some counties may choose to use funding raised through the program for non-road transportation improvements.

The effort, which originated with the Transportation Committee of Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson's Business Roundtable, was originally intended to generate extra money to widen roads in Oakland County to address the county's congestion problem. It proposes a number of local-option funding tools that, if approved by voters, would allow a county new options to pay for transportation improvements.

The local options proposed are: gas and diesel tax, vehicle registration fee, various license fees, property transfer fee and sales tax. In each case, state laws must be changed to allow for the local option taxes. For the local-option sales tax, the state constitution must be amended.

In 2006, Oakland BBR invited representatives of the nine other most populous counties in the state to join the effort, which led to the formation of the BBR Regional Steering Committee. The Regional Steering Committee, in addition to Oakland County, includes representatives of Genesee, Kent, Kalamazoo, Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, St. Clair and Washtenaw counties.

In December 2007, BBT invited all the other road commissions in the state to join the effort. As a result, the following road commissions are now participating supporters: Alcona, Allegan, Barry, Chippewa, Clinton, Crawford, Hillsdale, Ingham, Ionia, Isabella, Leelanau, Mason, Montcalm, Muskegon, Oceana, Ottawa and Shiawassee.

The Road Commission for Oakland County has long argued that the funding that could be generated through the BBT effort is needed in Oakland County because the traditional road funding mechanisms (the statewide gas & diesel taxes and vehicle registration fees and federal gas tax revenues) will never generate enough money to fund the road widenings needed to address Oakland's congestion.

"Even if we are successful in getting the state gas and diesel taxes raised," explained Managing Director Brent Bair, "the additional revenues those sources would generate is needed just to maintain the existing roads, and would provide little additional revenue for road widening. We need the BBT dollars to address congestion."

The BBT has also begun to talk with legislators about the potential of creating enabling legislation that would allow counties to take the local initiatives to the voters. So far, feedback has been positive, but the effort has a long way yet to go.

"The reality is that neither the state government nor the federal government is going to provide the amount of money we need to address congestion in Oakland County," Bair said. "Our best opportunity for the additional funds we need is through the BBT."

COMMITTEE CONT'D FROM FRONT

miles per gallon in 2000, and has continued to increase this decade.

Among other things, the committee is expected to review the results of a recently completed study by the Oregon Department of Transportation, which experimented with a new means of raising revenue to pay for roads: Rather than charging a fuel tax, they charged a per-mile-driven fee for a fleet of test vehicles. Each time a test vehicle pulled into a service station, a computer automatically downloaded the number of

miles driven and added a per-mile fee to the fuel bill.

"As this country moves away from traditional gas-powered vehicles," Bair observed, "this transition in road funding is inevitable. The Oregon experiment proved it can be done. The challenge will be to convince the public of the need and to get the auto and fuel companies to install the necessary equipment on the cars and gas pumps."

Bair noted the question of whether or not the fuel taxes should ultimately be replaced is a long-term issue that would take years to implement. In the mean

Federal Aid Committee selects 2012 projects

Funding was approved for more than \$25 million worth of future road projects by the Oakland County Federal Aid Task Force Funding Committee at its Feb. 8 annual project selection meeting.

The committee allocates federal funding to projects in the county. Each year, the committee selects the projects to receive the federal road funds four years in the future. This year, it selected projects for 2012.

Certain Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC), city and village road projects are eligible for federal funds. Federal funds are the primary funding source for major road improvements in Michigan.

The amount of funding available is determined by the amount of money the federal government designates for roads each year. This money is divided by formula between states and then between regions and counties. The "pot" the committee has to spend includes some state road funding through the Michigan Transportation Economic Development Fund (TEDF).

The Funding Committee includes 10 representatives of Oakland's cities, villages and townships, as well as two members from RCOC, one from SMART and one from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

The projects compete for the available funds. To receive funding, projects must be rated, ranked and approved by the committee.

The projects are ranked using a "worst first" point system that gives the most points to those that will do the

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time, he noted, Michigan continues to face a short-term road funding crisis.

"We need to consider how we will fund roads over the long term, but we also have a responsibility to address our roads today. For the short term, the gas tax is the most viable funding source. Because gas tax revenues are declining, we need to raise the gas tax. No one likes increased taxes, but the road system is critical to our economy and quality of life. We cannot let it further deteriorate."

The task force is required to provide a draft report to the governor by October 31, 2008.

Roundabouts continue to receive rave reviews

Now that the four new roundabouts constructed by the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) in 2007 have been online for several months, the intersections continue to get rave reviews.

In 2007, RCOC constructed roundabouts at the intersections of Maple at Drake and Maple at Farmington, both in West Bloomfield Township, and Cooley Lake at Bogie Lake and Cooley Lake at Oxbow Lake, both on the Commerce Township/White Lake Township border.

At the Maple/Drake roundabout, there was an initial slight increase in the number of minor accidents that occurred (primarily sideswipes). This was in part because, as soon as the new roundabout opened, the nearby Maple/Farmington intersection closed for reconstruction as a roundabout.

That meant that much of the traffic that would typically use Farmington Road was re-routed to Drake, essentially doubling the amount of north/south traffic traveling through the Maple/Drake intersection.

However, the number of minor accidents at the intersection steadily declined after the roundabout opened. By December, as drivers became used to the roundabout, and with the re-opening of the Maple/Farmington intersection, the number of accidents per week had dropped to zero.

More importantly, though, there have been no serious injury accidents in any of



Aerial and ground-level photos of the Maple/Drake roundabout.

RCOC's roundabouts in the nine years since the first was constructed in 1999.

"This is what we expected," explained RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair. "Road agencies across the country report the same thing: An initial slight increase in minor, 'fender bender' accidents, followed by a reduction in overall accidents and a virtual elimination of serious injury accidents."

Bair noted it is the virtual elimination of

serious injury accidents and fatalities, combined with the ability to more efficiently move traffic, that made roundabouts so attractive to RCOC in the first place.

In fact, RCOC continues to hear from motorists that the Maple roundabouts, in particular, have improved traffic flow. Several motorists reported the addition of the roundabouts have reduced their rush-hour commute times by 20 minutes or so.

"It used to be that you would sit at both these intersections, sometimes for two or more traffic signal cycles during rush hour," Bair explained. "Now, in the heaviest of traffic you may have to wait 10 seconds. It's really amazing how much difference the roundabouts make. We've increased the capacity of Maple Road without adding a single lane to the road."

Reports have been equally positive for the Cooley Lake roundabouts, though traffic at those intersections was not as heavy to begin with. In that case, the roundabouts were built to provide a safer intersection configuration - the two intersections in such close proximity would have been very problematic had traffic signals been installed.

Buoyed by the success of these four roundabouts, as well as that of the previous four constructed by RCOC, the agency is looking forward to adding many more of the circular intersections to county roads in coming years.

Evancoe to be new Planning Director; O'Brien heads Design

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has announced promotions to fill two positions that interact regularly with local, county and state officials serving the county.

David Evancoe will replace Planning and Development Director Brian Blaesing, who retires in April. Jeff O'Brien has taken the helm of RCOC's Engineering Dept. Design Division.

Hired in December as a planner III, Evancoe brings 22 years of related experience to the job: 15 in the public sector and seven in the private sector.

Prior to joining RCOC, Evancoe spent three years as the city of Novi's planning director. In 2004, he established Evancoe Planning Solutions, which he ran until being hired by RCOC.

Prior to leading Novi's Planning Dept., Evancoe spent 12 years as senior urban



David Evancoe

planner with the city of Peoria, Illinois. He also logged several years as a landscape architect and land planner with firms in Elgin, Illinois and Irvine, California.

Evancoe holds a master's degree in urban planning and bachelor's degree in landscape architecture, both from the University of Illinois.

"I look forward to fostering a strong team to serve the Road Commission and its customers," Evancoe said. He is also looking forward to working with public officials across the county.

A resident of South Lyon, Evancoe and wife Robin have four children, two boys and two girls.

O'Brien became RCOC's Design Division manager in February, when former division head Bill Conklin became managing director of the Ingham County



Jeff O'Brien

Road Commission.

He will oversee the design of \$30 - \$50 million of road projects each year, and supervise three design squads as well as the work of several consulting companies.

A 10-year RCOC veteran, O'Brien spent the last two years as manager of RCOC's Subdivision Improvement and Development Division (SID). Prior to that, he served as a squad leader in the Design Division, worked in the Programming Division and in RCOC's Permits and Environmental Concerns Dept.

Prior to joining RCOC, O'Brien worked for an engineering firm in Windsor, Ontario. He holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the University of Windsor, and he, his wife and two sons reside in Windsor.

O'Brien is a registered professional engineer both in Michigan and Ontario.

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most to improve motorist safety and reduce traffic congestion.

"More than \$25 million seems like a lot of money. However, when you consider how great the needs are in Oakland County, this is a drop in the bucket," explained RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair. "Over the next 10 years, there will be more than \$2 billion of needs on RCOC and city and village roads."

The list of projects approved this year is unprecedented because all but one are resurfacing jobs. In the past, the list has typically included more widening jobs and fewer resurfacings.

The list of projects approved for 2012 includes nearly 30 miles of resurfacing projects. Because the federal funds require at least a 20 percent local match, the actual work completed with these funds will exceed \$32 million.

Projects approved for 2012 funding:

PROJECT	LIMITS	COMMUNITY	FED \$\$\$
Nine Mile (resurface), Novi-Taft		Novi	\$ 163,798
Twelve Mile (resurface), Evergreen-Sthfld	Sthfld/Lath. Vill.		\$ 824,800
Meadowbrook (resurface), Eight-Nine Mile		Novi	\$ 169,894
Halsted (resurface), Twelve Mile-Emerald Forest	Farm. Hills		\$ 897,893
Orchard Lake (resurface), Maple-Lone Pine	W. Bloomfield.		\$1,399,200

PROJECT	LIMITS	COMMUNITY	FED \$\$\$
Opdyke (resurface), South Blvd.-Auburn		Aub. Hills/Pontiac	\$ 911,200
Hilton (resurface), Nine Mile-Woodward Heights		Ferndale	\$ 237,355
Nine Mile (resurface), Meadowbrook-Haggerty		Novi	\$ 169,848
Inkster, (resurface), Nine Mile-Ten Mile		Southfield	\$ 702,222
Orchard Lake (resurface), 12 Mile-13 Mile		Farm. Hills	\$ 691,200
Twelve Mile (resurface), Woodward-Crooks		Royal Oak	\$ 983,483
White Lake Rd (resurface), Clement-Dixie Hghwy		Indep. Twp.	\$ 788,800
Commerce (resurface), S. Commerce-Union Lk.		Comm. Twp	\$ 1,369,600
Twelve Mile (resurface), N. Main-N. Campbell		Royal Oak	\$ 791,489
Novi (resurface), I-96-Twelve Mile		Novi	\$ 661,600
Cesar Chavez (resurface), Woodward-Montcalm		Pontiac	\$ 365,000
Rochester (resurface), Lakeville-Mack		Addison Twp.	\$ 1,212,000
Livernois (resurface), Big Beaver-Wattles		Troy	\$ 847,200
Chrysler Service Dr. (resurface), Eight-Nine Mile		Hazel Park	\$ 584,090
Chrysler Service Dr. (resurface), Nine-Ten Mile		Hazel Park	\$ 508,458
Cooley Lake (resurface), Hiller-Cass Elizabeth		Waterford Twp.	\$ 991,924
Inkster (resurface), Ten-Eleven Mile		Southfield	\$ 868,997
Lincoln (resurface), Campbell-Stephenson		Royal Oak	\$ 303,578
Southfield (widen), Mount Vernon-10 Mile		Southfield	\$7,500,000
Undetermined (pave gravel)		Undetermined	\$1,500,000
Total 2012:			\$25,433,72

CRAKE IS CHAIR, CONT'D FROM FRONT

retired senior staff engineer with General Motors, Skarritt served on the County Board of Commissioners from 1985 to 1992 and the Milford Village Council from 1966 to 1969.

The third RCOC Board member is Eric S. Wilson, who was appointed to his first term in January 2007. An attorney in private practice, Wilson previously served two terms on the county Board of Commissioners (2000 through 2003) as well as nine years on the Orion Township Board of Trustees.

RCOC Board members are appointed by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners and serve for six-year terms.

At the same meeting, the RCOC Board voted to reappoint Skarritt as the RCOC representative to the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Board, where he is the vice chairman of that board and is serving his 10th term.

ROAD REPORT

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.

Board of Road Commissioners:

Larry P. Crake, Chairman

Richard G. Skarritt, Vice-Chairman

Eric S. Wilson, Commissioner

Brent O. Bair, Managing Director

Dennis G. Kolar, Deputy Managing Director/Co. Highway Engineer



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