

ROAD REPORT

A publication of the Road Commission for Oakland County for public officials serving Oakland County www.rcocweb.org

State and RCOC budget cuts will impact winter road maintenance

Michigan's economic realities are catching up with its road agencies -- and the evidence of that may be visible in the Road Commission for Oakland County's ability to fight ice and snow this year.

RCOC has 22 fewer employees available to drive salt trucks/snow plows this year. The agency is not filling positions as employees retire or leave unless the positions are critical to agency operation. So far, RCOC is down 44 staffers since 2006, with another 18 or more positions expected to be vacated in the current fiscal year.

"Our revenues are down for the second straight year, after having been flat for 10 years, while many of our expenses have increased at double- or triple-digit rates," explained Managing Director Brent Bair.

"We have no choice but to reduce staff." RCOC's current staffing levels are the lowest the agency has seen since the late 1960s or early 1970s, when the county had several hundred thousand fewer residents,

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hundreds of thousands fewer jobs, many fewer multi-lane roads and far fewer commuters coming into the county each day.

"We simply cannot provide the same level of service today that we did 40 years ago," Bair said. "The county has changed dramatically in that time, and motorist expectations have been raised."

Motorists likely won't notice the change during smaller snowfalls. Crews will attack these as they always have.

The difference is likely to become more noticeable after large storms that take multiple days to clean up. "We'll have as many

drivers and trucks out during the initial storm response," Bair said. "However, when the first shift must take a break, there will be fewer back-up drivers available. That means it will take us longer to cleanup back roads and subdivision streets."

Bair noted RCOC will still do the best it can with the resources available. "We ask that motorists understand that we simply have fewer resources than in the past," he said. "This is frustrating for us and for our drivers -- it is very difficult to have to reduce the level of service we provide."

In addition to its own budget cuts, RCOC is reducing service on some roads due to budget cuts at the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). RCOC provides routine maintenance on state highways in the county on MDOT's behalf.

This year, MDOT has mandated that RCOC (and other road commissions that

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Ceremony marks opening of Walton

Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) officials and staff members were joined by a number of dignitaries Oct. 17 to officially open the newly widened and reconstructed section of Walton Boulevard between Squirrel and Lapeer roads in Auburn Hills.

The largest RCOC project undertaken in 2008, the \$15.6 million effort involved widening the road from two lanes to five and reconstructing the bridge over I-75. This was the first time that a local agency reconstructed an MDOT bridge.

On hand for the opening were state and local officials, including US Congressman Joe Knollenberg, who obtained \$10 million for the project.



Auburn Hills Mayor James McDonald, left, joins MDOT's Paul Ajegba, Congressman Joe Knollenberg and RCOC Chairman Larry Crake to cut the ribbon and open the newly widened road.

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Committee appointed by governor and legislature calls for increased transportation funding

Road officials across Michigan are praising the report and recommendations released in November by the Transportation Funding Task Force (TF2).

The TF2 is a 13-member body appointed by the governor and the state legislature and given the task of studying transportation funding. After studying the issue for six months, the TF2 released its conclusions and recommendations in the form of a 62-page report to the governor and legislature on Nov. 10.

The report was the basis for the push to increase road funding in the state during the 2008 "lame duck" legislative session.

"It is gratifying that this task force, with the resources of the state supporting it, has come to the same conclusion we have," observed RCOC Board Chairman Larry Crake. "The Task Force has made it clear that Michigan is woefully under funding its transportation infrastructure, and if this problem is not resolved, our infrastructure will deteriorate at a rapidly increasing rate."

The TF2 report states, "We must increase investment in transportation soon, or we will put past investment at risk, and the infrastructure and transportation service on which we rely will deteriorate."

Crake noted delaying a solution to this problem could be even more expensive. "The longer we put off repairing our road system, the more costly those repairs will be," he stated.

Where to find TF2 report

The TF2 report, as well as four supporting reports provided by the Highway, Road and Bridge (HRB) Subcommittee of the TF2 Citizens Advisory Committee can be downloaded at:

► TF2 Final Report:

<http://tinyurl.com/tf2report>

► HRB Vol 1: <http://tinyurl.com/hrbvol1>

► HRB Vol 2: <http://tinyurl.com/hrbvol2>

► HRB Vol 3: <http://tinyurl.com/hrbvol3>

► HRB Vol 4: <http://tinyurl.com/hrbvol4>

RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair, who was a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee to the TF2, explained that the TF2 concluded the state needs to invest more than \$3 billion more per year just to bring Michigan's transportation infrastructure to a "good" condition.

The report notes that bringing Michigan's transportation system up to good condition would sustain 126,000 jobs in the state and yield \$15 billion in other economic benefits.

On the other hand, if Michigan does nothing, and merely maintains the current level of transportation funding, the report notes the state will lose approximately \$1 billion per year in federal funding because transportation agencies will no longer be able to afford to provide the local match for federal dollars to which the state is entitled.

The report lays out a variety of options that the state could implement to increase

transportation funding. These include raising Michigan's gas and diesel taxes, converting the fixed-rate gas tax to a percentage of the fuel sales price, establishing a 1 percent sales tax dedicated to transportation funding, redirecting all or a portion of the existing sales tax on fuel to transportation uses, allowing local-option transportation funding and several other options.

Bair noted RCOC is supportive of any effort that would provide increased funding for roads in Oakland County.

Currently, the state gas tax and vehicle-registration fee revenues provide the vast majority of operating funds for Michigan road agencies. Because of the decline in these funds, RCOC has reduced its staff by 44 positions over the last two years, and will reduce the staff by an additional 18-plus positions during the current fiscal years, as employees retire or leave.

The Task Force also concluded that there are many things that road agencies across the state are doing well, such as effectively utilizing available data, working cooperatively together, continuously seeking improvements and sharing resources and equipment. The report notes road agencies have "been relentlessly vigilant in stretching shrinking revenues."

The bottom line, according to the TF2 report, is that Michigan's investment in its infrastructure must increase. "The one choice we cannot afford," the report states, "is to do nothing."

Subcommittee reports support TF2 conclusions

As part of the TF2 process, the governor appointed a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to advise the task force. The CAC and its subcommittees produced a variety of reports that helped guide the Task Force to its ultimate conclusions.

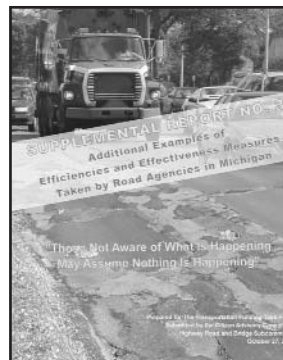
RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair was appointed by the governor to the CAC to represent all Michigan road commissions. Bair was part of the CAC's Highway, Road and Bridge (HRB) Subcommittee, which produced four reports for the TF2.

The first HRB report documented the needs on Michigan's roads, clearly showing that the current funding level is causing a rapidly deteriorating system. The second HRB report explained the method-

ology used in the first report, documenting how these conclusions were reached.

Next, the HRB produced a report that documented some of the many reforms and efficiency measures that have already been implemented by road agencies across the state. "This report opened a lot of eyes," Bair said.

"Many people assumed that Michigan's road agencies had not yet sought ways to improve efficiency or reform our operations. The fact is, because we have been underfunded for decades, finding ways to operate more efficiently has become a standard part of our operations."



One of the HRB Reports.

In fact the report documenting some of these reforms and efficiency measures was so well received by the TF2, that the body requested that the HRB Subcommittee provide even more such examples. This request led the final HRB report, which further documented reforms and efficiency measures.

"Even though we produced two reports full of examples of reforms and efficiency measures already implemented by Michigan's road agencies, we really have only scratched the surface of what road agencies have been doing for a long time," Bair said.

RCOC launches updated Internet Web site, makes information easier to access

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has launched an updated Web site which makes information about the agency easier to access and offers new ways to stay abreast of agency information.

The Web site, www.rcocweb.org (same address as the old site), offers a revamped, reorganized way to learn about RCOC and the services it offers and to communicate electronically with RCOC.

The new site also offers some new features, such as allowing viewers to sign up for "real simple syndication" (RSS) feeds.

RSS feeds allow site visitors to subscribe to the "News" section of the Web site and automatically receive all new press releases posted to the site (users must have RSS reader software on their computer, which can be downloaded for free from a variety of online sources).

The new site offers a wealth of information about the Road Commission, including downloadable versions of Road Commission publications, information about job postings (including the ability to apply for jobs online), informational videos (such as how to drive a roundabout), road project status, the RCOC "Real-Time Traffic Map" (providing real-time traffic congestion levels on many RCOC roads in the county) and much more.

The site also contains a search function, allowing users to quickly locate information within the site.

"We believe that communicating with our customers -- the motorists driving on county roads -- is critically important. The Web site is a quick and easy way to provide

two-way communications with the public that is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week," explained RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair. "The improvements to the newly redeveloped Web site allow for enhanced communications."

Web site visitors can ask questions of or offer concerns to the Road Commission via the Web site by clicking on the "Contact Us" button on the home page. This will lead them to a form that allows site visitors to post questions or leave comments. These communications are carefully tracked and, where appropriate, answers are provided by the RCOC Department of Citizen Services.

"Just as when you call the RCOC toll-free number (877-858-4804), any communication that we receive via the Internet is directed to the appropriate department or division within the agency, and where an answer is required, a complete response is provided to the person who sent the message," Bair said.

Bair added that it should be easier for visitors to the new site to find what they are looking for. "Part of our goal in redesigning the site was to make it more intuitive, so visitors could more easily find what they are looking for," he said.

Another new feature on the site is the



The home page of the newly redesigned RCOC Web site (www.rcocweb.org).

creation of the "Doing Business with RCOC" section. This is the area where businesses who are either already RCOC partners, or those who wish to bid on RCOC contracts can get information (this does not include RCOC road construction contracts). Current or potential vendors can sign up for e-mail alerts when RCOC sends out requests for bids or can view the final bid documents from recent bids.

Of course, the new site contains a wealth of information about how the agency is funded, who is on the RCOC Board of Road Commissioners, the agency's environmental efforts and much more.

pavement regardless of the time.

Bair reiterated that RCOC will continue to be guided by its policy of safety first. "If we perceive that following MDOT's new mandate will put motorists at risk, we will immediately ask that MDOT authorize additional overtime to address the situation," Bair said.

However, he added RCOC must respond to the realities of Michigan's economy. "Unfortunately, Michigan is struggling, and that is true of its road agencies as well," he said. "We will do the best we can with what we have, but unless and until our legislature provides adequate road funding, our best will be less than many motorists want and deserve."

BUDGET -- CONT'D FROM FRONT maintain state roads), must reduce overtime spent on some state routes. MDOT has divided its roads into two groups: "Orange" priority routes remain top priority, while "blue" routes will receive a somewhat reduced level of service.

In the past, all state routes, because they are high-traffic, high-speed routes, have been top priorities for RCOC.

The routes designated by MDOT as "blue" routes this year are: Woodward (M-1), Northwestern Highway (M-10), Grand River Ave. in Farmington Hills (M-5), Rochester Road in Rochester Hills (M-150), Auburn Road in Rochester Hills (old M-59), Square Lake between

Telegraph and I-75 (Business Route 75) and Ortonville Road (M-15) north of Dixie Highway. State routes not affected by this are: I-75, I-696, M-59, I-275, the freeway portion of M-10, the M-5 extension, US 24 (Telegraph Road and Dixie Highway) and M-24 (Lapeer Road).

On the impacted routes, MDOT has reduced RCOC's authority to clear the roads during overtime (anytime other than 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays). For these roads, MDOT mandates that following a snow event, RCOC clear them to the point they are "generally bare of ice and snow" in the wheel tracks, and then finish clearing the next regular work day. In the past, RCOC cleared these roads to bare

RCOC winter road maintenance facts

Below are some facts and figures related to winter road maintenance in Oakland County.

- ▶ The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) uses an average of 83,000 tons of salt per winter.
- ▶ RCOC salt trucks are kept at six garages located throughout the county.
- ▶ RCOC does not anticipate any problems getting salt this year, based on assurances from its salt vendor.
- ▶ In all, RCOC has jurisdiction over 2,700-plus miles of county roads (including subdivision and gravel roads).
- ▶ RCOC will spend approximately \$8.9 million on winter road maintenance this year alone, including approximately \$3 million to maintain the state highways for the Michigan Department of Transportation.
- ▶ RCOC expects to spend approximately \$3 million this winter on salt alone (cost per ton = \$33.19).
- ▶ All new RCOC salt trucks are equipped with computerized salting mechanisms that automatically adjust the amount of salt spread based on the vehicle's speed.
- ▶ All RCOC salt trucks are equipped with Southeastern Michigan Snow and Ice Management (SEMSIM) technology, including GPS tracking, which allows managers to monitor the trucks in real time. SEMSIM (a partnership with Wayne County, the Road Commission of Macomb County and the City of Detroit) also includes a number of sensors on each truck, providing a wealth of additional real-time data to fleet managers.
- ▶ The salt spreaders also include "pre-wetting" devices that spray salt brine on the salt as it is being spread, so that it begins

working more quickly.

- ▶ A single "salt run" for a truck can use up to 12 tons of salt.
- ▶ At temperatures below 20 degrees, salt begins to lose its effectiveness. At 0 degrees, it does virtually nothing.
- ▶ Salt is still the best option for removing snow and ice and maintaining the safest roads possible.
- ▶ RCOC keeps salt trucks loaded and ready to go 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- ▶ RCOC crews maintain state and county roads in Oakland County based on a priority system. "Critical priority" roads are those with more than 10,000 vehicles per day per lane. "Priority 1" roads are those with 2,500 to 10,000 vehicles per day per lane, while priority 2 and 3 roads have less traffic.
- ▶ RCOC typically does not use sand on paved roads because it does not melt ice and clogs storm drains.
- ▶ RCOC operates a fleet of approximately 140 snowplows/salt trucks, though all trucks are never used at the same time (some are "spares," used when others break down).

RCOC now has 10 roundabouts

With the opening of two more roundabouts this year, there are now 10 roundabouts on county roads in Oakland County. The most recent additions are the roundabouts at the intersection of 14 Mile and Farmington roads on the Farmington Hills/West Bloomfield Twp. border and at the intersection of Grand River and Lyon Center Drive in Lyon Twp.

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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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