

# Road Report

*A publication of the Road Commission for Oakland County for public officials serving Oakland County* [www.rcocweb.org](http://www.rcocweb.org)

## **Road Commission celebrates 100 years:**

# **Special meeting, open house mark RCOC Centennial**

One hundred years is a long time -- and reaching that milestone is worthy of a little celebration.

With that in mind, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) conducted two events recently to commemorate its centennial: a May 18 open house held at RCOC's Waterford Township garage and open to the public and a May 7 special Board meeting. The Board meeting was on the actual date of the first RCOC Board meeting in 1913.

The open house was a hit with Oakland County residents as well as RCOC staff and retirees. There were amazing displays, creative snacks, a slew of orange-shirted staff serving as ambassadors for the agency and a lot of fun for all. From the numerous retirees to the many children roaming the garage -- and everyone in between, a good time was had by all.

The event was kicked off with an opening ceremony in which RCOC's Board members addressed the crowd. They were joined by former Managing

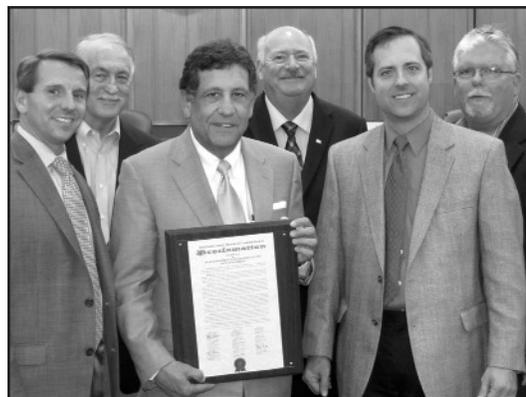


*Above left, Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson (center) presented the Road Commission with a special proclamation during the open house. Accepting were Managing Director Dennis Kolar (left) and Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz. At right, Senator Mike Kowall (center) and Representative Eileen Kowall (right) present a legislative proclamation to the RCOC Board (left to right): Commissioner Eric Wilson, RCOC Managing Director Kolar, Vice Chairman Ron Fowkes and Chairman Greg Jamian.*

Director Brent Bair, who described some of the agency's most noteworthy accomplishments over the last 30-plus years, including the incredible reduction seen in the county's traffic-fatality rate since RCOC declared safety its top priority in

1978 and the agency's shift to a greater focus on customer service.

Also at the ceremony, Michigan Senator Mike Kowall and Representative Eileen Kowall presented the RCOC Board  
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*Above left, during the open house, retired Managing Director Brent Bair explained why the agency changed its name and logo in the 1980s (he's holding the old logo). Above right, Oakland County Commission Chairman Mike Gingell, at left, and Vice Chairman Jeff Matis, second from right, are joined by (left to right) RCOC Commissioner Eric Wilson, Chairman Greg Jamian, Vice Chairman Ron Fowkes and Managing Director Dennis Kolar to present the RCOC Board with a proclamation for the County Board of Commissioners.*

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## More from the May 7 Centennial Board meeting



*Above, the RCOC Board receives a congratulatory resolution from Oakland County Commissioner Phil Weipert (at left). He's joined by (left to right): RCOC Vice Chairman Ron Fowkes, Chairman Greg Jamian, Commissioner Eric Wilson and RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. At right, Chairman Jamian discusses the agency's history during the special centennial Board meeting.*



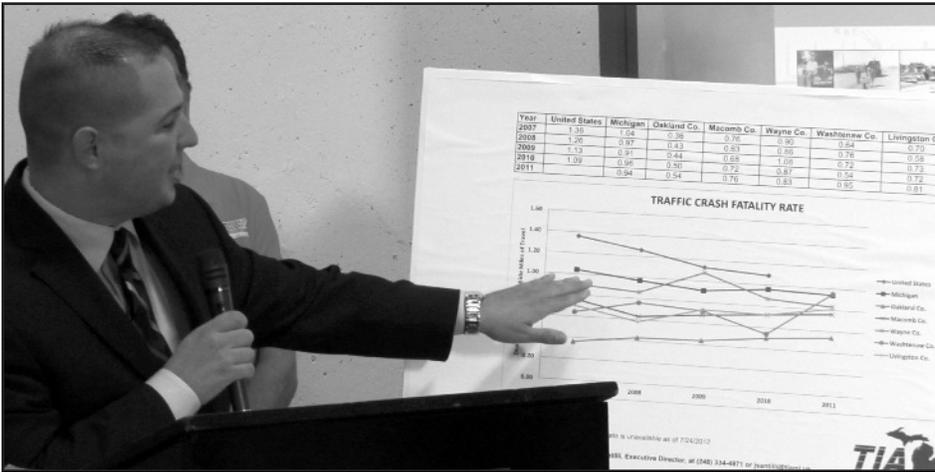
*Above left, the RCOC Board chats with the audience during the Centennial Board meeting. Above right, former Road Commissioner Richard Skarritt addresses the Board, while audience members look on.*



*At left, RCOC Chairman Greg Jamian laughs with Julia Ruffin, staff member to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, following the Centennial Board meeting. At right, RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar reads the Certificate of Recognition sent by Governor Rick Snyder and Lt. Gov. Brian Calley to commemorate the event.*



# More from the May 18 Centennial Open House



Above left, Traffic Improvement Association (TIA) Executive Director Jim Santilli points to the chart showing how Oakland County’s traffic fatality rate declined more rapidly than the state or national rates. At right, RCOC Vice Chairman Ron Fowkes (right) talks with County Commissioner Jim Runestad.



Above left, the food area of the open house was a popular destination. Also popular was the tour of the salt dome (above center). At right, RCOC Data Communications Specialist Glenn Davies (right) talks about the agency’s traffic signals display with Richard Beaubien of Troy.



Above left, the “orange mafia” (RCOC administrators volunteering at the open house). They are (left to right): Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz, Finance Director Dennis Lockhart, Dept. of Customer Services Director David “CZ” Czerniakowski, Highway Maintenance Director Darryl Heid, Managing Director Dennis Kolar, General Counsel Pat Carty, Planning & Environmental Concerns Dir. David Evancoe and Public Information Officer Craig Bryson. Above right, RCOC Chairman Greg Jamian chats with John Jones, the longest serving RCOC retiree (worked for RCOC for 46 years).

# RCOC completes three-year rolling budget; revenues stabilizing but still down from a decade ago

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) recently completed its Three-Year Financial Plan, or rolling three-year budget, covering the years 2014 through 2016, and the future continues to pose challenges for the agency.

This document allows RCOC to plan for anticipated revenue and needs changes in the coming years. It is compiled through an extensive planning process conducted by RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar, Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz and all the agency's department heads. This is RCOC's 33rd annual three-year plan.

RCOC Finance Dir. Dennis Lockhart leads the process. He estimates future-year revenues based on his own analysis of revenue sources in conjunction with revenue projections provided by the state.

The plan notes state road funding, derived primarily from the state-collected gas and diesel taxes and vehicle registration fees -- the primary sources of road funding in Michigan -- declined statewide by a cumulative 6.7 percent from 2002 through 2012.

That decline, coupled with dramatic increases in nearly all costs associated with maintaining roads, have already hobbled RCOC, causing a 32 percent reduction in

staff since 2007 and reductions in the level of service in nearly all areas.

The document calls for further reductions in staff in each of the years covered -- despite the fact the agency is already at staffing levels not seen since the 1950s. The plan also calls for further deferment of the purchase of sorely needed road-maintenance equipment. Consequently, the agency anticipates service levels will continue to drop during the three-year period covered in the document.

"Realistically, we expect to have to further reduce the frequency with which we perform nearly all our services, from grading gravel roads to patching potholes to repairing traffic signs and signals," stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. He added it also means the agency will have fewer snow-plow/salt truck drivers, meaning it will take longer to clean up following storms.

The Financial Plan projects state road funding will be stagnant during the three-year period. "The good news is the state funds seem to have stopped declining," Kolar observed.

Unless there is an increase in state road funding, the Financial Plan calls for the elimination of an additional 28 positions in 2014, 53 in 2015 and another 53 in 2016.

"The drastic and continued reductions in the workforce will have an increasingly significant impact on the level of service provided to the public," Kolar stated. As has been the case with staff reductions to this point, future staff reductions will be done through attrition if possible.

In addition to the reduced staffing levels, another significant impact of the state road-funding crisis is the inability of the agency to replace aging trucks and other pieces of equipment. RCOC uses a sophisticated fleet maintenance

analysis process to determine when it is more cost effective to replace equipment as opposed to continuing to maintain the equipment.

**"The drastic and continued reductions in the workforce will have an increasingly significant impact on the level of service provided to the public."**

**- Dennis Kolar,  
RCOC Managing Director**

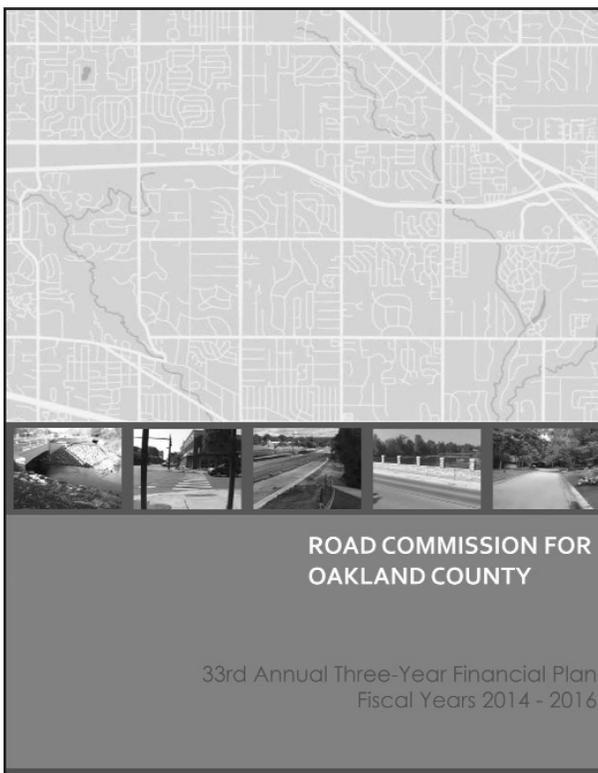
RCOC has not been able to replace equipment at this critical point for a number of years, as there has not been funding available. That is expected to continue to be the case in 2014 through 2016, barring a change in funding from the state.

By 2014, the plan projects RCOC will have a deferred-equipment-replacement deficit of \$25 million. That number is expected to grow to \$29.6 million in 2015 and \$35 million in 2016.

Other service areas where RCOC expects to make cuts between 2014 and 2016 include: gravel road maintenance, paved road maintenance, traffic management, drainage, guardrail maintenance and sign maintenance.

"We have made -- and will continue to make -- many changes in the way we do business in order to operate more efficiently," Kolar said. "We are cutting our costs every way and everywhere we can. However, without an increase in state road funding, our service level will continue to drop. The residents and businesses in this county deserve a better level of service, but there simply is no money to provide the level of service they deserve."

The RCOC 2014-2016 Financial Plan is available on the RCOC Web site at [www.rcocweb.org](http://www.rcocweb.org) (click on the "Publications" item in the "About Us" pull-down tab at the top left corner of the page, then scroll to the "RCOC Financial Documents" category and click on "RCOC Three-Year Financial Plan, 2014-2016").



*The cover of the Three-Year Financial Plan.*

**Centennial Feature:**

# Thoughts from the former managing directors: Brent Bair and John Grubba

*By Brent O. Bair*

Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) employees and retirees should be proud of their accomplishments, and Oakland County's citizens owe them a debt of gratitude. Why? Because these public employees have accomplished some amazing fetes over the years. It is due to their accomplishments that RCOC continues to be respected nationally as a leader in its field.

Often, the most significant accomplishments occur through change, and a great number of significant changes occurred at RCOC in the 34-plus years I worked there. I can't cover them all, so the following two strike me as the most significant.

The single most significant change affecting both RCOC and the traveling public was the selection of safety as the agency's No. 1 priority in 1978. An innovative highway risk-management program was adopted, and all operating departments were charged with identifying ways of improving road and employee safety.

Crash data was analyzed extensively and problem crash locations were reviewed. Road-safety improvements were required to be included in road-improvements projects. But, one of the most important and long lasting changes was the increased emphasis on safety improvements in major federally funded projects.

An objective point system was created to select projects, and RCOC staff convinced the cities and villages to agree to make safety the highest category for points. Thus, the projects that would reduce crashes the most were the first to get funded.

Since the early 1980s, over half a billion in federal dollars has been spent on county, city and village road improvements with a safety priority. The same safety priority was built into the point system for the selection of over a quarter billion dollars of Transportation Economic Development Fund projects RCOC staff was able to bring to the county.

Later, incorporation of Intelligent Transportation Systems -- or ITS -- such as adaptive traffic signals, as well as the advent of roundabouts, continued to increase safety at intersections. Today,



*Brent Bair was managing director 1993-2011.*

RCOC is recognized as a national leader in ITS and is home to the highest concentration of roundabouts in the state.

By 2007, the fatality rate on Oakland County roads dropped to one of the lowest in the world for an area its size and population. Due to the number of lives saved since 1978, there are probably children and even grandchildren who would not have been born but for the safety improvement efforts of RCOC staff.

Customer service began receiving a great deal more attention in the early 1980s as well. This included beginning biennial Strategic Planning meetings with officials of virtually every city, village and township in the county in order to build better relationships with the communities.

The tone of these meetings changed over time, becoming more positive as the community officials got to know RCOC's leadership and what RCOC could and could not do. This process paid off several times over the years, when those same communities stood up for RCOC when then-Governor John Engler attempted to abolish road commissions.

To our knowledge, RCOC is the only governmental agency its size in the state that undertakes such meetings with the leadership of each of its communities.

Even the change in the agency's name to the Road Commission for Oakland County was due to the increased focus on customers. It was noted that the largest words on the previous logo on the sides of the trucks was "Oakland County" with "Road Commission" below that in smaller letters. The impression left with many was that the agency was a department of the county.

As a result of an employee suggestion, the name and logo were changed. On the logo, the words were reversed with the largest being "Road Commission" to reflect that the agency was not part of the county and the word "for" was added to convey that the Road Commission was here "for" the citizens of Oakland County.

For these, and many more reasons which I do not have the space to address, the citizens of Oakland County should be proud of RCOC's employees. The agency would not be the leader it is in so many

areas today -- including safety and customer service -- were it not for the dedication of RCOC's employees to the citizens of Oakland County.

*By John L. Grubba*

In November 1912, the people of Oakland County went to the polls and decided, among other things, to establish a county road system to be administered by a board of county road commissioners to be elected or appointed in the first instance, as determined

by the county board of supervisors. The Board was declared by statute to be a body corporate, which could sue and be sued; and was charged by statute and the vote of the people to provide a reasonably safe and convenient road system.

A special meeting of the current Board of Road Commissioners was conducted on May 7, the date the Board first met in 1913, to commemorate this centennial event. It seems an appropriate time to ask whether this Board and the thousands of employees over the past 100 years has met its charge.

A few years ago, Brent Bair advised me that Oakland County roads had been determined to be among the safest in the world in terms of traffic fatalities for a community our size and population. Much better than "reasonably safe," I'd say.

The Board had jurisdiction over no roads when it first met. Today, it is in charge of more than 2,700 miles, including paved primary roads, gravel roads, subdivision streets and lots of bridges.

The traffic-control system and the maintenance operations are recognized as among the more advanced in the world and contribute every day to improving both the safety and convenience of the system, no matter the weather or economic conditions. Again, much more than "reasonably convenient," I'd say.

I think this Board and its employees, over the past century have performed the task it was created for in an exemplary manner. Of course, I have a very strong bias in this matter.



*John Grubba was managing director 1973-1993.*

## 100 YEARS -- CONTINUED FROM FRONT

with a proclamation from the State Legislature. A staff member for Representative Brad Jacobsen also spoke, conveying Jacobsen's praise for the agency.

Traffic Improvement Association (TIA) Executive Director Jim Santilli presented RCOC with a proclamation recognizing the agency's significant contributions to motorist safety in the county.

For the event, each Road Commission department created a display to represent the department's activities and history. From the row of functioning traffic signals dating to the 1930s, to the plow truck posed in snow to the historical documents displayed by the Planning and Environmental Concerns and Legal departments, there was something for everyone.

At the May 7 Board meeting, Board Chairman Greg Jamian reviewed the minutes of the May 7, 1913 inaugural Board meeting and recognized those agency retirees from recent decades who served the most years with RCOC.

"It is nothing short of amazing that it has been 100 years, exactly, since this Board of Road Commissioners first met." Jamian told the audience at the meeting. "Over that 100 years, the world, our nation, our state, Oakland County and certainly the transportation industry have all changed dramatically.

"One Hundred years ago, our graders were pulled by horses, road striping was done by hand with paint brushes -- in the rare cases where it was done -- and plowing snow was still a radical new concept. Most of Oakland County was occupied by farmland and cottages, occasionally interspersed with small villages and a few modest cities. The county had a population of about 50,000."

Since that time, however, Jamian pointed out, the county has experienced almost uninterrupted growth. "In fact, during the vast majority of our existence, this Road Commission has struggled with traffic congestion -- from the spread of the Model T to the Post-World War II boom to the growth of the 1980s and '90s."

Jamian noted that while the agency is proud of its past, it's also excited about the future. "Where do we go from here?" he asked rhetorically. "This Board and this agency are committed to remaining a national leader in our field. With the dedication and commitment of our top-notch staff, we will continue to find ways to become more efficient and even better at what we do."

## 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](mailto:cbryson@rcoc.org).

### Board of Road Commissioners:

**Gregory C. Jamian, Chairman**

**Ronald J. Fowkes, Vice Chairman**

**Eric S. Wilson, Commissioner**

**Dennis G. Kolar, PE, Managing Director**

**Gary Piotrowicz, PE, PTOE, Dep. Managing Dir./  
County Highway Engineer**

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**[www.rcocweb.org](http://www.rcocweb.org)**

## Contacting RCOC

If your constituents need information about a road project or want to report a pothole, traffic signal problem or other road issue, they should call RCOC's **Department of Customer Services** toll free at:

**(877) 858-4804**

**OR**

Send us an e-mail via the **RCOC Web site:**  
**[www.rcocweb.org](http://www.rcocweb.org)**

**ROAD COMMISSION**

**for OAKLAND COUNTY**

**31001 Lahser Road**

**Beverly Hills, MI 48025**