

Road Report

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

It's official -- Michigan has a new road-funding program

As has been widely reported, on Tuesday, Nov. 10, Governor Rick Snyder signed a package of new Michigan road-funding bills into law. While it is good to finally see action in Lansing, and while the package will certainly increase road funding, RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar notes it is not exactly the package he was looking for.

Road funding has been on the Lansing legislative "to-do list" for quite some time. In May, the Michigan voters spoke loud and clear on Proposal 1, a long-term road-funding solution, by voting it down. The resounding message from voters was for the Legislature to find another solution.

The solution was a series of seven bills that finally cleared the House and Senate



Governor Rick Snyder signs the road funding package into law on November 10.

in early November, paving the way for the governor's signature. The package will potentially generate \$1.2 billion in new road funding. However, the full amount will not be seen until 2021, six

years from now.

Of that amount, \$600 million will come from an increase in the gas tax and vehicle registration fees beginning Jan. 1, 2017. The current gas tax of 19 cents per gallon will rise to 26.3 cents per gallon.

The diesel tax of 15 cents per gallon will also rise to 26.3 cents per gallon, bringing truckers in line with what others are paying at the pump.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2022, the fuel-tax rates will be indexed to inflation. What does this mean? Rates on gasoline and diesel will rise each year based on the Consumer Price Index (the rate

of inflation) or 5 percent, whichever is less. This will ensure that the "buying power" of the fuel tax revenues does not decline each year, which is what happened
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14 Mile/Orchard Lake roundabout and "triangle" project completed

Much to the relief of area motorists, traffic is moving better than ever through the 14 Mile/Orchard Lake Road intersection on the West Bloomfield Township/Farmington Hills border, following the Road Commission for Oakland County's (RCOC) September completion of the new roundabout and "triangle" project at the intersection.

In addition to the roundabout, the project included the realignment of 14 Mile Road east of Northwestern Highway and the reconstruction of Northwestern Highway, 14 Mile and Orchard Lake in the "triangle" area.

The realignment of 14 Mile Road east of Northwestern Highway was completed in 2014, with the rest of the work taking place in 2015. During this year's work, the 14 Mile/Orchard Lake Road intersection



An aerial view of the "triangle," with the roundabout on the left and Northwestern Highway on the right.

was closed and Northwestern Highway
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RCOC's spot resurfacing work proves popular at more than 115 locations across the county

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) was able to improve more than 115 locations with some of the worst pavement in the county this year through its spot resurfacing program.

The program involves heavy-maintenance resurfacing work on short stretches of road -- the old pavement is "milled" off and new asphalt is applied. The sections selected were identified by RCOC Maintenance superintendents along with recommendations from communities and residents. In all, more than seven miles of roads throughout Oakland County were improved through the program.

"This is a cost-effective way to repair the very worst spots, and the program has



RCOC's contractor, Pavex, works on one of the spot resurfacing locations. The work includes removing old pavement.

proven very popular with residents and communities alike," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. Kolar

added that the warmer-than-usual fall allowed RCOC to expand the program. He noted the agency has also added additional funding to the spot resurfacing program budget that will ensure the program will continue in the spring.

"While this is not a long-term solution, such as reconstructing or resurfacing an entire road, it is a far less expensive way to address the worst areas," Kolar added.

Since the work entailed smaller sections of roadways, the roads remained open during the work, and traffic was minimally impacted.

The prime contractor for the heavy-maintenance work was Pavex Corporation of Trenton. The work was finished for the year in November.

RCOC reminds drivers not to pass snowplow trucks on right

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) reminds motorists it's never a good idea to pass a snowplow truck on the right side, and it's especially dangerous when the truck has a wing plow, which is often not clearly visible from behind.

Wing plows are attached to the sides of plow trucks. When in use, they extend out from the side of the truck on an angle, allowing the truck to clear an additional six feet of roadway. When not in use, the plow is retracted.

RCOC currently has 16 plow trucks equipped with wing plows, with another 10 expected to arrive in the coming months.



FUNDING -- CONT'D FROM FRONT

following the last gas-tax increase in 1997.

Vehicle-registration fees will also increase by 20 percent beginning Jan. 1, 2017. Additionally, there will be an increased registration fee for hybrid and electric vehicles; however, this is a small segment of the automotive population on our roads today.

"The troubling and 'stay tuned' part of the equation," Kolar explained, "is the other \$600 million. This money is going to come from the state's General Fund, which means other programs and services may get cut."

Kolar noted the Legislature's hope is that the economy will continue to grow. That would mean the General Fund would continue to grow and allow the \$600 million to be taken from the fund without having to cut any other programs.

"However, that is based on the assumption that the economy will continue to grow at the present rate," Kolar said. "And, while that would be great, history tells us that the economy is cyclical, and that it periodically slows down. If that happens, the Legislature would likely have to decide whether to cut road funding or some other important state service."

What General Fund categories could be cut? Potential targets could include schools, local governments, prisons, State Police, health services, etc.

These bills also provide slight income-tax and homestead property-tax cuts as well. However, these will reduce the dollars available in the state's General Fund. Other potential threats to the General Fund include anticipated, future increases in health-care costs and other future state expenses.

That means future legislators could grapple with taking a growing amount for

roads out of a potentially shrinking General Fund. Consequently, some observers question how secure the General Fund portion of the new road money really is.

"'Legislate now and pay later' means we wait five years for full implementation of the package," the managing director observed, "and that is \$6 billion in road funding we won't see, because of the delayed implementation."

So, what does the package mean for RCOC? It's not completely clear yet. The latest estimate is that it will generate a little over \$40 million in new funds annually when fully implemented in 2022, assuming the Legislature comes through with the General Fund dollars.

Less clear is how much RCOC will receive in the earlier years (it will receive nothing before 2017). Stay tuned for further details as they become available.

RCOC installs first "smart ditch"

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is always looking for innovative ways to solve issues -- even when it comes to roadside ditches.

The latest innovation RCOC utilized in this area is "smart ditch" technology. Smart ditch refers to a high-density polyethylene (HDPE) ditch-lining system that is designed to deal with areas subject to frequent erosion caused by storm water run-off. The material is recyclable and manufactured by the Penda Corporation in Portage, Wisconsin.

Over the summer, RCOC Highway Maintenance Department staff installed the first smart ditch on Tienken Road between Sheldon and Washington roads in Rochester Hills. In the past, the ditch in this area frequently eroded, requiring regular maintenance by RCOC staff.

The lining system interlocks and is anchored to an area that is excavated to the specifications of the liner. While more time consuming than standard ditch excavation, installation of the ditch liner is relatively easy once the technique is learned by staff. Each section is 8 to 10 feet long and weighs approximately 75 pounds. The material's lifespan is about 20 years.

The crew installed more than 290



The RCOC crew installing the smart ditch along Tienken Road in Rochester Hills.

feet of ditch liner. The project took close to 15 days to complete. However, the work included precise ditch excavation along with the installation of the HDPE liner.

Going forward, RCOC staff should not have to address erosion-related issues in that area -- a problem that frequently interrupted water flow in the old ditch. RCOC staff will closely monitor and evaluate the smart ditch over the next several months to determine if the system is viable for consideration in other areas of Oakland County.

RCOC images and videos available on Flickr, YouTube

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) continues to post new photos and videos on its social media accounts. In addition to its Twitter and Facebook accounts, RCOC also maintains Flickr and YouTube accounts.

Flickr is an online photo sharing site, where RCOC has posted photos on a variety of topics including individual road projects, winter operations, equipment and much more. To access the site, visit the RCOC Website home page (www.rcocweb.org) and click on the "Road Commission for Oakland County Photo Album" link in the "Quick Links" section on the bottom right of the page.

The RCOC YouTube channel contains a number of videos by and about the Road Commission as well as videos produced by others about relevant topics. To access the RCOC YouTube channel, click on the "RCOC YouTube Channel" link in the "Quick Links" section on bottom right of the RCOC Website homepage.

TRIANGLE -- CONT'D FROM FRONT

was limited to two lanes of traffic. "This project has been in the works for many years, and it was great to see it come to fruition," stated RCOC Chairman Ron Fowkes. "This is one of the most significant projects that we have taken on in recent years. The new road configuration will ease congestion while improving safety and access to businesses throughout the area."

RCOC marked the opening of the roundabout with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Sept. 21. For the event, RCOC leaders were joined by officials from the City of Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield Township, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Oakland County commissioners and state and federal elected officials.

"We thank the area businesses and residents for being patient throughout the construction," stated RCOC Vice Chairman Eric Wilson. "Detouring the traffic allowed for the project to move along expeditiously."

Various pedestrian access points are also part of the new configuration. Installation of High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk (HAWK) pedestrian crosswalk beacons at the roundabout will assure that pedestrian access is maintained in the safest manner possible.

The roundabout will ease traffic congestion, improve the environment, reduce accidents and provide cost savings through the elimination of the traffic signals at the 14 Mile/Orchard Lake intersection.

The improvements were part of the larger Northwestern Connector project, which is a partnership of RCOC, MDOT, West Bloomfield Township and the City of Farmington Hills. The Northwestern Connector project involves road improvements intended to alleviate congestion and help move traffic as Northwestern Highway would have if it had been constructed beyond Orchard Lake Road as originally planned in the 1950s.

Previously constructed Northwestern

Connector project improvements include the roundabouts at 14 Mile and Farmington Road, Maple and Drake and Maple and Farmington as well as the widening of 14 Mile to three lanes west of Orchard Lake Road.

The Northwestern Connector project involved significant input from the public and local community governments over many years through numerous public meetings and hearings. That input led to the plan that is now being implemented.

"The public input for the planning of this project definitely helped improve traffic conditions throughout the project," stated Road Commissioner Greg Jamian. "We thank the businesses for sticking with us through the construction and the citizens for their patience and continued support of these businesses. I believe the long-term benefit will prove worthwhile."

For more information on the Northwestern Connector project, visit: <http://www.nwconnector.com>.

A reminder: How to drive a roundabout

Modern roundabouts are different than traditional intersections, and they require some different driving techniques. Listed below are the steps to follow as you navigate a modern roundabout.

1. SLOW DOWN

Smaller roundabouts require speeds of 15 mph. Larger roundabouts allow for speeds of 20-25 mph. Watch for pedestrians.

2. PICK YOUR LANE

Before entering the roundabout be aware of your intended exit and pick the appropriate lane. Look for the green guide signs and black-on-white lane-use signs as you approach the roundabout. These provide directions for roundabout use.

The rules are similar to other multi-lane intersections. Make a left-turn from the furthest-left lane and a right-turn from the furthest-right lane. For a multi-lane roundabout, the left lane allows for going straight, turning left or making a U-turn. The right lane allows for going straight or making a right turn. When entering and navigating the roundabout, follow the lane lines.

3. YIELD AT THE ENTRY

Always yield to traffic already in the roundabout and to your left. The yield sign and pavement markings will show you where to stop if you need to. Yield to bicyclists either in the roundabout or in the crosswalks and yield to pedestrians in the crosswalks.

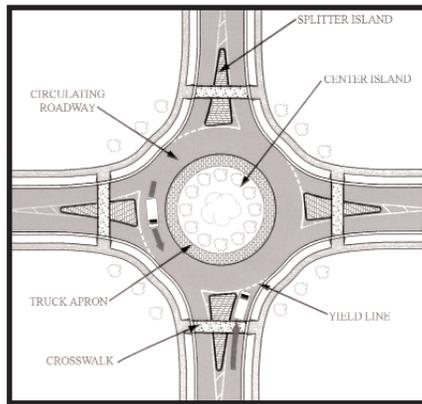
4. NEVER PASS IN THE ROUNDABOUT

5. ALWAYS CHECK YOUR REAR-VIEW MIRRORS

Always check your rear-view mirrors for other vehicles before changing lanes to exit the roundabout. If you cannot move to the outside lane safely, simply travel through the roundabout circle again, until there is an opening. Once you're in the circle, keep right. A roundabout is a one-way street, and the circulating car has the right of way.

6. GIVE WAY TO LARGE VEHICLES; EXIT FOR EMERGENCY VEHICLES

Allow large vehicles the extra turning radius needed to navigate the roundabout properly. Never pass or drive next to a large vehicle in the roundabout. If you see an emergency vehicle coming, exit the roundabout as quickly as possible -- don't pull over within the roundabout.



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

ROAD REPORT

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

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