

Road Report

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

Annual bridge report reveals RCOC structures in good shape

An annual report presented in October to the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Board of Road Commissioners by the Great Lakes Engineering Group, RCOC's bridge inspection consultant, revealed that the agency's bridges are in fairly decent condition.

According to the report, 61 percent of RCOC's 107 bridges greater than 20 feet in length are in good condition, while 17 percent are fair, 9 percent are poor and 13 percent are critical.

"We've been very aggressive about going after available dollars for bridge preventative maintenance work as well as for bridge replacements," explained RCOC Board Chairman Ron Fowkes. He noted the Road Commission has completely replaced 19 bridges over the last 11 years and performed preventive maintenance work on 8 bridges in the last two years alone.

Fowkes added that while RCOC would like to bring all its bridges up to good con-



A number of RCOC bridges, such as this one on Avon Road in Rochester Hills, have been replaced in recent years.

dition, it is not worried that any of its bridges are at risk of falling down. "That's because every bridge greater than 20 feet in length receives a detailed inspection every two years," he explained.

"At the first sign of deterioration, the frequency of inspections is increased, and

continues to increase as deterioration advances. Because of this, it's highly unlikely that a bridge on our system could advance to the point of being at risk of collapse without us closing it well before that."

Great Lakes Engineering Group
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Road Commission prepared for winter weather

Winter in Southeast Michigan can be challenging. But the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is on the job and ready for what Mother Nature can bring.

The Road Commission has reviewed its winter plowing and salting procedures with its truck drivers and prepared its trucks and plows -- all in anticipation of winter weather.

This year, for the fifth year in a row, RCOC has hired part-time, temporary snowplow/salt-truck drivers to augment its full-time staff.

"The part-time, temporary winter help is a great way to ensure we have enough drivers available," explained RCOC Chairman Ron Fowkes. "We have had to reduce our number of full-time staff over the last 10 years, so hiring additional temporary staff definitely helps with that effort."

While the addition of the temporary,



RCOC this year introduced some quick-response trucks that allow speedy response to isolated icing situations.

part-time workers helps to alleviate some of the strain caused by staff reductions, RCOC continues to struggle with aging equipment.

"We are slowly working toward replacing an aging fleet of trucks," said RCOC Vice Chairman Eric Wilson. "Nonetheless, we are ready to take on the winter."

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RCOC employees Willis Greer, left, and John Karns during the shooting of the videos. Videographer Rachel Sweet is filming at left.

Road Commission creates videos to remind motorists not to veer for deer

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) took the occasion of Michigan's firearm deer hunting season in November to bring attention to the deer/car crash problem and to remind motorists not to "veer for deer."

To do this, RCOC produced two short videos on the topic. In the videos, two RCOC staff members, who are also hunters, remind drivers deer move around more in the fall, and warn them to be alert.

They also remind drivers it's better to hit a deer than to veer out of your lane to avoid a deer -- doing so can cause a driver to swerve into oncoming traffic or off the road and lose control.

"Most fatalities and serious-injury accidents happen as a result of swerving into oncoming traffic or veering off the road and losing control of the vehicle to avoid hitting a deer," said RCOC Vice Chairman Eric Wilson. "For your own safety and that of other motorists, be extra cautious and do not veer for deer," he added.

According to the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning, Oakland County had the most vehicle-deer crashes in 2015 of any county in the state -- 1,873 were reported throughout the county.

Overall in Michigan, motorists reported

more than 47,000 vehicle-deer crashes in 2015. That includes 1,132 people injured and 11 people killed (including five motorcycle riders) according to the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning.

Here are a few safety tips:

- ▶ Stay awake and alert
- ▶ Wear a safety belt
- ▶ Most deer are active in the early morning and at dusk/in the evening; pay close attention when driving by wooded and farmland areas during these times
- ▶ If you see a deer SLOW DOWN; there are likely more nearby
- ▶ Never swerve; instead brake slowly, stay in your lane and bring the vehicle under control if the crash is unavoidable
- ▶ The safest action is hitting the deer

RCOC's "Don't Veer for Deer" videos are posted on the RCOC Youtube channel and on the RCOC Website (www.rcocweb.org -- click on "RCOC Videos" in the "Helpful Links" section at the bottom of the home page. One of the videos approaches the issue from a serious point of view, while the second uses a little humor to emphasize the message.

The videos were produced by Rachel Sweet, Lawrence Tech University student studying media communications.

Baldwin will be biggest projects for next couple of years

Big changes are coming to a section of Baldwin Road in Orion Township starting next year.

Having been in the pipeline for literally decades, the project will widen and reconstruct Baldwin between Morgan and Waldon, including the addition of five roundabouts. The project is expected to take several years to complete and cost approximately \$37 million.

The project is funded through a mixture of federal dollars, township contributions and Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) funds. The project was required to go through a federal environmental assessment process which involves considering all possible design alternatives and taking into account the needs of the community.

It will be one of the largest projects RCOC undertakes over the next couple of years. Sections of the two-lane road will be widened to five lanes, while others will be widened to a four-lane boulevard.

For more information, see the project page on RCOC's Website, www.rcocweb.org (click on "Road Projects" and select "Baldwin Road Construction 2017-2018") or visit RCOC's Baldwin Road Reconstruction Facebook page (www.facebook.com/BaldwinRd/).



BRIDGES -- CONT'D FROM FRONT specializes in bridge inspections and has some of the most qualified bridge experts in the state. Bridge inspections involve close examination of the critical superstructure, such as bridge beams, that is under the bridge deck and therefore out of sight. They can involve inspectors in scuba diving gear getting in the water under a bridge to examine under-water elements of the substructure.

"When our inspections indicate a bridge has reached a level of deterioration that affects its ability to carry certain weights, we typically reduce the amount of weight that can legally be driven across the bridge in order to slow the rate of deterioration," Fowkes said. He added that these restrictions typically don't impact passenger cars but generally effect commercial trucks.

RCOC expects to perform preventa-

tive maintenance on two bridges in 2017: both on 12 Mile over the Rouge River in Southfield. In 2018, RCOC expects to replace one bridge (Wixom Road over the Huron River on the Commerce Township/Milford Township border) and conduct preventative maintenance on three additional bridges. Bridges are selected for replacement or preventative maintenance based on the inspection results.

Longtime RCOC Finance director retires, new director hired

While many governmental agencies have been rocked by financial challenges and scandals in recent years, the Road Commission for Oakland County has been a bastion of stability.

A lot of the credit for that goes to long-time Finance Director Dennis Lockhart who retired Dec. 1 after 30 years with the agency and 24 as Finance director. He was replaced by Melissa Williams.

During Lockhart's time, stability has been the norm at RCOC. In fact, during the Great Recession, when nearly every governmental agency in the country laid off employees, RCOC reduced its staff by 35 percent without laying off a single staff member.

"I'm very proud of that," Lockhart said. He attributed that in large part to RCOC's Financial Planning process, which he led for years. The process involves a three-year rolling budget that is updated every year and is able to project and react to financial changes.

"Our Financial Plan has helped us to navigate through the rough years," the former director noted.

Lockhart says he is most proud of the people he has been able to work with at RCOC over the years. "We have such great people -- friendly, competent, hard working, always ready to lend a hand."

He is also proud, though, of the agency's Retirement System and Retiree Health Care Trust. "The Retirement System Board of



*Former Finance Director
Dennis Lockhart and new Director
Melissa Williams*

Trustees has been diligent," he noted. "The plan is well funded and well run."

The former director noted he had the opportunity to work with the best external partners as well. "We were fortunate to receive outstanding customer service from our auditors, consultants, actuaries and custodial bank. We had the best," he stated.

Ultimately, Lockhart feels his 30 years of work at RCOC was worthwhile. "I have always tried to contribute to the agency to help make it the best it can be," he said. "Everybody wants to feel they've made a difference."

Lockhart and his wife plan to remain in their long-time home in Livonia after retirement. Their two adult children live nearby. They will do some traveling, and he plans to work on the house.

New Finance Director Williams may be new to RCOC, but she is not new to

the world of finance or to road commissions in Michigan.

In fact, for the last eight years, Williams served as the Finance Director at the Genesee County Road Commission. She started her career in accounting as a governmental auditor at an accounting firm for three years before spending nine years at the City of Saginaw, including serving as the city's controller.

"My goal," Williams said, "is to continue the excellent work that Dennis Lockhart has done here and to find ways to best utilize the funding available to RCOC." Williams added she is excited to be at RCOC.

"I came here because of the people," she noted. "There is a positive atmosphere where people take pride in their work. I wanted to be a part of that."

Outside of work, Williams is a busy mother, with a 12-year-old daughter and a 21-year-old son. She lives in Frankenmuth, but hopes to move closer to RCOC's Beverly Hills administrative offices at some point.

Williams holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from Northwood University. She serves on the County Road Association of Michigan Finance and Human Resources Committee, the Audit Committee, the Accounting Manual Committee and the State Trunkline Negotiation Committee.

Don't pass plow trucks on right side

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) reminds motorists not to pass snowplow trucks on the right side -- many trucks now have "wing" plows that extend from the right side of the truck, making passing on the right very dangerous.

Wing plows fold out from the body of the truck to allow additional plowing capacity. They are used to simultaneously clear shoulders at the same time the truck is clearing a through lane.

"You often can't tell from behind that the wing plow is out," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "Each year, we have people who try to pass a truck on the right and run into the wing plow. This can be a very dangerous situation for motorists."

WINTER -- CONT'D FROM FRONT

"The winter season historically makes or breaks a road commission budget," Wilson added. "A lighter winter will definitely help the Road Commission plan for maintenance activities after winter is over."

RCOC Board Member Greg Jamian noted the RCOC team is constantly looking for best practices when it comes to maintaining roads during the winter months. "Equipping many of our trucks with wing plows improves their efficiency by allowing the snowplow driver to clear a lane of road while moving snow off the shoulder at the same time," he pointed out.

Fowkes noted RCOC has also introduced a quick-response plan that includes adding light-duty trucks to more quickly get to isolated icing occurrences and other urgent situations as well as to more quickly get into subdivisions and crossovers/turnarounds on boulevards.

RCOC has also hired contractors to help out on back roads and in subdivisions during heavy snow events.

Despite the addition of the part-time, temporary employees and the quick-response plan, Fowkes explained that motorists must still be vigilant when driving during or immediately after snow events. "Drive for the conditions. That will make a safer environment for everyone on the road." He also reminded motorists not to crowd the plow and give them "room to groom."

Finally, citizens are reminded to check the stability of mailboxes located along roadsides. "If your mailbox shakes just from touching it, chances are it will not withstand standard snow-removal operations," said RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "Taking time to tighten screws and securing or replacing mailboxes will help prevent mishaps," Kolar added.

RCOC's biennial Strategic Planning meetings with communities to start soon

Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Managing Director Dennis Kolar, Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz and the RCOC Board will begin the next round of RCOC biennial Strategic Planning meetings in early 2017.

The RCOC Strategic Planning process involves the agency's leaders meeting with the leaders of virtually every community in Oakland County. The meetings provide an opportunity for both RCOC and the communities to share what is new or significant.

"This year marks the 31st anniversary of our Strategic Planning process," RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar noted. He added that since 1985, RCOC officials have met every two years with the communities to ensure the community officials play an active role in setting Road Commission strategy for coming years.

"This is a very time-consuming activity," explained RCOC Chairman Ron Fowkes. "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." Fowkes 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 open communications with our customers," Fowkes added.

One of the points that Kolar noted will be covered by RCOC at the meetings is what the new road-funding package approved by the state Legislature in late 2015 means for roads in Oakland County. "We want to make sure everyone has realistic expectations about what this new funding allows and doesn't allow, and to reiterate that half the new funding must still be allocated from the state General Fund," Kolar said.

Half of the \$1.2 billion-per-year road-funding package relies on the state Legislature agreeing to take \$600 million out of the state's General Fund in each year in the future. "While we appreciate that the Legislature took action to increase road funding," Kolar explained, "we are concerned that other budgetary challenges may make it difficult for the Legislature to fulfill this commitment in the future."

RCOC staff will contact all communities in the county in the coming weeks to schedule RCOC Strategic Planning meetings with the community officials.

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.

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