

Road Report

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

RCOC presents proposed 2020 budget; revenues up 4.3%

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Board presented the agency's proposed fiscal-year 2020 budget at its annual budget hearing on Aug. 22. The proposed budget projects an increase of 4.3 percent in revenues and expenditures compared to the current year's budget.

The budget is expected to be formally approved at the Board's Sept. 26 meeting. The increase in revenues is primarily the result of increased state road funding from the road-funding package approved by the state Legislature and governor in late 2015.

"The increased revenue in this proposed budget will allow us to continue with our efforts to restore the roads in Oakland County," stated RCOC Chairman Greg Jamian. "This Board is committed to putting as much of the new funding as possible into the road surfaces."

The proposed budget totals \$162 million, compared to the fiscal-year 2019 budget of

\$155 million.

The following expenditures are called for in the proposed budget: \$14 million for major resurfacing projects, \$11.4 million for road-widening, \$6.4 million for paving gravel roads, \$5 million for replacing culverts and \$4.7 million for bridge replacement and repair. The budget calls for the addition of two new employees.

Jamian noted the proposed budget will also allow RCOC to continue to improve its vehicle fleet, expand its use of technology to improve efficiency and invest in its human resources. "In addition to investing in the roads," Jamian noted, "we must also



RCOC Deputy Managing Dir./County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz discusses 2020 projects at the budget hearing.

invest in our people, equipment and technology to ensure we can operate at peak efficiency. This budget does just that."

The chairman added while 2019 was a record year for the amount of roads improved (see story on page 2), 2020 will also see many roads impacted. "We will not improve as many

as we are doing this year," he said. "But, we will still improve far more roads than in most recent years."

The proposed budget is posted on the RCOC website (www.rcocweb.org — click the "Financials" button on the homepage and select "Budget Summary").

RCOC celebrates TRB's 100th anniversary

Unless you are deeply involved in transportation engineering, you might not be familiar with the Transportation Research Board (TRB). But, for agencies like the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC), the national institution is a tremendous partner.

In 2020, TRB, which was established to share transportation-related information, will celebrate its 100th anniversary. Today, it is a division of the National Academy of Sciences, which is an independent advisor to the President and Congress.

TRB also provides an invaluable service to local road agencies across the country such as RCOC. That's because it conducts extensive research that individual agencies could never undertake on their own.

RCOC does, though, also lend its expertise to the group by providing participants for numerous organization committees, such as national committees studying roundabouts, road construction practices

and materials, traffic signal design and function and much more. Additionally, TRB had used RCOC initiatives in the past as case studies to support its research.

"TRB is an incredible resource for us," explained RCOC Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz. "TRB studies help us learn about new methods, materials and designs and also help to validate some of the cutting-edge initiatives we undertake."

Piotrowicz noted RCOC has also played an active role with TRB over the years. "Many of us, including Managing Director Dennis Kolar and myself, serve on TRB committees, providing input on and direction for the research TRB undertakes."

He added TRB provides a service that no single agency could afford to do on its own. "TRB brings together the top professionals in the transportation field from across the nation and allows us to share ideas, test hypotheses and learn from each other."

What's Inside

Strategic Planning process completed . . . 2

Record number of RCOC roads being improved this year . . . 2

RCOC applies for federal grant 3

Watch projects on RCOC work-zone cameras 4

Biennial Strategic Planning process completed; report out soon

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has completed its biennial Strategic Planning process and will release its Strategic Planning Report shortly.

The Strategic Planning process involves Managing Director Dennis Kolar, Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz and Planning and Environmental Concerns Dept. Director Brad Knight meeting with the leaders of virtually every community in the county to review road issues. As part of each meeting, RCOC provided an overview of the road-funding debates in Lansing, information about new developments and programs at the agency and solicited the community's input regarding needed improvements on county roads in the community.

The report will summarize the meet-



RCOC officials meet with a local community during a Strategic Planning meeting.

ings with the community leaders and will be provided to all local, county and state officials serving the county.

"These meetings provide us with a broad view of road issues on a county-wide basis as well as a detailed examina-

tion of each community's needs," Kolar explained. "One thing is certain: Oakland County communities clearly understand the need for more road funding and the impact that has on our ability to provide the services they desire."

RCOC's Strategic Planning process was begun in 1985 in an effort to better gauge the needs and concerns of communities served by the Road Commission and to improve communications between RCOC and the communities. After each round of strategic planning meetings, RCOC compiles a list of road projects that the communities have identified as priorities over the next 10 years. The needs identified by the communities during the 2019 Strategic Planning meetings would cost well over \$3 billion to implement.

Additional funding means record number of RCOC roads are being improved this year

Thanks to additional road funding resulting from the state's 2015 road-funding package as well as additional one-time funding allocated by the state Legislature, RCOC was able to undertake a record amount of road improvements this year.



"By the end of this construction season, we will have put a new surface on more than 160 miles of paved roads," explained Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "We believe that is more than we have ever done before."

Accounting for the largest portion of those road improvements is the more than 90 miles of preservation overlay projects undertaken this year. Preservation overlays are simple resurfacing projects that involve applying two to three inches of new asphalt to a road in modest shape with minimal milling or base repair.

"The preservation overlay program allows us to provide a smooth new surface while extending the life of the road and do it very quickly and relatively inexpensively," Kolar said. He added it costs \$200,000 to \$300,000 per mile to do a preservation

overlay as compared to \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million to perform a major resurfacing project on a mile of two-lane paved road.

Typically, a preservation overlay project can be completed on a one-mile road section within two to three weeks, while

a major resurfacing project can take three or more months.

In addition to the preservation overlay projects, this year's construction program has included major resurfacing projects, paving a gravel road, widening roads, reconstructing roads, replacing concrete slabs, constructing roundabouts and more.

While RCOC anticipates another aggressive road construction year in 2020, it is not likely to surpass 2019. "The one-time money from the state Legislature really allowed us to pump up the program," Kolar noted. "And while our revenue will increase in 2020, it will not allow for as much work as are doing this year."

Even with all this work, Kolar cautioned that there is still a tremendous amount of work needed, and additional state funding is critical to eventually getting the system back into really good shape.

RCOC official elected ITS MI VP

Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz has been elected vice



president of the Intelligent Transportation Society of Michigan (ITS Michigan) for the 2019/2020 term. ITS Michigan is a non-profit organization chartered to promote transportation technology and to bring together those in the public and private sectors as well as academia who are involved in the technology.

RCOC is viewed as a national leader among local road agencies for the deployment of transportation technology, such as its state of the art "smart" traffic-signal system known as FAST-TRAC. Prior to being promoted to his current position, Piotrowicz was director of RCOC's Traffic-Safety Department, which oversees many of the agency's transportation technology initiatives including FAST-TRAC.

He holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering and a master's degree in transportation, both from Michigan State University. Piotrowicz has been with the Road Commission since 1997.

Road Commission applies for federal BUILD grant to improve Brown, Giddings and Silverbell roads around GM Orion plant

The Road Commission for Oakland County, in partnership with Orion Township and the City of Auburn Hills, has applied for a Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) federal discretionary transportation grant to cover the majority of the cost of reconstructing sections of Brown, Giddings and Silverbell roads in the area around the General Motors Orion Assembly Plant in the two communities.

Previously known as Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, or TIGER Discretionary Grants, the program was funded by Congress, which has dedicated nearly \$7.1 billion for the current round of national infrastructure investments to fund projects that have a significant local or regional impact. The grants are highly competitive, and the RCOC application will compete against grant applications



A section of Silverbell Road within the grant corridor.

from across the country.

“We believe our BUILD grant application is very competitive,” explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. “In addition to one of General Motors’ most advanced manufacturing facilities,”

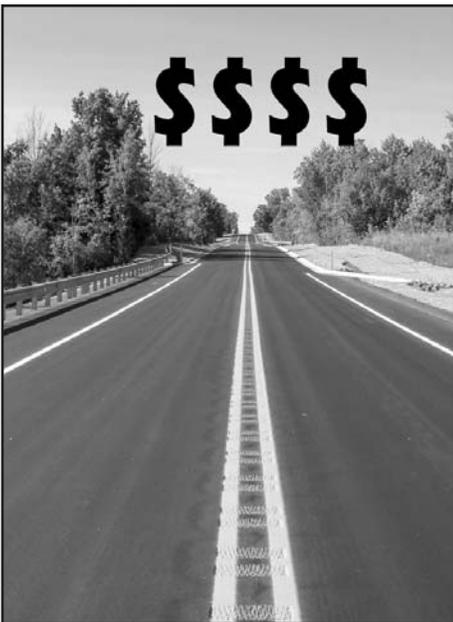
Kolar added, “there are numerous other high-tech and nationally and regionally important businesses within this corridor.”

The GM plant not only currently produces electric vehicles, but is also expected to be the site of future autonomous-vehicle production, making it central to the domestic auto industry’s push to dominate the high-tech auto sector of the future. The roads around the plant are critical to both the plant’s supply process and its ability to ship finished vehicles.

“There is simply no other funding source currently available to us to rebuild these roads,” Kolar said. “Because of the importance of the businesses in the corridor to the local, state and national economies, we are optimistic that we have a very strong application.”

The Federal Highway Administration is expected to announce the recipients of the BUILD grants in early 2020.

The road-funding debate: Do we really need additional money for roads?



There has been a lot of debate in 2019 about whether or not Michigan needs additional road funding. An examination of the data in Oakland County makes it pretty clear that the need is critical.

It’s no secret that roads across the state are not in great shape. However, examining the data a little closer reveals some interesting details. For example, the statewide road condition data shows that the state highways across the state – those

maintained by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT – the “I”, “M” and “US” routes), are in better shape, collectively than the local roads in the state (those maintained by county road commissions, cities and villages).

For example, 78 percent of MDOT’s roads across the state were in good condition in 2018. That percentage is far lower in Oakland County. Even after a record year of road improvements this year, by the end of 2019, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) expects to have about 33 percent of its roads in good condition.

Additionally, RCOC projects that by 2025, when taking into account the additional road funding the agency will receive as the 2015 state road-funding package is fully implemented, only 51 percent of RCOC roads will be in good condition. Then, according to computer modeling, the overall condition of RCOC roads will again begin to deteriorate without an infusion of additional road funding.

“That means we’ll never get to better than 51 percent of our roads in good shape without additional funding,” stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. “51 percent of our roads in good condition, while far better than we are today, is not acceptable,” he added. “We

need to get far more of the system into the ‘good’ column. But, the only way that is going to happen is with additional funding.”

Kolar noted where that additional funding comes from is up to the Legislature. “We have two simple goals for additional road funding,” he noted. “It should be adequate to actually address the size of the problem, and it should be secure – we need to know that it will be there year after year, and won’t be cut arbitrarily. How the Legislature gets to that point is up to them.”

Bi-partisanship in Lansing?

While there has not yet been a new road-funding package enacted in Lansing, there has at least been something positive to come out of the related discussions: The Democrats and Republicans seem to at least be attempting to find common ground. “While it’s too early to suggest the two sides may be able to find a reasonable compromise,” observed RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar, “they do seem at least willing to listen to each other, and that’s a good start.”

Watch progress of two major projects on work-zone cameras

Anyone interested can watch the progress of two of the Road Commission for Oakland County's (RCOC) major road projects this year through the work-zone cameras available on the agency website.

The cameras are positioned on poles above the two projects and take photos every 15 minutes during daylight hours. The photos are posted to the website.

The two projects are the construction of a roundabout at the Adams Road/Gunn Road intersection in Oakland Township and the Maple Road culvert replacement in West Bloomfield Township (this camera will be moved to capture the construction of the Maple Road/Middlebelt Road roundabout adjacent to the culvert once the culvert is completed).

The links to the two cameras are on the homepage of the RCOC Website, www.rcocweb.org (they are listed in the "Helpful Links" section at the bottom of the homepage).

Additionally, a third work-zone camera will be added along the Baldwin Road widening project in Orion Township in the near future.

"These cameras provide a great perspective to see the work being done that cannot be seen from outside the work zone," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. Kolar added that the cameras also allow viewers to play a time-lapse video of all photos captured to date.



An image captured by the Adams/Gunn roundabout project camera in Oakland Township.



An image from the Maple Road culvert project camera in West Bloomfield Township.

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

Fill out a report 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 Communications Manager Craig Bryson at (248) 645-2000, ext. 2302.

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