

Road Report

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

Jury sides with RCOC in potentially costly court case

On July 5, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) received some good news: The jury in a court trial involving the Road Commission came back with a verdict that may save the agency more than \$20 million.

The court case, RCOC vs. Northwestern Holdings, took place in the Oakland County Circuit Court of Judge Denise Langford Morris. It was the result of an RCOC condemnation of a commercial property located near the intersection of 14 Mile Road and Northwestern Highway in West Bloomfield Township.

The land in question was adjacent to RCOC's 14 Mile/Orchard Lake/Northwestern Highway "triangle" project, which involved reconfiguring the 14 Mile/Northwestern Highway intersection and constructing a roundabout at the 14 Mile/Orchard Lake intersection. The



An aerial view of the "triangle" project which spurred the lawsuit.

project was completed in 2015.

As part of the 14 Mile/Northwestern Highway intersection reconfiguration, RCOC re-routed 14 Mile on the east side of Northwestern Highway. This required that RCOC acquire some vacant land. The land needed was part of a much larger parcel.

The owner of that parcel filed the lawsuit, arguing that RCOC's project caused him to lose some big-box development opportunities. For its part, RCOC argued

that it paid fair market value for the land it acquired -- \$3.8 million. The owner asserted RCOC owed him more than \$20 million because of the lost big-box store deals.

"We did not believe the property owner lost the big-box stores because of our project, and the jury apparently agreed," RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar said. The jury awarded the property owner only \$700,000 above what RCOC had already paid him.

"We are pleased with this outcome," Kolar noted. "We would have preferred not to give the property owner any additional money, but \$700,000 is far better than \$20 million."

RCOC will also have to pay court costs and the opposing party's legal costs, which will increase the amount due. The property owner may also choose to appeal the jury verdict, though RCOC attorneys believe that will not be an easy case to make.

Watch construction of the 10 Mile/Napier roundabout through workzone camera

A real-time workzone camera is up and running during the reconstruction of the 10 Mile Road/Napier Road intersection to a modern roundabout, as well as the reconstruction of 10 Mile Road from Copperwood to Nepavine Drive on the Novi/Lyon Township border.



Viewers can zoom in or view earlier images on the camera.

Viewers can watch the progress of construction on the RCOC website, www.rcocweb.org (click on the "10 Mile/Napier roundabout workzone camera" link at the bottom of the homepage) via camera images that are automatically taken every 15 minutes. Site visitors can

also view a time-lapse series of all the photos taken since the camera was installed.

Additionally, RCOC will produce a compilation of the photos at the end of the project that will allow viewers to see the progress from beginning to end. "The camera is an educational tool that enables the public to follow step-

by-step progress of highly anticipated projects," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "It is an effective way to answer questions about how such projects progress, and it is in real-time." **CONT'D ON PAGE 4 -- SEE CAMERA**

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RCOC Board calls for wider white striping along RCOC roads to help improve motorist safety

As part of its long-term commitment to motorist safety, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Board has chosen to use wider white edge lines and lane "skip" lines (the dashed lines between lanes on multi-lane roads) on RCOC roads, making them easier for drivers to see.

The idea was proposed by RCOC Vice Chairman Greg Jamian and supported by the RCOC Board at its May 4 meeting. The change was then added to RCOC's annual road-striping contract. The white lane skips and edge lines will now be six inches wide, as opposed to four inches.

RCOC hires a contractor to repaint the stripes on all its paved non-subdivision roads each year. The 8 million feet of white edge lines and lane skips were repainted in



the wider width by the end of June.

"This is part of our continuing effort to make our roads as safe as they can be," Jamian explained. "Wider lines are more visible in all weather conditions and at all

times of the day or night. They are less likely to be completely covered by snow and ice in the winter and will take longer to wear off. The more people can see the lines, the more likely they are to stay in their lane and on the road."

Board Chairman Eric Wilson endorsed the effort as well. "Anything we can do to make the roads safer is worth doing," Wilson said. "It is efforts like this that have resulted in Oakland County having the lowest traffic-fatality rate of any county in the state and one of the lowest for a county our size in the nation."

RCOC's third commissioner, Ron Fowkes, concurred. "Safety is our number-one priority, and this is simply another step in that direction."

RCOC program aims to control dust on gravel roads

By Kayara Rivers
RCOC Intern

Anyone who lives along or frequently drives on a gravel road knows they can become very dusty in the summer. While it is impossible to completely eliminate dust along an unpaved road, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) seeks to minimize the dust through its Dust-Control Program.

And it's no small effort. RCOC is responsible for almost 800 miles of gravel roads. This is more roads than some northern Michigan counties have in total (paved and gravel combined).

Why is dust a problem? It decreases visibility for drivers, can cause airborne health risks and can coat all surfaces both inside and outside of homes near the roads.

The Dust-Control Program begins each spring when RCOC road graders begin to repair the gravel roads, which often become rough during the spring thaw. "In the springtime we work really hard to get the gravel roads back into shape," explained RCOC Brine Well Field Specialist Rod Pierson. "Typically, the graders can cover four to five, sometime six, miles a day depending on if the road is really bad and needs a lot of work."

Shortly after the grading, semi trucks carrying large tanks filled with calcium chloride, or brine (naturally occurring salt water), apply the brine directly onto the road's surface. Most gravel roads are treated four to five times throughout the season.

When applied to gravel roads, brine draws moisture from the air and ground. This helps to bind the materials in the road surface, reducing the amount of dust that becomes airborne and providing a better driving surface.

RCOC used to purchase brine. Today, RCOC pumps brine from its own three wells located at its garages that serve the rural parts of the county where the majority of gravel roads are. Those garages are in Orion, Milford and Springfield townships.

"The three brine wells are centrally located in the districts served by these three garages, and that allows us to operate more efficiently," Pierson said. He added not having to purchase the brine saves the Road Commission money.

The brine is stored in massive tanks until it is needed, at which time it is transferred to a chloride tanker. In addition to the Dust-Control Program in the summer, RCOC also uses brine in the winter as part of the effort to fight snow and ice.

All RCOC salt trucks are equipped with brine tanks. This allows brine to be sprayed onto the rock salt as it is spread on the road which causes the salt to activate more quickly. This, in turn, means less salt is needed to melt the snow and ice.

Brine is also spread directly on roads



An RCOC brine tanker fills up at one of the three RCOC brine wells prior to doing dust control.

prior to a snowstorm in some situations to help delay the formation of ice.

"If we stopped using our brine for the Dust-Control Program, there would have to be something that replaces it," Pierson noted. "Our cost/benefit analysis indicates this is a cost-effective program."

RCOC applies chloride to all "primary" gravel roads in the county (the more heavily traveled roads). However, not all "local" gravel roads receive applications (these are the less-traveled roads including subdivision roads). Local roads are treated when the applications are paid for by the township, the homeowners or a combination of both.

Oakland County residents living on gravel roads who would like to participate in the dust-control program can submit their applications for the service online. Instructions and applications are available on the RCOC Website (www.rcocweb.org -- click on the "Residents" tab at the top of the homepage and then select "Gravel Road and Dust-Control Chloride Schedule").

Purchased federal funding allows for resurfacing of 15 miles of road

In 2016, state legislators changed Michigan law allowing road agencies to purchase federal road funding from each other. The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) was one of the first agencies to do so, buying funds from four rural road commissions this year alone.

Federal road funding is allocated regionally on a project-by-project basis, and traditionally can only be used on the project for which it was allocated. The change to the state law allowed road agencies to use other funding, such as their state road funding, to purchase the federal dollars.

Selling the federal funds is beneficial for both parties for several reasons. The agency that sells the funds must still complete the same project with the sale proceeds that the federal funds would have been used for. However, since they are no longer using federal funds, they no longer have to follow all the federal guidelines for the project, which saves them both time and money. Additionally, some smaller road agencies do not have in-house staff who have either the expertise or time to easily ensure all federal guidelines are met.

The benefit for the purchaser is that they can negotiate the price at which they purchase the federal dollars. In RCOC's

case, the funds were purchased at 75 cents on the dollar. "This process allowed us to resurface approximately 15 miles of roads. Without the federal dollars, we would not have been able to do as many miles," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar.

Kolar noted purchasing the federal funds is beneficial for RCOC because the agency has staff who are well versed in federal funding rules and regulations. "We deal with federal funding and federal regulations all the time," Kolar said. "So for us, using federal funds is not a big deal. For some smaller agencies, it is much more challenging."

RCOC purchased approximately \$2 million in federal funds from four northern Michigan county road commissions: Delta County, Dickinson County,



The recently resurfaced section of Oakwood Road. The project was paid for with federal funds purchased from another road agency.

Leelanau County and Menominee County. The funds were used to resurface sections of Baldwin, Lakeville and Oakwood roads in Addison, Oxford and Brandon townships.

One of the requirements of the purchased federal funding is that it must be used in an area with the same federal designation as the area from which it was purchased. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) designates

all areas as either "urban" or "rural". Because these funds were designated for use in a rural area, RCOC had to use them within an area of Oakland County that is federally designated as "rural."

The process was considered so successful this year, that RCOC is already working on additional purchases later this year or next year for funds that could be used in 2018.

RCOC Strategic Planning Report coming soon to Oakland officials

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) will soon release its biennial Strategic Planning Report which presents an overview of the agency and of road funding and summarizes the meetings the agency's leaders conducted recently with the leaders of virtually every community in the county.

The report reviews the impact of the recent increase in state road funding, the uncertainty of the second half of that funding and reviews the ways that RCOC is making sure its dollars go as far as possible.

The RCOC Strategic Planning process involves Managing Director Dennis Kolar and Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz meeting with each community's leaders to review road issues. As part of each meeting, RCOC provided an overview of the road-funding challenges the agency faces and also solicited the community's input regarding needed road improvements.

"Two of our key messages were that,

yes, there is new road funding, but that funding does not solve all the problems, and there is the risk that we'll only get half of the new funding promised," Kolar said.

"We appreciate that the Legislature did increase road funding.

However, most experts agree that the increase was not enough to meet the state's road needs. And, the legislation requires that future legislatures approve the second half of the funding package, shifting \$600 million per year from the state General Fund to road funding, which could be problematic."

The report is being provided to all public officials serving Oakland County and is available on the RCOC Web site, www.rcocweb.org (click on the "About Us" tab at the top of the home page, then select "Publications" and scroll to



the "2017 RCOC Strategic Planning Report" category).

"We do appreciate the new funding we received, and we are doing everything possible to make sure those dollars go as far as possible," Kolar added.

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 2017 Strategic Planning meetings would cost over \$3 billion to implement.

Interns provide additional tech savvy and enthusiasm for RCOC

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is always looking for ways to improve efficiency, expand its use of technology and accomplish more. One good way to accomplish all three goals is through its intern program.



The 2017 RCOC interns. The students worked in a variety of RCOC departments.

"Interns allow us to bring in college students with important skill sets and new perspectives. These students are also often very tech savvy and help to ensure we are using the latest technologies," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "Additionally, the interns often are very enthusiastic about their fields which brings new energy to the agency."

Kolar noted the RCOC internship program includes students in engineering, communications, planning, human resources and other fields. "We have had many great college students participate," he noted, adding that some of the students have gone on to become full-time employees at the agency.

"This is a mutually beneficial program," the managing director said. "We benefit from the students' knowledge and enthusiasm, and they learn from us as well and also gain some practical, real-world experience in their fields."

CAMERA -- CONT'D FROM FRONT

During the project, both 10 Mile and Napier are closed at the intersection. The project is expected to be completed in mid-October.

The detour route for 10 Mile traffic is Griswold Road to 8 Mile Road to Novi Road, back to 10 Mile Road and vice versa. The detour route for Napier traffic is Grand River Ave. to Novi Road to 8 Mile Road and back to Napier and vice versa.

The approximately \$6.3 million project is funded with a mix of federal and local dollars. The local funding is shared by RCOC, Lyon Township and the City of Novi. Dan's Excavating of Shelby Township is the prime contractor.

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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