

Road Report

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

Road agency budgets impacted by COVID-19 also

It seems no level of government across the country is likely to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis financially unscathed. Unfortunately, that holds true for Michigan road agencies as well.

While the full extent of the budget impact for the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is not yet known, it is clear RCOC will take a significant hit. All the cities and villages in Oakland County will take a hit in state road funding as well.

For RCOC, state funding, primarily in the form of vehicle-registration fee and gas-tax revenues, is the agency's largest source of funding. While vehicle-registration fee revenues seem relatively unharmed so far, gas-tax income has clearly dropped as many motorists have stayed home.

"So far, our state revenue payment for March was down about 10 percent compared to last year," RCOC Managing

Director Dennis Kolar observed. "However, the stay-at-home order didn't start until mid-way through March, so we expect the April and May payments to each be down more than 20 percent."

Of course, no one knows how long it will be before the economy fully re-opens. Which means it is equally unclear when gas-tax revenues might return to normal.

"If the economy comes back quickly, we could see the gas-tax revenues return to normal fairly quickly," Kolar said. "However, many economists are predicting the economic recovery will be more gradual, extending over numerous months or even years. Obviously, that would be very detrimental to our operations."



A second factor that could negatively impact Michigan road funding is the question of state General-Fund dollars. When the state Legislature approved the road-funding package in 2015, it determined that half the projected \$1.2 billion annually in new road funding statewide would come from income tax revenues placed in the state's General Fund (the other half of the revenues came from the increased gas and diesel taxes and vehicle-registration fees).

From the day the income tax/General
CONT'D ON PAGE 3 — SEE COVID

RCOC staff keeping roads safe during COVID-19

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) staff has continued to work throughout the coronavirus pandemic, making sure the roads are safe so all the other essential employees can get to their places of employment, so that everyone can get to the grocery store or pharmacy and so that police officers and firefighters can provide their critical services.

That means not only are the RCOC frontline crews out patching potholes, repairing traffic signals and signs or replacing guardrail and many other vital tasks. It also means the RCOC payroll staff is busy making sure those frontline employees get paid. The RCOC Central Operations Department is making sure they have the equipment and materials they need to do their jobs and that their equipment is operational.

At the same time, the RCOC Engineering Department is making sure the road project plans are ready for the



Highway Maintenance staff member Jennifer Miracle working in the RCOC Waterford Township offices — one of many staff helping to keep crews out on the roads.

agency's contractors to build and overseeing those contractors' work. The RCOC Legal Department is making sure all the
CONT'D ON PAGE 4 — SEE STAFF

What's Inside

2020 RCOC road-improvement list 2

Preservation Overlay program 3

New Construction engineer 4



Longtime RCOC Engineering director retires. Page 3.

2020 RCOC Road Improvement Program (RIP) list

Despite an unprecedented pandemic, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is proceeding with a robust road construction season, improving roads and bridges across the county.

While not quite as large as last year’s program — thanks largely to some one-time funding received from the state last year — the program is still large by historic RCOC standards, including two major road-widening projects, four gravel-road paving projects, three bridge preventive maintenance projects, nine culvert replacements and numerous simple resurfacing projects. Also included are the resurfacing of five road segments in Independence Township paid for largely through a special township millage approved by voters in 2018.

The following list includes the projects expected to be constructed, or at least started, this year. It does not include projects for which only design or right of way (ROW) acquisition work is planned for 2020.

The costs listed for the projects are estimated contractor payments only and do not include costs such as design/preliminary engineering, project oversight and right of way acquisition. Except where noted, the projects are expected to be fully or mostly constructed in 2020.

More information about the projects, including detailed descriptions, funding breakdowns and schedules are available in the “Road Projects” section of the RCOC Website, www.rcocweb.org.

Project type, location and description

Cost

Widen (reconstruct adding additional through lanes)

- Baldwin Road, Gregory to Waldon, Orion Twp. (widen to 5-lanes/4-lane boulevard, construct three roundabouts as second phase of project) \$18.5 million
- Dequindre Road, West Utica Road to north of Auburn Road in Rochester Hills/Shelby Twp. (widen 2 lanes to 5) \$9 million

Repair, Rehabilitate & Resurface (repair road base/add 3 to 4 inches new asphalt)

- 12 Mile Road, Greenfield to Coolidge in Berkley \$2.4 million
- 12 Mile Road, Telegraph to Lahser in Southfield \$1.6 million
- North Holly Road, north of Grange Hall to the north county line, Village of Holly and Holly Twp. \$4.3 million

Gravel Road Paving

- Dixboro Road, 8 Mile to 9 Mile, Lyon Twp./South Lyon/Green Oak Twp. \$3.5 million
- Grass Lake Road, Ormond to Steeple Hill, White Lake Twp. \$3 million
- Currie Road, North of 9 Mile to 10 Mile (tree removal and utility relocation only), Lyon Twp. \$6.5 million
(construction in 2021; 8 Mile to 9 Mile in 2021 or 2022)
- Baron Road, Grange Hall to Groveland, Groveland Twp. – tree removal and utility relocation only in 2020 \$6.2 million

Bridge Preventive Maintenance

- Grand River Ave. over CSX RR in Novi \$2 million
- Parkdale Road over Stony Creek in Rochester \$ 50,000
- Tienken over Stony Creek in Rochester Hills \$ 64,000

Culvert Replacements

- Cooley Lake Road over Lake Sherwood, Commerce Twp. \$ 750,000
- Square Lake Road over the Amy Drain, Bloomfield Twp. \$ 700,000
- Wise Road over the Huron River, Commerce Twp. \$ 750,000
- Davisburg Road over the Garner Drain, Springfield Twp. \$ 650,000
- Pickering Road over Rouge tributary (three culverts) in Bloomfield Twp. \$ 500,000
- Oxbow Lake Road over the Huron River in White Lake Twp. \$ 750,000
- Sashabaw Road over the Whipple Lake canal in Independence Twp. \$ 600,000

Independence Twp. Millage Resurfacing (paid for mostly with township millage funds)

- Andersonville Road, south township line to Old White Lake Rd. \$ 650,000
- Sashabaw Road, south township line to Maybee \$ 550,000
- Clintonville Road, Mann to Clarkston \$1.3 million
- Waldon Road, Clarkston Village limits to Clintonville \$1.6 million
- Sashabaw Road, South of Clarkston Rd. to Oak Hill \$1.6 million

Federally Funded Preservation Overlays (simple resurfacing)

- Ormond Road, township line to Davisburg Road, Springfield Twp. \$1.1 million
- Fish Lake Road, Fenton Road to Elliott Road, Rose Twp. and Holly Twp. \$1.2 million

Long-time RCOC Engineering director Blust retires

In his 21 years as director of the RCOC Engineering Department, Tom Blust has overseen an amazing amount of road construction. In fact, the value of those road improvements is nearly \$1 billion.



That’s an amazing run for any civil engineer anywhere. And it makes for a good point from which to hang up one’s slide rule. And, so, Blust retired on June 1.

While Blust is proud of the significant improvement his department has made to the county’s road system, he’s quick to point out that this work could not have been done without the staff of the Engineering Department. “The Engineering Department staff – everybody here – is involved in almost every project in some

way,” he explained. “Each one has a part to play, and every part is vital. I really appreciate the amazing work they all do.”

A graduate of Michigan Tech, Blust started at RCOC in 1992 as the permit engineer before being named director of Engineering in 1999. Prior to joining RCOC, he worked at a consulting engineering firm and served as township engineer for Waterford Township.

Several things have distinguished his time as Engineering director, Blust said. The first is the fact that RCOC has risen to become a national leader in roundabouts, having constructed its first one in 1999. Another has been the opportunity to work with so many community leaders across the county on many significant road projects.

RCOC 2020 Preservation Overlay Program

The RCOC Preservation Overlay Program involves minimal road-surface milling (grinding off the existing surface) and the application of two inches of asphalt. It is intended to provide a smooth, new surface and extend the life of a road in moderate condition for another 5 to 10 years. Below are the projects included in the 2020 program.

Project, project limits and community

	<u>Cost</u>
• Lone Pine Road, Lahser to Inkster, Bloomfield Twp.	\$ 561,000
• Elizabeth Lake, Cooley Lk. to Union Lk., Waterford & White Lk. twps.	\$ 1 million
• Wise Road, Bogie Lake to Union Lake, Commerce Twp.	\$ 560,000
• Milford Road, 10 Mile to Grand River, Lyon Twp.	\$ 738,000
• Pontiac Trail/Silver Lk., Grand River to county line, Lyon Twp.	\$ 700,000
• Commerce Road, Milford Village to Duck Lake (east), Milford Twp.,	\$ 253,000
• Middle Road, Hickory Ridge to Milford Road, Highland Twp.	\$ 433,000
• White Lake Road, Andersonville to east of Eagle, White Lake & Springfield twps.	\$ 1.2 million
• Carey Road, Commerce to west of Cooley Lake, Commerce Twp./White Lake Twp.	\$ 508,000
• Ormond Road, M-59 to Springfield/White Lake line, White Lake Twp.	\$ 732,000
• Union Lake Road, Richardson to Cooley Lake, Commerce Twp.	\$ 706,000
• Oak Hill Road, Sashabaw to Dartmouth, Independence Twp./Brandon Twp.	\$195,000
• Richardson Road, Green Lake to Newton, West Bloomfield & Commerce twps.	\$ 508,000
• Squirrel Road, South Blvd. to Wattles, Bloomfield Twp.	\$ 525,000
• Lahser Road, 10 Mile to Civic Center, Southfield	\$ 246,000
• Lahser Road/9 Mile intersection, Southfield	\$ 113,000
• Livernois Road, north of Walton to south of Tienken, Rochester Hills	\$ 146,000
• Avon Road, Livernois to west of Dequindre, Rochester Hills	\$ 753,000
• Parkdale Road, Letica to Dequindre, Rochester	\$ 298,000
• Wixom Road, Pontiac Trail to Glengary, Wixom and Commerce Twp.	\$ 625,000
• Glengary Road, Wixom to Benstein, Wixom and Commerce Twp.	\$ 402,000
• Bogie Lake Road, Cooley Lake to Wise, Commerce Twp.	\$ 245,000
• Commerce Road, Wise to Carroll Lake, Commerce Twp.	\$ 213,000
• Carroll Lake Road, Commerce to Cooley Lake, Commerce Twp.	\$ 325,000
• Pontiac Trail, west of Arline to Orchard Lake, Orchard Lake Village	\$ 198,000
• Hiller Road, Commerce to Cooley Lake Road, West Bloomfield Twp.	\$ 490,000
• Cooley Lake Road, Cass Elizabeth to Elizabeth Lake, Waterford Twp.	\$ 800,000
Total Preservation Overlay Program:	\$13,503,000

Fund revenue was proposed to be part of the road-funding package, many in the road world warned against this, noting General-Fund dollars are not constitutionally dedicated to transportation, as the fuel taxes and vehicle-registration fees are. That means, if/when the state economy slowed down, General-Fund dollars could easily be diverted from roads to some other use.

Sadly, that scenario seems to be happening far sooner than anyone anticipated. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has already warned road agencies that the state, as it faces massive budgetary shortfalls caused by COVID-19, is likely to redirect the \$600 million in General-Fund dollars that had been earmarked each year for roads starting in 2021.

“I never expected we would be in the midst of an international pandemic in 2020,” Kolar said, “but, from the start, I feared that sooner or later there would be some sort of fiscal crisis that caused the state Legislature to redirect those General-Fund dollars away from roads.”

Kolar added that the real irony is that, even if the state had continued to devote \$600 million per year from the General-Fund toward roads for the foreseeable future, there was still a looming shortfall in road dollars for the state. “We were already facing a situation where, by 2025, our road system would begin to again deteriorate due to inadequate funding. If we now lose the \$600 million in General Fund dollars in 2020, that deterioration will resume even sooner.”

While Kolar noted he certainly understands the immediate urgency of addressing the COVID-19 situation and the public health and economic crises it has created, he is also concerned about the long-term state of Michigan’s roads.

“Obviously, the health and wellbeing of Michigan’s residents – and the need to save lives – is the top priority,” he stated. “But we also cannot lose sight of the fact that Michigan’s long-term ability to compete economically and to maintain satisfactory quality of life also require an adequate road system. Right now, I am gravely concerned that we’re not going to be able to provide that in coming years, unless we address this road-funding crisis, which becomes even harder to do in the wake of the pandemic.”

Rucinski takes over as head of the RCOC Construction Division

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has named Alex Rucinski the new head of the Construction Division of the Engineering Department.

An RCOC employee since 2007, Rucinski is now in charge of making sure the agency's annual road-construction program is completed successfully. He took the place of long-time Construction Engineer Mike Torres who retired recently after many years in the role.



Rucinski previously served in the Signal Systems Division of the Traffic-Safety Department, in the RCOC Design Division and in the Permits division of the Customer Services Department.

STAFF — CONT'D FROM FRONT

contracts are accurate for those contractors.

In other words, while the frontline employees working out on the roads are vital to ensuring the roads remain safe and usable, it takes the entire agency to support those frontline workers. "What those frontline workers do is critically important," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "But without all the other agency staff supporting them behind the scenes, they would simply not be able to do their jobs."

That doesn't mean RCOC hasn't taken steps to reduce the likelihood that the virus is spread among staff. For example, Highway Maintenance Department staff – the frontline workers out patching potholes and performing other critical tasks on the road system, were divided into two separate shifts, so that only half as many employees were working at any given time.

Additionally, where possible, office staff have been able to work from home, with about 75 doing so, significantly reducing the number of staff in RCOC offices. And, of course, personal protective equipment, such as masks and gloves has been made available to all employees.

At the same time, the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting RCOC facilities has been greatly increased, and only one employee is allowed in each agency vehicle at a time.

"While we would rather not have to take all these steps, the health and wellbeing of both our employees and the public we serve are our top priorities," Kolar said. "We will continue to do everything possible to minimize the risk of exposure to the virus until the pandemic passes."

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.

Board of Road Commissioners:

Gregory C. Jamian, Chairman
Ronald J. Fowkes, Vice Chairman
Andrea LaLonde, Commissioner

Dennis G. Kolar, PE, Managing Director
Gary Piotrowicz, PE, PTOE, Dep. Managing Dir./County Highway Engineer