

Road Report

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

RCOC wins award for its cellular-communications project

The Signal Systems Division of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Traffic-Safety Department has been selected as a winner of the Michigan Chapter of the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) 2020 Transportation Achievement Award.

The award will be presented at the chapter's Technical Session in October.

The award recognizes RCOC's leadership through the Signal Systems Division's establishment of a cellular-based wireless communications system to connect its "adaptive" traffic signals with its Traffic Operations Center (TOC) through a public/private partnership with AT&T. "This new system is significantly improving the operation of our signal system," explained Signal Systems Engineer Ahmad Jawad.

He added the new system is also saving RCOC about a half-million dollars per year and dramatically reducing the amount of staff time devoted to operating

the adaptive-signal system. "RCOC is one of the first road agencies in the nation to convert its adaptive-signal system communications infrastructure from hard-wire phone lines to cellular communications," Jawad said.

"This initiative is positioning the agency to remain on the cutting edge as we move into the era of connected and autonomous vehicles, 'smart cities' and the 'internet of things'," Jawad noted.

In addition to connecting RCOC's adaptive traffic signals to the TOC, the private cellular network also allowed the Signal Systems Division to install nearly



RCOC Signal Systems Engineer Ahmad Jawad led the agency's move from hard-wire communications linking traffic signals to wireless communications.

200 closed-circuit video cameras at key intersections and send the live video feeds back to the TOC wirelessly.

The partnership with AT&T sprang
CONT'D ON PAGE 3 — SEE AWARD

2021 RCOC BUDGET to be approved in September

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Board was expected to approve the agency's fiscal year (FY) 2021 budget at its Sept. 24 meeting.

The proposed \$161 million budget represents a slight decrease of about \$1 million compared to the \$162 million 2020 budget adopted in September of last year. The 2021 budget decreased primarily due to an anticipated decrease in state road funding.

The FY 2021 budget was presented at a public hearing Thursday, Aug. 20. The hearing was conducted virtually via conference call due to the coronavirus pandemic.

RCOC anticipates receiving approximately \$102.4 million in state road funding in fiscal year 2021, compared to just over \$111 million received in the current year. State road funding is derived primarily from state-collected fuel taxes, vehicle-registration fees and state General Fund dollars.

The remaining revenue comes from community contributions (\$18 million) federal funds (\$20.8 million), the contract with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to maintain state highways in the county (\$10.5 million), state Transportation Economic Development Fund (TEDF) grants (\$3.6 million), federal funds for traffic signals (\$3 million) and permit fees and other revenues (\$2.6 million).

The state dollars continue to represent RCOC's largest source of funding and its main funding source for operations. The anticipated drop in state funding is the result of the impact of coronavirus on state revenues, particularly vehicle-registration fees and fuel taxes, which are the two largest sources of state road funding.

The TEDF and federal funds are awarded on a project-by-project basis,
CONT'D ON PAGE 2 — SEE BUDGET

What's Inside

2021 RCOC road-improvement list 2

RCOC deals with coronavirus 3

Work zone cameras for Dequindre, Baldwin 4



Fitzer is new RCOC Engineering director. Page 3.

BUDGET — CONT'D FROM FRONT
and the amount RCOC receives from each source fluctuates from year to year.

The 2021 budget includes nearly \$35.6 million in annual contributions toward road-improvement projects planned to be under construction in 2021 (this is not the total cost for these projects -- some costs were included in the 2020 budget or will be included in the 2022 budget where projects are carried over from last year or expected to be carried over into 2022); \$32.4 million for road maintenance efforts such as pothole patching, gravel road grading and salting and plowing in the winter; and \$15.4 million for maintaining traffic signs, signals, pavement markings and guardrails among other activities.

The remainder of the budget is dedicated to operating expenses including customer services, vehicle maintenance, staff wages, buildings and grounds and administration.

RCOC's fiscal year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.

"The state of the Road Commission remains strong," reports RCOC Board Chairman Greg Jamian. "However, we continue to feel the impact of the coronavirus, and the resulting economic downturn, on our budget," he added. "We have already reduced this budget by \$11 million in response to anticipated reductions in revenue, and it's possible we may have to

make additional cuts during 2021."

RCOC Vice Chairman Ron Fowkes concurred. "We have always been fiscally conservative," he explained. "The economic downturn from the coronavirus caught everyone by surprise. There is nothing we could have done differently to better prepare for this," he added. "I am very thankful that we were in good financial shape when the pandemic arrived."

Board Member Andrea LaLonde added the Board remains concerned about the funding that comes from the state General Fund and is controlled by the Legislature, which requires that the Legislature annually commit substantial state General Fund dollars to roads. "We recognize that the state budget is under great strain due to the pandemic, but we implore the Legislature to live up to its commitment to appropriate \$600 million yearly from the General Fund toward roads. Without our share of those dollars, we will face some tough financial decisions," she noted.

Managing Director Dennis Kolar noted the budget also demonstrates the agency's continued commitment to maintaining culverts and bridges. "These structures are not always obvious to motorists, but their condition nationwide continues to be a concern. We are committed to devoting as many resources as possible to keeping them safe and well maintained," Kolar

said. "That is reflected in this budget."

The budget includes the 2021 Road Improvement Program (RIP) which includes next year's road-construction projects. Among the planned projects are:

- ▶ Reconstruct 12 Mile, Lahser to Evergreen in Southfield
- ▶ Resurface Walton Blvd, Dixie Hwy. to Sashabaw in Waterford Twp.
- ▶ Resurface Adams, Long Lake to Square Lake on the Troy/Bloomfield Twp. border
- ▶ Resurface Cranbrook, 14 Mile to Maple on Birmingham/Bloomfield Twp. border
- ▶ Pave the gravel section of Currie from 9 Mile to 10 Mile in Lyon Twp.

A complete list of projects expected to be constructed in 2021 is below. Projects are typically selected based on a detailed, computerized road-assessment program combined with engineers' analysis and a review of safety data. The decisions are often made years before construction begins because of funding requirements.

"RCOC continues to improve the safety and condition of our roads," Kolar said. "We know that many roads still need improvement and appreciate the patience of our citizens and businesses as we continue to work through a very long needs list."

The budget is posted on the RCOC Website, (click on the "Financials" button on the home page, then select "Budget Summary" and click on "2020-21 Budget").

Proposed 2021 RCOC Road Improvement Program (RIP)

This list includes only projects that are expected to be constructed in 2021, not those where only design or only right of way (ROW) acquisition work is planned for 2021. To avoid confusion over the project costs, the costs listed are the estimated annual contributions for each project and not the total project costs which may span multiple fiscal years.

Widening

- Baldwin Road, Morgan to Gregory in Orion Twp. (widen to 4-lane boulevard/5-lanes; completion of ongoing project)

Project Cost
\$ 1.5 million

Reconstruct (completely replace road base and road surface)

- 12 Mile Road, Lahser to Evergreen in Southfield

\$ 3.15 million

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

- Cranbrook Road, 14 Mile to 15 Mile in Birmingham and Bloomfield Twp.
- Adams Road, Long Lake to Square Lake in Bloomfield Twp./Troy
- Walton Blvd., Dixie Highway to Sashabaw in Waterford Twp.
- Maple Road, Inkster to Franklin (including culvert replacement) in Bloomfield Twp.

Project Cost
\$ 1.4 million
\$ 1.6 million
\$ 3.15 million
\$ 4.075 million

Gravel Road Paving

- Currie Rd, 8-10 Mile in Lyon Twp. (9-10 Mile to be constructed in '21; 8-9 Mile to be constructed in '22 with roundabout at 8 Mile & Currie) \$4 million

Project Cost

Intersection Safety Enhancements

- Sashabaw Road at Oak Hill Road in Independence Twp./Brandon Twp. -- compact roundabout

Project Cost
\$ 2.1 million

Culvert Replacements

- Union Lake Road over the Hayes Drain (south of Wise Road) in Commerce Twp.
- Orchard Lake Road over the Rouge River (north of 10 Mile Road) in Farmington Hills
- Fish Lake Road over the Shiawassee River (south of Grange Hall Road) in Holly Twp.

Project Cost
\$ 970,000
\$ 970,000
\$ 1.6 million

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

- Clarkston Road, Clarkston Village border east to Orion Twp. line
- White Lake Road, Clarkston Village border to Andersonville Road
- N. Eston Road, Clarkston Road north to end of pavement

Project Cost
\$ 2.3 million
\$ 975,000
\$ 225,000

Concrete Repairs (remove and replace bad concrete slabs)

- Various locations, Troy

Project Cost
\$ 7.5 million

Total annual contributions for projects to be constructed in 2020:

\$35.56 million

RCOC names Fitzer new Engineering director

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has named veteran civil engineer Samuel Fitzer the new director of the agency's Engineering Department.

Fitzer, of Clawson, comes to the agency with more than 14 years of wide-ranging civil engineering experience from across the country. The California native is also a



former United States Marine (he did two tours in Iraq during the Iraq War), He holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering and a master's degree in structural engineering, both from San Francisco State University.

"We are thrilled to have Sam join our management team," stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "He is highly qualified and will help ensure that we provide the highest level of service possible for the residents, motorists and businesses of Oakland County."

The RCOC Engineering Department includes about 70 employees across five divisions: Design, Construction, Right of Way, Programming and Subdivision Improvement and Development (SID). The department annually oversees more than \$40 million worth of road-construction projects; oversees approximately 415 bridges and culverts; acquires all the necessary right of way for road projects; pursues and tracks federal, state and local funding sources; oversees all special assessment district (SAD) subdivision street resurfacing projects; and much more.

Prior to joining RCOC, Fitzer served in the private sector as a design manager for various road and transit projects; as a construction technical advisor for Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) projects; and was a lead materials and materials-testing engineer for various California Department of Transportation projects.

"I was the lead materials engineer for the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge replacement project and was part of the program management team for the California High-Speed Rail project," Fitzer said.

Fitzer replaces long-time RCOC Engineering Director Tom Blust, who retired recently. "I have some big shoes to

fill," he noted. "There are a lot of things that the Road Commission does that it is rightfully proud of, and I want to make sure we continue to do those things well."

He added he hopes to help ensure that the agency gets the most value for its expenditures, especially in the area of road construction. "Construction is the biggest step in delivering a project. A lot of time and money is spent, and its significance goes up when you factor in safety, quality of life and the economic impact of the roads," Fitzer noted.

"Ultimately, we are using taxpayers' money, and we must be good shepherds of that money." He added that because road construction is a highly visible activity, it's critical that project costs align with the agency's vision and intended scope for the projects.

When not working, Fitzer enjoys running and bicycling as well as spending time working on his yard. He also enjoys riding motorcycles, though he sold his bike when he moved to Michigan from California. "I do hope to get a new one," he said.

Noting he moved to Michigan last August and started at the Road Commission this July, Fitzer said it has been a bit surreal making such big moves in the midst of a pandemic. "Because everything has been shut down, it's been a little hard to get to know my new community," he explained. "I'm looking forward to, hopefully, being able to get out a little more when things open up again."

RCOC Deputy Managing Director is ITS Mich. pres.

Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz has been named the 2020-2021 president of the Intelligent Transportation Society of Michigan (ITS Michigan). ITS Michigan is the state chapter of ITS America, the organization that brings together and advocates for public and private sector entities involved in the connected-transportation field. Piotrowicz, who for many years ran RCOC's transportation-technology initiatives, is nationally respected for his leadership in the field.



AWARD — CONT'D FROM FRONT
from a consultant's study of alternatives to the traditional hard-wire phone lines that had connected RCOC's smart traffic signals to the TOC since the system's launch in 1992. "The consultant reviewed multiple technologies to replace the phone lines and concluded that a public/private partnership with a cellular-technology provider was the way of the future," Jawad said.

"It was also clear," he added, "that RCOC did not have the internal expertise to build and maintain its own wireless system. So, the decision was made to partner with AT&T to create an RCOC-specific virtual private network (VPN) to connect the signal system."

The result was 850 smart-signal intersections were linked to each other and to the TOC via the new network (with 500 more slated to be added), thus improving the reliability of the system, reducing operating costs and reducing the amount of time staff spends addressing signal communications issues.

RCOC plows through coronavirus; 2021 budget impact unclear

As the providers of an official "essential service," the staff of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has continued to work throughout the coronavirus Pandemic.

That has meant road maintenance crews have continued to patch potholes, grade gravel roads, repair drainage problems and traffic signals, erect guardrails and traffic signs and much more. While some office staff, where appropriate, has worked from home, all agency work has continued a normal pace.

Additionally, RCOC's contractors have continued to work on road projects across the county, from road widenings to resurfacing projects, to culvert replacements and gravel-road paving — the work has not stopped.

What will happen next year remains a question, though. If the state Legislature reduces the state General-Fund contribution to roads, it could have a detrimental — and potentially very serious — impact on the Road Commission's ability to maintain and improve the roads.

Stay tuned for more info on the state-funding front as things develop.

31001 Lahser Road
Beverly Hills, MI 48025

Work zone cameras provide public view of Baldwin, Dequindre projects on website

Anyone wishing to see the current status of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) road-construction projects on Baldwin Road (in Orion Township) or Dequindre Road (on the Rochester Hills/Shelby Township border) can view the projects in real-time via work zone cameras on the RCOC website. The cameras take a photo every 15 minutes between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.



To view the cameras, visit the RCOC website at www.rcocweb.org and then click on the “Baldwin Road Construction Work Zone Camera” link or the “Dequindre Road Construction Work Zone Camera” link, both of which are in the “Helpful Links” section at the bottom of the website home page. Site visitors can view photos of the projects or time-lapse series that combine all photos taken in succession. RCOC will also produce a compilation of all the photos for each project following the completion of the projects.

The Baldwin project involves widening and reconstructing the road from Morgan Road to Waldon Road including the construction of five roundabouts and sewer line installation. The \$50 million project is funded primarily with federal dollars and contributions from Orion Township, RCOC and Oakland

County General government (through the Tri-Party program).

The Dequindre project involves widening the road to five lanes between Utica Road and Collins Avenue, including new concrete curbs and traffic signals, improved drainage and storm sewers and updated crosswalks.

The \$9.3 million project is 80 percent funded with federal dollars. The remainder will be shared by RCOC, the Macomb County Department of Roads, the City of Rochester Hills and Shelby Twp.

To learn more about the Baldwin project, visit the project’s webpage at <https://www.rcocweb.org/329/Baldwin-Road>. The link to the work zone camera is https://public.earthcam.net/tJ90CoLmq7TzrY396Yd88JhdaRzEMhdiy4BXT007Qg!/baldwin_stage_two/baldwin_road_2020/view_1.

To learn more about the Dequindre project, visit the project’s webpage at <https://www.rcocweb.org/539/Dequindre-Road>. The direct link to the camera is: <https://tinyurl.com/y9rhx6ar>.

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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