

Road Report

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

World's largest transportation tech showcase coming to Detroit in September -- local elected officials get in for free

The world's leading transportation policy makers, researchers, high-tech innovators and business professionals from around the globe will converge on Detroit Sept. 7 to 11 for the 2014 World Congress on Intelligent Transport Systems -- and local elected officials are invited to attend all or part of the event for free.

The event will showcase the latest technological developments in the transportation industry -- known as Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS). A number of prominent CEOs from the auto world and major corporations will lead programs. There will be more technology demonstrations at this event than any previous World Congress.

The prestigious World Congress is held only once every three years in North America. In the intervening years, it is held in Europe and Asia respectively. Previous North American venues for the World Congress have included New York City, San Francisco, Chicago and Orlando. In Europe, host cities have included London, Paris, Vienna and

Stockholm. In Asia, the event has been hosted by Beijing, Nagoya and Busan.

The 2014 event will be held at the newly renovated Cobo Center in downtown Detroit, with technology demonstrations and social events hosted at Belle Isle. The event will also include an array of technical tours highlighting the latest regional, national and global ITS deployments.

The event is hosted by the Intelligent Transportation Society of America (ITS America) and the organization's state chapter, ITS Michigan. The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has long been a leader in the field of ITS, was a founding member of ITS Michigan and was instrumental in helping to bring the World Congress to Detroit.

"We're really thrilled to have the World Congress in Detroit," stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar.



"This is a really big deal for this region and this state. As the nation's automotive capital, it's fitting that this event be held in Detroit."

Kolar added he hopes many local officials take advantage of the opportunity to attend part or all of the event.

"There is not likely to be another opportunity like this locally to hear the world's leaders in this field talk or to see such a large collection of the latest technology demonstrated." He noted the invitation to all local elected officials to attend for free is unprecedented.

First responders from Michigan will also be invited to attend the event free of charge on Tuesday, Sept. 9. Local officials will receive a letter explaining how to take advantage of the offer to attend for free.

For more information about the World Congress, visit the event Web site, <http://itsworldcongress.org>.

Kolar elected president of ITS Michigan

Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Managing Director Dennis Kolar, PE, has been elected president of the Intelligent Transportation Society of Michigan (ITS Michigan) by that organization's Board of Directors.



Dennis Kolar

America is the leading advocate for ITS technologies that improve the safety, security and efficiency of the nation's surface transportation system.

ITS Michigan members include private corporations, public agencies and academic institutions involved in the research, development, design, sales, installation and deployment of ITS technologies.

"I am very excited about the opportunity to lead ITS Michigan at this critical time," Kolar said. He noted this is a big year for the organization because it
CONT'D ON PAGE 2 -- SEE KOLAR

What's Inside

**What a winter:
Summary of season . . . 2**

**Road funding
punted...again 3**

New maps 3

Horsing around 4

What a winter: Historic season took toll on Road Commission

We've never seen anything like it.

This past winter that is. No one alive today has ever lived through a Southeast Michigan winter as severe as the 2013/2014 season.

In fact, the winter set at least two records: Snowiest January on record and snowiest winter on record for the region. Additionally, the region experienced some of the longest unusually cold spells on the books as well.

What did all that mean for the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC)? A winter that was much more costly than a normal winter and that required Road Commission crews to work considerably more overtime than a normal winter.

In fact, the RCOC snowplow and salt truck drivers worked a total of more than 35,000 hours of overtime during the winter. That's about 15,000 hours more than the Road Commission budgeted for. That factor alone cost RCOC nearly \$2.2 million more than was budgeted for winter.

On the state highways -- the roads RCOC maintains on behalf of the Michigan Department of Transportation, which include all the freeways in the county and major state roads like Woodward, Telegraph and Lapeer Road/M-24 -- the Road Commission used more than twice the number of overtime hours that were budgeted.

Additionally, for only the second time ever, RCOC brought in contractors to help plow snow on both rural roads and in subdivisions. While these contractors helped RCOC get roads open and clear in a shorter time than it would have taken otherwise, it came with a cost. The agency spent more than \$600,000 on snowplow contractors.

And, because much of the agency's



Following the massive snow storm of Jan. 6, RCOC lined up a row of snowplows to clear the freeways. Here, the trucks tandem plow I-75.

snow-fighting equipment was running around the clock for much of the winter, and because much of it is very old, the equipment broke down more frequently than in past years. That meant RCOC paid \$2.2 million just to repair its snowplow fleet and keep the trucks on the road.

Then there were the little things. For example, snow plow "blades". These are the steel plates attached to the bottom of the snowplows.

Last winter (2012/2013), RCOC used 352 blades. In the 2013/2014 winter, the agency used an amazing 893 blades. At \$110 per blade, that amounted to an additional bill of nearly \$60,000.

All these expenses, and many more, added up. In all, the 2013/2014 winter

cost RCOC more than \$4 million more than expected.

Thankfully, the state legislature opted to use some of the state's surplus dollars to help reimburse road agencies for the horrendous winter. For RCOC, that meant a special, one-time payment from the state of approximately \$3.9 million.

"That additional money from the state, thankfully, helped to backfill the hole created by the winter," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "However, contrary to some public opinion, that extra money was not available to use to repair the roads, which have been devastated by years of inadequate road funding topped off by this particularly bad winter."

KOLAR -- CONT'D FROM FRONT will host the ITS World Congress -- the largest gathering of ITS professionals in the world -- in Detroit in September.

The World Congress is held in North America only once every three years (the off years are in Europe and Asia respectively) and has never been in Detroit before. It is expected to draw approximately 10,000 ITS professionals to the region from across the globe. For more information about the World Congress, visit <http://itsworldcongress.org>.

RCOC is a founding member of ITS

Michigan and has been a leader in the field of ITS for more than 20 years. The Road Commission's largest ITS initiative is its FAST-TRAC (Faster And Safer Travel through Traffic Routing & Advanced Controls) system of smart, "adaptive" traffic signals. FAST-TRAC is the second largest such system in North America.

However, RCOC is involved with numerous other ITS projects on the local, state and national levels. "ITS is not only a rapidly growing industry that has the potential to be an economic

driver for Michigan, it also holds great promise for dramatically improving motorist safety," Kolar said. He added the World Congress will feature many of the emerging ITS technologies that will ultimately allow vehicles to communicate with each other and with the road system to create "cars that can't crash."

Kolar's term as ITS Michigan president begins June 1 and is for one year. For more information about ITS Michigan visit the organization's Web site, www.itsmichigan.org.

Once again, Michigan Legislature punts on road funding

Many road-funding proponents were more optimistic recently than they have been in years when Michigan Senate Majority Leader Randy Richardville (R-Monroe) began pushing hard for a serious increase in state road dollars.

With the governor and the Senate majority leader supporting a healthy increase in road funding, and the House having already passed a smaller funding package, there seemed a real chance that all the powers might actually be aligned to enact a package that would really allow for Michigan's roads to be fixed. But, then the effort fell apart at the last moment on June 11 and 12, the last days of the session, when some senators refused to support a tax increase.

Sen. Richardville's proposal would have shifted the gas tax from a flat 19 cents per gallon to a percentage of the wholesale price. It would have started at 9 percent and risen over time to 15 percent. Ultimately this would have produced the \$1 billion-plus in additional road funding that the governor and most experts believe is needed to fix the state's badly deteriorated roads.

Since the Legislature is now on recess, the next best opportunity to fix Michigan's road-funding crisis will likely be when the Legislature meets in the "lame-duck" session after the November election, though that has never proven particularly productive for road-funding issues. It's unlikely anything will happen

between now and the elections.

The most unfortunate aspect of the Legislature's failure to resolve the road problem is that the roads will continue to get worse. That means when the issue finally is resolved, it will be even more expensive and time-consuming to repair them.

"It is unfortunate that the Legislature missed this critical opportunity," RCOG Managing Director Dennis Kolar said. He thanked the majority of senators from Oakland County, though, who did support the funding issue.

"I think most of our legislators recognize the need and are trying to solve the problem. It's too bad a few legislators are able to hold the whole state hostage," Kolar noted.

Congress struggling with national road-funding crisis; federal Highway Trust Fund could run out of money in August

According to reports from Washington DC, members of Congress seem truly baffled about how to resolve the ever-worsening federal road-funding crisis.

Everyone agrees that the current trajectory will result in the federal Highway Trust Fund (the pot of federal road funding) running out of money in August. There seems to be absolutely no agreement, though, about how to fix that problem.

And it's a big problem. If Congress

opted not to address the problem, many federally funded road projects around the country could grind to a stop in late August.

Many observers are speculating that Congress won't let that happen, though there certainly don't seem to be any serious solutions being discussed yet. Case in point: Republic leaders have proposed filling the hole in the Trust Fund this year by eliminating Saturday mail delivery across

the country, and devoting the money saved through this -- over the next 10 years -- to this year's Trust Fund shortfall.

Initial indications are that there is little support for this proposal, particularly given that the idea of eliminating Saturday mail delivery remains a very controversial item. So, discussions continue on Capitol Hill about what to do about the impending crisis, and progress seems highly elusive at this point. Stay tuned...

RCOC publishes new county road map; now available

A new Oakland County road map is now available from the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC).

The new map is drawn from the Oakland County Enterprise Geographic Information System (GIS) program.

"We feel that one of the services we can provide as the county road commission is to offer maps to those using the roads we maintain," stated RCOC Board Chairman Greg Jamian. "This map has the most up-to-date road information available anywhere for Oakland County."

RCOC Vice-Chairman Ron Fowkes noted the map is updated from the last RCOC map, which was published in 2012. "We recognize that many people now use GPS systems for navigation purposes, but there are still many benefits of a map of the entire county," he said.

RCOC Commissioner Eric Wilson

added that the new map includes a complete directory of all roads under RCOC jurisdiction. "This makes it much easier to find a specific road in the county," Wilson said.

The new maps are available free of charge, but with a limit of two per person. Maps can be picked up at RCOC's two administrative offices:

▶ 31001 Lahser Road (at 13 Mile) in Beverly Hills

▶ 2420 Pontiac Lake Road (at County Center Drive West) in Waterford Twp.

Additionally, the Road Commission



will mail maps to those requesting them (up to two) upon receipt of payment to cover the cost of postage to mail the maps. To receive maps by mail, provide a check or money order made out to Road Commission for Oakland County (the name must be exactly as written here), and provide the exact cost of the postage for the map(s). The postage rate for one map is \$1.61. The rate for two maps is \$2.45.

For more information about the maps, call the RCOC Clerk's Office at (248) 645-2000, ext. 2290.

Horsing around: RCOC completes first equestrian/pedestrian crossing in state

On June 7, state, county and local officials joined RCOC Board Chairman Greg Jamian and Vice Chairman Ron Fowkes to cut the ribbon on the first equestrian and pedestrian crosswalk in the state of Michigan.

The crossing, located on Milford Road near Kensington Metropark, features the traditional pedestrian crosswalk push button as well as a button placed higher for those on horseback to use -- something never before done in Michigan. The crossing serves the Kensington Connector Trail, which is frequented by equestrians.



Above left, RCOC Vice Chairman Ron Fowkes (at right) describes the partnership that enabled the construction of the crossing. Looking on are (L-R): Senator Mike Kowall, Rep. Eileen Kowall, County Commissioner Phil Weipert and County Commissioner Bob Hoffman. Above right, an equestrian using the new crossing.

MDOT video busts myths about Ohio roads

Ever wonder why roads are better in Ohio than they are in Michigan? If so, you're not alone.

Those in the road industry in Michigan hear this question all the time. In fact, the question comes up so frequently (and often in conjunction with misinformation about why there is a difference) that the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) recently produced a video to explain exactly why this is and to debunk some of the related myths.

The video, entitled "MDOT Reality Check No. 4: Michigan needs to build roads like Ohio does," can be viewed on MDOT's YouTube channel or at www.youtube.com/watch?v=5W321V9WiYU.

The video cleverly points out that the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) does not have a "magic formula" for building better, longer-lasting roads. Rather, Ohio simply invests significantly more in their roads every year than does Michigan.

The video notes Ohio invests about \$1 billion more every year in roads than Michigan. That's a big difference.



Visit RCOC online at
www.rcocweb.org

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Road Report is published quarterly by the Road Commission for Oakland County. Have a question or comment about **Road Report**? Call Public Information Officer Craig Bryson at (248) 645-2000, ext. 2302 or send him an e-mail at cbryson@rcoc.org.

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