

Road Report

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

Legislature approves one-time road-funding boost:

RCOC pledges to put new money directly into road surfaces

At Governor Rick Snyder's request, the state Legislature has approved a one-time transfer of \$175 million from the state's General Fund to be used on roads this year.

The new money will mean approximately \$7 million this year in additional funding for the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC).

"We can definitely use the funding," RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar said. "We'll put every penny into improved road surfaces to address the pothole issue."

Kolar noted the funding would be used on three programs: spot resurfacing, preservation overlays and concrete slab replacement.

The spot resurfacing program involves identifying relatively small sections of road that are in poor condition, while the rest of the road is in moderate shape.



Spot resurfacing projects like this will be among the work done with the new money.

Those sections, which can range from about 100 feet in length to 1,000 feet, are then "milled" (the existing pavement is ground off) and new asphalt is added.

"We think of the spot resurfacing program as a sort of a surgical strike," Kolar said. "We can come in quickly and

repair the very worst sections. This is a very cost-effective way of improving the worst pothole areas."

Preservation overlay projects involve a simple resurfacing of roads that are in moderately good shape. They include small amounts of milling, but typically no other base repair followed by the application of one-and-a-half-to-two inches of new asphalt. "This is a good way to quickly get a new surface on a road for a very modest price -- typically just over \$200,000 per mile."

The concrete slab replacement program, as the name implies, involves removing the worst slabs on concrete roads and replacing just those particularly bad slabs.

"These three methods provide the biggest bang for the buck, and allow us to address the very worst sections of roadway," Kolar noted.

Costs piling up for 2017-2018 winter

It's pretty obvious to everyone in Oakland County that the 2017-2018 winter has been much more harsh than recent past winters. But the increased snow, ice, rain and potholes are not just causing an inconvenience for motorists -- they're also taking a bite out of the Road Commission for Oakland County's (RCOC) budget.

"All of the activities that we have had to do more of this year are very expensive," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "These include salting, plowing, pothole patching and gravel-road maintenance"

He noted that by mid-February, RCOC had exceeded its budget for employee overtime for salting/plowing. The agency has also exceeded its salt budget.

"We won't stop doing any of these critical safety-related activities -- such as salting, plowing and pothole patching," Kolar said. "But, the further over budget

we go, the more money we'll have to take from other budget items like resurfacing roads in the summer."

The culprit? More snow than Oakland County has seen in recent years combined with dramatic temperature swings (going from single digits to 50-plus degrees in a day and back and forth), followed by torrential rain and a near-historic pothole season. "We spent millions of dollars fighting these conditions," Kolar explained, "and we have no road improvements to show for all those expenditures."

Unfortunately, these weather phenomena came at a time when Michigan's roads are also in historically poor condition following decades of inadequate funding. As a result, more roads than at any time in recent memory are in poor condition and, therefore, prone to potholes.

"It's a double whammy," Kolar lamented.

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Road Commission saves money by buying used cars for fleet

In addition to road improvement projects, road maintenance efforts and staff costs, one of the Road Commission for Oakland County's (RCOC) expenses is the cost of purchasing and maintaining the many vehicles in its fleet. Recently, the agency found a new way to cost effectively replace the sedans in its fleet.

Within the fleet, there are the large dump trucks used to plow snow, haul materials and so on; there are the massive road graders, many pickup trucks, boom trucks for repairing traffic signals and signs, vectors for cleaning out drainage structures and more. All these vehicles are critical to RCOC being able to maintain the road system.

At the bottom of the vehicle priority list is the passenger car pool. These sedans are used primarily by office staff who need to visit job sites, attend off-site meetings, travel between RCOC facilities, etc. As the Road



Commission's budget shrank or remained stagnant in the years prior to 2014, the agency was not able to replace many of its aging vehicles.

When revenues finally began to rise in 2015 (though only slightly prior to the increase of the gas tax and vehicle registration fee in 2017), RCOC devoted its limited vehicle budget to replacing critical dump trucks, graders and the other "work horses" of the fleet. In the meantime, its collection

of 1990s and early 2000s Pontiac Bonnevilles continued to deteriorate.

Finally, in 2017, RCOC had no choice but to begin replacing the dying Bonnevilles. However, in an effort to stretch its scarce dollars as far as possible, the agency tried something new: It purchased used cars.

"This has worked very well for us," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. He explained that the agency purchased eight used cars in 2017 and recently purchased another seven.

The cars cost, on average, about \$14,000 compared to about \$20,000 if they had been purchased new. None were older than two years old. They included primarily Chrysler 200s and Ford Fusions.

"We will monitor this program over time to see how the cars perform," Kolar noted. "But for now, the program seems to be a great solution to the challenges of our passenger-vehicle fleet."

Late United States Congressman Joe Knollenberg remembered fondly by RCOC Board

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Board paid tribute to late former US Congressman Joe Knollenberg, who represented Oakland County's 9th and 11th Congressional districts for 16 years. Knollenberg died Feb. 6.

No other federal legislator during Congressman Knollenberg's tenure brought as much federal road funding to RCOC as he did. Knollenberg left office in 2006.

The RCOC Board adopted a resolution in honor of Knollenberg at its Feb. 8 meeting. In the resolution, the Board noted that RCOC and the motorists of Oakland County benefitted greatly from Knollenberg's commitment and dedication to improving the roads in his district.

Throughout his tenure, Congressman Knollenberg, who served on the House Transportation Appropriations



Congressman Knollenberg joining in an RCOC groundbreaking ceremony in 2006 in West Bloomfield Twp.

Subcommittee, brought a tremendous amount of road funding back to Oakland County for a wide variety of projects. This funding included \$12 million for the Northwestern Connector project (roads in the vicinity of the Northwestern Highway/Orchard Lake Road intersection), \$10 million for the Tienken widening project (Livernois to Sheldon), \$6 million for Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) projects, \$2.5 million for Livernois resurfacing (Long Lake to north of Avon) and \$2.75 million for the widening of Crooks (14 Mile to Meyer) among others.

The resolution added that Congressman Knollenberg not only made road projects a top priority in his district, but also continually demonstrated a true concern for and interest in the people he served, always making time to offer a kind word and warm handshake to all he met.

Excess property page added to RCOC website

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has added a section to its website offering site visitors the opportunity to view and purchase excess properties owned by RCOC.

The section can be found by clicking the "Excess Property" item within the "Doing Business with RCOC" tab on the top of the website home page (www.rcocweb.org). Available properties range from small portions of a lot to full lots with buildings and acreage.

"Posting our excess property on the website will make it easier for the public to see what we have for sale," noted RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "It should also make it easier to sell land we no longer need."

Some of the features of the new section include:

- Listings of properties currently available for purchase.
- Option to sign up to receive notices and updates about properties.

In addition to property currently available for purchase, site visitors can request a review of a specific property owned by RCOC but not currently listed on the site.

RCOC working to repair Oxford Twp. "sinkhole"

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is working with Oxford Township, the Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner's Office, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and the Polly Ann Trail authority to repair a "sinkhole" that developed in late February on Wood Trail Drive in the township when a culvert under the road failed.

While Wood Trail Drive, located south of Draher Road and west of M-24 (Lapeer Road), is under RCOC jurisdiction, the culvert extends west of the road under the Polly Ann Trail. The trail is a on a 100-plus-year-old railroad bed.

RCOC's plans call for the culvert to be replaced, though an exact schedule and specific details have not yet been finalized. RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar noted the goal is to complete the work as soon as possible.

In the mean time, the subdivision road remains closed.



The sinkhole was created when water from the failed culvert washed out soil under the road. This left the pavement unsupported, and it collapsed.

RCOC's Torres named Urban Engineer of the Year

Michael Torres, head of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Construction Division, in February was named the County Road Association of Michigan (CRA) 2017 Urban Engineer of the Year.



Torres, a 32-year RCOC veteran, annually manages the construction of road projects valued at \$35 to \$50 million. He oversees a staff of 31 including project engineers, surveyors, inspectors, laboratory staff and administrative staff.

Torres holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Wayne State University and a master's degree in business administration from the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

SB 637 would divert road funding

The Michigan Senate continues to debate Senate Bill 637 which would result in road agencies subsidizing for-profit telecommunications companies with funds intended to improve Michigan's roads. The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is urging a "no" vote on the bill.

"The bill is being promoted as an effort to help expand broadband access across the state," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "It would do this at the expense of Michigan roads, which can hardly afford to lose any funding."

The bill would severely restrict the fees that road agencies could charge telecom companies for the permits required to place and maintain their equipment in road rights of way. It would also reduce the size of the bond these companies must post when installing equipment in the right of way.

"It is ironic that the Legislature voted to provide \$175 million in additional road funding recently," Kolar stated, "and now is considering forcing us to give some of those hard-earned dollars to for-profit telecom companies."

Bill would likely increase the cost of salt for Michigan road agencies

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is urging the state Legislature to oppose Senate Bill 363, which would give preferential treatment to one of the four salt companies operating in Michigan.

"We believe this is bad legislation that would waste tax-payer dollars and cause Michigan road agencies to divert scarce road funding from road repairs," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "We also believe it is unnecessary and, in fact, would provide the largest benefit for the Canadian company that owns the only salt company with facilities in Michigan."

The legislation is also misleading, as it purports to support a Michigan-based company. However, the reality is that the lone salt company that would benefit from the legislation is wholly owned by a Canadian company (the Detroit Salt Company is owned by Kissner, an international company based in Kitchener, Ontario).

"Because it favors only one of the four salt companies that regularly bids on road-salt contracts in Michigan, this legislation cannot help but increase the cost of salt. This is ironic," Kolar added, "since

the Michigan Legislature in 2015 voted to increase road funding for the state. This legislation would force the road agencies in the state to pay more for salt, meaning they would have to use some of that new money to subsidize a for-profit company. Of course, that also means the road agencies would be forced to make fewer repairs to the roads."

Kolar noted the bill also does away with the idea of the free market determining the best contractor. Rather, it picks winners and losers. Doing so also jeopardizes hundreds of Michigan jobs supported by companies that bring salt into Michigan through ports, docks and trucking companies. That means the bill is favoring some Michigan jobs over other Michigan jobs.

"This bill could also have the unintended consequence of resulting in significantly increased truck traffic on Michigan's roads," Kolar said. The current responsible bidding practices encourage multiple vendors utilizing multiple transportation practices, such as shipping on the Great Lakes.

"This bill is bad for Michigan," Kolar concluded.

Road Commission plans busy 2018 road construction season

The 2018 road construction season will be starting soon. Here is a listing of the major road construction projects planned this year (this does not include the "spot resurfacing" and "preservation overlay" projects).

Widening:

- Baldwin, Gregory to Waldon in Orion Twp. (two-year project)
- Dequindre, Long Lake to Burning Bush on the Troy/Sterling Heights border
- John R, Long Lake to South Blvd in Troy (city is leading project)

Reconstruct:

- Tripp, Dixie to Van in Groveland Twp.
- Hamlin, Adams to the western Rochester Hills city limits in Rochester Hills

Major resurfacing:

- Adams, Square Lake to South Blvd. in Bloomfield Twp. and Troy
- Maple, Haggerty to Drake in West Bloomfield (includes adding center left-turn lane)
- Opdyke, Auburn to Perry in Auburn Hills and Pontiac
- South Blvd., Adams to Crooks in Rochester Hills and Troy

Gravel road paving:

- Napier, 9 Mile to 10 Mile on the Lyon Twp./Novi border

Intersection safety improvements:

- Flint at Miller/Orion in Lake Orion and Orion Twp.
- Grand River at South Hill in Lyon Twp.
- Adams at Gunn in Oakland Twp.

Bridge preventive maintenance:

- Lansdowne over Williams Lake canal in Waterford Twp.
- Manor over Swartz Creek in Holly Twp.
- Secord Lake over East Creek in Addison Twp.
- South Blvd. over Ferry Creek in Rochester Hills

Concrete slab replacement

- Long Lake, Corporate to Tower in Troy

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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