

Road Report

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

RCOC opens first "mini" roundabout at Orion/Miller/Flint intersection on Lake Orion/Orion Township border

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) in November opened its first-ever "mini" roundabout at the Orion Road/Miller Road/Flint Street intersection on the Lake Orion/Orion Township border.

Mini roundabouts are similar to traditional roundabouts except that they are smaller and the center island is typically either simply painted on the pavement or only slightly elevated. They offer the benefits of regular roundabouts with the added benefit of a smaller footprint.

According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), mini roundabouts are best suited to locations where speeds are already low and environmental constraints would preclude the use of larger roundabout with raised central islands. Mini roundabouts are common in the United Kingdom and France and gain-



A view of the roundabout just before it opened. The roundabout includes pedestrian crosswalks.

ing popularity in the United States.

The roundabout provides improved safety and traffic flow at the intersection and on nearby roads including those "downstream" from the roundabout. The previous intersec-

tion operated as an all-way stop.

The approximately \$570,000 project was funded primarily by RCOC.

In addition to the construction of the roundabout, the project included raised, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant pedestrian crosswalks; improved drainage; updated signs; and new street lighting.

The intersection was closed during construction.

Crash data has consistently demonstrated that roundabouts result in far fewer traffic fatalities and serious-injury crashes than signalized intersections. Additionally, roundabouts generally handle 30-50 percent more traffic than a signalized intersection -- meaning fewer backups and delays, due to the fact that traffic moves continually in all directions through a roundabout.

RCOC recognized for long history of traffic safety

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) was one of a select few companies and organizations recognized by the Transportation Improvement Association (TIA) recently for its contributions to safety.

The recognition occurred at TIA's 2018 Annual Meeting at the Suburban Collection Showplace in Novi. RCOC's award was accepted by Traffic-Safety Department Director Danielle Deneau.

The award recognized RCOC's leadership in the effort to reduce Oakland County's traffic fatality rate. TIA CEO Jim Santilli noted when presenting the award that Oakland County has dramatically reduced its traffic fatality rate since 1967 when 200 county, Road Commission and corporate leaders came together to form TIA in response to the then-high fatality rate.

Since then, Oakland County has gone from having a traffic-fatality rate higher



TIA CEO Jim Santilli presents RCOC Traffic-Safety Director Danielle Deneau with the 2018 TIA Transportation Safety Award.

than either the state or the nation to having a rate today that is approximately half the state and national rates.

Other award recipients included General Motors, Ford, Secretary of State Ruth Johnson, recently retired MDOT Director Kirk Steudle and the City of Novi.

What's Inside

Two bills would be bad for Michigan 2

RCOC Strategic Planning process coming in spring 2

RCOC is ready for the snow 3

Local road millages do well in election 3

Two bills before the state Legislature are bad news: SB 637 and SB 396

Now that the election is behind us, we have entered "lame duck" season in Lansing -- and the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has serious concerns about two bills the legislature may take up during this time.

Lame duck is the time after an election when term-limited legislators -- who will be out of office at the end of the year -- sometimes take up bills that might not otherwise see the light of day. The bills that concerns RCOC are Senate Bill (SB) 637 and SB 396.

SB 637 purports to support the concept of expanded "small cell" (cellular) networks -- which RCOC supports. However, it is written with a clear bias in favor of the telecom cellular companies. A number of the requirements spelled out in the bill would actually cost agencies like RCOC money -- dollars that would not be available to improve our roads.

For example, the bill would restrict the fee that road agencies could charge telecom companies for locating small-cell wireless equipment on a road agency's traffic-signal poles to \$20 annually. This would not come close to covering RCOC's cost to manage the facility, including having agency electricians inspect the equipment to ensure it is not interfering with traffic-signal operations. Those costs would have to be covered with road funding.

The bill would also prohibit road agencies from requiring bonds from the telecom companies for the eventual removal and disposal of their equipment. This would leave the road agency to pay for any equipment removal costs if the telecom company refuses to remove it or goes out of businesses.

The Michigan House's Energy Policy Committee passed Senate Bill 637 on Oct. 4. It is now before the full House. "This bill is bad legislation that would divert sorely needed tax-payer dollars from Michigan's roads to subsidize multi-billion-dollar telecommunications companies," noted RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar.

"**SB 396** is also bad legislation," he explained. "It would allow oversized and overweight timber trucks to use gravel roads without special permission during the critical spring thaw period when non-all-weather roads are particularly vulnerable to damage."

This is the period when road agencies typically enact spring weight restrictions (also known as "frost laws") on these roads to prevent damage from heavy trucks. If the trucks are allowed to operate with excessive weight during this time, they will do serious damage to the roads, leaving the road agencies to pay the cost of repairing that damage.

"That means the road agencies will subsidize the timber industry," Kolar said.

"Even the Senate's own Fiscal Agency has warned of the negative financial impacts for road agencies if this bill passes."

Finally, SB 396 is sponsored by Senator Tom Casperson, a term-limited legislator whose family owns a timber-trucking business. "Since his family stands to gain from the legislation, this seems like a self-serving gesture as well as a clear case of conflict of interest," the managing director noted.

While this bill would primarily impact roads in the northern Lower Peninsula and Upper Peninsula, the fact that it will waste scarce road dollars should concern all Michigan residents.

The bill was passed out of the Senate Transportation Committee in September and is before the full Senate.

"Both bills are ill-conceived and amount to unfunded mandates for road agencies," Kolar said. "I hope our friends in the Michigan Legislature will put the kibosh on both bills. If you agree with me, please let your legislators know."

RCOC Winter Fast Fact: **How much salt in a winter?**

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) uses 64,000 tons of salt in an average winter. Last year, which saw above-average snowfall, the agency used approximately 80,000 tons.

RCOC will kick off Strategic Planning process with communities in the spring

Top administrators, planners and engineers of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) will soon begin the process of meeting with officials of virtually every city, village and township in Oakland County as part of RCOC's biennial Strategic Planning process.

RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar noted that since 1985, RCOC officials have met every two years with the communities to ensure community officials play an active role in setting the Road Commission strategy for coming years. The meetings will be scheduled in the spring.

"This is a very time-consuming activity," explained RCOC Chairman Eric Wilson. "But it is one of the best investments of our time that we can make. Nothing else gives us such a clear understanding of what the important issues and

priorities are for the communities."

"This is part of our philosophy of open communication with our customers," Wilson added.

Managing Director Kolar explained that the process allows RCOC to take the pulse of the communities on large issues as well as ensure community officials have an avenue to discuss road needs and provide feedback on road-maintenance issues. "Through these meetings, we keep abreast of what is happening in the communities. We learn about new developments, redevelopment efforts and related traffic and road needs," Kolar noted. "It helps promote a better understanding of the issues we all face."

During the process, RCOC asks the local officials to prioritize the needs on county roads within their communities. This information is then used to help pri-

oritize RCOC projects in coming years.

After the last round of Strategic Planning meetings in 2017, RCOC calculated the cost of addressing the current and projected needs identified by the communities on county roads. The total came to nearly \$3.1 billion worth of road needs. Kolar expects this figure to have increased since then.

Also, at the meetings, the RCOC administrators share with local officials important developments at the Road Commission, such as new technology initiatives, and convey financial news. They will also discuss developments at the state level that could impact Oakland County communities.

Once the Strategic Planning meetings are complete, RCOC will compile a report summarizing the information gathered at the meetings.

Bring on the snow: RCOC prepared for winter weather

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has reviewed its winter operations with its truck drivers, filled its salt domes and prepared its trucks and plows. Let the snow fall.

"We have a detailed preparation process that involves going over trucks with a fine-toothed comb, reviewing operations and safety procedures with staff and making sure all of our salt-storage facilities are full," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "We have done all those things. We are ready for winter."

Again this year, RCOC also hired part-time, temporary snowplow/salt-truck drivers to augment its full-time staff. The agency hired approximately 25 temporary drivers.

"These part-time workers are a great way to ensure we provide the service that Oakland County residents deserve," explained RCOC Chairman Eric Wilson.

RCOC is also continuing to update its fleet of snowplows/salt trucks. "We are gradually replacing our aging fleet of trucks," said RCOC Vice Chairman Greg Jamian. "Each year, we purchase 12 new snowplow/dump trucks." He noted RCOC has purchased 59 new trucks since 2013.

Road Commissioner Ron Fowkes noted the agency is prepared for whatever Mother Nature brings during the winter, though a milder winter is always appreciated.

Wilson noted the RCOC team is con-



RCOC Deputy Managing Director Gary Piotrowicz, far right, talks with drivers at RCOC's Southfield garage during winter-maintenance

stantly looking for best practices when it comes to maintaining roads during the winter months, such as the "wing plows" ordered with new trucks in recent years. The wing plows extend from the right side of the truck and are retracted when not in use. They can expand the width of roadway a single truck can plow, enabling trucks to plow a roadway lane and the shoulder at the same time, for example.

RCOC also implemented a quick-response plan that includes light-duty trucks to more quickly get to isolated icing occurrences and other urgent situations as well as to more quickly get into subdivisions and crossovers/turnarounds on boulevards. Additionally, RCOC uses non-road-maintenance staff and hires contractors to help on back roads and in sub-

divisions during heavy snow events.

Despite these initiatives, Jamian explained that motorists must still be vigilant when driving during or immediately after snow events. "Drive for the conditions. That will make a safer environment for everyone on the road," he explained. He also reminded motorists to not crowd the plow and give the plows "room to groom."

Check your mailbox

Residents with mailboxes along roadsides are reminded to check the stability of boxes. "If your mailbox or post is at all loose, chances are it will not withstand standard snow-removal operations," Managing Director Kolar said. "Taking time to tighten screws or securing or replacing mail receptacles or posts now will help prevent future mishaps," Kolar added.

Congratulations to communities that passed roads millages in election

Voters in seven Oakland County communities stepped up on Nov. 6, when they approved property-tax millages to support roads.

The communities are: Independence Township, Berkley, Milford, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Huntington Woods and Northville (which is partially in Wayne County).

"I applaud each of these communities - and those that have previously approved road millages," stated Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "The leaders and voters in these communities acknowledged the magnitude of the road problem and took it upon themselves to do something about it."

In particular, Kolar praised Independence Township Supervisor Pat Kittle and the voters of that township who approved a tax increase of up to two mills for four years for roads. "That makes Independence Township



only the second township in Oakland County with a millage for roads," Kolar noted. Bloomfield Township has a one-mill levy that is required under a state law that allows the township to maintain local roads within its borders.

"A lot of people complain about the roads. It's harder to do something about them," Kolar said. "The leaders and voters of these communities did something, knowing it would cost them a little money personally. The rest of us who use those roads owe them a debt of gratitude."

Independence Township's millage will allow for the resurfacing of all main roads within the township during over the coming four years. "I think that's a pretty good return on a two-mill-a-year investment," Kolar said.

RCOC Winter Fast Fact: How many salt trucks?

When RCOC is conducting winter operations at full capacity, it will have:

- 106 snowplows/salt trucks on the road (the traditional large, orange trucks).
- If needed, 19 road graders and
- 18 pickup trucks can be deployed to help clear back roads and subdivisions.
- Following major storms, private contractors are also called in for both the back roads & subdivisions.

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Beverly Hills, MI 48025

Knight named new RCOC Planning & Environmental Concerns Director

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has named Brad Knight as the new director of the agency's Planning and Environmental Concerns Department.

A seven-year RCOC employee, Knight spent the last six years as environmental concerns coordinator for the agency. Prior to that, he was an environmentalist II. Before joining the Road Commission, Knight worked for the Hubbell, Roth and Clark (HRC) engineering consulting firm for 12 years in a variety of positions.



The Planning and Environmental Concerns Department performs short- and long-range transportation planning, does geographic information system (GIS) mapping, oversees federal road funds coming to Oakland County, handles all RCOC information-technology needs and provides environmental services for the agency.

"We are very pleased to promote Brad to this position," stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "He has accomplished great things as the head of our Environmental Concerns division, and I am sure he will bring the same drive, determination and enthusiasm to his new position and to the Road Commission's leadership team."

Knight holds a bachelor's degree in environmental sciences and urban planning from Central Michigan University. He is a resident of Troy and a member of the Michigan Wetland Banking Advisory Board.

Knight noted he is thrilled to be working with the respected staff of the department. "The staff is amazing," he said. "They are capable, enthusiastic and hard working. We have experts in GIS, IT, transportation planning, the environment and much more. Though they are rarely seen by the public, they really serve as sort of the backbone of the agency, providing many critical services."

The new director added he is excited about learning about and being involved in the world of Transportation Asset Management - which is a process for establishing transportation system management best practices. State legislation mandated that all Michigan road agencies establish a transportation asset management plan by 2022. Knight will be leading this process at the Road Commission

"I also want to make sure we maintain and grow the great relationships we have with the 61 cities, villages and townships in Oakland County as well as with our county commissioners, state and federal legislators and other public officials serving the residents of Oakland County," Knight observed.

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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