

*Quality Life through Good Roads "We Care"*



**Inter-Departmental Memorandum**

**MANAGING DIRECTOR'S OFFICE**

**VIA FAX**

**DATE:** January 11, 2008

**To:** Oakland County Township Supervisors,  
City and Village Managers and Administrators,  
Mayors Barnett and Phillips

**FROM:** Brent O. Bair

**SUBJECT: COUNTY ROAD ASSOCIATION SURVEY RESULTS**

---

In mid-November I sent you a letter indicating that the County Road Association of Michigan (CRAM) was conducting a survey of all Michigan road commissions asking for input on the impact of revenue shortfalls with regard to staffing and services. All 83 counties responded and CRAM has issued its report. A copy of this five-page report follows this memo.

What the survey results cannot document is the ultimate cost to the public in terms of travel delays, crashes, and damage to vehicles resulting from deteriorating roads. The survey data also do not indicate the ultimate additional cost of road repairs due to delayed maintenance.

Feel free to share this information with your councils, commissions and boards as well as others in your community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Bair", is written over a horizontal line.

/w

5 pages to follow

**County Road Association of Michigan**  
PO Box 12067 Lansing, MI 48901-2067

January 7, 2008 - Issue XIV

**Survey Highlights Need for Reform**

The County Road Association of Michigan recently surveyed all 83 county road agencies to determine the impact of funding that has failed to keep up with inflation, and is projected to decrease by another 4 percent for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

It was discovered that declining revenues from the Michigan Transportation Fund coupled with significant increases in the costs of materials, fuel, labor and equipment have caused county road agencies to make cuts across the board.

For many county road agencies, increased costs and a reduced workforce have resulted in a reduction of services. Road commissions in 46 counties reported having to reduce or discontinue programs and services in 2006.

Unfunded maintenance needs will continue to devastate county roads. Recent legislation to expand the list of vehicles exempted from the seasonal weight restrictions, which are intended to reduce the damage caused by the thaw-freeze cycle of spring, will only exacerbate the deterioration of our county roads.

If the situation remains unchanged it is clear that following the spring thaw, not only will Michigan motorists be stuck in the mud and mire, but so will the state's economy.

Below are additional results from the survey.

**Staffing:**

The lack of adequate funding has caused county road agencies to make significant staffing cuts, crippling response time for snow removal and forcing delays of needed infrastructure improvements.

- 
- 74 of Michigan's county road commissions have eliminated staff positions.
  - Six county road commissions experienced one- to two-week shutdowns, while several others experienced no-pay days, shortened work weeks and significant layoffs.
  - Two-thirds of all county road commissions have made changes to overtime policies.

**Winter Maintenance:**

Reductions in staff will have the most visible impact during the snow removal season. More than one-third of all county road agencies have made changes to winter road maintenance policies. The most common changes were reductions in weekend and night shift snow removal, and approval of overtime only in emergencies.

- Emmet County, for example, cannot afford to hire enough drivers to staff their established plow routes.
- Charlevoix County has eliminated weekend road plowing other than on state trunk lines and has discussed further reductions to a 32-hour work week in the future.
- Several counties have implemented policies to plow only when significant snow accumulates (three to six inches on low-volume roads). Osceola County will plow only when the accumulation reaches six inches or greater.

**Preservation and Maintenance:**

Increased costs and flat or decreasing revenues have caused the majority of county road agencies to make cuts in road preservation and preventative maintenance. Given that three-quarters of county paved roads are currently in need of repair, these statistics are troubling.

- More than half of Michigan's county road agencies have reduced, or plan to reduce funding for road preservation, which includes resurfacing and reconstruction.
- More than one-third of county road agencies have made the difficult decision to forgo preventative maintenance.
- One-quarter of all county road agencies has reduced gravel road maintenance including grading and brining.
- One-quarter of counties has reduced roadside maintenance work including mowing and trimming brush.
- Seven counties have reduced or eliminated bridge and culvert replacements and another county anticipates doing so in the next year.
- Pavement markings and sign/signal upgrades which, by their nature are intended to increase traffic safety have been reduced by 11 counties.

County Road Association of Michigan  
January 7, 2008

Page 3

### **Fewer Construction Projects:**

Road commissions in 22 counties reported they have postponed necessary road projects due to lack of funding, while 12 others have modified their township participation programs, further reducing the number of road projects scheduled.

### **Reverting to the Stone Age:**

Years of delaying road projects due to lack of funding has caused seven counties to revert to the "Stone Age," returning paved surface roads to gravel. These counties indicated that they simply could not afford to re-pave these roads. Several counties indicate they may be forced into this same regression if funding does not increase.

Some counties have increased the number of roads that are designated as "seasonal" to minimize funds expended on winter maintenance.

### **Costs Continue to Increase:**

Without increased revenues, additional cuts by county road agencies are inevitable. The costs of doing business continue to increase and road commissions have no taxing authority to generate revenue.

Winter maintenance accounts for a significant portion of a road commission budget. In addition to the expense of overtime, winter snow removal taxes county road agency budgets in the areas of fuel, salt and equipment.

#### **Winter Maintenance Facts**

- At 25 mph, which is the typical speed on the county system, one driver can plow only about 200 miles of one lane during an eight-hour workday.
- The average fuel economy for a plow truck while clearing snow is about 4 miles per gallon.

### **Road Commission for Oakland County:**

In the 9 years since Michigan's last gas tax increase (fiscal year 1998 to fiscal year 2007) the costs for materials road commissions use on a regular basis have increased at an alarming rate. The following cost estimates were provided by the Road Commission for Oakland County but are comparable throughout Michigan.

- The cost to replace a 12 yard truck has increased 73.6 percent.
- Diesel fuel costs have increased 303.8 percent.
- Gasoline costs have increased 312.7 percent.
- The cost of asphalt has increased 47.8 percent.

County Road Association of Michigan  
January 7, 2008

Page 4

- The cost of gravel has increased 20.1 percent.
- Guardrail and related hardware costs have increased 113.4 percent.
- Plow blades have increased 89.4 percent.
- Sign posts have increased in price by 95.4 percent, and
- Traffic signal cable has increased in price by 140.1 percent.

### **Rural Road Commission Experiences:**

The following statistics provided by Clinton County clearly demonstrate their need to do more with less.

- Road commission officials in Clinton County estimated that salt prices have increased in cost by approximately 10 percent annually for the last few years.

{Note: The cost of salt varies based on the time of year and volume purchased. Ionia County, for example, is paying 38 percent more this year than they did last year for salt.}

- Steel underbody blades on road plows which may need to be replaced 2 to 3 times daily during a winter storm have increased in cost by 86 percent over the past 5 years.
- The cost of patching materials also has skyrocketed. The cost of cold patch has nearly doubled in the last five years, while the cost of hot patch has increased by one third.

### **Moving forward:**

The stories are the same across the state. To balance their budgets, county road agencies are being forced to make difficult cuts in staff, and eliminate projects that are vital to the safety of residents. Depending on the severity of this winter's weather, many road commissions face the possibility of having to close their doors for a period of time in 2008.

With Gov. Granholm's announcement that she will not advocate for a fuel tax increase, county road agencies are quite literally between a rock and a hard place. Not unlike 1997, we face an uphill battle. Michigan's county road system is the backbone of our state's local economy. Nearly \$800 billion in goods are moved on more than 91,000 miles of county roads each year.

County Road Association of Michigan  
January 7, 2008

Page 5

### **If Not Now, When?**

CRAM recently issued a press release asking, "If Not Now, When?" Now is the time for the Governor to make a commitment to transportation funding as a top priority in 2008!

To achieve a diverse and robust economy, the legislature must make funding for Michigan's roads and highways a priority. A strong system of local roads is essential to economic growth. We must act now to stop the bleeding.

Governor Granholm is pinning the future of Michigan's transportation system on the potential outcome of a bi-partisan workgroup. It is a laudable effort, and we remain hopeful that an alternative funding mechanism can be developed in the long term, but our roads need to be fixed now.

While the discussion goes on for long-term solutions, an increase in the fuel tax would provide an instant source of desperately needed funds. The fuel tax is essentially a user fee. The average driver today spends less than a dollar a day to maintain Michigan roads. A moderate increase will stop the hemorrhaging while the search for a long-term solution continues.

With a consistent and vocal grass roots effort we can achieve the funding increases crucial to economic stability. Our voice will be heard at the State Capitol and beyond! The passage of House Bills 4574, 4576 and 4577 will help keep Michigan's economy from being stuck in the mud!

---