



COUNTY ROAD ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN

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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Feb. 9, 2009

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The State of Michigan's Crumbling County Road Network is Dire

Lansing, Mich.- Today, the County Road Association of Michigan (CRAM) announced the results of a survey to determine the impact of decreased state funding on our county road system.

“This is the second year CRAM has asked these questions of county road agencies,” said association Director, John Niemela. “It is astounding to see the deterioration of our local road network from year-to-year. Unfortunately, we know this trend will continue unless funding for Michigan’s road agencies is increased substantially.”

The Michigan Transportation Asset Management Council concluded in their most recent annual report, “at current funding levels, Michigan’s roads are deteriorating faster than they can be repaired or replaced.”

“Our survey results indicate the accuracy of this predication,” Niemela said “We are literally reverting to the stone age.”

When paved roads crumble to the point they are no longer safe for motorists to travel and funding is not available to reconstruct a road, road commissions put the public safety first- even if that means reverting paved roads to gravel.

“In 2007, seven counties returned paved roads to gravel. By 2008, 23 road commissions were forced to make this difficult decision because they simply could not afford to reconstruct these roads,” Niemela said. “I wish I could say this is a short-term problem, but without increased revenues, additional cuts by road agencies are inevitable.”

When asked if they anticipate returning hard surface roads to gravel in coming years, 25 county road agencies indicated this was likely, another 11 that it was a possibility.

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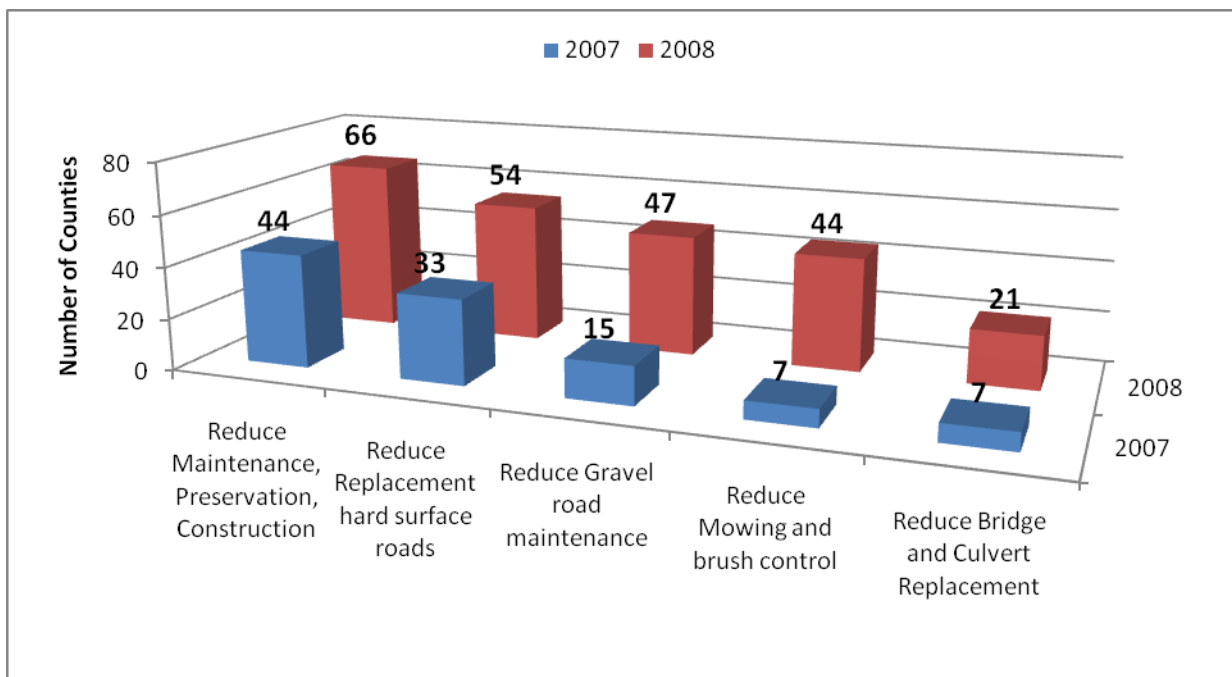
“Reverting paved roads to gravel is a graphic image that should serve as a wake-up call to legislators, but is by no means the worst news for our local road and bridge system,” Niemela said. “Recent hard winters, skyrocketing costs of construction materials, and steadily decreasing revenues have caused many county road agencies to reduce preventive maintenance.”

When adequately funded, preventive maintenance helps to extend the life of roads in good condition by applying lower cost treatments at the appropriate time. This slows the rate of deterioration and yields long-term savings.

All of Michigan’s county road agencies participate in asset management, but most find it very difficult to fully fund the necessary routine maintenance and preventive maintenance (resurfacing and other activities to extend pavement life) necessary to keep these roads from falling to poor condition, where they must be rehabilitated or reconstructed.

“It really is a pay now, or pay more down the road scenario,” Niemela said. “The longer we underfund transportation in Michigan, the more it will cost to bring our infrastructure back to a state of good condition.”

Reduced Maintenance-



The chart above clearly shows the dramatic impact reduced funding levels are having on the ability of county road agencies to maintain our local road network. In some areas more than triple the number of road agencies made cuts to programs in 2008, than in 2007.

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“The trends are clear, road commissions have been doing more with less for many years and have cut to the point where there is nothing left that does not impact the level of service,” Niemela said. “Road Commissions have cut back on replacing equipment and have eliminated many positions in recent years.”

Equipment-

In 2007, 11 road commissions reduced or eliminated equipment purchases and 14 indicated they were operating with reduced equipment levels or with equipment beyond its scheduled service life. By 2008, 61 road commissions reduced or eliminated equipment purchases and 60 were operating with reduced equipment levels or with equipment beyond its scheduled service life. At least 53 road commissions expect to further delay equipment replacement.

“Road commissions are having a hard time keeping their older snowplow equipment on the road instead of in the garage,” Niemela said. “Some road commissions are still working with equipment from the 1970’s, which can lead to expensive and time consuming repairs.”

Staffing levels and overtime-

Road commissions continue the trend of reducing staff levels. In 2007, 72 road commissions indicated they had eliminated positions with 11 initiating new lay-offs. In 2008, 67 road commissions eliminated positions, while several others commented they are already working with reduced staff which inhibits efficiency. Most road commissions continue to eliminate positions through attrition. However, at least 14 road commissions laid off workers in 2008, accounting for 88 lost jobs. At least 57 road commissions plan to make additional staff cuts in the coming year.

In 2007, 61 road commissions changed policies to reduce or eliminate the use of overtime, and 43 altered their snow removal policies. In 2008, 58 road commissions made new or further changes to overtime policies. It is clear that winter maintenance services across the state are being reduced. Another hard winter holds the strong potential that many road commissions will have to make additional cuts to summer maintenance.

Shut downs-

When asked if the road commission had shut down for any period of time during the last twelve months, six road commissions responded yes in 2007 with the longest duration of shut down being two weeks. Again in 2008, six road commissions shut down temporarily. It is important to note that only two of these agencies also shut down in 2007, which means 10 road agencies have made this decision in the past two years. In each of these cases less routine and preventive maintenance work was performed.

Federal Aid-

The Governors Transportation Task Force reported last fall that by 2010 Michigan stands to lose up to \$1 billion in federal funds annually because transportation agencies will not be able to match federal funding. This is already starting to be a problem for county road agencies as 15 turned down available federal aid in 2008, up from just 4 in 2007.

The State of Michigan's County Roads

“As Michigan pauses each year to assess the state of our great state, it is imperative to consider the condition of our long-neglected transportation infrastructure,” Niemela said. “For Michigan’s economy to flourish it must have a vital state and local road and bridge network. Our county road system is the backbone of the state economy.”

“Investing in highway, road and bridge infrastructure is the long-term economic stimulus Michigan needs,” Niemela said. “It is Asset Management 101- the right fix, at the right time, which will yield long-term savings!”

“We were encouraged to hear that Gov. Granholm plans to recommend long-term reforms that will achieve affordable and stable funding for Michigan’s roads and bridges,” Niemela said. “Timing is everything! The longer it takes to secure new revenue, the more expensive it will be to bring the system back to good condition.”

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