

Crossroads

The Quarterly Journal of the County Road Association of Michigan

Volume 1 | Number 2

Winter 2015

→ Deal **DONE**

**\$1.2 Billion in
Road Funding**

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- **Flying in the Dark:** New rules protect endangered bats





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Crossroads

Crossroads is the quarterly publication of the County Road Association (CRA) of Michigan. The 83 county members of CRA represent the unified, credible and effective voice for a safe and efficient local road system in Michigan.

The Association, headquartered three blocks north of the State Capitol, is dedicated to helping members promote and maintain a safe, efficient and local road system in rural and urban Michigan.

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→ CRA How's That Again?

"C-R-A." That's how to pronounce the County Road Association's new acronym. Three short letters: "C-R-A."

For the last year, the Association has been moving away from "CRAM," as the acronym used. While it's snappy and memorable, it's often first seen as hostile or uncivil, even. One chain of radio stations said, "For most groups we use their initials on the second mention of an interview. Of course with you – with CRAM – we can't do that."

The name of the organization is still the County Road Association of Michigan, but it's pronounced "C-R-A," for short.



→ President's Corner

Well, we finally have it! In about 16 months we will begin to receive increased MTF revenues. It can't come soon enough.

The new transportation package brings some sense of relief as we can now begin to plan additional projects with a definite construction date. And we are now able to focus on our jobs, fixing roads, not fighting for more revenue. It has been quite the roller coaster ride.

While road funding has consumed much of our time, CRA staff and members have been busy on many other important issues.

The Rural Task Force Oversight Board has made some great progress.

Jim Iwanicki (Marquette) and **Wayne Schoonover** (Mason) are the CRA voting members of this board and they have put in many hours over the past year.

Their efforts are paying off. For the first time in many years we have had a positive, open discussion with MDOT on the many issues with the federal aid funding system. Even though this board was formed in response to major issues with the RTF process, we will see many benefits throughout all our relations with MDOT. More on this within this issue of Crossroads.

Also, we have finalized an agreement with MDOT on a Federal Fund Exchange Pilot program. This fiscal year, a few counties will exchange Rural Surface Transportation Program (R-STP) funds for unrestricted county money.

We have developed guidelines and an agreement document that we feel could be used as the model for a future, long standing federal fund exchange program that all local road agencies could use.

Denise, Steve Puuri and Ed Noyola have met with MDOT and provided them with our program documents after much work with the pilot counties and CRA's legal counsel. We will update you on progress of this program as it is implemented in the coming months.



Thank you all for your participation with CRA.
Together we are making Michigan roads better.

Burt R. Thompson, P.E.
CRA President
Engineer-Manager of
Antrim County Road Commission

Next Publication

The next issue of *Crossroads* (February 2016) will promote CRA's Annual Highway Conference – Partners in Excellence – and the CRA Road Show, to be held March 15-16, 2016. Submit story ideas or inquire about advertising opportunities by contacting **Monica Ware** at **517.482.1189** or by email, **mware@localroads.net**.



Politics on STEROIDS

Retired *Detroit Free Press* reporter Chris Christoff, when reflecting on his long career as a capitol journalist, recently made the observation that we now have "politics on steroids."

The change to a 24/7 news cycle, where stories are immediately posted to the web and social media, has changed politics as we know it. Campaigns are more expensive, and there are more demands on public officials. More than ever before, issues debated within the Legislature unfold online simultaneously.

Legislators hear, in real time, where constituents stand on the issues. Especially when it comes to topics like tax increases and how to best fund our roads – responses are immediate and attention-grabbing.

To be heard through the clutter our voices have to be louder too.

CRA has amplified its voice with the Legislature, using a top-drawer lobby firm to work in coordination with Deputy Director **Ed Noyola**. RUSH-PAC has become more creative in fundraising as ticket prices to member fundraisers have doubled. CRA has doubled down on our communication efforts, too.

What has your road agency done to amplify your voice?

- Are you meeting regularly with lawmakers?
- Inviting them to tour your facilities?
- Making yourself and your agency a resource to elected officials?

Doors are being opened at the Capitol as CRA amplifies the voice of county road agencies. It's important for everyone to work together toward common goals. ---

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\$1.2 BILLION IN ROAD FUNDING ACHIEVED!



Deputy Director Ed Noyola has been working on road funding since 1991, in his then-capacity as legislative liaison for MDOT. He was directly involved in the 1997 4-cent increase in fuel tax. This November, he was extremely active in the comprehensive, 9-bill transportation funding package approved by both chambers and enacted by Gov. Rick Snyder.

Let's not forget counties' meetings with legislators in Lansing, as well as making phone calls and sending emails and working with their local media.

CRA's multi-client lobbyist, Karoub Associates, was and continues to be a key influencer in keeping a large chunk of legislators informed about road commission issues and priorities.

Crossroads sat down with Ed to learn his perspective on this 18-year journey to new road funding.

IS THIS THE PACKAGE YOU EXPECTED?

Let me start by saying this is a momentous beginning. In my heart of hearts and from talking with many, many legislators, I didn't think the revenue would be fully constitutionally protected. I was hoping for a larger percentage – like 75 percent.

But at the end of the day it is in the law that the state General Fund (GF) will contribute a certain funding level each and every year beginning in 2019. And, if they can't find that level of growth in GF dollars, they will have to go back to the drawing board. That means we will have to be there to ensure future Legislatures live up to the \$600 million in GF annually.

HOW DID PASSING THIS TAX PACKAGE DIFFER FROM PASSING THE 1997 PACKAGE?

Back in 1994-97, it was also a comprehensive package including multi-modal (transit, railroads, etc.), roads and bridges.

At that time none of the transportation advocates – including CRAM – aggressively pushed the Legislature into a specific increase. And 4 cents was as far as the Legislature and governor were willing to go.

In 1997, we transportation advocates saw the 4 cent increase as a short-term legislative adjustment. We knew we would have to come back in five or six years and ask for another increase.

Indexing for inflation never made it into the package. In hindsight and as former Gov. Engler has since agreed, had the index been inserted, road funding would have been an easier lift in this legislative session.

This time around, with the Transportation Funding Task Force (TF2) report and the Olson reports in hand, the Michigan Transportation Team (MTT) including CRA, was much more deliberate and very vocal about the total need. We need \$2.1 billion in new revenue to maintain and make modest improvements to the statewide system.

This number was communicated to the media, the Legislature and the governor. For every new legislative proposal we informed the legislators about how much that would generate for transportation.

WHAT ROLES DID OUR COUNTY ROAD COMMISSIONS AND DEPARTMENTS PLAY IN PASSING THE PACKAGE?

Many! We got more legislators into road commission facilities. We had more one-on-one meetings to explain the condition and need at their local level.

HOW SOON WILL WE BE BACK TO THE LEGISLATURE LOOKING FOR ROAD FUNDING?

We never stop looking at funding. The state's budget process keeps me engaged on this key issue. We will know by 2019 whether the forecasters were right about the growth in GF revenue. If they weren't, moving up the indexing date is an easy temporary fix until a longer-term fix is identified and enacted. ---



REACTION FROM COUNTY ROAD AGENCIES

... from Marquette

"This package has been a long time coming. As I told our staff, this amount of funding will allow us to stop the bleeding. We will be able to keep our current level of road repair work and do some additional things for the travelling public.

Moving ahead we will be discussing the anticipated funding levels with our townships and have them help guide the Marquette County Road Commission forward."

→ **Jim Iwanicki, PE, Engineer-Manager, Marquette County Road Commission**

... from Alger County

"We are going to concentrate on more preventative maintenance, more pavement surface treatment projects and invest more in our gravel roads. We have a plan in place.

Our 2016 budget will remain much the same as 2015. Our five-year plans are in place for roads and equipment, so the prioritizing process has been set up in preparation for the anticipated funding."

→ **Bob Lindbeck, PE, Engineer-Manager, Alger County Road Commission**

... from Livingston County

"Like everyone, we're so glad we've gotten through this phase so that we can start putting some serious dates to some of our plans.

This is the 3rd package I've been through and there's never been an easy one. There's never been one that we got everything we wanted. But this represents a really good start. I'm totally pleased by the including of indexing in the out-years. It's something we've badly needed in the last 35 years."

→ **Mike Craine, Managing Director, Livingston County Road Commission**

... from Muskegon County

"Relentless, positive, delayed action is preferable to no action!

The reality is it would not be good to dump \$1.2 billion into the system in 2016. The material suppliers and contractors need time to ramp up. Without adequate material and contractors we would be driving prices through the roof.

In Muskegon County we intend to develop a multi-year plan based on projected revenue that maximizes the impact of the new revenue."

→ **Ken Hulka, Managing Director, Muskegon County Road Commission**

... from Saginaw County

"The Saginaw County Road Commission and Saginaw County Board of Commissioners are exploring a county-wide millage to generate funds that enable our townships to help improve the local road system.

Even prior to the new road funding package, we were educating our township and county officials that a statewide package would not provide adequate funding for the local system. SCRC requires townships to provide a local match on local road projects, and many of them cannot currently provide it.

With the new road funding package from Lansing, it will be necessary to educate the public and other officials that there is still a need for local funding. People are talking about the new funding plan, and many of them assume their road will be repaired – and soon. With the phased-in revenue, and full funding not available until 2021, it is apparent additional local revenue sources are needed."

→ **Dennis Borchard, Managing Director, Saginaw County Road Commission**



+ CRA board members and representatives from 10 county road commissions were able to attend Governor Rick Snyder's bill signing ceremony for the transportation package on Tuesday, November 10. A work-worn truck loaned by the Clinton County Road Commission was one of the backdrops to the stage, and Crossroads was able to photograph most of the counties in attendance. From left, CRA President Burt Thompson, Antrim County Road Commission; Matt Breslin, Karoub Associates; Monica Ware, CRA; John Daly III, Genesee County Road Commission; CRA Treasurer Dorothy Pohl, Ionia County Road Commission; Joe Pulver, Clinton County Road Commission; John Hunt, Huron County Road Commissioner; Denise Donohue, CRA; Dennis Kolar, Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC); Joanna Johnson, Road Commission of Kalamazoo County; Bill McEntee, retired RCOC and TAMC; Larry Brown, Allegan County Road Commission; Bradley Lamberg, Barry County Commission; Steve Warren, Kent County Road Commission; and Ed Noyola, CRA.

Joanna Johnson also spoke at the news conference, representing road commissions and the Transportation Asset Management Council.

RURAL TASK FORCE OVERSIGHT BOARD

a Resounding Success

Approaching its one-year anniversary, the Michigan Rural Task Force (RTF) Oversight Board has achieved significant milestones in reformatting the RTF Program to satisfy federal oversight rules and better serve local road agencies and transit.

CRA has been represented on the Board by **Jim Iwanicki**, PE, engineer-manager of the **Marquette County Road Commission** and **Wayne Schoonover**, PE, manager of the **Mason County Road Commission**.

In October 2015, the Board was created to improve allocation, obligation, distribution and carry-over in the RTF process.

In early 2016, the RTF Oversight Board will begin rolling out materials to bring more transparency and equity to the way federal funds flow through Michigan's 22 Rural Task Forces and 15 regional planning agencies (RPAs).

Key changes to be implemented include:

- Guidelines and training to ensure RPAs are "on the same page" with MDOT in their guidance to local road agencies.
- A commitment to fund any active project described in a complete biddable package (CPB) and submitted by August 1st each year, which should end the occurrence of "lost" projects.
- A change in the use of August redistribution obligation authority to first fund any active CPB not funded before the year's obligation authority ran out.
- Policy change to ensure active STIP projects not bid-ready by August 1

will be pushed ahead to the next fiscal year – not dropped off the list.

- An agreement that MDOT will continue to spend any unused obligation authority and RABA funds before fiscal year end, crediting the statewide RTF account up to 5 percent in the next fiscal year.
- Improved obligation data given to RTFs via the RPAs on every project, including allocation amount, obligation amount, bid amount and final amount.
- An agreement to supply county and local spending targets each year in early November. The RTF Oversight Board will consider annual adjustments before targets are set.
- An agreement that spending targets will reflect 95 percent of obligation authority in FY2017, which will be adjusted to 90 percent of that figure in FY2018. This will provide obligation authority for all active CPBs submitted by August 1 and avoid a "cascading" effect of larger-and-larger downward adjustments in future years.
- A recommendation that each RTF maintain a list of contingency projects to better use year-end obligation.

Re-inventing how local federal obligation authority is distributed, while meeting FHWA and MDOT guidelines required teamwork, time and out-of-the-box thinking. In coming months, the Education Committee of the RTF Oversight Board will begin publicizing the new guidelines. All sides believe these changes will alleviate frustration and lack of transparency in the process. ☹

CROSSROADS EVENT Calendar

Feb 2-4

County Engineers Workshop

Held at the Little River Resort in Manistee. Network with county engineers and discuss trending topics in engineering. Continuing education credits available for licensed professional engineers.

Feb 11-12

2016 UP Road Builders

Representing the fifteen UP County Road Commissions, the UP Road Builders meeting covers current issues, legislative updates, committee meetings and more. This year's winter meeting is at the Holiday Inn in Marquette.

Mar 15-16

2016 CRA Road Show

The CRA Road Show is a must attend event for any company in the road business! MDOT, county and municipal road agency staff are invited to attend at no cost. Registration information is available on the CRA website.

Mar 15-17

2016 CRA Highway Conference

This year's Highway Conference will be held at the Lansing Center and adjoining Radisson Hotel. The theme is Partners in Excellence, and will feature excellent speakers, and breakouts on emerging topics.

For additional information on CRA Events, visit micountyoroads.org/Events

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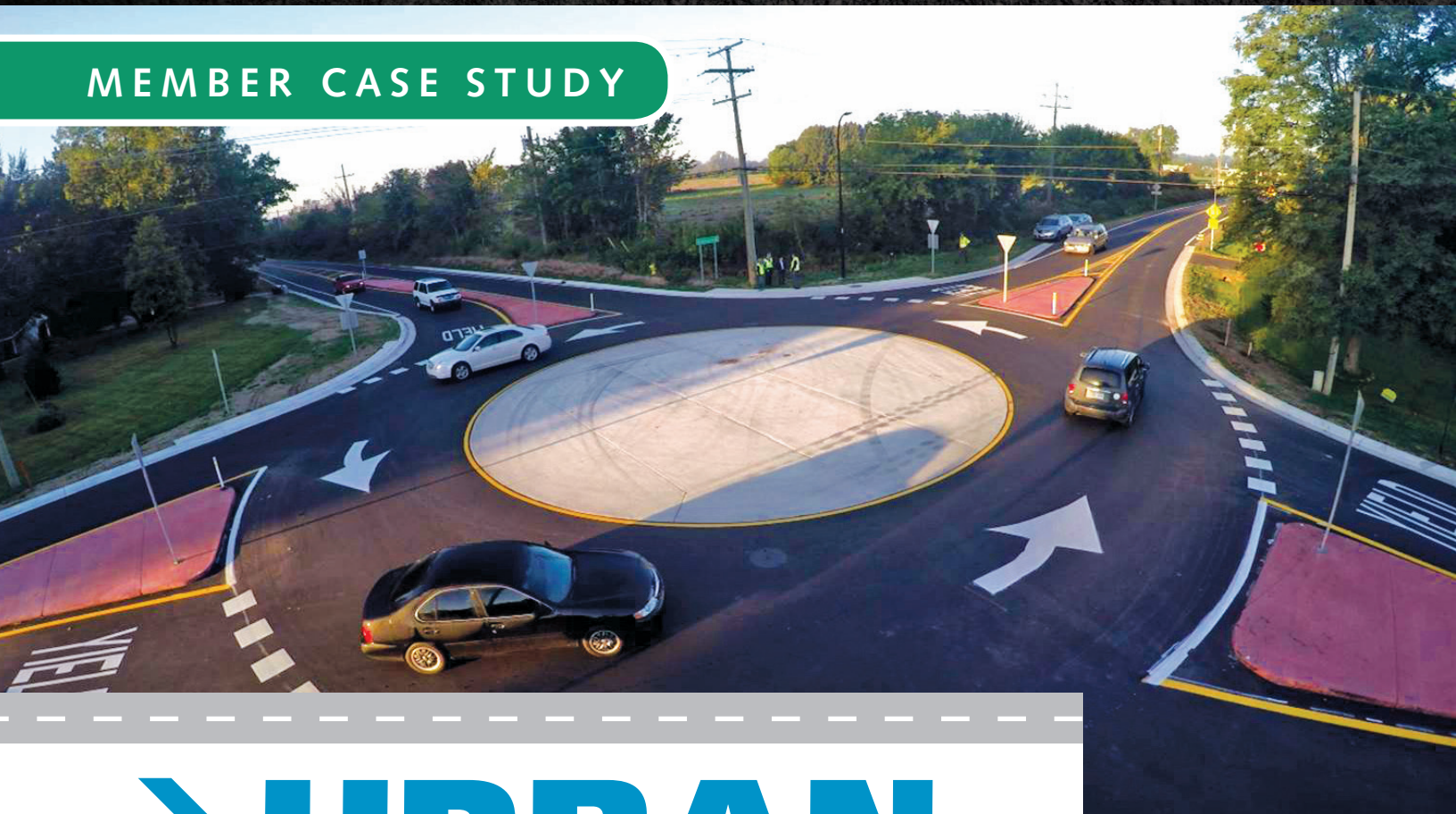


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MEMBER CASE STUDY



→ URBAN ROUNDAABOUTS

Washtenaw County Road Commission Circles Around Traditional Intersection Hurdles

A few simple facts:

- 1) Right-of-way acquisition can be one of the most costly components of any project. In urban areas, it sometimes costs as much as the project itself.
- 2) Intersection work is one of the most expensive, time-consuming projects for a county road agency. Traditional intersections often have large footprints that require additional taxpayer funds to survey, design, purchase right-of-way and construct the project.

One county road agency found a way around many of these hurdles by embracing compact urban roundabouts.

COMPACT URBAN ROUNDAABOUTS

The Washtenaw County Road Commission (WCRC) broke new ground this summer when they built the first two

compact urban roundabouts of the kind in the state. About 10 to 15 exist across the United States.

In September, WCRC unveiled two compact urban roundabouts at the intersections of Textile Road at Hitchingham and Stony Creek Roads in Ypsilanti. The “compact” part of the roundabouts comes from the size of the inscribed circle diameter, 90-feet, compared to the normal 135-foot diameter that larger roundabouts utilize.

According to WCRC engineer **Mark McCulloch**, using urban roundabouts has impacted almost every aspect of the intersections in a positive way.

“In our specific situation, urban roundabouts have been a major win for Washtenaw County residents and the families traveling to South Arbor Academy located south of the Hitchingham intersection,” McCulloch said. “We were able to utilize the size

ADVANTAGES OF COMPACT URBAN ROUNDABOUTS

- Require less space
- Less planning time
- Less construction time
- Less costly ROW acquisition
- Increased safety
- Less pollution from idling cars
- Decreased traffic congestion

of the urban roundabout to provide a 'right-size' solution to address capacity issues during peak periods."

"Before the project began, traffic backups regularly occurred at both intersections. The project exceeded my expectation, virtually eliminating these backups," McCulloch said.

WHAT SETS WASHTENAW'S ROUNDABOUTS APART?

Apart from size, there are a few other key elements to the compact urban roundabouts WCRC is using that differentiate them from similar roundabouts in the state.

The center of the roundabout has a six-inch domed concrete surface that allows large trucks and farm equipment to drive over the central island to meet the vehicles strict turning radiuses.

The biggest difference from others in Michigan, however, is the specific geometry of the entry and exit deflections, reducing vehicle speeds from 45-55 miles per hour to 20-25 miles per hour, maximizing safety for motorists. Similar roundabouts have not had to address this level of deflection.

THE WASHTENAW EXPERIENCE

McCulloch recommends others contemplating compact urban roundabouts to first look at all-way stopped intersections with capacity issues. These drivers are already accustomed to stopping from all directions, minimizing the learning curve.

WCRC's cost to construct two urban roundabouts was \$840,000. That's significantly less than traditional roundabouts or installing signals at each intersection, which would have required additional purchase of right-of-way.

WCRC built the urban roundabouts largely within the footprint of the existing intersection, only needing to purchase slivers at the corners.

WCRC found the project to be a win-win for the community. Less money and resources were utilized, minimal impact on adjacent property owners, and it still addressed the main problem – delay!

With their first two compact urban roundabouts declared a success, McCulloch says the WCRC will consider more of them.

"The traditional roundabouts we've constructed in the past were important to address safety concerns. Safety wasn't an issue with these intersections," McCulloch said. "We have begun the design process to construct a third compact urban roundabout at another all-way stopped intersection with capacity issues, next summer." ---

IF YOU VISIT: Type intersection of Textile Road and Hitchingham Road, Ypsilanti; into your navigation app.



BEFORE



AFTER



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYUy67kDSE0>

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CASE
CONSTRUCTION



ITS coming to a community near you

Intelligent transportation systems (ITS) have been widely used in urban areas for sometime. Recently, thanks to advanced technology, added features and decreased installation costs, the traffic management systems are being installed in smaller communities, too.

Utilizing ITS no longer requires cutting large swaths of pavement to install the sensors; reducing time, labor costs, and impact on the road surface. New vehicle detection systems are wireless and very sensitive to movement.

Clinton County Road Commission (CCRC) has used the wireless detectors in multiple intersections for the last few years.

"These wireless detectors are the size of a hockey puck, but very sensitive. They can detect a bicycle on the road or even a person wearing a steel-toed boot.

Wired loop systems can't do that," said **Dan Armentrout**, PE, CCRC director of engineering.

Armentrout says the wireless sensors are a great alternative to address intersections with intermittent traffic. Clinton County has the wireless detectors at two intersections

where there is a main road with continuous traffic and side street with occasional traffic and intermittent congestion. The sensors keep the traffic signal on the main road green, unless a car is detected.

"We installed the pucks at the intersection of Wood and Clark Roads a few years ago," said Armentrout. "There's poor visibility on that corner and people on Wood Road (the less traveled road) are hesitant to pull out due to difficult visibility. Installing the sensors allows Clark Road to remain green unless there's a car on Wood Road, and allows drivers on Wood Road to travel safely through the intersection."

The wireless sensors can help alleviate congestion near churches, schools and factories; enhancing safety and improving traffic flow. The system transmits real-time data; ideal for managing traffic signals timed to go flashing yellow a specific times of the day.

"The sensors would be great for a school football game," said Armentrout. "You can manage the game traffic without pre-planning for it."

The hockey puck size sensors are quick and easy to install, requiring only 10 minutes per puck to set in the ground, according to Armentrout.

"You just have to drill a hole in the pavement and epoxy the sensor in place," said Armentrout. "The receiver is mounted to the traffic signal controller box. The sensors are maintenance free, install in minutes and can be deployed in a matter of hours."

"This wireless system serves as the brain behind traffic signals," said Armentrout. ---





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CRA Takes the RED CARPET



➔ Recognizing the County Road Association's (CRA) re-emergence as a strong association, the Michigan Society of Association Executives (MSAE) honored CRA with three prestigious awards at the 14th annual Diamond Awards in September.

2015 Strategic Association Leader

Director of the County Road Association, **Denise Donohue**, CAE, APR, was named Michigan's 2015 Strategic Association Leader for her dedication and continued work with CRA.

"I am humbled and honored to win such a prestigious award from MSAE," Donohue said. "The Strategic Association Leader award recognizes my accomplishments and commitment to Michigan's road agencies, but more importantly it recognizes all of the professionals and volunteers that we work with every day."

Donohue was nominated for this prestigious award by Communications and Development Manager, **Monica Ackerson Ware**, APR, who said, "We've made a tremendous amount of positive change in a short time. Donohue's strength

is in identifying change agents, empowering staff and setting us all free to do our best work on behalf of the members. This is what makes her a 'strategic' association leader."

Past recipients of the award include Dan Gilmartin of the Michigan Municipal League and Larry Merrill of the Michigan Townships Association.

Diamond Award

On behalf of CRA, Ware brought back a Diamond Award in the Diversified Revenue category for the rebranded 2015 CRA Road Show. It was expanded to two days and included heavy equipment for the first time last February.

"We've worked hard to make the Road Show more than just another source

of revenue for CRA," Ware said. "It is the place-to-be for the companies that serve the state's local road agencies. It's about bringing value to our members and associate members."

Gold Award

The County Road Association also took home a Gold Award in the Public Relations campaign category for its Local Roads Matter campaign.

The **Local Roads Matter** campaign was an excellent resource as CRA advocated for increased state funding. With road funding now in place, it's also a tool in the toolbox for county road agencies to set expectations on road repair, and potentially secure additional locally-raised revenue. ---

On the Red Carpet (from left): Dustin Earley, CRA student assistant; Dennis Kolar, PE, managing director, Road Commission of Oakland County; Denise Donohue; Monica Ware; John Daly III, PhD, managing director, Genesee CRC; and Walt Schell, PE, deputy county highway engineer, Macomb County Roads Department attended the MSAE Diamond Awards ceremony in September.



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FLYING IN THE DARK

New rules help road agencies protect threatened and endangered species

FOR MORE BAT INFORMATION

Rules and information on the new bat guidelines are constantly changing. For the most up to date documentation on the subject, visit MDOT's website at: michigan.gov/mdotlap.

Uncharted air

The County Road Association of Michigan (CRA) has worked closely with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to create new guidelines on environmental clearance related to road and bridge work because of two species of bats that call Michigan home.

The threatened Northern long eared bat and endangered Indiana bat are rapidly dwindling in numbers, thanks in part to changes in their natural habitat and a fungal disease. To promote ecological well-being, a process for removing trees, brush, and performing construction on bridges throughout Michigan has been developed.

These new guidelines are a work in progress and have the potential to heavily impact local agency projects.

CRA has talked with counties who have been or are just now dealing with the guidelines on working in or near bat habitats. By concentrating on three areas, following the new guidelines won't drive a road commission batty.

Planning, planning, planning

The most important aspect of dealing with change is adapting the planning process. The size of a county road agency and its experience with bats impact the approach taken.



The **Road Commission of Kalamazoo County** (RCKC) has begun to reassess how some of its projects are planned, in part because of the guidelines on bats. While still working through the more technical aspects of the guidelines, Kalamazoo had moved to evaluating each project a minimum of one year before it's set to advance.

In counties where the Indiana bat is the primary source of concern, engineers and managers have been dealing with restrictions for many years now.

The **Allegan County Road Commission** is in an area where the Indiana bat has impacted projects. Over time Allegan has



Advice for the taking

A common issue in long-term planning is the need to schedule when, where and how much environmental clearance can be done in advance. Clearing in advance is often necessary and important to finishing projects on time, but it has disadvantages.

“While environmental clearance related to bats may seem like strictly an engineering issue at first blush, it certainly requires careful communication to avoid community backlash.”

County road agencies may be tempted to remove more trees and brush than necessary to ensure projects can be completed during construction season without stopping work. In these cases and in other similar situations, turning to the experts may be the best course of action.

RCKC has a part-time forester on staff who helps with planning and evaluation, but this isn't an option for many agencies.

Cass County Road Commission's chief engineer, **Joe Bellina, III, PE**, pointed out that CCRC doesn't have foresters or experts on staff, but most design firms now employ experts in dealing with bats and other environmental issues. When CCRC recently put out an RFP for a project, firms highlighted that they were equipped to deal with special environmental regulations.

Let's talk about it

Another important aspect county road agencies must consider in following new guidelines is public perception. When road agencies are dealing with things like clearing trees a year in advance, or making other changes to tree/brush cutting policies, the importance of communications cannot be overemphasized.

A simple Google search for “community fights road commission to save tree” reveals more than a few examples of just how seriously Michigan residents take tree removal. While environmental clearance related to bats may seem like strictly an engineering issue at first blush, it certainly requires careful communication to avoid community backlash.

Proactive public education and public relations play crucial roles in maintaining the county road agency's good standing with the public.

Consider the wide range of tools available for communicating with the public and assess what might work best for your county.

- Pamphlets on tree removal might work well in government offices or hosted on your website;
- A letter to the editor addressing concerns before they come to a head can show understanding and care from a county road agency;
- Putting a face to a story on local TV can create a connection worth working for;
- Contact local media to attend a special educational event hosted by the county road agency;
- Attend town hall meetings and work with other area organizations to inform them of the changes your agency is facing. ---

TELL YOUR STORY

Foster your agency's relationship with the public and show that you care and are thinking about the issues that affect them.

Don't rely on numbers and data. Talk about real people and use policy and guideline changes as an opportunity to connect.

gotten extended planning time down to just a few extra weeks.

The **Cass County Road Commission** (CCRC) has experienced a similar lengthening in planning for the Indiana bat. CCRC recognizes that now, as they deal with both types of bats, planning time will most likely be extended by much longer than a few weeks.

In the future, the issue of planning ahead when tree removal is needed will become a bigger issue to most road agencies. Indiana bats roost in dead trees, and with the spread of the emerald ash borer, counties could be facing a lot more dead trees.



Key transitions at...

Road Commissions and Departments

Matthew Skeels has been hired as manager for the **Benzie County Road Commission**. He previously served as coordinator of the Traverse City Transportation and Land Use Study.

Jay Syrewicz has joined the **Mason County Road Commission** as an Engineering Tech.

Josh Bader is now serving as an Engineering Tech at the **Mason County Road Commission**.

Marilyn Kilpatrick is now serving as Office Manager for the **Hillsdale County Road Commission**.

Jim Johnson is now Engineer of the **Leelanau County Road Commission**.

Dan Wagner has joined the **Leelanau County Road Commission** as **Manager**.

... MDOT

Bradley Wieferich, PE, has been named director of **MDOT's Bureau of Development**. Before holding the position of director, he served as a design engineer since 1998.

Mile Marker

After 42 years of service, **Janet Aemisegger** has retired from the **Hillsdale County Road Commission**.

In Memoriam

On September 20, 2015, **Marquette County Road Commissioner Neil Anderson** passed away. Anderson served as Road Commissioner for Marquette County for eight years.



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CRA'S Legal Issues Forum



FOIA Changes for Road Agencies Highlighted

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was amended significantly in a law that took effect July 1, 2015. These changes documented in MCL 15.231 - 15.246 primarily involve new procedures for calculating the cost of, and documenting, a response.

FEE CHANGES

Labor costs may be charged for:

- Searching for, locating, and examining a record.
- Record review to separate and delete exempt information from disclosure of other information, except (for example) if previously redacted versions are available.
- Duplication costs, including making paper or digital copies, transferring digital public records to other media, or via internet.

Labor costs must be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest paid employee capable of doing the work regardless of who actually does the work, and charged in 15 minute increments with all partial time increments rounded down.

Road agencies may charge actual or partial **fringe benefits** costs, but these may not exceed 50 percent of the applicable labor charge.

Overtime wages may not be charged unless agreed to by the requester and may not be included in fringe benefit calculations. The fringe benefit percentage multiplier used must be stated on the detailed itemization sheet.

Actual Costs. FOIA costs may be charged for computer discs or other digital media where the requester asked for this. An agency is not required to convert records to another form, if it lacks the "technological capability."

Paper copy costs cannot exceed \$.10 per sheet for an 8 ½ x 11 or 8 ½ x 14 sheets, regardless of whether it is one-sided or two-sided. The paper copy cost must be itemized

and listed; the cost per sheet and number of pages provided must be included. The most economical means available must be used, including making two-sided copies.

Mailing costs must use the least expensive method. Expedited shipping or insurance charges may not be passed on, unless specifically requested. Road agencies may waive or reduce fees for requestors of limited means, including those in a new category: nonprofit organizations.

DEPOSITS AND LATE RESPONSE PENALTY

If the total fee exceeds \$50, road agencies may require a good-faith deposit not to exceed half the total estimated response fee. The deposit request must include a detailed fees statement, and a "best efforts estimate" regarding the time frame it will take to provide the records.

Charges may also be modified to the extent the documents are publicly available online. The itemization sheet must indicate what documents were provided directly and which were made available on the website. If a person desires to receive copies that are available on the website, they must be provided, but the fringe benefits multiplier may be increased.

DOCUMENTATION

Under the FOIA changes, road agencies must use new, clear and reader-friendly documentation:

- (1) A standard form (which they may create) to provide a detailed itemization of fees.
- (2) A written summary of FOIA procedures, including how to submit a request and details regarding written responses, such as deposit requirements, fee calculations and avenues for challenge and appeal. This information must be free, available to the public and easily understandable.
- (3) If the agency has a website, it must post and maintain the procedures and guidelines.

A FEW MORE NOTES

Additional changes to Michigan's FOIA include:

- The new law gives public bodies "10 business days," rather than "10 days," to respond to an appeal.
- If a request is sent by e-mail and ends up in a spam or junk mail folder, the request is not considered "received" until one day after the public body first becomes aware of the written request. A late receipt notation must be made for the record.
- There are additional penalties and fines that a public body may have to pay for failing or refusing to respond to a FOIA request.
- Under certain circumstances, a verbal request for documents available on a website may be responded to with information that a response is available on the website.

THE FINAL TAKEAWAY

Agencies need to be aware that they cannot collect fees for their FOIA responses if newly required forms and regulations are not in place and available to the public. FOIA coordinators now have the opportunity to make data available online which may reduce time and expense involved in responding to requests. ☹

Submitted by Stephen Denenfeld, David Lewis, Sheralee Hurwitz, Lewis Reed & Allen, P.C.

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STORY TELLINGS



Reality TV continues to top the ratings. Four billion videos are viewed on YouTube daily. Instagram and Pinterest are now widely used by major corporations.

Why? People love a good story!

There is no greater tool in modern communications than storytelling. The ability to frame your communication as a story can make the difference between connecting and resonating with your audience, and being completely forgotten before you can even finish your sentence.

While it's more difficult to get people to tune in to your message, it's not impossible. Consider TED talks – "Riveting talks by remarkable people, free to the world." It's all about having concise and riveting content!

HERE ARE 4 EASY WAYS TO TELL YOUR STORY:

Interview residents on a newly-fixed street.

Use a good interview to frame the decisions being made between difficult priorities in your annual budget. Create your own video and post to YouTube and social media.

Jump in the truck with a snowplow driver.

Make a short video describing winter operations and helping motorists understand the challenges road crews face.

Put your operations director or supervisor on TV.

Arrange a story with your local news outlet on winter maintenance. Put a relatable face to the current issues affecting Michigan residents.

Hold a town hall meeting on Twitter.

Use the pace of social media to your advantage. Take a few hours a month to address questions and concerns from residents on your local roads, and use those questions later, in other communications.

With information moving faster every day, it's important to use tools that get your audience to slow down and listen to what you have to say. Everyone loves a good story! ---

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New QA/QC certification – detecting bridge design errors

Eight years ago, the transportation world was rocked by a tragic event. The I-35W bridge, an eight-lane, steel truss arch structure carrying the interstate across the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, Minnesota, failed catastrophically. During evening rush hour on Aug. 1, 2007, it suddenly collapsed, killing 13 people and injuring 145.

The I-35W failure sparked numerous investigations and audits. In its analysis of the tragedy, the National Transportation Safety Board cited a design error as the likely cause of the collapse, finding that a gusset plate ripped along a line of rivets. This was a wakeup call to the nation's bridge engineers to review all of their design Quality Assurance and Quality Control (QA/QC) procedures to lower the risk of any similar disasters. Michigan has not been lagging in this effort.

In the wake of I-35W, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) was charged with developing and implementing, in partnership with state transportation agencies, a bridge design QA/QC program that included procedures to detect and correct bridge design errors before the design plans are made final. FHWA then reviewed with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) our bridge design QA/QC procedures, both for MDOT trunkline bridge projects and local agency bridge projects.

The review found "MDOT does a satisfactory job of assuring quality during the bridge design process; however, additional work is needed to improve the compliance of the QA/QC of local agency bridge designs." The FHWA also recommended MDOT better document its own QA/QC procedures. As a result, MDOT created a Guidance Document for Bridge Design Quality Assurance and Quality Control.

STANDARDIZING PROCEDURES STATE-WIDE

For local agency projects, the FHWA and MDOT did a survey two years ago looking at 17 local agency bridge design projects chosen at random across the state. Most of the QA/QC procedures were quite good, but there was a lot of variation between different agencies. The FHWA called for MDOT to standardize these procedures across the state.

The result of the FHWA push is a one-page self-certification document for local agency bridge projects that will be included in all bridge programming applications beginning mid-2016. Fundamentally, the document says, on the design side, appropriate QA/QC procedures are being followed. All projects reaching the grade inspection stage after mid-2016 will be required to have this QA/QC signoff certification.

The certification asks the project engineer to affirm the calculations, plans, quantities and other engineering data has been checked and, if so, if they were checked by an independent party.

Consultants working on bridge designs for local agencies should be – and are – already doing this type of review. The purpose of the new MDOT document is not to add a layer to the design process, just formalize the practice. Because MDOT delegates bridge design to the appropriate bridge owners – counties and cities – around the state, the idea is to standardize and formalize a procedure across the board for local agencies. The new policy document will apply to all local bridge design, whether done by in-house or consultant designers.

BETTER, SAFER BRIDGE DESIGN

MDOT doesn't see these new procedures as adding expense or complexity to the bridge design process.

The document has already been reviewed and approved by the CRA Engineering Committee. The FHWA has already reviewed it as well. Now, it's down to the final preparations for implementation.

MDOT, as a steward of the Federal Aid Program, is delegated the responsibility and held accountable for bridge safety. Local agencies are key partners in this effort. We hope the new bridge design certification document helps this partnership continue to work smoothly together toward ever better, and safer, bridge design.

If you have questions for MDOT on the new bridge QA/QC certification, please contact Keith Cooper, MDOT Local Agency Program Bridge Program Manager at cooperk@michigan.gov. ---



Keith Cooper,
MDOT Local Agency
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LEGISLATOR PROFILE



SEN. ARLAN MEEKHOF

We continue our conversation with Michigan legislators, allowing our members the chance to get to know the leaders in Lansing. In providing a view of where these elected officials stand on particular issues, we hope you will reach out to them more often and let your voice be heard.

CRA's Deputy Director, **Ed Noyola** met with **Senate Majority Leader Arlan Meekhof**, Michigan's 30th district serving Ottawa County. Sen. Meekhof talked about his career in Lansing, accomplishments along the way and the challenge of passing the road funding bill.

CRA: What was the biggest challenge in getting road funding passed?

SEN. MEEKHOF:

Roads have been a top priority for the state for some time. It was the foremost piece of

policy worked on for the last six to seven months. Citizens consider road conditions and funding more important than the economy and jobs. The goal was to create a sustainable funding method. The toughest part of achieving this goal was identifying new revenue that would offer consistency and continuity.

CRA: What are your thoughts on the funding bill that passed?

SEN. MEEKHOF:

I have been realistic in my expectations that ultimately a road funding plan would include compromise in order for all parties to agree. For me, long-term tax relief had to be a component of the plan. I firmly believe we can always find ways to make state government more accountable and responsible. We are asking for more from

our taxpayers in order to improve our state and it only makes sense that we return available dollars to our hardworking families.

Over the past several years we have seen different iterations of a road funding solution, but none that garnered enough support to begin the process of repairing and adequately funding our roads. It has taken years to come up with a road funding plan and in that time the cost of bringing our roads up to better standards has increased. No one likes to pay more for services, but the people who drive the roads and cause wear and tear on the roads should contribute to road maintenance.

CRA: What can road agencies do to better communicate with senators?

SEN. MEEKHOF:

I get regular communication from my road commission. Anything to do with roads or drains, it's sent my way. I appreciate this information. It's important for road agencies to keep us informed on a regular basis.

CRA: Weight restrictions during the frost period, it's a common issue that comes up often. What suggestions do you have to help road agencies manage these restrictions?

SEN. MEEKHOF:

We have to get the industries most impacted by the weight restrictions to understand the importance of these limits. The restrictions are in place for safety reasons. It really comes down to being responsible in adhering to the restrictions. ---

Sen. Arlan Meekhof – from government class to Lansing

Arlan Meekhof's high school government teacher led him to pursue a career in politics. Mr. Wayne Kensil, former teacher at Allendale High School said to the class; "other people are going to make decisions for you if you are not somehow engaged."

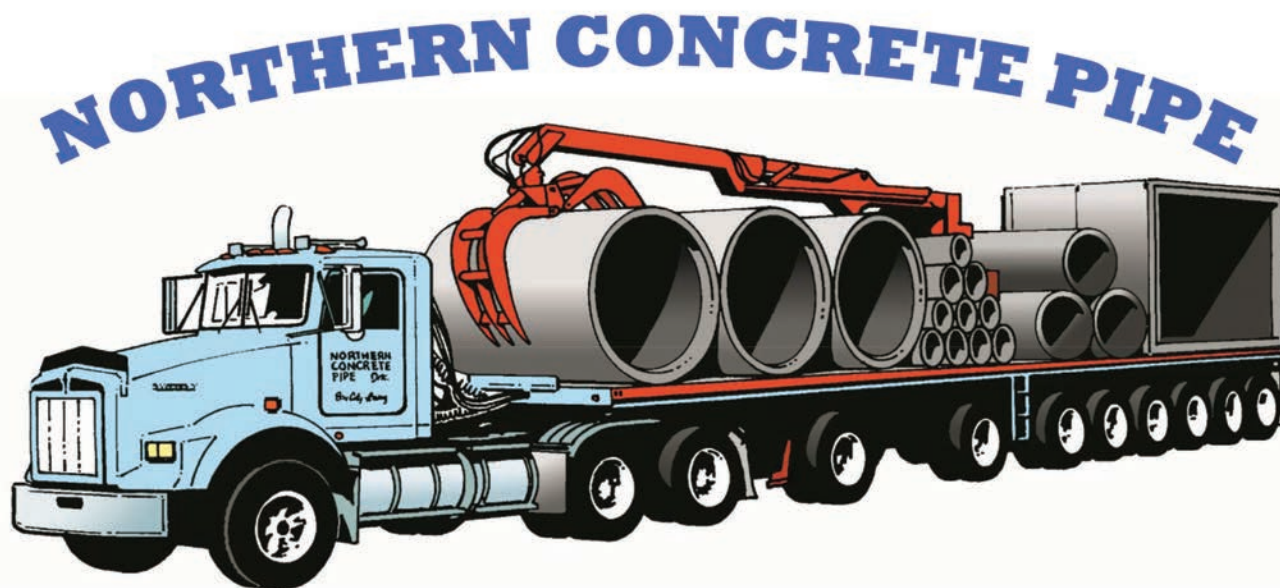
Sen. Meekhof first became engaged in his community in 1996 when elected to the Olive Township Board of Trustees. He served as a trustee and later as township supervisor. His experience with roads and transportation issues began with the proposal of US-31 highway bypass going through Holland.

Elected to the House of Representatives, Meekhof served the 89th District from 2007-2010. He was selected to the

position of assistant leader in 2009. While in the House, Meekhof was one of two freshmen to assist in passing the recreation bill, adding the purchase of a state park pass to license plates, reducing the annual fee to \$10 and increasing participation from 17 percent to 26 percent.

He was elected to the Senate in 2010 and chosen to serve as majority floor leader for 2011-2014, and elected as Senate Majority Leader for his second term. In addition to road funding, Sen. Meekhof worked on legislation regulating Michigan's sand dunes, intended to balance protecting the dunes and the rights of private property owners.

Meekhof has lived in Olive Township for more than 25 years with his wife Barb. They have three adult children, Adrian, Rich and Meredith and four grandchildren.



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Bridging the Gaps

OPEB – fully funded, how to get there?

Managing OPEB, mitigating future costs

It has been 10 years since the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) started requiring other post-employment benefits (OPEB) such as retiree medical benefits, life insurance or deferred compensation be included in the footnotes of state and municipal financial reports, including road commissions.

The next step for governmental employers was to fund these liabilities similar to pension plans, rather than paying as they went and budgeting money to pay only that year's bill for retirees. This pay-as-you-go method fails to save money for benefits earned this year by current employees.

OPEB (OH-pehb) – Other Post Employment Benefits, a concept created by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) to address benefits employees receive at retirement. OPEB compensation can include healthcare, life insurance and deferred compensation, but not pension benefits.

The total unfunded OPEB liabilities of state and local governments in the U.S. totaled \$529.8 billion, as of the most recent evaluation reports by Standard & Poor's Rating Services. Where employers have not taken steps to reduce benefit costs, OPEB liabilities have grown 40 to 50 percent over five years.

OPEB liabilities are not going away and there's no silver bullet solution to fully fund them. It is a challenge every governmental entity faces. We talked to a few road commission finance directors about how they manage OPEB and work to mitigate benefit costs.

WHAT IS "FULLY FUNDED" AND HOW TO GET THERE

John Strauss, finance director, **Kent County Road Commission**, describes two big components to achieve a fully funded OPEB.

"It starts with the actuary's report, forecasting the future and what's required to provide benefits in the plan," Strauss said.

Next step involves the annual required contribution (ARC); the amount the actuary determines necessary to pay current costs and to put away in a trust to catch up on accumulated liabilities. The trust should be able to absorb retiree costs.

"Ultimately, you want to reach a point where the funds in the trust are enough to cover the costs of what's due to past employment," Strauss explained. "Fully funded means there's enough money in the trust to cover what's been earned by employees to date."

Kent County Road Commission has reached a point where they may start pulling from their trust to help cover retiree OPEB costs. Reaching this goal was challenging and required changes, said Strauss. "Our OPEB related benefits are part of a plan to phase those benefits out," he said.

"Our benefit plans are modest. We offer a limited benefit package compared to other road commissions," said Strauss. "Although not an OPEB item, we moved to a 401K plan for all employees; that has made a difference in the cost of overall benefits."

"It's difficult for some road commissions with high contribution OPEB requirements to set aside the necessary funds," said Strauss. "Being required to include OPEB on financial reports is not identifying an unknown problem; it's just bringing the issue to light."

CHANGES NECESSARY, GETTING BUY IN

Lenawee County Road Commission (LCRC) has made strides in moving toward 100 percent OPEB funding. Working closely with its insurance agent allowed LCRC to make cost saving changes to health care for all employees, current and retired.

"Meetings were held with employees and retirees to explain the new healthcare plans," said **Beth Hunt**, finance director, **Lenawee County Road Commission**. "Considering the federal mandated changes to health care, current employees and retirees were pleased with the health care plans offered."

Some road commissions are starting to implement cut-off dates for providing healthcare in retirement. As of April 2014 new LCRC employees do not receive health insurance benefits at retirement.

In implementing the cut-off date and other changes to their health care plans, Hunt says their annual required contribution has been reduced by almost 30 percent, allowing more money to go toward road improvements.

These liabilities are not going away. The goal of 100 percent OPEB funding is lofty, but not impossible. Hunt suggests finding an insurance agent and an actuarial service provider who work together, look at the whole picture and develop a plan that is in the best interest of the Road Commission, employees and retirees. ---

TIPS TO MANAGE OPEB

John Strauss, finance director, **Kent County Road Commission** offers the following tips to better manage OPEB:

1. Be mindful of retiree benefit plans. Be sure they are economical. Consider cost trimming where possible.
2. Review the actuarial service provider you are using for effectiveness and cost. The actuary can often assist in understanding the process and identifying opportunities to make small changes to the plan that will yield significant reductions to the ARC.
3. Evaluate the manager of the trust is holding the OPEB funds to ensure appropriate investment strategy.

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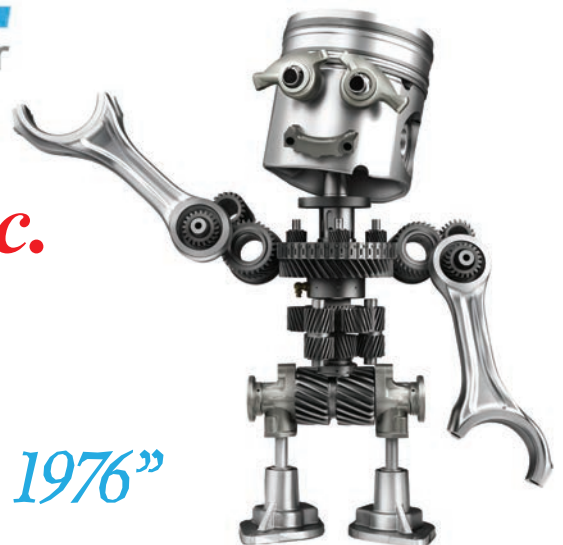


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TELLING YOUR LOCAL ROADS MATTER STORY

Ask Michigan residents what road funding means to them. Most will point to flat tires and other repairs, blaming inaction on Lansing. People rarely make the connection to the importance of roads and bridges until they are touched personally.

The Local Roads Matter campaign was created to tell how important roads are in everyday lives, to help residents understand the many ways roads impact them.

Local Roads Matter is a great tool to help a road agency explain its role in serving the community. It's about telling the story!

- When children head back to school in the fall, coordinate efforts with local school districts to highlight the importance of roads and bridges to schools. Are weight restricted bridges lengthening the time children are on buses and increasing pupil transportation costs?
- When you announce projects for the construction season, make sure the press release includes the importance of the project to the community. If it's a preservation project, what's the cost and how long is it expected to last?
- Plow drivers are the ultimate first responders, clearing the roads so emergency personnel can reach their destinations, and people can travel safely. When the media wants a winter interview, take a driver out of the plow for an interview.
- The community waves at firemen in the parade. It's our job to help them understand the role road workers play. Consider asking employees to volunteer for parades and community events.

Most powerful road agencies stories are never told. The best advocates are often the truck drivers, equipment operators, supervisors, managers or commissioners who are passionate about maintaining local roads.

And, like any good advertising message, it takes repetition! Engage the community. Engage reporters. Seek out opportunities to consistently update local organizations.

The local roads story is ours to tell. If we don't tell our story, who will?

Local Roads Matter

TO MICHIGAN



Editor's Note



Crossroads is the County Road Association's tool to tell stories of the best practices at Michigan's county road agencies. You'll notice the theme of storytelling wrapped throughout this issue.

For those who work with road agencies, it's easy to

get passionate about roads and advocating for funding. It's hard not to see, every day, how important roads and bridges are to every aspect of our lives.

I'm passionate about the need for a vital road and bridge network, not because it's my job to be, but because I've seen its importance first hand. The day my mom died, the combination of an ice storm and a detour around a weight-restricted bridge made it virtually impossible to reach a hospital during the "golden hour," critical in health care.

Stories don't have to be dramatic. The reality is that most people never realize how important roads are to their lives until they can't reach their destination. Family get-aways are planned; and we go about our daily lives, to school and work, assuming the roads will always be there.

Residents in Livingston County's Osceola Township are struggling with a bridge closure causing hassles for school bus drivers and parents, and increasing pupil transportation costs. Each community has a story to tell.

For the public to support funding for roads and bridges, they have to understand the value and importance. That's what the great debate has been in Lansing. How do we find money for roads, when everything else is a priority too?

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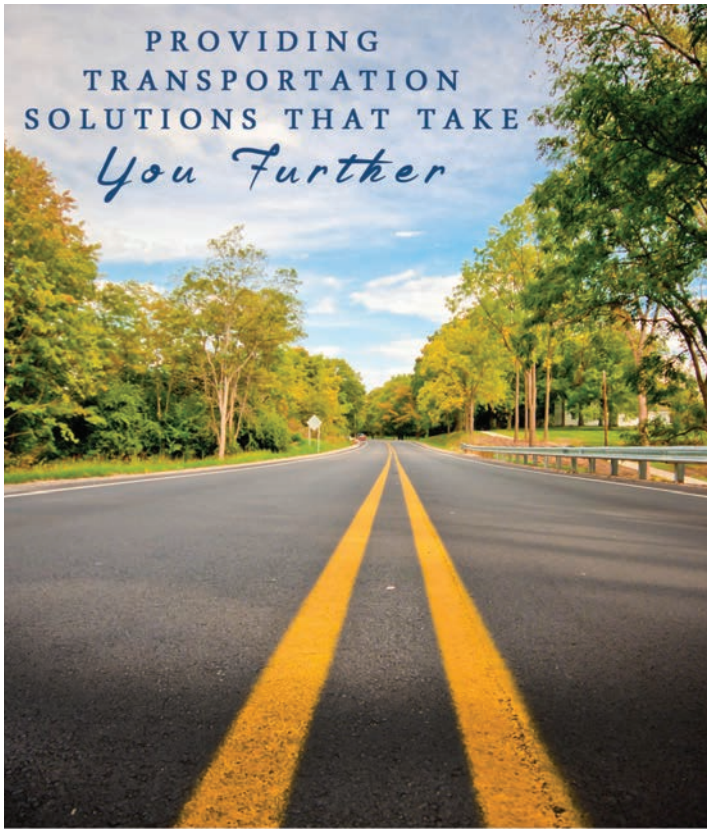


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