

Crossroads

The Quarterly Journal of the County Road Association of Michigan

Volume 4 | Issue 3

Spring 2019



A view from above

*Drones capture both the big picture
and high-res close-ups*

Page 15

(Photo courtesy of the Washtenaw County Road Commission)



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Monroe County anchors southeast Michigan
- New MDOT director shares his top 3 priorities for 2019 and beyond



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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 county 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 county road system including stewardship of the county road right-of-way in rural and urban Michigan.

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ON THE COVER:

A reconstruction project on Harris Road in Washtenaw County is shown after completion in this photo taken by Washtenaw County Road Commission's drone.

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Next Publication

The Summer 2019 issue of *Crossroads* will look at the latest and emerging issues for local county transportation infrastructure.

Crossroads' editorial team wants to hear from you. Call CRA at 517.482.1189 and share ideas for future issues!

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



As I come to my final chapter as the County Road Association (CRA) president, I continue to be honored to serve and impressed by all of our county road agencies dedicated to public service. Probably this last column is typically dedicated to showcasing the various accomplishments and lessons learned as CRA president.

However, I would prefer to focus on our 83 county road agencies and our CRA board, CRA Standing Committees and CRA team.

Wikipedia defines public service as a service which is provided by government to people living within its jurisdiction for which certain services should be available to all, regardless of income, physical ability or mental acuity.

It goes on to say that public policy when made in the public's interest and motivations can provide the best of public services.

Public service may involve outputs that are hard to attribute to specific individual effort or hard to measure in terms of key characteristics such as quality. They often require high levels of training and education. They may attract people with a public service ethos who wish to give something to the wider public or community through their work.

I have had the opportunity to work with many of our county road agencies, and visit CRA District Councils (my apologies to the Great Lakes Council!) and have found the heart of our work in each of these public service people.

Our county road agencies work to be good stewards of Michigan roads and bridges, collaborating with townships and other local governmental units and industries that need the roads to do business.

I have worked with our CRA board and CRA standing committees with people who have spent countless hours supporting the very work that is available to all because, after all, our infrastructure touches everyone.

I am thankful to our CRA team who works with our members to promote and maintain a safe, efficient county road and bridge system, including stewardship of the county road right-of-way, in rural and urban Michigan. I have seen our members come together and address good public policy and speak loudly together against that which is not.

So, as I look at my rear-view mirror, driving along one of our 90,000-plus miles of county roads, I simply say thank you to each of you for your public service and dedication to your CRA. I am forever grateful for the opportunity you gave me in yet another form of service in 2018-2019.

Joanna I. Johnson
CRA President
Managing Director
Road Commission of Kalamazoo County

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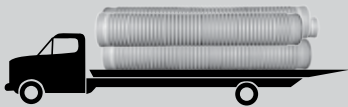
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- Self unloading - no lifting required



OF TRUCKS* 49

- RCP uses more trucks
- Machinery required to unload

* Based on 5,000 feet of 30" diameter pipe.

STAGING

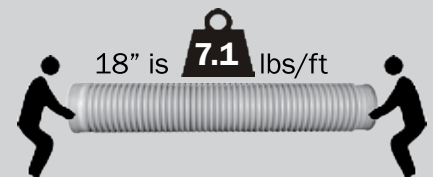


- HP Storm is able to be stacked high
- Nest smaller diameters



- RCP stacks two high

STRINGING



- HP Storm can be moved quicker
- Handle safer

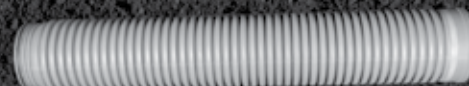


- RCP is moved two at a time
- Requires machinery

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Installation Rate
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**Data compiled from RSMeans

MEMBER PROFILE

MONROE COUNTY



Monroe County Road Commission crews perform edge repairs to Rauch Road. (Photo courtesy of Monroe County Road Commission)

Commercial gateway to Michigan

Anchoring southeast Michigan, Monroe County became the Michigan Territory's second county (after Wayne) in 1817, named after the country's fifth president, James Monroe. French settlers and Pottawatomi Indians lived more or less peaceably in the area, with perhaps the greatest excitement being the year-long Toledo War that stripped Toledo from Monroe County and granted the Upper Peninsula in exchange.

Thus, Monroe County became the gateway to Michigan from the East and later the main corridor to burgeoning factories in Detroit.

Work on the MDOT contract

The **Monroe County Road Commission** (MCRC) tends a very industrialized network of 583 miles of highways for the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). "We are the southern gateway to Michigan," said **Randy Pierce**, MCRC managing director and 20-year employee.

MCRC and 63 other county road agencies have a State Trunkline Maintenance Contract to take care of MDOT routes including snowplowing and winter maintenance, pothole patching, roadside mowing, guardrail repair and more.

This allows Michigan to avoid duplicate services, and lets MDOT focus on reconstruction and construction projects.

One of the most challenging roads for MCRC is I-75, which carries more than 100,000 vehicles per day in this area.

MDOT has future plans to reconstruct sections of I-75, from the state line through Monroe County, in stages over several years. Until then, the freeway has many maintenance challenges including deterioration of cement slabs, patching potholes, picking up shredded tires and other refuse. That pulls MCRC staff off county routes or tasks.

"When MDOT provides MCRC a restrictive budget for a network in poor condition, we work hard to provide an acceptable level of service to the motorist," Pierce said. "We need funding on the State Trunkline Contract that is appropriate to the volume of work required, and be able to hire the correct number of people and purchase appropriate equipment to get the job done."

"Years back, the roads were newer and this was less of an issue. But now the maintenance costs are so much more, we can't afford to keep doing the work that's necessary with the monies that have been appropriated," Pierce said.

JUST THE

Facts:

Monroe County Road Commission

Office headquarters:	Monroe
Staff:	55 full time
No. of commissioners:	5 (appointed)
Miles of paved roads:	Total: 1,953 Primary: 1,030 Local: 923
Miles of unpaved roads:	Total: 766 Primary: 8 Local: 758
MDOT contract:	Yes (583 lane miles)
No. of bridges:	168
Annual budget:	\$37,156,660* (FY 2018)
Local revenue:	\$8,150,052 (FY 2018)
Annual snowfall:	43 inches
MCRC established:	1914
No. of garages:	4
Office built:	1930s

*Includes local revenue.

FUN FACT:

January 2019: Had to clean up an I-75 crash with a septic hauler. The road was literally crap in this instance.

This past fall, the Monroe and **Ottawa County Road Commissions** both gave written notice to MDOT they would be withdrawing from the state contract, and that MDOT would need to find other ways to plow and maintain over 1,100 miles of highways in the two counties.

Reasons cited included insufficient funds to maintain worsening state roads and the lack of a partnership approach.

"MCRC performed a study three years ago looking at how our people were spending their time in a winter weather event," Pierce said. "As an example on I-75/I-275 in a 12-hour shift, the drivers lost four hours of plow time to return to our garage in Monroe Township and reload with salt, and then head back up to I-75/I-275 in northern Monroe County where it was needed. Sometimes, by the time one driver reloaded with salt and got back up there we had 'lost' the road to unfavorable weather conditions. This is not the most efficient use of resources."



+ Randy Pierce, managing director, conducts a training for staff at the Monroe County Road Commission.

MCRC shared the study with MDOT and recommended a state-funded salt shed be built in northern Monroe County.

"MDOT said they don't build salt sheds anymore due to funding. So I convinced my commissioners to buy the land, build the salt shed and put in the culverts ourselves at an approximate cost of \$500,000," Pierce said. "This winter is the first time we're using it and it is helping us more quickly service MDOT roads with existing staff, so that

we can get back onto the local road system. That's very important to our county residents."

"When we see a problem, we should fix the problem together," said Pierce, who has the backing of his road commission and county commission to exit the contract.

Additionally, Pierce related that the MDOT contract is a drain on MCRC. The road commission hires enough people to meet MDOT's service levels for winter events, and is forced to keep them on the road commission payroll at all other times.

"While I like and work well with our local MDOT team, we do not have a true partnership with the agency that we need for Michigan," Pierce said.

The State Trunkline Maintenance Contract is a very important issue to CRA members, and discussions are planned with the new director and administration to consider better options for Michigan taxpayers overall.

A head above water

Monroe County has bragging rights to being the lowest elevation in Michigan. As water drains from the southern Lower Peninsula into Lake Erie – within eyesight of I-75 – the land is less than two football fields above sea level.

That makes drainage very important to local and primary roads, and highways in the area. MCRC has 168 bridges, eighth-most statewide.

"Ditching and berming to keep water off the road is an area that most of Michigan has had to let go over the last decade or so for lack of funding," Pierce said. "In Monroe we're using some new state revenue to expand our ditching and berm program so that the road has a better chance of surviving."

Shoring up the road commission on Lake Erie

"One of the things I'm most proud of is that we have overcome many of the challenges we faced just five years ago," said Pierce. "The money wasn't there, the truck fleet was deteriorated, the townships paid for everything and we just did the work. The county board of commissioners was talking about taking us over."

"We were struggling and faced many challenges within our own county, and outside as well. But now, we're making big strides and it shows in what we have accomplished in the county road system," Pierce said.

Streamlining the fleet. Among the changes over the last decade is getting rid of the "mutt fleet" of trucks.



The Monroe County Road Commission recently purchased a \$500,000 salt shed for the northeast part of the county to help improve efficiency. (Photo courtesy of MCRC)

"We had one of everything and tons of parts to support them. We have streamlined our truck fleet and replacement parts," Pierce said. That simplifies purchasing, mechanic work and parts storage.

Local government partners. MCRC has partnered with its county drain commission to work on culverts, has privatized mowing and contracted out all paving work. "It's not about building

roads anymore," Pierce said. "It's about maintaining what we have in the most efficient manner possible."

Recycling roads. Monroe designs roads to utilize recycled products, such as RAP (recycled asphalt) and/or concrete millings on the road system. MCRC targets 140 miles of chip seal annually to maintain its road assets.

"In 2014, the MCRC was able to reconstruct about 10 miles of a concrete road by removing the concrete, rubble-izing the material, using RAP as the base, then paving over it for approximately \$5 million. It would have cost roughly \$10 million if we used all virgin material," Pierce said.

While on vacation in South Dakota, Pierce watched a crew perform a chip seal process and was able to incorporate some of those ideas in Monroe's practices.

Today, MCRC has a steady fund balance, a \$1 million annual capital improvement budget and a pension plan that is 90 percent funded. "We expect to spend

\$40 million on road improvements in the next few years of our own money," Pierce said.

"It's not just the managing director that has turned things around in Monroe. It's everyone pulling together to improve the system. I'm very proud of our workers – they brought us to where we are today," Pierce said. ---

The 500+ Mile Club -----

These county road agencies are contracted to maintain more than 500 miles of MDOT highways, working with local MDOT Traffic Service Centers.

- Wayne – 2,194 miles
- Oakland – 1,542 miles
- Kent – 1,139 miles
- Genesee – 811 miles
- Macomb – 662 miles
- Washtenaw – 598 miles
- Monroe – 583 miles
- Jackson – 561 miles
- Chippewa – 527 miles
- Ottawa – 521 miles
- St. Clair – 507 miles

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Ask MDOT

New MDOT Director: Thinking new thoughts about Michigan's transportation infrastructure



A week after Paul Ajegba (pronounced: ă-juh-bah) was selected by Governor Gretchen Whitmer as the new director of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), CRA director **Denise Donohue** and deputy director/legislative liaison **Ed Noyola** met with him to learn more about his plans.

"Operations is my passion"

Ajegba is a smart pick by Whitmer, as he is a licensed professional engineer with 28 years in different MDOT capacities, mostly in Southeast Michigan (Metro and University regions). However, entering the field he did not see himself becoming director.

"I did not plan on a career in civil engineering. I started out in college wanting to be an architect, but I couldn't draw very well," he said, tongue-in-cheek. "I was taking a few civil engineering classes as part of the program, and I found that I really liked them."

Ultimately, he graduated with a BS in civil engineering from Prairie View A&M University (Texas), and later earned a master's degree in construction engineering from the University of Michigan.

Ajegba joined MDOT in 1990, participating in the two-year Engineering Development Program, rotating through several divisions of the agency. In 1992, he settled in the Traffic and Safety Division which "to this day I consider my best assignment – next to this one as director, of course!" he said.

Over the years, Ajegba has served as the Metro Region's utilities/permits engineer, Tecumseh construction engineer and University Region's traffic and safety operations engineer, "My passion has always been in operations ... I have a knack for process," he said.

In recent years, he has served as MDOT's Metro Region engineer and deputy region engineer and as the University Region engineer.

He has led innovative projects, including the US-23 flex route project north of Ann Arbor, which was an AASHTO top-12 finalist for America's Transportation Award. He also worked on the I-94 rehab from Ann Arbor to Jackson, the I-75 freeway project and the I-69/US-23 interchange recently completed.

"I like to color outside the lines and think creatively," Ajegba said.

Emphasis on working with local road agencies

"The partnership that counties and MDOT have formed over the years is invaluable," Ajegba said. "We both need each other. We [MDOT] cannot establish garages in all the counties."

"So the question is: How can we grow the partnership and find more ways to think out of the box and find efficiencies?" he said.

Ajegba indicated to CRA he would like to participate as the MDOT Trunkline Maintenance Contract negotiations get underway this year. "We need to know if this contract, which has been in place since the 1980s, is still the right delivery model for the 21st century. Is it fair to county road agencies? Is it fair for both sides?" he said.

The CRA Negotiating Committee team and a few CRA board members are putting together a framework to discuss what should be included in a more workable MDOT contract moving forward. At press time, two county road commissions – in Monroe and Ottawa counties – had announced plans to pull out of the state contract in the coming year. Those negotiations are ongoing. --

Top 3 for 2019 and beyond

Crossroads asked Director Ajegba what his priorities were as he entered his first month on the job.

1. Push efficiency through innovation.

"One of the things I want both sides to hone in on: Is this the model contract we want to use moving forward? Whether Act 51 is still applicable: How can we improve some of the requirements in Act 51? How can we change the system so that it works well for everyone?"

Asked to give an example of the type of change he'd like to see in PA 51, Ajegba cited lighting of poorly-lit intersections for safety purposes. A provision in PA 51 prohibits the municipality from paying to light the intersection on an MDOT road, yet MDOT does not have its own electrical supply to the corner.

Thinking out of the box, solar lighting – where no one pays – was adopted to resolve the issue.

2. Communicating more transparently about the use of road dollars.

"The public doesn't even know how we select our projects. They don't know why we do the things we do... how we do maintenance... or how we even deliver our projects," Ajegba said.

"We need to explain more about what we're doing and why we're doing it," he said.

3. Workforce development for road work.

"This is an area I'm very passionate about," Ajegba said. "How do we get people to see road construction, including maintenance, as a career?" Having enough workers at MDOT, at the counties and in the private roadbuilding industry will be critical to restoring Michigan roads.



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LEGISLATOR PROFILE

STATE SENATOR WAYNE SCHMIDT

Serving the 37th State Senate District, representing the counties of Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Chippewa, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Luce and Mackinac, State Senator Wayne Schmidt has the unique distinction of being the only Senator in Michigan whose constituents reside on both sides of the Mackinac Bridge.

Crossroads and CRA deputy director **Ed Noyola** sat down with Sen. Schmidt to talk about how vital transportation is to northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula.

CRA: Can you tell us about your background and how you came to be a Senator?

SEN. SCHMIDT: I grew up in Traverse City and started working on political campaigns when I was still in high school. I went to college in Chicago and when I got back I began serving on the Zoning Board of Appeals. There was an open seat for County Commissioner so I took the chance and ran in 1998 and served 10 years representing the east side of Traverse City, East Bay and Garfield Townships.

When a State House seat became available I ran for that, won and then the same opportunity became available in the Senate. I had great support from Grand Traverse and Kalkaska counties when I decided to run for House Rep. as well as great support from my wife, Kathleen, and our two boys.

CRA: You have been heavily involved with transportation in your time with the Michigan Legislature, serving as Chair of House Transportation Committee and Chair of Senate Transportation Appropriations Committee. Can you tell

us about your history in transportation and how that came about?

SEN. SCHMIDT: It really came out of a love for transportation. I have always loved trains and was an avid passenger flyer from a young age. Going to college in Chicago, which is a transportation hub, exposed me to so many modes of transportation it continued to grow my interest. I did course work in transportation so it was a natural fit once I entered the Legislature.

With the size of Grand Traverse back then, residents were very heavily reliant on good roads to get them around, especially during the winter. It was always something I was tuned in to.

CRA: Representing the 37th State Senate District is rather unique with constituents above and below the bridge. What's it like representing such a wide geographic difference and where do you see overlap and differences in transportation issues?

SEN. SCHMIDT: When you live in northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, you have local roads, freeways and bridges. Then with so many islands,

Beaver, Mackinaw, Drummond, Bois Blanc and Sugar Island, you have active ferry services. And because you're so far away, you sometimes need airports for regular travel, which we have three. We also have rail, which can be a great tool in getting heavy loads off roads, helping preserve the road.

One of the other key pieces of infrastructure we have is the Soo Locks. Between the Locks, Mackinac Bridge and International Bridge, we have three of Michigan's most iconic pieces of infrastructure.

Up north, it all comes together. You name the mode of transportation, and in northern Michigan and the U.P., we got it. While the Upper Peninsula may be more remote, whether you are above the bridge or below, we rely on a strong road and multimodal network to work together.

CRA: What are some key transportation issues the new Legislature will be addressing and are there any issues you see cresting on the horizon?

SEN. SCHMIDT: The Legislature right now wants to see the results of the funding package it put together in 2015. Funding will continue to ramp up until we see \$1.2 billion on an ongoing basis, plus we've dedicated hundreds of millions in additional funds to infrastructure. For the next two years, we want to see how's it working.

Looking further on the horizon, we're looking at what's the next funding step going to be, how much is it going to be, and in conjunction with that, how do we capture that next generation of road builders? Operating engineers, design engineers, all the men and women who build and maintain roads and bridges, we need to make sure we have that skill set available to us in Michigan.

Do we have more challenges ahead? Yes. But have we taken a huge bite at the apple, getting more funding, getting people better coordinated and working together? You bet, we're excited to see how this plays out while we get ready for the next step.

CRA: Final and toughest question: If you had to pick, are you a Yooper or a Troll?

SEN. SCHMIDT: I don't get to choose. I grew up in the city of Traverse City, (big laugh) I'm definitely a troll. ---



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Getting a bird's-eye view of the road

Drones offer broad and close-up views ... and they're more affordable than you think



Drone footage shows a crane lowering the first section of culvert into place during a concrete box culvert replacement project on Mast Road. (Photo courtesy of Washtenaw County Road Commission)

County road agencies are no strangers to taking “big-picture views” of the world.

They look at finances, construction projects and equipment purchases with an eye on the broader picture.

A new tool is allowing them to capture that picture – in high definition – from the sky.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, allow road agency personnel to gauge and record damage to a wide area that might be inaccessible after a storm or other disaster; inspect bridges from a multitude of angles; and monitor and record progress of construction projects to share with the public.

“Essentially, [using a drone] increases the quality of most activities that counties do, like construction, bridge inspection,” said Joe Campbell, PE, FHWA Minnesota Division and transportation/assistant division bridge engineer. Campbell presented “Using Drones on Local Agency Projects” at the County Engineers’ Workshop in February.

“The images and the video captured is so much better quality. If a picture is worth a thousand words, and a video is thousands of pictures per minute, you’re able to tell a story so much faster than a page of notes.”

A worthwhile investment

That’s been the experience of **Washtenaw County Road Commission** (WCRC), which purchased a drone in fall 2017 after seeing drone-captured video of construction projects another county had shared. After researching costs and potential uses for the drone, and inviting a company to do a demo flight, WCRC bought a DJI Inspire™ Drone for about \$3,000.

Allen Squire, WCRC’s GIS developer, said the investment is more than paying off in the number of uses they’ve found for it.

“The drone connects through wi-fi to an app running on a tablet, which is connected to the remote control,” said Squire, who is a Federal Aviation Administration-licensed drone pilot. “The app shows the camera view, radio signal, battery power, drone GPS location, distance, height.

“If the drone loses radio signal or is running low on battery, it will automatically return to the pilot,” Squire said. “It also has obstacle avoidance detection, so if it is flown too close to a building, it will stop automatically.”

Squire said WCRC’s main use for the drone is to take photos and videos of road construction projects, documenting the progress and sharing it with the public via the website and social media.

So you want to fly a drone ...

License: According to Federal Aviation Administration rules adopted in August 2016, anyone who works for a company or public agency and wants to operate a drone must pass a remote pilot test. The test costs about \$150 and must be taken at an FAA-approved testing center. Successful completion secures a remote pilot’s certification card rated for small unmanned aircraft systems.

Operating the drone: Just because someone is licensed does not mean he or she is properly prepared to fly the drone. The operator’s manual, online training videos and practice are recommended.

Rules of flying: Drones must be flown within the pilot’s line of sight, below 400 feet, not in restricted airspace, and not over people or moving vehicles. The FAA can issue a waiver that to allow users to fly over vehicles or beyond line of sight.

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Which one is right for you?

Determining a drone's primary use is the first step toward figuring out the type of drone a county road agency might need and how much it will spend, said Colin Brooks, senior research scientist with the Michigan Technological Research Institute and UAV program leader.

"If you need a drone for quick aerial images, that could be priced below \$1,500," Brooks said. "It depends on what you need. A small Phantom™ or Mavic™ Pro for aerial shots at 12-20 (megapixels), the range is \$700 to \$1,800. If you need to do more sophisticated work, like survey grade or fly a thermal camera for bridge deck assessments, you're looking at a more expensive UAV."

Brooks noted he has had success creating high precision 3D data using an \$8,000 drone setup from Bergen RC Helicopters of Vandalia in Cass County.

A dedicated inspection drone can cost \$25,000 to \$40,000, and if a Lidar unit is added, the price jumps to \$70,000 to \$100,000, Brooks said.

More expensive doesn't mean better

But with the capabilities of the less expensive models, county road agencies have cost-conscious options that would serve a multitude of purposes. Throw in a pair of FPV (first-person view) goggles that run between \$350 and \$550, Campbell said, and you've got a well-rounded system to see things like never before.



A Mavic™ Pro drone is shown flying in the air. Mavic™ Pro drones are among the more affordable options on the market. (Photo courtesy of the Michigan Tech Research Institute.)

+ A recently constructed roundabout at Moon and Bemis roads is shown in this photo taken by a drone. (Washtenaw County Road Commission.)



"The drone takes great video and images, but it's hard to capture in the field if you're using a phone or tablet for display," Campbell said. "It's a standard version that's hard to see with sunlight. The FPV is designed to block out sunlight, and the image is four to eight times larger than what the tablet would be. It's the equivalent of watching a 20-foot big screen TV from 9 feet away, so it's immersive."

Another reason to stick with lower-cost models is it might quell operators' fears of damaging a costly piece of equipment.

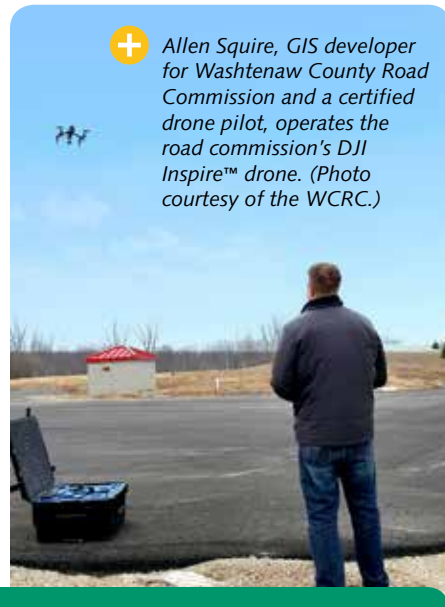
"Most county employees I know don't like the thought of breaking something expensive even when they don't pay for it themselves," Campbell said. "If the cost is lower, they might be more at ease to use it and feel comfortable."

Still, a county road agency that wants to reap the benefits of a drone without the investment can likely partner with a private-sector company. Brooks said five years ago "only a handful" offered UAV services, and it's much more prevalent now with start-ups focused on drone apps and engineering and surveying firms adding UAVs to their list of capabilities. That's how the **Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC)** plans to take

advantage of the technology, although they are also positioning themselves to possibly obtain their own drone down the road.

"We have a planning staff member who is completing all the necessary training to legally operate a drone, and we will consider purchasing a drone once he is 'legal,'" said **Craig Bryson**, RCOC's senior manager of communications. "However, we have also found that most of our consulting engineering companies own drones and can provide project drone footage for reasonable costs." ---

+ Allen Squire, GIS developer for Washtenaw County Road Commission and a certified drone pilot, operates the road commission's DJI Inspire™ drone. (Photo courtesy of the WCRC.)



Some additional reading:

Unpaved roads project for USDOT: <http://www.mtri.org/unpaved>

Second-phase unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) project for MDOT: http://www.mtri.org/mdot_uav.html

An example of using UAS imaging for environmental assessment: <http://www.mtri.org/ewmlci.html>



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A truck sits ready in the obstacle course during the SAM Southwest Council New Employee Winter Operations Training in September at **Kent County Road Commission**.



You're hired. Now what?

SAM operations training sessions aim to ease onboarding of new employees

County road agencies essentially serve a unified purpose, so when new employees are hired, it makes sense to not reinvent the “training wheel.”

That was part of the reason the **Superintendents Association of Michigan (SAM)** Southwest Council came together to create a new employee winter operations training class to better acclimate new hires to life at a county road agency. Not all new employees come to work for a county road agency and have similar work experience.

That scenario plays out at many garages around the state, to the point that the SAM Southwest Council came together to create a new employee winter operations training class to better acclimate new hires to life at a county road agency. Not all new employees come to work for a county road agency and have similar work experience.

The first-of-its-kind SAM Southwest Council New Employee Winter Operations Training took place in late September at the **Kent County Road Commission (KCRC)** Southwest Complex with 25 participants from road agencies within the SAM Southwest Council (Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Cass, Kalamazoo, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties).

Through the free training program, new employees learned about road commission funding; workplace harassment; and truck safety issues in the classroom. After lunch they climbed into truck cabs to learn about blind spots; three-point entry and exit with seatbelt; and auger and chain. Then they tackled an obstacle course.

The SAM Southwest Council is primarily rural, which provided the impetus for the training.

“Some [county road agencies] have a full safety department,

The Superintendents Association of Michigan (SAM) Southwest Council New Employee Spring Operations Training will take place April 9-10 at Allegan County Road Commission (ACRC).

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some don't have those resources," said **Walter Jansen**, superintendent at **Allegan County Road Commission** (ACRC) and SAM Southwest Council president. "So we took it upon ourselves and made it happen."

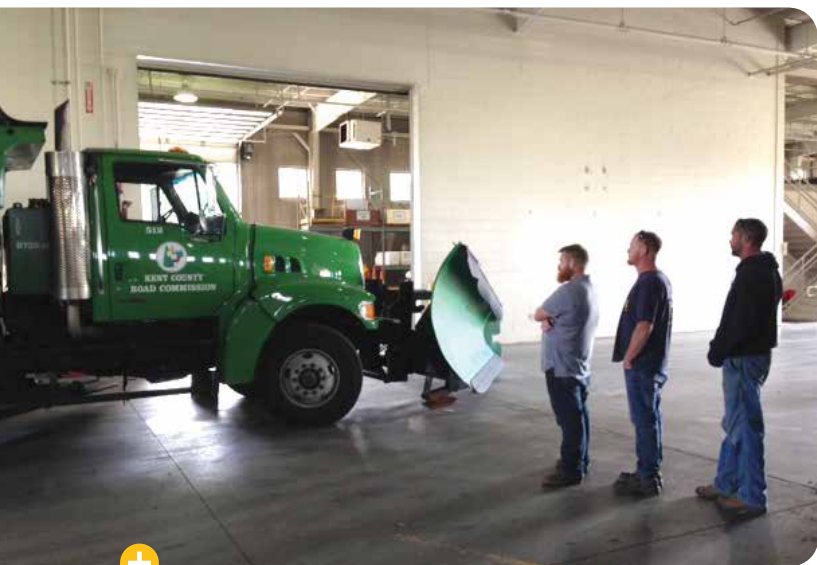
"We designed it for use with our council, however we structured the class intentionally so it can be shared with other councils statewide," Jansen said. "So the Paul Bunyan Council could take on this same class that's already written but do it for their proximity."

About a dozen people from the SAM Southwest Council – from county road agencies in Allegan, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa, along with a representative from the Michigan County Road Commission Self-Insurance Pool (MCRCSIP) – designed the class after discussions revealed new hire training was a pain point for several of them.

While all new employees will receive hazmat and hazcom training at their own county road agency during annual and semi-annual safety meetings, in-truck training was not as structured and streamlined. Courses offered by MDOT often involve material that doesn't apply to counties.

"MDOT focuses mostly on highways, so we talked about a class specifically geared toward new employees, asked for volunteers and next thing you know, here we are," Jansen said.

The winter session was completed in one day since the size of the group of new employees allowed for that. Jansen said flexibility is built into the sessions to allow for fluctuations in the sizes of the class.



New hires get an overview of a **Kent County Road Commission** truck during the SAM Southwest Council New Employee Winter Operations Training in September.



New employees listen to **Joanna Johnson**, managing director for the **Road Commission of Kalamazoo County**, talk about road funding and the County Road Association during the SAM Southwest Council New Employee Winter Operations Training in September at **Kent County Road Commission**.

"If times change and the Southwest Council only has eight new employees, we'd do the one-day class," Jansen said. "If there were a bunch of retirements and new hires because of that, we could possibly do a three-day class."

The winter session was a success as feedback was generally positive. The same group met again and planned the spring operations training session, which will focus on tie-downs, securing loads, flagging, arrow boards and work-zone safety, among other topics.

Muskegon County Road Commission (MCRC) sent five employees to the winter session, and Superintendent **Eric Scott** said they walked away with greater knowledge and comfort in the equipment. Because each county road agency brought its own truck with a wing and plow, they learned on the same equipment they will operate on the roads.

"We all have our own methods of training, so to put together formal training that is designed through all the superintendents and other professionals, one baseline training that's important to all of us, I found a lot of value in that," Scott said.

"Any kind of training, when you take people from Muskegon to Grand Rapids, you find out a lot of why we're teaching the same stuff and the employees started to realize that pretty quick," Scott said. "Really, we all have the same mission." --

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Lending a helping hand



Montmorency County Road Commission crews work on County Road 624, a project that was completed thanks in part to the State Infrastructure Bank loan program. (Photo courtesy of Montmorency County Road Commission)

State Infrastructure Bank loan program provides flexibility when it's needed most

Todd Behring at the **Montmorency County Road Commission** wanted to get a job done ahead of schedule.

Bryan Santo at the **Macomb County Road Department** had a township that needed matching funds to move an important project forward.

In both cases, the State Infrastructure Bank (SIB) loan program proved the answer.

Administered by MDOT, the loan program is available to any Act 51 public entity for transportation projects and is particularly useful in times of emergency. Road commissions in **Houghton**, **Isabella**, **Midland** and **Gogebic** county road commissions have all used the program to recover from recent disasters.

The SIB was authorized in 1995 and three years later originated its first loans from a \$15 million pool – \$11 million in federal and \$4 million in state funding. Nearly \$68 million has been borrowed since its inception, and the “pot” has grown to \$21.1 million. SIB has \$17.5 million in outstanding loans and about \$3.6 million available to loan, as of September 30, 2018.

The program's standard interest rate is adjusted periodically based on prevailing rates, increasing from 3.25 percent to 4.5 percent recently.

“The program helps local agencies accelerate transportation projects, make them more financially viable and, if possible, attract other investments into transportation infrastructure,”

said Mike Kapp, administrator in the MDOT Office of Economic Development, which oversees the SIB. “We were one of the first states to have one, and we have one of the better banks. We’ve built in a lot more flexibility over the years as it’s been implemented.”

That flexibility particularly helps in time of crisis.

Houghton County Road Commission secured a no-interest, \$4 million SIB loan to help with recovery efforts from a June 2018 storm. **Isabella** and **Midland** county road commissions both received \$2 million SIB loans after a road-eating rainstorm in June 2017. A \$3.4 million SIB loan at 0 percent interest for two years and 1 percent thereafter helped **Gogebic County Road Commission** in the aftermath of a July 2016 storm-fueled road disaster.

What is it: The Michigan State Infrastructure Bank (SIB) loan program is available to any Act 51 public entity (county road commissions, cities, villages, or MDOT) for eligible transportation projects.

Why use it: The SIB complements traditional funding techniques and serves as a tool to meet urgent project financing demands.

How to apply: Visit michigan.gov/mdot, and under Projects and Programs, click on Grant Programs. Find the link to State Infrastructure Bank for a guideline for applicants and the two-page loan application.

"In those cases, they usually receive federal emergency response funds, and sometimes FEMA," Kapp said. "For federal emergency response, if you qualify and you're awarded the funds but Congress doesn't fully fund it, well, in emergencies, you have to respond, so we've offered loans at 0 percent interest."

"We also have flexibility with the term, which is maxed at 20 years, but we typically do three to five years as it's a revolving program and we try to get the funds back for the next potential customer," Kapp said.

Emergencies were not why Montmorency or Macomb sought SIB loans.

Behring, managing director at Montmorency County Road Commission, inherited a federally-funded project to upgrade County Road 624 for a 12-mile stretch connecting M-33 to the village of Hillman.

The project was just over halfway completed after six years because Rural Task Force funding would only allow one mile of road to be done each year.

Behring said he could have considered bonding through the county commission for the \$1.5 million project but said that option proved unfeasible based on Behring's desire to expedite the project.

"I'm the type of person, when you start a project, I want to finish it," Behring said. "The engineers came up with a cost estimate, other managers told me about the SIB program, so I educated myself on it, got with MDOT and brought it to my board's attention."

Once educated, the board approved and the \$1.5 million SIB loan let the road commission finish the remaining 5¾ miles "all in one shot," as Behring put it. The result is a Class A route completed three years ahead of the federal funding schedule that saw greater construction efficiencies, better



+ Work on County Road 624 started several years ago, and a \$1.5 million loan through the State Infrastructure Bank helped complete it ahead of schedule. (Photo courtesy of the Montmorency County Road Commission)

bid price and less hassle to local drivers than doing one mile at a time for four years.

"It worked out pretty good," Behring said. "In the future, I won't be surprised if we do it again."

In Macomb, the SIB loan helped Bruce Township fulfill its cost share to construct an exit ramp from M-53 to 33 Mile Road and a roundabout at the 33 Mile and McKay roads intersection.

Townships are not eligible for a SIB loan, but the program allows county road agencies to secure loans for townships. The county road agency's Act 51 funds are essentially the collateral, and the township repays the county.

This was the fifth SIB loan Macomb County Road Commission has secured for a township, and Santo said, "it's worked out great in the past."

The majority of the work on the M-53/33 Mile Road project was done in 2017 with the remainder completed in 2018.

"It's a great program that allows communities to take out low-interest loans. The M-53 project is 2.5 percent interest, so they're pretty good rates for communities to use," Santo said. "It works out well, as some of our northern, rural communities don't have an influx of revenue from taxes, so it's invaluable for them to tap into a loan resource as a low interest rate to advance infrastructure projects."

If a county road agency has not heard of the SIB program, that's likely intentional.

"We're careful about over-marketing it," Kapp said. "We try to keep a balance so that enough agencies are aware of it but there are some funds there when the need comes up. County road agencies are pretty conservative with funds, they typically prefer to have appropriations in hand before spending them." **--**

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CRA'S Legal Issues Corner



Help your neighbor ... but have a Mutual Aid Agreement in place first

This article is a follow-up to CRA's December 2018 educational event on emergency response and the Mutual Aid Agreement presentation by CRA legal counsel Mike Levine, Levine Law Group, LLC.

Mutual aid agreements between governmental entities provide a mechanism to quickly obtain emergency assistance in the form of personnel, equipment, materials and other services.

The scope of an agreement can serve a single limited purpose such as debris management or a broad purpose that includes all services provided by a participating entity.

Most mutual aid agreements between public works agencies generally do not impose a duty on participating agencies to respond. Each participating entity should be allowed to assess its own immediate needs and then its ability to assist the requesting agency.

Having written agreements will facilitate reimbursement, especially when reimbursement includes federal assistance provided through FEMA. Under federal law, costs incurred

by an assisting entity are eligible for reimbursement when there was an expectation of payment by the requesting entity evidenced by a Mutual Aid Agreement in place prior to the disaster.

FEMA will reimburse the requesting entity based on assistance provided by an assisting entity under a verbal agreement which spelled out the terms, conditions and cost of services if the verbal agreement is subsequently documented in writing and executed by an authorized official of each entity.

Mutual Aid Agreements should be reviewed regularly to determine that the legal authority is current, the scope is appropriate, there are no conflicts with other agreements and that the responsible individuals have a complete understanding of how your agency may request or provide assistance as well as its duties and obligations. ---

Elements of a Mutual Aid Agreement should include:

- Legal authority;
- Conditions for implementation;
- Procedure for requesting assistance;
- Officials/employees authorized to request assistance;
- Terms and method for reimbursement;
- Status of each entity and its employees;
- Terms under which equipment may be provided;
- Supervision and control;
- Recordkeeping;
- Communications protocols;
- Training requirements;
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Bridging the Gaps

What account should we charge this to???

By Brenda Gordert, Finance Director, Midland County Road Commission

+ A massive rainstorm left Midland County roads under water in June 2017. (Photo courtesy of **Midland County Road Commission**)

June 23, 2017: It was a Friday. Everyone was excited for weekend camping trips, graduation parties, golf outings, typical summer fun. Unfortunately, this weekend turned into anything but fun for Midland County. And things were downhill quickly.

In fact, as of January 2019 we have not seen the end of this weather event.

The nightmare began on June 23, when Midland County had 7 inches of rain overnight. The entire county was under a flood warning by the time we got to work in the morning. The river was expected to crest at 31.5 feet, 7.5 feet above flood stage.

Emergency crews were called in, local contractors and emergency responders from neighboring counties. Everyone was willing to assist wherever they could.

In such situations, it falls to the road agency's finance and accounting staff to keep track of it all.

Unfortunately, this was not Midland County's first experience with flooding so we were prepared to track all the costs for both federal aid and non-federal aid locations by giving each one a separate account number.

We quickly set up an emergency response account to track the initial weekend overtime. After the initial weekend we mapped all the locations through GIS and set up separate account numbers for each location to track individual costs. Our main three cost centers associated with this event were:

- Emergency Response Account for initial weekend.
- Account Number for each Federal Aid Location.
- Account Number for each Non-Federal Aid Location.

We gave distinctive account numbers to the flood-related projects to set them apart when running reports in our accounting system.

The initial estimate for damages was over \$7 million! We needed cash to start restoration before any other form of financial assistance would be available. Our managing director, **Terry Palmer**, applied for a State Infrastructure Bank (SIB) loan in the amount of \$2 million, and approval was received within weeks.

"We did not meet the threshold for FEMA assistance; however, our townships and county were eligible to apply for up to \$100,000 of Section 19 funding through the Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division," Palmer said.

Accounts were established for financial assistance:

- Account for SIB Loan revenue.
- Accounts for Section 19 revenue from each township.

To date Midland County has not received any federal funding for road or bridge repairs due to the 2017 flooding, Palmer said. Projects have been approved, and some contracts have been signed for completion this summer.

Tracking of all flood related costs continues with the expectation of an audit when the end of this 2017 crisis is in sight. --



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Award SPOTLIGHT

ENGINEER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

The following individuals were honored at the awards presentations at the County Engineers' Workshop on February 5 in Sault Ste. Marie.



+ Jake Perkins, left, was named 2018 Project Manager of the Year, and Daniel Armentrout, PE, was named 2018 Rural Engineer of the Year. Perkins is an engineering technician with the Clinton County Road Commission, and Armentrout is the director of engineering for the Clinton County Road Commission. Both received their awards at the annual County Engineers' Workshop in Sault Ste. Marie in February.

2018 Rural Engineer of the Year

Daniel R. Armentrout, PE

Director of Engineering
Clinton County Road Commission (CCRC)

Armentrout has served as the director of engineering/county highway engineer for CCRC since 2003 and has mastered the federal aid process. He serves as a resource for trying to secure project funding and annually maximizes the amount of federal aid work that gets performed within Clinton County. Armentrout maintains his own accounting of funding available for the regional planning commission and ensures his region maximizes its funding.

2018 Urban Engineer of the Year

Charles T. Keller, PE

Traffic Engineer
Road Commission for Oakland County

The traffic engineer for RCOC since 2007, Keller has helped make its traffic operations one of the best in the state and one of the lowest traffic-fatality rates in the world for a community of its size. Keller is well versed with the *Michigan Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices*; was instrumental in establishing pavement-marking, sign-management and guardrail-maintenance programs; and has served on the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) review board for pavement markings.

2018 Project Manager of the Year

Jake Perkins

Engineering Technician
Clinton County Road Commission

Perkins was involved in a number of projects during 2018, including:

- Coordinating tree removal with a contractor and land owners to ensure trees cut for a federal aid bridge project complied with long-eared bat concerns;
- Coordinating with several farmers and a gravel supplier for another project during planting season.
- Coordinating with the county drain commission, township and school officials, local police and fire on a major urban project.

2018 APAM/MDOT Asphalt Paving Award CRC Winners

The following county road commissions were honored in December by the Asphalt Pavement Association of Michigan (APAM) and Michigan Department of Transportation at the Asphalt Paving Awards. Only paving projects constructed by an APAM contractor member are eligible for this recognition.

Projects 10,000 to 30,000 Tons

Award of Merit: Napier Road, 9 Mile to 10 Mile, Oakland County
Contractor: Cadillac Asphalt, LLC, Wixom Plant
Owner: **Road Commission for Oakland County**

Projects 2,500 to 10,000 Tons

Award of Excellence: Lee Road Roundabout, Livingston County
Contractor: Cadillac Asphalt, LLC, Rawsonville Plant
Owner: **Livingston County Road Commission**

Local Agency Projects

Award of Merit: Overbrook Subdivision, Oakland County
Contractor: Cadillac Asphalt, LLC, Clarkston Plant
Owner: **Road Commission for Oakland County**

Single Course Overlay Projects

Award of Merit: 3 Mile Road, Mackinac County
Contractor: Payne & Dolan, Inc.
Owner: **Mackinaw County Road Commission**
Inspection: R. S. Scott Associates, Inc.

Recreational Projects

Award of Excellence: Iron Belle Trail Phase 1
Contractor: Ace-Saginaw Paving County
Owner: Genesee County Parks and Recreation and **Genesee County Road Commission**
Consulting Engineers: ROWE Professional Services Company



Key transitions at...

...Road Commissions and Departments

Robert Bowler has been hired as finance director at the **Luce County Road Commission**.

Stuart "Mike" McTiver has been hired as engineer manager at the **Luce County Road Commission**.

Kenneth Bower has been elected commissioner for the **Menominee County Road Commission**.

Brad Knight is now director of planning/environmental concerns at the **Road Commission for Oakland County**.

Andrea LaLonde has been appointed commissioner for the **Road Commission for Oakland County**.

...In Memorium

Marvin Kociba, commissioner for the **Huron County Road Commission**, passed away. He was on the Huron board for 18 years.

Eugene Smith, commissioner for the **Midland County Road Commission**, passed away. He was on the Midland board for 18 years.

Do you have a staff member you want recognized in *Crossroads*?

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...Mile Marker

Amy Price, payroll clerk/board secretary, **Chippewa County Road Commission**, retired after 18 years of service.

Peter B. Blauwiel, commissioners, **Clinton County Road Commission**, retired after 12 years of service.

Kim Sohlden, office manager, **Houghton County Road Commission**, retired after 31 years of service.

James Boluyt, engineering aide IV, **Kent County Road Commission**, retired after 29 years of service.

Thomas Johnson, district equipment supervisor, **Kent County Road Commission**, retired after 28 years of service.

David Kalkofen, equipment specialist III, **Kent County Road Commission**, retired after 27 years of service.

Daniel Luyk, sign shop foreman, **Kent County Road Commission**, retired after 32 years of service.

Patrick Malone, commissioner, **Kent County Road Commission**, retired after 11 years of service.

Stanley Ronquist, engineer manager, **Luce County Road Commission**, retired after 18 years of service.

Nick Mataish, commissioner, **Mason County Road Commission**, retired after 18 years of service.

William Anderson, commissioner, **Menominee County Road Commission**, retired after 28 years of service.

Eric Wilson, commissioner, **Road Commission for Oakland County**, retired after 12 years of service.

Gerald "Jerry" Nelson, county road foreman, **Osceola County Road Commission**, retired after 29 years of service.

Clint Stauffer, operator, foreman and later commissioner, **Roscommon County Road Commission**, retired after 51 years of service.

Chris Minger, managing director, **St. Joseph County Road Commission**, retired after 44 years of service.

CROSSROADS EVENT Calendar

March 10-12

2019 Commissioners Seminar

This event moves to the Radisson Hotel in Lansing and precedes the 2019 Highway Conference and Road Show. The theme of "Red Light, Green Light" for commissioners features many useful sessions and optional tour of the American Center for Mobility in Ypsilanti.

REGISTRATION LIVE!

March 12-14

2019 Highway Conference and Road Show

Our biggest event of the year takes over the Lansing Center and features keynote speaker Herman Moore of the Detroit Lions and two days of sessions focused on county road agencies' many roles. The Road Show is bigger than ever with more display space and vendors.

REGISTRATION LIVE!

May 7-9

2019 Finance & Human Resources Seminar

This annual event for finance and human resource staff members that focuses on trends and new practices in the industry takes place at Crystal Mountain in Thompsonville.

To register and for details on all CRA events, visit www.micountyroads.org/events.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Driving road improvement locally, and in Lansing



"Moving on..." Too passive.

"Spring ahead..." Too daylight savings-ish.

"Relentless, positive..." Lived that.

"Driving local road improvement..." Maybe that fits us best.

Whatever term we apply to progress, it's time for county road agencies to step up our game (to use another trite phrase) and tell people what's happening out on the nation's fourth-largest local road system.

With about 60 percent of the new road dollars promised in 2015 now arriving, all 83 county road agencies, CRA, MDOT and municipal road agencies need to explain what has been done and the challenges we still face.

Our new governor is very supportive of increasing revenue to "fix the damn roads!" The House Speaker has considered increased transportation revenue for roads and bridges, and the Senate Majority Leader wants to be convinced the road funds appropriated so far are well-used.

The challenge has been thrown down to us as the road owners.

We need to be transparent about what's getting done – and what

isn't. Road funding pledged to date is half of what four studies called for, and won't be fully received until late 2021.

And while roads are slowly beginning the turnaround as new dollars arrive, bridges have not particularly benefitted from new dollars. However, a creative, new solution is being considered as MDOT and CRA's Local Bridge Advisory Board members explore bridge bundling.

Soon, CRA will share results of our 2018 road funding usage study. And because numbers don't give a complete picture, all road agencies should talk with local government and business leaders, statewide elected officials and the motoring public about what progress is being made and how much the improvements cost.

For the first time in decades, perhaps, some county road engineers are testing innovations they've learned about from other experts and other states. Driving the innovation home to Michigan roads.

These are exciting times for county road agencies to be driving – and talking – about local road improvements.

Denise Donohue

Denise Donohue
CRA Director

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