



COUNTY ROAD ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN

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County Road Association Calls for Real Solutions

Lansing, Mich. – Today, the County Road Association of Michigan (CRAM) lauded House Republicans and members of Michigan’s Congressional Delegation for recognizing the need for additional transportation funding, but asked them to look beyond the Michigan Department of Transportation’s (MDOT) inability to match federal aid when seeking solutions.

“We are pleased that lawmakers have realized a vital statewide transportation infrastructure is key to economic growth and failure to address Michigan’s crumbling roads and bridges will continue to impede job growth,” Association Director, John Niemela said.

We don’t want to rain on the parade, the current discussions are very important, but we must move beyond just looking at temporary fixes for the 8 percent of the road system maintained by MDOT,” Niemela said. “There are 83 counties and 533 cities and villages struggling not just to match federal funding for road projects, but to maintain all of our states roads and bridges.”

In June, CRAM Director John Niemela told members of the House Transportation Committee that 12 county road commissions have already delayed projects due to a lack of matching funds and at least 21 county road agencies are unable to match all available federal funds between 2010 and 2012.

“For those counties sacrificing to match federal aid, it comes at a cost,” Niemela said. “County road agencies are responsible for 75 percent of Michigan’s roads, most of which are ineligible for federal funding. Road commissions are cutting local road projects and preservation of the current county road system to provide the match for these federal funds.”

“Road agencies face difficult decisions between turning away funds to reconstruct roads and applying preservation techniques that will extend the life of existing road surfaces,” Niemela said. “The current funding crisis has put road agencies in a lose/lose situation.”

“Lawmakers are struggling to find a short-term solution to a small piece of the puzzle,” Niemela said. “As they do, it is vital that they understand the magnitude of the problem and that potential solutions be realistic given Michigan’s economic situation.”

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“In 2007, the Michigan Legislature passed a law creating a Citizens Advisory Committee and Task Force to research Michigan’s transportation funding needs and make recommendations on how to pay for these needs,” Niemela said. “The task force provided those recommendations to the legislature and since that time they have been largely ignored while our infrastructure continues to decay.”

The governor’s Transportation Funding Task Force (TF2) issued its recommendations in October 2008 that Michigan must double transportation funding. The task force suggested the best way to accomplish this goal was to increase current road user fees, fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees.

“The Task Force pointed out that we cannot count on federal funds to resolve our transportation funding crisis,” Niemela said. “Federal funds can’t be used to plow snow, patch potholes, or even pay for construction projects on the vast majority of the county road system.”

A 2008 survey of Michigan's 83 county road agencies revealed:

- 21 counties had reduced bridge and culvert repairs;
- 44 counties had reduced mowing and brush control;
- 47 counties had reduced gravel road maintenance;
- 66 counties had reduced road maintenance, preservation and construction; and
- 25 counties had returned paved roads to gravel due to a lack of funding to properly reconstruct the roads.

“We simply cannot continue to ignore the elephant in the room- we need to raise the gas tax,” Niemela said. “Ignoring the need has created a pothole in Michigan’s economy and quality of life. We have finally reached the common ground of establishing that there is a need to increase transportation funding. Now we just need to roll up our sleeves and look at real solutions that will ensure our states roads and bridges remain open to travel.”

“We are grateful that the House Republican budget proposal offers funding for transportation, but we cannot lose sight that a \$419 Million one-time funding stream does nothing to solve a \$3 Billion annual problem,” Niemela said. “It is time once and for all, to find a long-term funding solution.”

The County Road Association of Michigan represents the interests of Michigan’s 83 county road agencies that maintain more than 90,000 miles of Michigan’s roads (75 percent of roads in the state) and more than 5,600 bridges- the fourth largest local road system in the nation.

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