



COUNTY ROAD ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN

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Returning to the Stone Age *County Road Agencies in Michigan Suffer from Lack of Funding*

Lansing, Mich. -- The County Road Association of Michigan (CRAM) today announced the results of their annual survey to determine the state of Michigan's crumbling county road and bridge network. Over the past three years, the number of county road agencies returning paved roads to gravel has more than tripled.

Thirty eight counties have now returned more than **100** miles of paved roads to gravel; approximately **35** miles in 2009 alone. Results indicate that by 2010, half of Michigan's county road agencies will be faced with the decision of moving backward to maintain their infrastructure.

"As Michigan pauses to assess the condition of our great state, lawmakers must consider the condition of our long-neglected transportation infrastructure," Association Director, John Niemela said. "Last year, newspaper headlines hailed the return to the stone age. This is exactly what we have seen in recent years."

In 2007, CRAM first announced that county road agencies were returning paved roads to gravel because they did not have sufficient revenues to reconstruct the roads. By 2008, **25** road commissions had returned an estimated **50** miles of paved roads to gravel. The results of CRAM's recent survey reveal the further deterioration of Michigan's county road system.

When paved roads crumble to the point they are no longer safe for motorists to travel and there is not enough funding available for reconstruction, road agencies put public safety first even if it means returning paved roads to gravel.

"MTF revenues have fallen to 1998 levels while construction costs over the past decade have skyrocketed," Niemela said. "County road agencies have reached the point where they can no longer afford to patch roads that have failed until funding becomes available for reconstruction. Resources are better spent investing in capital preventive maintenance (CPM) to extend the life of road surfaces."

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

“It really is a pay now, or pay more later scenario,” Niemela said. “The longer we continue to underfund our road and bridge network, the more it will cost to bring our transportation infrastructure back to good condition.”

“The pulverization of roads in Michigan has made national headlines several times in the past year. It is a graphic image that should serve as a wake-up call to legislators, but is by no means the only startling news,” Niemela said.

Over the past three years, **79** county road agencies have reduced maintenance, preservation, or construction programs; **77** have reduced or eliminated maintenance or replacement activities on hard surface roads; **68** have reduced or eliminated gravel road maintenance; **63** have reduced or eliminated roadside mowing and brush control; **49** counties reduced or eliminated bridge/culvert replacements; and levels of service have been reduced statewide for winter maintenance.

The survey also showed that the worst is not behind us. In 2010, **65** counties plan to delay necessary capital preventive maintenance due to a lack of funding; **54** anticipate reductions of traffic safety measures such as re-striping roads or replacing signs and guardrail; and **45** counties plan to delay a local road or bridge project which could have a negative impact on communities and local businesses.

“Legislation to increase transportation funding has been introduced in both the Michigan House and Senate,” Niemela said. “The time for action is now. The longer we wait, the more expensive the solution will be. Inaction is costing the state hundreds of millions of dollars annually in the deterioration of our road network. Michigan voters deserve better.”

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

CRAM represents Michigan’s 83 county road agencies and is part of the Michigan Transportation Team (MTT), a broad-based, bipartisan partnership of business, labor, local government, associations and citizens with the common goal of improving Michigan’s transportation infrastructure. For the past three years CRAM has surveyed county road agencies to determine the impact of decreased Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF) revenues and skyrocketing costs on our county road system.

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