

VAN BUREN COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION

NEWS RELEASE

BETTER HIGHWAYS: SAVE LIVES, SAVE TIME, SAVE MONEY

Lawrence, Michigan

2008 #2

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RELEASE: Immediately

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION BUDGET ISSUES

It may come as a surprise to learn that road commissions have no taxing authority, and receive almost all of their revenues from fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees through the State of Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF), not through property taxes.

Van Buren County, unlike most counties, does have a county-wide road millage that funds road and bridge construction, reconstruction, paving, sealcoat operations, and more. The millage funds can be seen at work across the county on both the local road system (streets and avenues), and the primary road system (county road routes) as these funds are used to leverage many sources of local, state and federal funds to the benefit of Van Buren County. Road Commission Board Chairman, William Rhodes, commented that, "With the continued support of the citizens of Van Buren County, the millage will continue to provide the funds for these improvements to the County's road system". The county-wide road millage, however, does not fund routine road maintenance, such as snow plowing, shaping gravel roads, roadside mowing, etc.

Like many county road agencies across the State of Michigan, the Van Buren County Road Commission has been forced to make budget cuts due to declining revenues from the Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF), coupled with significant increases in the costs of fuel, materials and equipment. Reductions in overtime operations will have the most visible impact during the snow removal season. Winter maintenance accounts for a significant portion of the road commission's budget, including the expense of overtime, fuel, salt, and equipment. A typical 10-hour shift on a weekend snow removal operation costs approximately \$42,000 for a full crew.

Winter Maintenance Facts:

- * At 25 mph, which is an average speed on the county road system when plowing, one driver can plow only about 200 miles of one lane during an eight-hour workday. Van Buren County's road miles total 1,329 (2,658 lane miles), plus 50 lane miles maintained under contract with the MDOT.
- * The average fuel economy for a plow truck while clearing snow is about four miles per gallon.
- * Steel underbody blades on road plows, which may need to be replaced two to three times a week during winter storms, have increased in cost by 86% over the past five years.

Road Commissioner John Rosevelt commented that, "The government is more efficient than you may think. Roads are a bargain when you think about the cost of your monthly utility bills". According to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, registration fees and gasoline taxes cost the average Michigan resident approximately \$31.87 per month in 2005, or about 2.4 cents per mile. It is interesting to compare the cost of road access to the costs of other utility-like services. Typical Michigan costs for other utilities are approximately \$70 for monthly household electricity service, \$50 for cable television service and \$60 for cellular service. The legislature must make funding for Michigan's roads and highways a priority. The fuel tax is a user fee that costs the average driver less than a dollar each day to maintain Michigan roads. Unfunded maintenance needs will continue to devastate county roads not only here in Van Buren County, but across the state. An increase in the fuel tax would provide an instant source of desperately needed funds.

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