

Road Report

A publication of the Road Commission for Oakland County for public officials serving Oakland County

www.rcocweb.org

New road-funding package will keep RCOC roads on track

It has been widely reported that the state Legislature, on Oct. 3, was able to negotiate a new road-funding package as part of the state's 2026 budget. But what does the package mean for the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC)?

"It will allow us to build on the progress we have made since the last road-funding package in 2015," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. He added the Road Commission was at risk of seeing the progress that has been made since the 2015 package took effect in 2017 lost if the state had not provided a new infusion of funding.

"We were at a critical point, and the Legislature came through," Kolar said.

The package is expected to generate about \$1.7 billion in new funding in 2026, growing to about \$2 billion by 2030, according to the County Road Association of Michigan (CRA). The Michigan House Fiscal Agency estimates RCOC will get about \$46 million in additional funding in fiscal year 2026, or about a 35 percent

increase in state funding.

The package removes the 6 percent sales tax from gas and diesel in Michigan, which has long been a point of contention, since it is a tax on fuel, but none of the revenue went to roads. The sales tax will then be replaced with a 20-cent increase in gas and diesel taxes, that will generate

\$1.1 billion annually for transportation. The package will also eliminate the \$600 million general fund contribution to transportation that was established in the 2015 package and replace those dollars by redirecting \$688 million in corporate income tax revenues annually to transportation.

Finally, the package also applies a new



24 percent wholesale tax to marijuana, that is estimated to generate around \$420 million per year.

And while RCOC has not yet put together a detailed plan of how it will spend the money, Kolar and Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz indicate it will

Tylene Henry named to RCOC Board

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has a full Board of Road Commissioners for the first time since May.

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners, on Oct. 16, appointed Tylene L. Henry, of Beverly Hills, to fill the seat on the Board that was left open when former Road Commissioner Nancy Quarles resigned in May.

The Road Commission is an independent agency, but it's three-member Board is appointed by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners. The road commissioners serve for six-year terms and are responsible for overseeing the RCOC budget and setting agency policy.



Henry is a lifelong Oakland County resident and a business development consultant dedicated to cultivating culturally rich, economically thriving organizations and communities. She is the president and owner of Ujima Services LLC, a strategic business planning and leadership development firm.

She has consulted on inclusive development and worked with entities including the Michigan Workforce Development Institute, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), MCO Consulting and FINM Solutions. Henry is also an adjunct faculty member at Wayne County Community College.

CONT'D ON PAGE 2 — SEE HENRY

What's Inside

RCOC is ready for the arrival of winter2

RCOC roads remain among the safest3

New SAD video explains process4

How to contact RCOC ... 4

ROAD COMMISSION
for OAKLAND COUNTY

Ready for snow: RCOC completes preparations for winter

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is ready for winter, having completed the process of reviewing its winter operations with its truck drivers and prepped its winter-maintenance equipment, including trucks and plows, in anticipation of the inevitable arrival of winter weather.



Some of RCOC's new plow trucks ready to roll.

RCOC has also added 34 new plow trucks, which cost approximately \$425,000 apiece, to its fleet. "We are continuing to replace our aging fleet of trucks," RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar said.

"As a safety feature," Kolar added, "all new trucks are equipped with green lights that can be seen from a greater distance during winter weather. Pick-up trucks used for winter maintenance are also equipped with the green lights."

Kolar noted the agency is prepared for whatever Mother Nature brings during the winter, though a milder winter is always appreciated. "Winter maintenance

is one of our most critical functions for the safety of everyone," he said. "We always prepare for a worse-than-normal winter which includes having plenty of road salt available."

The RCOC team is also constantly looking for best practices when it comes to maintaining roads during the winter months, such as the "wing plows" ordered with new trucks in recent years. The wing plows extend from the right side of the truck and are retracted when not in use.

"The wing plows increase the width of roadway plowed by a single truck,

enabling trucks to plow a roadway lane and the shoulder at the same time, for example," Kolar said. "Equipping many of our trucks with wing plows has improved their efficiency," he added.

RCOC also utilizes its pick-up fleet to clear crossovers/turnarounds on boulevards in a more timely

manner as well as to get into subdivisions/residential streets more quickly. The pickup fleet is also used for winter-weather rapid-response operations that allow RCOC staff to get to isolated icing occurrences and other urgent situations more quickly.

Additionally, during or following weather events with six or more inches of snow, RCOC uses non-road-maintenance staff to augment its pool of drivers and hires contractors to help on gravel roads. The Road Commission also hires part-time temporary drivers to help man the plow trucks during the winter.

Despite the addition of the part-time, temporary employees and the rapid-response plan, Kolar explained that motorists must still be vigilant when driving during or immediately after snow events. "Drive for the conditions. That will make a safer environment for everyone on the road," he stated.

Kolar also reminded motorists that as of last year, Michigan law requires motorists to stay 200 feet back from a plow truck. "This helps to ensure the safety of motorists," he said. "It can take a longer distance to stop in snow and ice, and when vehicles run into the back of one of the big orange trucks, it's not good for the passenger vehicle. So, please don't crowd the plow -- give the plows 'room to groom'."

What will winter be like?

Every year at this time, there are a rash of winter forecasts — some predicting a mild winter for our region, others predicting a ton of snow and ice. The Road Commission is often asked what we think of these forecasts. Unfortunately, the reality is that forecasts are often not reliable a day or two out, let alone months ahead. So, we take them with the proverbial grain of salt.

Oakland County roads top safety list for decades; traffic-fatality rate remains far lower than state and national rates

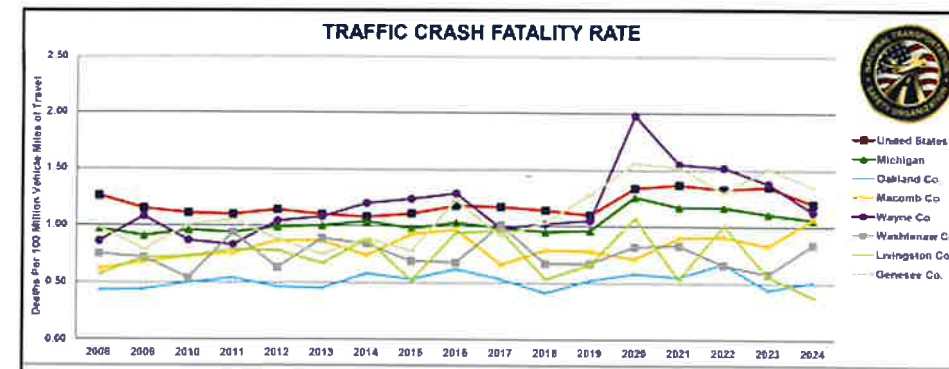
Once again in 2024, Oakland County saw a substantially lower traffic-fatality rate on its roads than either the state or nation as a whole or than almost any surrounding county.

The county, state and national traffic-fatality rates were recently released for 2024. For the year, Oakland County's fatality rate was less than half of either the state or national rate.

In fact, Oakland County has had the lowest, or among the lowest, traffic-fatality rate in the state nearly every year for the past several decades. In part that is the result of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) making safety its top priority since 1978. Since that time, the agency has been a national leader in traffic safety and one of the first and most aggressive users of traffic-crash data to drive road-improvement and maintenance decisions.

For 2024, Oakland's traffic-fatality rate was 0.51 deaths per 100 million miles of vehicle travel. For the year, the statewide rate was 1.06 fatalities per 100 million miles of vehicle travel and the national rate was 1.20.

"Safety is our number-one priority," stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "While we are always striving to reduce the number of crashes on our roads, and even one fatality is too many, it is still encouraging to see that our roads remain very safe compared to others across the state and nation. That is the result of more than 40 years of using crash data as the number-one factor driving road project selection and design deci-



This graph shows traffic fatality rates for the U.S., Michigan and Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Livingston, Washtenaw and Genesee counties from 2008 through 2024. Graph courtesy of the National Transportation Safety Org.

sions. This has involved a lot of hard work and commitment to safety by everyone at RCOC, but that work has clearly paid off."

Not only is Oakland County's traffic-fatality rate lower than the state and national rates, it is also lower than other counties in Southeast Michigan, including Wayne, Macomb, Washtenaw and Genesee counties. Only Livingston County had a lower traffic-fatality rate for 2024.

"Most people don't realize it," Kolar noted, "but when they are driving in Oakland County, they are driving on some of the safest roads in the nation."

Kolar added that RCOC's data-driven safety efforts have been successful in part because they remove political considerations from road-improvement decisions. "Virtually everything we do is driven by an interest in safety," he said. "Whether it is how we select the projects we do each year, how we design those projects, how

we prioritize our road maintenance activities, etc. It is all based on crash data and safety analyses and not on political considerations or political influence."

In fact, if Oakland's roads experienced the same fatality rate as the national rate, approximately 60 more people would die on Oakland roads every year. "That's a huge deal," Kolar said. "That's 60 families every year that do not have to suffer the loss of a loved one."

Kolar also thanked the National Transportation Safety Organization (NTSO -- formerly the Transportation Improvement Association or TIA), an Oakland County-based non-profit dedicated to promoting data-based traffic safety. "NTSO was established to reduce traffic-fatality rates, and they have been our partner in making roads safer for more than three decades," he observed. "They are at the forefront, nationally, of traffic-data management."

RCOC/U of M project improving traffic signal timing and reducing congestion

A partnership between the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) and the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) is helping to improve traffic flow on several RCOC corridors.

The project, funded by a \$1.4 million federal grant, harnesses vehicle GPS data to quickly and cost-effectively update traffic-signal timing. The project is reducing the number of times vehicles stop at intersections on the corridors and could eventually be expanded across the region and state.

The system was developed by UMTRI engineers and was initially tested at 34 RCOC intersections in Birmingham, pro-

ducing 20 to 30 percent reductions in stops.

The latest step in the project involved 13 more signals updated with the system:

- Four signals on 8 Mile Road between Orchard Lake Road and Brentwood St. in Farmington Hills.

- Nine signals along 12 Mile Road between Vinsetta Blvd. and Connecticut Ave. in Royal Oak.

The results have been impressive: Along 8 Mile, there has been a 30 percent reduction in delays and a 40 percent reduction in stops. The 12 Mile corridor has seen a 20 percent reduction in both stops and delays.

RCOC is seeking another grant to further expand the program.

RCOC Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz noted retiming traffic signals was traditionally costly and labor-intensive. "This process determines traffic congestion levels and flow based on GPS data and then uses customized software to determine the most efficient timing," he said.

Piotrowicz noted the project improves safety, because when motorists are stopped less frequently for traffic signals, they are less likely to take risky actions such as running amber or red lights, which can lead to traffic crashes.

The program is believed to be the first such program in the nation to use GPS data.

HENRY — CONT'D FROM FRONT

"I am honored to have been appointed to this important position to help oversee an agency that has a tremendous impact on both the residents and businesses of Oakland County," Henry stated.

"I look forward to learning more about the Road Commission's operations, programs and dedicated staff who work tirelessly to maintain and improve our county's road network," she said. "My goal is to serve the people of Oakland County by helping ensure our transportation system is safe, efficient and responsive to the needs of our diverse communities. I'm excited to collaborate with my fellow road commissioners, the Road Commission administration, the Oakland County Board of

Commissioners, local leaders and residents to continue building a strong foundation for the county's future."

Henry is the president of the National Association of Black Women in Construction (NABWIC) and was that organization's Member of the Year for 2022. She was named one of Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter's 40 under 40 class of 2022 and is a member of the Oakland County Neighborhood and Housing Development Citizen's Advisory Committee.

Henry holds a bachelor of arts degree from Michigan State University and a master of business administration (MBA) degree from Wayne State University.

She joins Eric McPherson and James Esshaki on the RCOC Board.

NEW \$ — CONT'D FROM FRONT

be directed towards items including resurfacing paved roads, especially those that are not eligible for federal funds; intersection safety improvement projects; culvert replacements; some form of contribution to subdivision street repaving; and replacing aging equipment.

"This is a big deal," Kolar said. "In my 40-plus years at RCOC, this is only the third time the state has increased road

funding. While it is not enough to address the total needs on Michigan's roads, it will go a long way toward continuing to improve the road system."

He added that the culverts that will be addressed first are those that are currently posted with weight restrictions, meaning some heavier vehicles, such as school buses or garbage trucks, are currently prohibited from crossing the structures.

New RCOC video introduces special assessment district subdivision paving program

A new video recently produced by the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is helping to explain the agency's special assessment district (SAD) subdivision street-paving program.

"Many people do not understand what the SAD process is or why it is needed," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "This video provides an introduction to the process and an explanation of why it is necessary."

The video explains that RCOC receives state road funding per mile of county road, and receives different amounts based on the type of road: High-traffic-volume roads generate larger per-mile rates, while low-volume roads, such as subdivision streets, generate relatively low amounts. In fact, RCOC receives about \$11,000 per mile of subdivision road annually, which must cover the cost of plowing/salting in the winter, pothole patching, drainage repairs, sign maintenance and other rou-

tine maintenance costs.

That means the \$11,000 per mile per year is not enough to cover the cost of repaving subdivision streets, which is approximately \$1 million per mile. As a result, the state Legislature addressed this situation by creating the SAD process.

The SAD process involves homeowners on subdivision roads petitioning the Road Commission to repave the roads and then paying for the repaving through a special tax assessment that is repaid over a 10-year period. The RCOC video explains why the process is needed and how it works. It is posted on the "Subdivision Paving" page on the RCOC website (www.rcocweb.org – then click on the "Residents/Common Questions" tab and select "Subdivision Paving").

"This video is a good introduction to the program," Kolar noted. "If residents want to learn more about how to initiate an SAD project, the video directs them how to proceed."

RCOC Strat Plan report coming out soon

Every other year, Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) leaders meet with the leaders of virtually every city, village and township in Oakland County as part of their Strategic Planning process. The most recent round of Strategic Planning meetings were completed in the fall of 2025.

Once the meetings are completed,

RCOC publishes a report summarizing both what RCOC leaders shared with the community leaders and what the community leaders shared with RCOC. Topics include updates on road funding, new developments (both at RCOC and in the communities), community road improvement priorities and more. The report will be sent to all public officials in the county.

Contacting RCOC

If your constituents need information about a road project or want to report a pothole, traffic-signal concern or other road issue, they should call RCOC's **Department of Customer Services** toll free at:

(877) 858-4804

OR

**Fill out a report via the
RCOC Web site:**

www.rcocweb.org

ROAD REPORT

*Road Report is published quarterly by the Road Commission for Oakland County. Have a question or comment about **Road Report**? Call Senior Communications Manager Craig Bryson at (248) 645-2000, ext. 2202.*

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