

Road Report

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

www.rcocweb.org

Oakland County roads remain safest in Southeast Michigan

Once again in 2023, Oakland County saw a substantially lower traffic-fatality rate on its roads than either the state or nation as a whole or than any surrounding county.

The county, state and national fatality rates were recently released for 2023. 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 decades. In part that is the result of RCOC making safety its top priority since the 1970s. 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 2023, Oakland County's traffic-fatality rate was 0.46 deaths per 100 million miles of vehicle travel. For the year, the statewide rate was 1.15 fatalities per

100 million miles of vehicle travel and the national rate was 1.35.

"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 decisions. 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, Livingston and Genesee counties.

"Most people don't realize it," Kolar

Year	United States	Michigan	Oakland County
2014	1.08	1.04	0.58
2015	1.11	0.98	0.53
2016	1.18	1.03	0.62
2017	1.17	0.98	0.53
2018	1.14	0.95	0.41
2019	1.10	0.96	0.52
2020	1.34	1.26	0.58
2021	1.37	1.17	0.55
2022	1.33	1.17	0.67
2023	1.35	1.15	0.46

Fatality rates for the United States, Michigan and Oakland County from 2014 through 2023.

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
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Looming road-funding challenge is topic of RCOC meeting with state legislators

In an effort to tackle Michigan's perpetual road funding crisis, RCOC's Board of Road Commissioners took the proactive step of taking its case directly to state legislators representing Oakland County, inviting the legislators to learn about the situation first hand at RCOC offices on June 24.

At the meeting, RCOC Chair Andrea LaLonde welcomed the legislators and legislative staffers before Managing Director Dennis Kolar and Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz reviewed road funding, RCOC's safety success story and other topics.

The meeting allowed Kolar and



RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar, center; Chair Andrea LaLonde, second from left, and Deputy Managing Director Gary Piotrowicz, left, meet with legislators and legislator staffers at the RCOC offices.

Piotrowicz to articulate the pressing needs and challenges of maintaining the county's roads, highlight the critical issues surrounding Michigan road funding and seek

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Road Commission thanks employees for winter overtime

Being a snowplow driver for the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) means more than knowing how to maneuver the massive orange plow/salt trucks. It also often means spending many evenings and weekends on the road away from your family, making sure the roads are safe for Oakland County motorists.

In July, the RCOC administration hosted a breakfast to thank those drivers who worked the most overtime last winter for their dedication and commitment.

A total of 70 RCOC employees were recognized July 17 for coming into work on overtime between 85 and 100 percent of the time they were asked last winter. The employees, most of whom work in RCOC's Highway Maintenance Department, were treated to the annual



The RCOC workers who worked 100 percent of the overtime requested last winter.

overtime recognition breakfast at Look Out Lodge at Waterford Oaks County Park.

"The hard work of these women and men ensures that we are able to keep the roads safe for the motorists during the winter," stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "We appreciate their efforts and the time they spend away from their families keeping the

roads safe," he added.

Those who worked 100 percent of the overtime requested also received RCOC jackets. Those who worked between 95 and 99 percent of the overtime requested received RCOC hoodies, while those who worked 90 to 94 percent received T-shirts. Those who worked 85 to 89 percent were recognized at the breakfast.

RCOC bids farewell to another great group of interns

After a whirlwind summer, the Road Commission for Oakland County's (RCOC) 2024 interns bid farewell on Aug. 2.

In all, the 12 interns were here for 12 weeks, starting in May. They served in eight RCOC departments: Engineering, Planning and Environmental Concerns, Customer Services, Traffic-Safety, Highway Maintenance, Finance, Legal and in the public relations office of the Managing Director's Office.

"As is the case each year, this was a valuable experience for both the interns and the agency," Managing Director Dennis Kolar stated. "It is really great to hear what



the interns learned while here, but also to hear from our staff how they brought enthusiasm and new ideas to the agency."

At least one of the interns, while finished with his RCOC internship, is just getting started at RCOC. Ali Mansour, a

civil engineering student at Wayne State, finished his second internship at RCOC – but he will start as a full-time employee after he finishes his fall semester at Wayne State and graduates with his engineering degree.

MEETING — CONT'D FROM FRONT

collaborative solutions.

With RCOC facing aging infrastructure and increasing traffic demands from growing communities, the discussion emphasized the urgency of a state road-funding solution. "There's no question that the state needs a larger road-funding package," Kolar said. "Without new funding, we risk roads getting far worse again."

Kolar explained that the state road-funding increase passed by the Legislature in 2015, and which was phased in between 2017 and 2022, was helpful, but not large enough to solve Michigan's road-funding crisis. He added that the benefits of that package will be fully eaten up by inflation starting in 2025.

"That is when we will see a 'fiscal cliff' unless additional road funding is identified," he said. "We are already planning for the belt tightening we will face starting next year. Without additional funding, there is no question that Michigan's roads will again begin to deteriorate, and we'll see a reversal of the benefits we've seen since the last funding increase started in 2017."

Another key topic during the meeting was the ongoing loss of road funding as a result of the rise of electric vehicles (EVs), coupled with increasing fuel efficiency of new, internal-combustion-engine vehicles. Both are resulting in reduced fuel-tax income in the state, and these losses are projected to grow.

In addition to outlining challenges, the

meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss potential solutions. Ideas ranged from exploring innovative funding to advocating for sustained state and federal support for infrastructure projects.

Kolar noted several states are studying road-usage charges. He pointed out that replacing the gas tax with a charge of 3.2 cents per mile for cars and 11.6 cents for trucks would generate \$3.9 billion per year.

An additional option is a retail-delivery fee. Charging a 25-cent fee per retail parcel delivery could produce \$195 million per year in revenue for transportation in the state.

Kolar said he hopes this meeting with legislators sparks more discussions that ultimately lead to securing the necessary funding for Michigan's roads.

RCOC Board adopts reduced 2025 budget of \$177.7 million

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Board of Road Commissioners, on Sept. 19, adopted its fiscal year 2025 budget which, at \$177.7 million, represents a \$16.2 million decrease from the current year's budget of \$193.9 million adopted in September of last year.

The 2025 budget decreased primarily due to decreases in federal road funds, interest earned on investments and contributions from local governments.

Both the federal funding level and the number and size of contributions from local governments fluctuate from year to year depending on the type and number of road projects conducted. The interest revenue fluctuates based on the amount of money held by the agency at any time and the interest rates available.

RCOC anticipates receiving \$28.2 million in federal funding in FY 2025 (compared to \$42.3 million for the current year), \$800,000 in interest revenue (compared to \$1.9 million for the current year) and \$10.1 million in local government contributions (compared to \$10.8 million for the current year).

RCOC anticipates no increase for the coming year in its largest source of revenue – state road funds generated by the state fuel taxes, vehicle-registration fees and the state income tax. The agency expects to receive about \$122.3 million in state road funding in fiscal year 2025, the same amount it budgeted for the last two years and less than it received in 2022.

The state dollars are RCOC's main funding source for operations.

The remaining revenue making up the budget comes from RCOC's contract with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to maintain state

highways in the county (\$14 million, up slightly from the current year) and fees and other revenues (\$2.7 million, about the same as received for the current year).

The proposed 2025 budget includes nearly \$56 million in annual contributions toward safety-focused road-improvement projects planned to be under construction in 2025 and future years (this is not the total cost for these projects -- some costs were included in the current year's budget or will be included in the 2026 budget where projects are expected to be carried over into 2026); \$30.2 million for road maintenance efforts such as pothole patching, gravel road grading and salting and plowing in the winter; and \$16.5 million for maintaining traffic signs, signals, pavement markings and guardrails among other activities.

The remainder of the budget is dedicated to operating expenses including customer services, vehicle maintenance, staff wages, buildings and grounds and administration.

"The 2025 budget reflects our commitment to not only maintaining but enhancing the quality of our roadways," noted RCOC Board Chair Andrea LaLonde. "We're investing in infrastructure that will support economic growth and improve safety for all residents," LaLonde added.

RCOC Vice Chair Eric McPherson concurred. "Our proposed budget is designed to address the immediate needs of our roadways while also preparing for future challenges," McPherson said. "It's about balancing short-term improvements with long-term vision, while ensuring that we operate in a fiscally responsible manner."

Board Member Nancy Quarles added the Board is very deliberate in how it

spends the money it receives. "Investing in our roads is an investment in our community's future," she explained. "The 2025 budget demonstrates our commitment to providing high-quality infrastructure that will benefit generations to come," she said.

Managing Director Dennis Kolar agreed. "Safety is always our top priority," he said. "And this budget reflects that."

Among the road-improvements planned for 2025 and identified in the budget are:

- Major resurfacing of Greenfield Road, 12 Mile to 13 Mile in Southfield, Berkley and Royal Oak
- Major resurfacing of Orchard Lake Road, Will-O-Way to Long Lake in West Bloomfield Twp.
- Replacement of the Martindale bridge over the Novi-Lyon Drain in Lyon Twp.
- Resurfacing of Oakwood Road, Hadley Road to M-24 in Oxford and Brandon townships

Projects are typically selected based on a review of safety data; a detailed, computerized road-assessment program; and engineers' analysis. The decisions are often made years before construction begins because of funding requirements.

"RCOC continues to improve the safety and condition of our roads throughout Oakland County," Managing Director Kolar said. "We know that many roads still need improvement and appreciate the patience of our citizens and businesses as we continue to work through a long needs list with the available funding."

The proposed budget is posted on the RCOC Website, www.rcocweb.org (click on the "Financials" button on the home page, select "Budget Summary" and click on "2024-25 Budget").

RCOC seeking public input about safety concerns on roads across the county

Do you have a safety concern related to roads in Oakland County? If so, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) wants to hear from you.

The effort is part of RCOC's implementation of a US Department of Transportation (US DOT) Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program planning grant. The SS4A program supports the US DOT's National Roadway Safety Strategy and its goal of zero roadway deaths.

RCOC received an SS4A planning grant for \$470,000 in 2023 to establish a comprehensive safety action plan. Public

input will help establish the plan. The SS4A program provides funds for projects that significantly reduce or eliminate roadway fatalities and serious injuries.

The funds are intended to promote safety for everyone who uses roads: motorists, bicyclists, transit users, pedestrians and others. RCOC has created a Safety Action Plan Committee (SAPC) to assist with the review of crash data and identify high-risk locations.

The SAPC consists of RCOC staff members as well as representatives of Oakland County municipalities, safety

organizations, law enforcement and SEM-COG. It will provide oversight for the development of the Safety Action Plan.

A website has been set up that provides more information about RCOC's SS4A process and public input options including an interactive map where anyone can post safety concerns. The website address is www.bit.ly/RCOC-SS4A.

Comments must be posted to RCOC's SS4A website by Sept. 30, 2024.

For more information on the US DOT's SS4A grant program, visit www.transportation.gov/grants/SS4A.

31001 Lahser Road
Beverly Hills, MI 48025

Young engineers JOIN RCOC Adopt-A-Road program

The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Michigan Young Professionals Committee has joined the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Adopt-A-Road program.

The group of young engineers supports ITE's goal of improving the communities its members serve, and participants opted to express their support through the Adopt-A-Road program.

The program allows groups to adopt segments of RCOC roads for the purpose of cleaning up litter along the roads. Groups are expected to clean up along the road segment at least two of the three designated cleanup periods during the year (spring, summer and fall).

The Road Commission then places signs at each end of the adopted segment

noting who has adopted that segment.

The ITE group joins the approximately 370 other groups that have adopted some 586 miles of roads across Oakland County, helping to beautify the county.

RCOC named IRWA employer of the year

The International Right of Way Association (IRWA) in June named the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Employer of the Year. The award is based on IRWA's assessment of employees' engagement in company values and purpose, how supporting resources have been optimized and whether a company is an employer of choice in its industry.

RCOC employees – and the retirees before them, that resulted in this situation. “No matter what department you work in, you have contributed to this accomplishment,” he said. “All of our departments support our data-driven approach in one way or another.”

Kolar also thanked the Transportation Improvement Association (TIA), an Oakland County-based non-profit dedicated to promoting data-based traffic safety. “TIA 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.”

RATES -- CONT'D FROM FRONT
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 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.”

He also noted that it is the hard work of

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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