

Adequate roads: worth trying harder?

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So the Research Council made a practical decision. Forget the future needs and concentrate on needs that are critical now.

That was the basis for the 10-year catch-up program.

The price tag for this 10-year program is not peanuts. It will

cost a total of \$302 million. That means an average of \$30.2 million a year for 10 years.

Even so, that's a much more acceptable figure than \$89 million a year for 20 years as planners looked at the problem in 1970.

A substantial portion of the cost of the 10-year catch-up

program would, of course, come from normal road commission funds.

The \$18.8 million spent on 1974 road construction by the road commission was a record high. But only \$7 million of that total came from road commission funds. Another \$5.5 million was federal aid for designated projects. The balance of the \$18.8 million came from sources within the county: the county itself, townships, cities and villages and from special assessments levied against property owners for road improvements in subdivisions in unincorporated areas.

Assuming road commission and federal aid contributions to the 10-year catch-up program would average \$10.2 million, the local matching share that Citizens Research Council calls necessary would amount to only \$21.50

a year for ten years from each of the county's 975,000 residents.

That is not, however, the way anyone has proposed raising the local matching share of cost. The road commission does not have and does not seek taxing authority.

Instead, the Board of County Road Commissioners has indicated its backing of the 10-year catch-up road improvement program. Further, the road commissioners think a decision of this magnitude should be shared with the county executive, the Board of County Commissioners and the citizens of the county — through both their elected county officials and through a broad-based and representative citizens committee.

The road commissioners are laying the groundwork now for

all of this input in the decision-making process.

Whether the county will actually undertake the 10-year catch-up road improvement program and how it will be financed will ultimately be decided by the residents of the county.

The Board of Road Commissioners considers the catch-up program the most valuable of all of the 135 recommendations that came out of the Citizens Research Council's year-long study of the road commission.

It provides a highly visible and much needed benefit to the public. At reasonable cost.

The question now is whether the public really wants to get rid of the costly car repair bills, wasted time, safety hazards and frayed tempers that are the inevitable companions of an inadequate county road system.

Acting on 'recs' proves highly complex!

*"If we can bring that 10-year program off, . . .
Oakland County will have a truly adequate road
system for the first time. . ."*

If you've ever tried to assemble a complicated Christmas toy from printed instructions, you can sympathize with John L. Grubba.

Grubba is managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission. He is responsible among a host of other things for seeing that 135 improvements suggested for the road commission by Citizens Research Council of Michigan are put into action — the sooner the better!

Figuring where to take the first bite out of such an "elephant" was the first problem.

Product of a solid year of analysis of the road commission by CRC staff and consultants, the report's 200 pages of single-space typing detail changes that show the way to better county roads and a more effective road commission.

Sounds simple, doesn't it?

But appearances, like assembly instructions, can be misleading.

Surest way to assure failure would be to cram all that change down the throats of the very people whose cooperation is vital to success — the road commission staff. Grubba recognized this.

So he circulated the report to all staff departments and asked department heads to suggest how best recommendations for their departments might be implemented.

Adjusting to far-reaching changes is not comfortable for everyone, and here is where resistance might have been expected.

"But that was not the case," Grubba says. "Negative reaction

was almost non-existent. The prevailing attitude was either 'let's get on with it' or 'isn't this a better way to achieve this objective?'

"The constructive attitude of our people was fantastic."

This homework completed, Grubba was able to take 26 of the CRC recommendations to the Board of Road Commissioners for approval this May. They were all adopted. Along with nine adopted earlier, all dealing with subdivision street paving, the board has formally adopted a total of 35 of the 135 CRC recommendations. Others have been put into practice by administrative directive.

"I haven't sat down and taken a precise count of the recommendations that are partially or fully in practice," Grubba says, "but I believe I am conservative in estimating the number at 50 or more. Others will be adopted as we can get to them."

The big one, Grubba says, is the 10-year catch-up program to bring the county road system's 2,388 miles of roads up to state standards of adequacy.

"Our new transportation planning and environmental concerns department — itself the product of a CRC recommendation — is defining the needs of each inadequate section of road so the design division can work on design of improvements."

"If we can bring that 10-year program off with the help of the county and its citizens, Oakland will have its first truly adequate road system in modern history."

Q. & A.

Q. Why are our roads so bad?

A. Because, as Citizens Research Council confirmed, the road commission has never had sufficient funds since the development boom started after World War II. Result: nearly 80 percent of county road mileage is inadequate.

Q. Ten years is a long time to wait for good roads, isn't it?

A. That's just the financing period. With the money assured, probably 80 percent or more of the improvements can be complete in five years.

Q. Taxes are breaking my back now. How can I afford a transit tax and a road tax?

A. The transit tax will hardly be noticeable when it all shakes out. Only you can decide if adequate roads would save your family enough in time, car repairs and travel safety to justify the estimated yearly cost of about \$22 a person for good roads.

