

Winter challenges maintenance men

Oakland or Siberia?

Paul Bays doesn't plan many evening activities during the winter.

Bays, a Waterford resident, is a road commission float operator and back-up dispatcher. Typical of the maintenance department's 280 employees, he is on 24-hour call when a winter storm dumps a load of snow or ice on Oakland county roads.

He and his fellow employees in the maintenance department, from Maintenance Director David W. Hasse down, had their full share of being hauled out of bed at all hours to combat snow and ice this past winter.

For Oakland county experienced 44 occasions of measurable snowfall, and the winter's 77.5 inches of the white stuff was only 2.5 inches short of qualifying Oakland for a windfall usually reserved for far northern Michigan counties — a snow-control "bonus" that the

Michigan Motor Vehicle Highway fund pays counties that have 80 inches or more of snow a year.

The county also had its earliest snowfall since the weather bureau began recording such information 104 years ago — snow mixed with rain on the evening of October 1.

The 3.5-inch snow of November 13 was the first to require Bays and his companions to turn to their salters and snow plows. That turned out to be only a warm-up for two real main events — the 19-inch deluge of December 1 and 2 and a storm on April 2 that featured eight inches of snow, plus hail, sleet, freezing rain, lightning, thunder.

Most of the past winter's snows required plowing rather than salting.

As a result the road commission used only 29,000 tons of salt, the lowest tonnage in years. During the previous winter, 1973-74, the road commission used 6,751 tons more than that with only 55.25 inches of snowfall, compared to the past winter's 77.5 inches.



BAYS

Overtime too, under pressure because of declining road revenues this year, was lower than in previous winters.

"The reduction in overtime is largely attributable to our excellent storm warning service from General Weather Center," says Maintenance Director Hasse.

Hasse said 66% of General Weather Center's alerts came after regular working hours.

And if it seemed to you that the past winter was one of a kind, you're right. Just ask any road commission maintenance crew worker!

Speed upsets woman

Restorations improved

The woman on the phone was alarmed.

"The contractor connecting us to the sewer cut through the road pavement, put in our sewer connection and backfilled the excavation one day, then came back the next and patched the pavement cut," she said. "Some of my friends have waited as long as a year before having the pavement patched. This contractor must be doing something wrong."

She was reassured after William R. (Bert) Mercer explained. Mercer, director of the road commission's department of permits and special users, agreed the speedy restoration of the woman's road was in contrast to past practice.

He told her why. His department has recently revised specifications for underground construction requiring cuts in county roads. The new emphasis is on more timely and higher quality restoration of road cuts and drainage disruption by contractors for other governmental agencies and public utilities.

To further assure prompt and satisfactory restoration of road surfaces by contractors, the road commission has negotiated an agreement with the county

department of public works that calls for more rigid and earlier inspections before signing off with a contractor who has cut into a road surface. This agreement implements one of the 135 recommendations made by Citizens Research Council for improving road commission services.

"Unsatisfactory restoration of road cuts and road drainage by contractors has long been a source of public complaints," Mercer says. "One swallow doesn't make a summer, of course, but that lady's call is proof that our efforts for better and quicker restoration are working."

Not all of the permit department's activities are as visible as policing pavement cuts, Mercer points out. But other activities are important, nevertheless.

The department is responsible for issuing permits for a variety of purposes bearing on county roads including underground and overhead utilities, special-haul routes, road-oiling, parades, banners, house-moving and forestry in road rights-of-way, and driveway cuts.

All told, the department issued 5,964 permits in 1974, and it collected \$106,793 in fees for them.

'74 improvement record not threatened in '75

The day may come when the road commission again has \$18.8 million for construction as it did in 1974 — but don't hold your breath! The petroleum shortage has slashed road revenues. And the economic downturn hasn't helped.

By comparison, there's only \$6,681,000 in the road commission's till for construction in 1975. So more expensive types of construction are being deferred, and emphasis is on lower-cost projects.

Scheduled for 1975:

- rebuilding or widening 5.7 miles of roads
- improvement of 9.9 miles of local roads
- \$716,000 worth of intersection improvements, including 14 railroad crossings that will be improved partly at federal expense
- resurfacing 27.5 miles of paved roads, and
- paving 6.7 miles of gravel roads.

Road commission results in 1974 were more impressive. Four

miles of road widened, some to as much as five lanes. Seven and four-tenths miles of paved roads rebuilt. Major improvements of 16 intersections. Routine resurfacing of 21.6 miles of paved roads and 3.6 miles of gravel roads paved.

Another 47.1 miles of worn paved roads were resurfaced, with the road commission and the county splitting the bill.

Fourteen townships, the road commission and the county also shared equally in paying some \$880,253 to place 336,000 tons of gravel, three inches deep and 20 feet wide, on 210 miles of gravel roads, in addition to the 5,000 tons of gravel the road commission applied at its own expense to primary roads in Brandon and Oxford townships.

Maintenance activities provide interesting comparisons. The 7,330 tons of asphalt used to patch chuckholes is enough to pave seven miles of two-lane road. The 14,704 road miles graded in 1974 is equivalent to more than half-way around the world. Enough litter was swept up from 1,670 miles of curb to fill 50 average home swimming pools. Crews mowed the equivalent of 2,300 football fields and removed 1,826 dead trees.

Through special assessment procedures, the road commission paved 7.54 miles of subdivision streets in Bloomfield township and 2.18 miles in West Bloomfield township.

Every major storm and the advent of dust season sent complaints skyrocketing. The 5,736 complaints registered in 1974 were up 25.6 percent over 1973 volume. West Bloomfield and Waterford shared the dubious honor of complaining most. West Bloomfield complaints ran at a rate of one for each 26.8 residents. Waterford's rate was one per 32.7 residents.

Bloomfield township, whose residents tax themselves extra for roads, was at the other end of the scale — one complaint per 135.5 residents. The two other townships with road taxes, complained at a higher rate, but still below the average of one in 52.3 for all townships. Commerce's rate was one in 71 and the rate in Highland was one in 72.2.

Intended slip!

Slip-form paving has been a stranger to Oakland roadways since it was tried experimentally in the early 1960's until 1974.

Last year, the paving technique was used effectively on three of the largest county road projects — widening of John R road in Madison Heights and of Maple road in Troy and Clawson, and the paving of a section of Tenken road in Avon township.

The process provides significant savings in materials and labor costs. With a special mix, such as the one specified on the three 1974 projects, the newly-poured concrete can bear traffic loads 12 hours after being poured. That feature minimized disruption of traffic in business places along the projects.

Instead of relying on conventional pre-installed forms, the special paving machine drags movable forms behind it that simultaneously and quickly form two lanes and integral curb. The process also eliminates the expansion strips that often cause annoying thumping when a car is driven over them.

The department's weighmaster division checked 1,214 vehicles for possible weight or permit violations. It issued 339 violation citations and let another 295 drivers off with a stern warning

ROAD COMPLAINTS?

Call

858-4804

Fognini heads new department

There's nothing hidebound about the Oakland Road Commission. Not since the Board of Road Commissioners ordained change by inviting a critical evaluation by Citizens Research Council.

Latest evidence is the board's action in creating a new department of Transportation Planning and Environmental Concerns.

The long-range forward planning had previously been done by a division of the engineering department. Citizens Research Council suggested upgrading and broadening the function by giving it departmental status and including among its responsibilities appraisal of social, economic and environmental consequences of proposed road construction projects.

Selected to head the new department was William J. Fognini, formerly director of engineering. Dennis A. Grylick, former design engineer, is acting director of engineering, and Ralph O. Collyer, formerly a construction project engineer, is acting design director.

"The changing transportation needs of the county and region have forced us to include modes of transportation other than the automobile in our planning," said Fred L. Harris, chairman of the road commissioners.