



Editorial: More gravel roads in our future

Posted by The Muskegon Chronicle Editorial Board August 11, 2009 07:19AM

Rural Muskegon County residents are going to have to bite the bullet when it comes to some roads.

A Muskegon County Road Commission proposal to crush three rural roads back into gravel as a cost-saving measure makes sense. It also will make the roads more passable than their current state.

The roads were constructed with a layer of gravel and two layers of stone sealed over the top. Drivers are battling "major potholes" and "piece-meal patching," and parts of the roads are literally coming off in some areas, according to road commission officials.

The hard-surface roads, totaling four miles, are in Holton and Cedar Creek townships. Through the first half of 2009, the road commission spent \$27,000 patching these roads.

Crushing the roads into gravel will cost more than the road commission has to spend, but it gives the commission a better chance of maintaining the roads -- and at a lower cost. And the road commission will quit throwing good money after bad roads.

More than 20 of Michigan's 83 counties have turned rural roads to gravel with no immediate plans to repave, according to the County Road Association of Michigan. Approximately 50 miles have been reverted in the past three years, including 2 miles of Brunswick Road in Muskegon County.

While the shock of suddenly living on a gravel road will be tough, residents still should expect the county to maintain these roads. Residents should not be doubly penalized by having their roads turned into gravel and then ignored.

In the meantime, township and county officials need to contact our state lawmakers and insist that action be taken to improve road funding in the state. Paralyzed by taxpayer revolt, no action has been taken on this issue. Yet, costs continue to mount.

Vehicle registration and gasoline taxes for a typical Michigan driver come to just pennies over \$1 per day. Road disrepair costs the average motorist an additional \$318 per year in vehicle repairs, lost time and wages, according to the County Road Association of Michigan.

Local officials need to tell lawmakers they want the formula for the distribution of funds changed and they want more money. It's been estimated that \$6 billion is needed to maintain all state and local roads in good condition; that's \$3 billion more than current spending of \$3.4 billion.

About 39 percent of the Michigan Transportation Fund goes to counties, which have jurisdiction over 75 percent of the state's roads.

The litany of complaints against Michigan roads just goes on and on. According to the report, "A Quick Guide to Roads & Road Funding in Michigan" by the County Road Association Township Relations Committee, Michigan has the eighth largest public road system in the nation, third largest county system, and sixth largest local system of county, city and village roads combined. Yet, in 2006, Michigan ranked 47th in per capita spending on roads. based on U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

In addition, the Reason Foundation, a Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit think tank, found in its 2007 "Report on the Performance of State Highway Systems," that Michigan had the eighth worst road system in the nation based on overall performance.

Grinding all of our roads back into the stone age is not an acceptable alternative.

Crushing plan

The Muskegon County Road Commission is considering crushing these hard-surface roads to gravel to save money:

Holton Township □ • Meinert Road, from M-120 to Holton Duck Lake Road -- 2 miles

- Brickyard Road, from M-120 to Brunswick Road -- 1 mile

Cedar Creek Township □ • Crocker Road, from M-120 to Ewing Road -- 1 mile

Alternative repair options

- Paving -- Apply a heated mixture of asphalt and stone, which solidifies into hard pavement. Cost: \$150,000 per mile.
- Prime and double seal -- Hard surface road three-quarter inch of layered asphalt and stone smoothed over a layer of gravel. Cost: \$50,000 to \$80,000 per mile.
- Gravel upgrade -- Crush existing material, then add 2 to 3 inches of new gravel. Cost: \$4,900 per mile.

Source: Muskegon County Road Commission

© 2009 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.