



Rising gas prices cut into road projects

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PONTIAC - Sky high gas prices will hinder efforts by the Road Commission for Oakland County to patch potholes, widen and resurface roads and fix bridges during 2007.

Even so, plans were outlined at a public hearing Thursday night at the Oakland County Board of Commissioners Auditorium to spend \$39.22 million on road and bridge improvements during the 2007 fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

A proposed \$109.5 million budget outlined at the hearing includes plans for \$28.72 million of county road and bridge improvements to be made during the upcoming year.

However, the amount to be spent on road improvements will jump by \$10.5 million shortly, when the budget is amended to reflect the addition of a project to widen Walton Boulevard from two to five lanes between Perry Street and Squirrel Road in Auburn Hills, which includes a new bridge over Interstate 75.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm and state legislators recently approved Granholm's "Jobs Today" program designed to jump-start the state's struggling economy.

The "Jobs Today" program will provide a \$2 million grant to cover local matching funds for the project, which will be constructed in 2007.

Another \$8 million in special federal grants were obtained to cover most of the costs because of the efforts of U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, RBloomfield Hills.

However, the proposed budget outlined Thursday represents a \$16.2 million decrease when compared with the \$125.7 million for 2006 adopted last September.

Road commission officials say the budget is lower because of the continued stagnation in state road funding as gas prices rise and motorists drive less.

"The two largest sources of our operating revenues, the state-collected gas tax and vehicle registration fees, both tend to rise and fall with the economy," RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair said.

"With gas prices near an alltime high, people are driving less, further reducing gas tax revenues."

During the upcoming fiscal year, the road commission expects to receive more than \$62.8 million as its share of revenues generated by the state gas tax and vehicle registration fees.

Bair said the revenue from the state gas tax and vehicle registration fees is what the road commission uses to pay for routine maintenance such as pothole patching, plowing and salting roads in the winter and grading the nearly 800 miles of gravel roads countywide.

Bair said money that the road commission previously used to resurface roads and repair concrete now must be spent on general operating costs instead.

"The purchasing power of these dollars has steadily diminished," Bair said.

Among projects that will get under way in 2007 is the first phase of the "Northwestern Connector" project designed to resolve traffic congestion problems caused by the dead-ending of Northwestern Highway at Orchard Lake Road in West Bloomfield Township near its border with Farmington Hills.

Besides widening some roads, the connector will include construction of eight roundabouts along Orchard Lake, Maple and 14 Mile roads between Orchard Lake Road and the Haggerty Connector (M-5) in West Bloomfield and Farmington Hills.

Plans call for the first three roundabouts to be constructed in 2007 at the intersections of Maple and Drake, Maple and Farmington and 14 Mile and Farmington roads. [Article View Links](#)

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