

Starke County Highway Department
 Monthly Report
 March 2015
 SUMMARY

SNOW PLOWING/REMOVAL – Winter operations are going well. February was a busy month for snow removal. We plowed just less than 50,000 miles of roadway and used 683 tons of salt. The chart below compares last year's winter plowing to this year's. We have, up to this point, received about half the snowfall that we did last year and the number of plowing day (snow events) has decreased from 56 to 32. March has started out much like February but the long range forecast for the month shows warmer weather could be on the way in the next few weeks. We have plenty of salt sand available and all our front line trucks are in working order.

2014-5 WINTER PLOWING

MONTH	SNOW EVENTS	SNOWFALL IN INCHES	PLOW HOURS	PLOW HOURS PER DRIVER	MILES CLEARED	MILES CLEARED PER HOUR PER DRIVER	SALT USED	SAND USED
NOVEMBER	1	0.1	12	3	287.7	23.98	20	80
DECEMBER	1	0.2	120	8	3181.6	26.51	30	120
JANUARY	12	8.25	1515	91.2	28154.4	18.58	576	2352
FEBRUARY	18	36.4	2745.5	158.1	48730	17.75	683	3404
TOTALS	32	44.95	4392.5	260.3	80353.7	18.29	1309	5956

2013-14 WINTER PLOWING

MONTH	SNOW EVENTS	SNOWFALL IN INCHES	PLOW HOURS	PLOW HOURS PER DRIVER	MILES CLEARED	MILES CLEARED PER HOUR PER DRIVER	SALT USED	SAND USED
NOVEMBER	4	8.9	360.45	3	7328	20.32	150	655
DECEMBER	9	9.9	954.56	8	18243	19.31	275	1112
JANUARY	30	46.6	2923.17	182.7	54985	18.81	917	4632
FEBRUARY	13	19.7	2373.75	148.31	43321	18.25	486	2876
TOTALS	56	85.1	6611.93	342.01	123877	18.74	1828	9275

ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM – We are waiting for warm weather to arrive to begin making our asphalt for summer paving operations. After the asphalt is made, it needs to "cure" for approximately a month before be use it. Our goal is to pave 30+ miles, chip seal about 30 miles (primarily overlays of previous pug paving). We will also continue our crack sealing and gravel road repair operations.

INTERSECTION SAFETY – 350E/250N – We began installing the new four way stop at the intersection today. We should have it finished tomorrow. There will be new signs installed that say "new traffic pattern ahead" installed at all four approaches about 200ft. before the stop signs

WAGE SCALE ADJUSTMENTS – We have completed our Department's proposed adjustment and we are working with the Sheriff's Department and EMS Department so that we can present them together to the Council. The adjustment is based on longevity and performance. Excessive payroll increases are avoided by reducing the base rate for new employees and by tying any County-wide raises to the lower base rate.

BRIDGE INSPECTIONS – Our biennial bridge inspections have begun. USI Consultants is performing the work and the first round of inspections should be complete this Spring. The formal, engineer led inspections are in addition to our Department led

maintenance inspections for each bridge. The maintenance inspections focus on erosion control, bridge cleaning, brush control, and minor pavement and drain repairs. The consultant led inspections focus more on the structural integrity of the superstructure, substructure, and deck.

SAFETY AND TRAINING – We have continued our weekly safety sessions. During the winter we focus on plowing and cold weather safety. Four of our employees are taking the tests required to become State certified construction inspectors. They have to pass six 3 hour long tests in Bridge Repair, Asphalt Paving, Concrete Paving, Construction Earthworks, and Construction Techniques 1 & 2. Three have passed the bridge test and all four will be taking another test at the end of March. Once they are certified they can assist our current construction inspector. This will give us "homegrown" inspectors that can take his place if he leaves or retires. This could also give us more to offer neighboring Counties when we share resources. For example, we could use a neighboring Counties distributor trucks and they could use one of our construction techs, saving resources for both Counties.

EQUIPMENT PURCHASING – The Superintendent, Garage Foreman, and Senior Driver are attending the National Work Truck Show in Indianapolis this week. They will be talking to vendors and salesmen regarding our Department's annual budgeted purchase of a work truck and necessary road equipment. We are looking at boom mowers to increase our ability to control brush. We are also looking at distributors and loaders.

COUNTY ROAD INVENTORY – In December we submitted to INDOT changes to our County's road inventory that were approved by the Commissioners. We recently received word from the state that a net total of 8.9 miles were approved and added to our County total road mileage by the state. This will equate to approximately \$30,000 more a year to the MVH funds that we receive from the gas tax. We are making an effort this year to further "clean up" our road inventory. We are currently working on a few other roads in question and will be presenting them at a future Commissioner's meeting.

INDOT/LPA FUNDING SURVEY - The State is considering changes to the funding levels and sources for Local Public Agency road and bridge improvements. This week our Department completed a survey that was sent out by the state to each County, City, and Town. We are hopeful that this study may result in changes that will benefit our County. The survey can be found at this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/INDOTFinanceLocalSurvey>

PROPOSAL FOR A THIRD MECHANIC POSITION

Prior to 2010 our Department had three mechanic positions to work on approximately 76 Highway Department Vehicles and pieces of mechanical equipment (Loaders, Wood Chipper, Graders, etc.). About five years ago one of the mechanic positions was eliminated to save costs. Although this did slightly limit the mechanics' ability to do certain large repairs for the most part two mechanics were able to do all routine maintenance for the Department's vehicles and equipment.

In 2012 the maintenance of all the County's vehicles was added to our Department's responsibilities. This was done to save the cost of sending the other Departments' vehicles to outside mechanics. This added 25 vehicles for a total of 106 vehicles and pieces of equipment to our repair list. In addition, top repair priority was rightfully given to Ambulances and then Sheriff's vehicles. Highway vehicles and equipment were third on the priority list and the other Departments' vehicles were fourth.

DEPARTMENT	VEHICLES	MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT
HIGHWAY	40	38
SHERIFF	14	0
EMS	6	0
SURVEYOR	1	0
HEALTH	1	0
PLANNING	1	0
CORONER	1	0
I.T.	1	0
EMA	1	0
COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS	2	0

68 38
TOTAL 106

At the time there was a plan to either bring back the third mechanic's position or to have the other Departments fund the cost of labor for their repairs. Neither one happened. This necessitated a shift in the work strategy of the lead mechanic. All large repairs had to be sent out to outside sources thus negating the savings of not sending the other Departments' vehicles out for repairs. Many routine maintenance activities had to be put on the back burner. Everything was focused on making quick repairs and getting the vehicles safely back on the road.

Also added to our Department's responsibilities was the paperwork associated with the repair of the other Department vehicles. Only recently was our Department able to reorganize our paperwork procedures and get caught up on the additional paperwork from the last few years.

Here is a list of positive and negative effects of bringing back the third mechanic position.

POSITIVE

- 1) We would be able to perform all regularly scheduled routine maintenance. This would save on large repair costs and down time. We estimate that approximately \$25,000 would be saved each year by keeping up on the routine maintenance.
- 2) Despite having an area in the garage set up for large repairs such as transmission and engine rebuilds we have not been able to perform these tasks with only two mechanics. A third mechanic whose priority would be other Departments' vehicles would allow our lead mechanic to perform the large repairs for which he is trained. We currently have two trucks that could be put back into service if our mechanic had time to do engine rebuilds. This would save on the cost of purchasing new trucks. Last year our Department spent about \$20,000 on outside repairs. This cost would be greatly reduced if we could have had time to do our own large repairs.
- 3) It would help our mechanics not only keep up on the current paperwork but it would also allow them to keep better service records which in the long run save money by allowing the Department to properly order and organize parts, plan repair strategies, and free our administrative assistant to work on her already crowded workload.
- 4) We would be able to spend more time properly training our current apprentice mechanic.
- 5) This would limit the down time and lost productivity caused by vehicles waiting to be repaired.
- 6) We would be able to turnaround the EMS and Sheriff's vehicles much faster than we already do.
- 7) We have a list of "big projects" that our mechanic has always wanted time to do. These include properly reorganizing the garage, parts room, and rehabilitating some of our equipment that still has value but that we don't have time to properly repair such as our big grader, our second roller, etc..

NEGATIVE

THE COST!!! At the current mechanic base rate of \$18.50/hr the third mechanic would cost the department about \$50,000 a year in salary and benefits (38,480 in salary, \$1200 overtime, and the rest in benefit costs)

We propose that the other departments, beginning next January, begin paying \$18.50/hr labor cost rate for the repair of their vehicles. This is still much less than any outside source and we can better oversee the number of hours as well. We would not begin this until next year to allow the Departments to fit it into their budgets. They would still see significant savings as opposed to sending their vehicles to outside sources. At the current rate of use approximately \$14,000 of the \$38,480 salary costs would be covered by the other departments. This would put about \$38,000 on our department starting next year. This year, starting on June 1st, it would cost our department approximately \$24,000 in salary and benefits. We currently can fit that into our budget. We also believe this will be offset by the savings in large repairs, less down time, and added routine maintenance savings. It would also save money we would have to spend on new equipment by rehabilitating our current inventory.