

## **It takes a map to track funding for road repairs**

GRAND BLANC TOWNSHIP

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GRAND BLANC TWP. - Who fixes the roads? How are repairs paid for?

The answers to those two questions are not simple, which is why so many taxpayers get frustrated with local officials whenever the topic of roads arises. Add the question of who has jurisdiction over which roads and it gets even more complicated.

Why are Michigan roads such a mess?

John Daly, manager-director of the Genesee County Road Commission, equates it to "a perfect storm."

"We have some of the highest weight limits of any state in the United States. The second thing is the freeze-thaw cycle. And the third thing is we are amongst the lowest states of money (from all sources) flowing into the road systems," Daly said.

Michigan has one of the lowest state gas taxes in the nation. And while the cost of road repairs has risen sharply, the gas tax hasn't been raised in a decade.

How are road repairs funded?

Through gas taxes and vehicle registration fees primarily.

Each gallon of gas carries an 18.4-cent federal tax, which goes to the Michigan Department of Transportation for state highways and bridges. MDOT gets 75 percent of the federal gas tax. The remaining 25 percent is split among all county road commissions, cities and villages in the state.

Michigan also has a state gas tax of 19 cents per gallon, one of the lowest in the nation. The tax hasn't been raised since 1997. It accounts for roughly 45 percent of the funding for roads.

Vehicle registration fees account for another 45 percent of road funds and 11 percent comes from diesel fuel taxes and miscellaneous sources.

According to the County Road Association of Michigan, state funds are then distributed by law to the Bridge Fund and mass transit; 39 percent goes to MDOT (which has jurisdiction over 8 percent of Michigan's roads), 39 percent goes to county road commissions (which have jurisdiction over 75 percent of the state's roads) and just under 22 percent goes to cities and villages (which have jurisdiction over 17 percent of Michigan's roads). Townships do not receive money directly from the state for roads.

"Property taxes don't go to fix roads," Daly said.

Why isn't the county road commission fixing roads in my subdivision?

State law requires county road commissions to spend 70 percent of their funds on primary roads and 30 percent on local roads like those in subdivisions.

State law also requires the road commission to get at least a 50 percent match when it does construction and heavy maintenance on local roads. Usually the road commission asks for 75 percent. That money comes from local governments and from special assessments paid by residents.

Until last year, the commission initiated special assessments and floated the debt for construction projects in subdivisions. Now, local municipalities are responsible for those special assessments.

So when township residents want their subdivision roads resurfaced, they collect a petition asking for a special assessment district and take it to their township board. Homeowners cover 50 percent of the cost of the project through that assessment, paid over five years at no interest. Townships like Grand Blanc Township have paid for 25 percent of the construction costs and the road commission has paid the other 25 percent.

But with the large number of subdivisions in need of repair, Grand Blanc Township cannot afford to keep paying 25 percent of construction costs, board members say. That means homeowners would end up picking up more of the tab.

What if township residents approved a millage specifically

for roads?

"There is a provision under state law that would allow the township - once it had its millage in place for one year - to petition the road commission to take over the routine maintenance," Daly said.

The county road commission would then transfer authority for routine local road maintenance to the township. Routine maintenance does not include resurfacing, Daly said. The county would still be responsible for primary roads and for construction and heavy maintenance like resurfacing.

That millage money could also be used toward special assessment districts, enabling the township to keep paying 25 percent of those construction costs if it chooses.

Bottom line: Without an increase in the state gas tax, there is no additional funding for local road construction and resurfacing. While the Grand Blanc Township Board has not taken a position on a millage specifically for roads, it is one option being discussed. Such a millage could only be enacted through a ballot measure. Ultimately, the decision lies with voters, not the board.

For an explanation of how road repairs are funded in Michigan, go to [www.micountyroads.org/pdf/roads\\_and\\_road\\_funding.pdf](http://www.micountyroads.org/pdf/roads_and_road_funding.pdf).

The Genesee County Road Commission's Web site also has information at [www.gcrc.org](http://www.gcrc.org).

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