

Informing the Public on County Highway Matters

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Since the money spent by the county highway department is from public funds, the people in your county are entitled to know how and where this money is spent. When they know this, they should be of help to you in trying to carry out a program of road improvement and maintenance.

How best to inform the public may differ somewhat, depending on what you consider the most effective media in your community. The newspaper is always good, and will usually print items if you send them in; and if asked, a reporter will go out on a project with you and take notes and write the item. However, if this is done, be sure he has the correct information in his notes, as you must realize he is not as familiar with road work as you are, and may not have a true picture of what you are doing. Some organizations put out bulletins that are good for an occasional item. Short reports given at civic club meetings and farm or other group meetings are usually welcomed and appreciated. It is not necessary to be a good speaker to do this. Get the facts down on paper and read them if you cannot memorize what you want to say. Pictures are very good to use in group meetings if it is convenient to show them properly. The county road men working under you should be informed on road matters so that they can pass this information on to others in an intelligent manner when approached by citizens.

Information should include: total miles of roads in the county, type of surface, condition of roads, culverts and bridges, need of improvement caused by increased traffic or other conditions, cost of material and equipment, cost of one or more individual projects, such as a culvert or fill, or the rebuilding of a mile of road, roadside clearing and mowing, how often the roads must be dragged or maintained, and any of the other hundred and one things that you must do during the year to round out the full road program. Some people do not think of a road as wearing out and, when informed of this, are surprised that so much can be done with the limited funds that are allotted to the county highway department.

The source of funds should be explained clearly, as some people still think a part of the property tax is used for road construction and maintenance, which it is not. Funds can be used only up to the amount received each year regardless of how badly repairs may be needed.

More services are being demanded by those who use the roads without thought of the need for increased revenue. Roads that can be traveled the year around are demanded and, in most cases, needed. Load limits on trucks have been increased; roadside clearing and mowing is now the duty of the highway department instead of the property owner as in the past. Dust treatment and bituminous surfaces are demanded; and where increased traffic warrants, it may prove more economical. Bridges and culverts need to be widened, and signs are being asked for at curves and other places where needed.

It is my thought that informing the public on county highway matters is a part of our job and means nothing more than telling others in your own words what you are doing with what you now have, and what you expect to do with what you get, making it simple and easily understood.