County Road Organization

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St. Joseph County, situated in the northernmost section of this state, with a road mileage of 1,289, is faced with the usual maintenance of concrete, black-top, and gravel roads, and with the biggest problem of counties in the snow belt—snow removal.

All policy and work projects must be approved by the Board of Commissioners, who meet regularly with the Highway Supervisor. At these meetings, each road problem or petition receives careful consideration. One of the outstanding achievements of these meetings has been the co-operation of the Board and the residents in subdivision areas for the construction of gravel or black-top streets on a cost basis. Engineering and construction estimates are furnished residents of these subdivision areas—who then mutually subscribe the necessary funds for construction costs. The work is usually done by contract. These agreements have given subdivision residents improved streets at low cost to themselves and at practically no cost to the county. After meeting with the commissioners and receiving approval on policy or projects, the supervisor meets with his assistants to put in motion decisions reached by the commissioners.

Since 1938, St. Joseph County highway employees have been paid on an annual salary basis. The work week consists of 45 hours. Any overtime is credited to an individual and he is allowed to take time off at a later date. No overtime wages are allowed. Each employee receives a week’s vacation and is also allowed a week sick leave with pay each year. All employees are fulltime, but occasionally extra employees are hired to do miscellaneous work, such as clearing and grubbing, guard rail painting, etc.

For maintenance work, the highway department has divided the county into three districts, each headed by an assistant to the supervisor. Each assistant has charge of all construction and maintenance in his area. The district is then divided into three subdistricts, each of which is headed by a district man who has under his supervision approximately 145 miles of road. The district man must live in his district and is provided with all necessary equipment to maintain his roads. The equipment consists of an F.W.D. truck and snow plow, a grader or
maintainer, culvert pipe, barricades and flares for emergency work, and a gasoline pump to service equipment. Besides the district men, the assistant supervisor has working directly under him truck drivers, grader operators, and common laborers that he may assign to any project. All employees, except the district men, operate from the central garage.

Each morning before assigning his men to particular duties for the day, the assistant supervisor prepares a daily report showing the name of employee, the equipment number assigned employee, the work he is to perform, and which road he is to work on. This report is then made available to the supervisor, so that at all times he is acquainted with all phases of the work in the field. After assignment of his men and filing of his daily report, the assistant supervisor is expected to carry out his duties in the field.

The highway department also has two special crews, each headed by a foreman. One has charge of all sign and safety work. This crew erects all road signs and repairs and erects all necessary guard rails and other safeguards necessary to safe driving on county roads. The other crew is an asphalt patching crew that also does all the necessary concrete crack sealing during the year.

At the central garage is a stenographer to handle all phone calls and stenographic work. His most important task is to record on especially prepared maps the work in progress daily. These maps are prepared from daily reports made by the employees. Monthly maps are prepared for all grading operations and, in season, for mowing. During snowstorms, daily maps are prepared for snow removal.

A master map is kept for black top, surfacing scaling, concrete sealing, brushing, ditching, graveling, and bridge repairs. By using a different color or crayon pencil for each operation, we can determine at a glance the work in progress—either daily, monthly, or work accomplished for the year. In snow removal, this map charting has proved very valuable because it gives the department information as to what roads are open or closed to traffic at all times. In grading, it is almost impossible to neglect maintenance of a road because maps show definitely what roads were graded and any omissions are immediately questioned. Another great advantage of this map charting system is that it shows roads that require excessive grading and that should be converted to higher-type roads.

The clerk of the department has charge of all records, issuing of all purchase orders, proper recording of all claims against the department—besides keeping gasoline, oil, and greasing records. The stockroom clerk is in charge of ordering, receiving, and disbursing all necessary parts for repairs for all trucks and equipment.
Three mechanics service our fleet of 65 pieces of running equipment. All repair and overhaul work is done in our central garage, a well-lighted 40' x 100' building, equipped with practically everything necessary to a modern garage—hoists, jacks, plenty of bench spaces with all heavy tools, a lathe, a drill, acetylene and electric welding outfits, grinders, valve refacers and reseaters, a blacksmith's forge, steam pressure, and solvent parts and equipment cleaners. A grease mechanic services all equipment each night for oil and water. Each night, from records compiled by the clerk, definite equipment is serviced for greasing, oil change, battery and tire checkup, and minor repairs. The clerk also answers all emergency calls that may come in after regular working hours. All body repairing and paint work on equipment is done by skilled help hired on a part-time basis. A janitor services all four buildings belonging to the highway department. To round out the organization, a night watchman is on duty at all times when no regular employee is on duty.

All road construction is done by the department, be it a gravel or bituminous road. To construct or seal black-top roads, the department has its own distributor, tank-car heater, sweeper, chip spreaders, rollers, and sufficient graders to construct all mileage approved by the commissioners. Other equipment owned by the county includes eight four-wheel-drive trucks, equipped with V-type snow plows (three also are equipped with underneath graders), six three- to five-ton trucks equipped with side plows for high-speed snow plowing, and fourteen other trucks. We have also five service trucks, six large power graders, six maintainers powered by tractors, one caterpillar tractor, one medium-sized crusher, and two power shovels (one equipped with dipper bucket and the other with clamshell bucket).

Supervisor-employee relations are well maintained by periodic meetings at which various problems are discussed.