

**Nordholm, Gail [DOT]**

---

**From:** Nordholm, Gail [DOT]  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 15, 2009 1:01 PM  
**To:** Nordholm, Gail [DOT]  
**Subject:** 2008 December ICEA Conference Roundtable Discussions

**TO:** County Engineers  
Gail Nordholm Iowa DOT - Local Systems gail.nordholm@dot.iowa.gov

**CC:** District Local Systems Engineers, Service Bureau  
and Office of Local Systems

**FROM:** Office of Local Systems

**SUBJECT:** 2008 December ICEA Conference Roundtable Discussions

**DATE:** January 15, 2009

The following linked information is the [2008 December Conference Roundtable Discussion](#) notes.

**Please do not hit the reply option in your e-mail note.**

Thanks,

Gail Nordholm  
Office of Local Systems  
515-239-1528  
gail.nordholm@dot.iowa.gov

Note: Documents are in Adobe Acrobat's pdf format. If you do not have the Adobe Acrobat Reader software, you can download it free of charge at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>.

Mailings are available at the Local Systems Weekly Mailing web address [http://www.iowadot.gov/local\\_systems/mailing/main\\_mailing.htm](http://www.iowadot.gov/local_systems/mailing/main_mailing.htm)

ROUNDTABLE TOPICS DISCUSSION SUMMARY  
FROM DECEMBER 2008 IOWA COUNTY ENGINEERS CONFERENCE

Recorders:

Group 1: Bob Butin, District 1  
Group 2: James Hemberger, District 2  
Group 3: Brian Catus, Local Systems

Group 4: Vince Ehlert, District 4  
Group 5: Jim Armstrong, District 5  
Group 6: Kent Ellis, District 6

**Question No. 1** How are counties meeting funding shortfalls, as in:

- a. Property tax – increase levy transfers to Secondary Road Fund
- b. LOST
- c. Bonding
- d. Fees for services
- e. Reduction in services
- f. Cutback on expenses – Examples – as in equipment-how many hours/miles, layoffs?
- g. Group purchasing – as in through DOT or shared local lettings
- h. Innovative practices – prefab timber panels, contract rock hauling, partnering with owners/developers, rock base bituminous surfacing,

**Group 1** Property tax – Most counties indicated that they had not received figures yet.

Funding Issues: County carry over amounts from year-to-year have decreased dramatically in recent years. Increasing fuel and rock costs have played a big role. Some counties continue to place the same amount of rock each year and the associated costs are now consuming a larger portion of the budget. Clarke County has received FEMA funds for rock restoration in eligible flood damaged areas. Corn yields continue to increase which results in larger and heavier loads each year and a corresponding increase in costs to repair the damaged roads.

Cost savings measures: Some counties have reduced staff and done less mowing. Marshall County is using a vehicle monitoring system to try and improve the efficiency of their fleet. Idle time reduction is a goal and is a big factor in reducing costs. The monitoring system can be accessed from any computer with internet access. Tama/Poweshiek County indicated that some motor graders can now be programmed to utilize less horsepower and consequently use less fuel. No counties mentioned using drags in lieu of motor graders. Some counties have gone to 4 day work weeks (with 10 hr days) for maintenance employees. Some stagger their employee's work shifts so someone is always on duty during normal working hours. Muscatine County has a 4 day work week (Fridays off) for all maintenance employees. Typical hours are from 6:00-4:30. It has worked pretty well for them since very few calls come in on Fridays. The union contract must be taken into consideration. Boone County maintenance employees go to a 4 day work week from Memorial Day thru Labor Day with good success. Tama County tried staggering 10 hour & 8 hour employees simultaneously. It did not prove to be very successful.

**Question No. 1 continued**

Group purchasing: Some counties have leased equipment with agreement to later buy. Some vendors offer 5 or 7 year buy-back options. One county indicated they typically use motor graders for 10-15 years and maintain them in-house. One county said they have had their motor graders reconditioned by professionals but do some of the more routine reconditioning in-house to save money. Counties indicated that maintaining trucks was even a bigger challenge than the motor graders. Some counties obtain 5 year warranty on their trucks. Newer trucks with lower emission standards can be problematic if allowed to idle too long. They tend to miss out at first when going down the road. Obtaining fuel timely for the newer lower emission trucks has also been an issue at times. Need a backup plan because No 1 is not always available.

Innovative Maintenance Practices: One county encouraged screwing down timber bridge planks to increase their life and reduce future maintenance. Tama County chip seals treated lumber decked bridges. Clarke County indicated that large livestock producers have contributed money for rocking and maintaining gravel roads in their county. Tracking of mud onto paved county roads is an issue in many counties. Hamilton County encourages contacting the County when it occurs so County forces can clean it up if need be and so they can try and persuade the operator to refrain from doing it again.

**Group 2** Some counties are bonding to cover budget short falls. Bonding ranging from equipment to actual projects. Boards usually request public feed back so public is aware of details. Black Hawk County has plans for more bonding this upcoming fiscal year. Clinton County will be asking for public vote for bonding some large construction projects in their respective counties.

Some counties are making use of local options sales tax schemes to generate additional funding. Winneshiek County mentioned they have been having some of their costs paid directly by the auditor with a transfer of dollars. They were thinking this is an up to \$100,000 max. FICA and IPERS paid directly out of rural, general, and road funds.

Driveway fees for constructing accesses are another way of off-setting costs. \$600/drive on gravel. \$1200/access on paved. Winneshiek County does not build driveways anymore. Some counties charge a \$25 fee for access permits, but most do not. It was discussed charging for a permit is a way to offset administrative costs. Other counties should consider this fee based system. A few counties even charge \$100 for fee to hang utilities on bridges. Understand DOT used to make this a practice. It was based on size and weight of the utility conduit.

Another technique being used to offset costs suggested was to reduce services. Many boards are in the middle of discussing what can be cut in the way of services to reduce costs. Many rural counties have already reduced costs by limiting snow removal and winter treatments to day light hours only. More urban counties argued this is not an option and 24 hours/day round the clock snow and ice treatment was needed. One county was eliminating their bridge crew in an effort to reduce staff and costs. One technique

**Question No. 1 continued**

being utilized is to post roads during early winter and spring to reduce damage and need for expensive repairs. Winneshiek County makes it a practice to embargo all paved roads up to a maximum 7 tons/axle for up to 90 days a year to save roads and reduce maintenance costs. County will consider issuing grain handlers permit to use specific roads on a case-by-case basis. Some counties have found the “blue weight boys” don’t enforce embargoes uniformly. Some will not enforce at all. The consensus was “blue weight boys” need to handle this uniformly on a state-wide basis. Cost of road stone is between \$3.83 and \$5.00/ton for repairing damaged gravel roads when damaged. Minnesota makes it a practice to embargo all roads during certain times of the year.

**Group 3 LOST - 1 county**

Fees of Service - 1 county

Reduction of service - 1 county

Cutbacks - Temporary time off, attritions are not replaced

Group purchasing - join other counties or DOT in purchase of salt  
change in maintenance of class b roads

**Group 4** Six are maxed out @ the 3.95 property tax levy rate, only two still receive General Basic, whereas one county did receive a 200K increase (but that was because they bonded into the near future).

Seven counties receive LOST, almost all of those get less than half of what is collected.

Blackhawk County has bonded for 6 M (2 years worth of projects) to be repaid over 10 years and Shelby County bonded 1 M for just 1 project.

Those counties that do not charge for entrance placement are going to start, some charge an entrance fee also, many of those who presently charge for permits and for placement are in the process of increasing those fees. Only Dallas County charges a dust control fee (very surprising that others do not). Although a few counties charge a service fee to quarries and use the revenue to dust control that stretch of road.

A few counties will cease installing entrances, period. Some have stopped cutting brush near the fence lines. Almost all are doing less mowing. Many are increasing the sand in the salt/sand mixtures for snow/ice control.

Most counties report that equipment replacements have been and will continue to be delayed. A few are selling equipment off. When purchases are approved, piggy-backing IDOT contracts are seriously considered. No county shared purchases were mentioned.

Glad to report, no counties were laying off, but some counties were losing positions after retirements and many were postponing filling positions. All part-time positions were reported removed.

The only innovative practice discussed, was the using ACC recycle for edge-ruts and shoulders.

**Group 5**

- a. At max mostly, or minimums.
- b. Offered to ballot in November but no follow-through in Keokuk. Des Moines gets 50% - has it.
- c. 5 Mil bonding – new roads in TIF area – Sioux City, O’Brien – Haul Road.
- d. For Driveway Permits.
- e. Cutting back in General – Monroe. No Seasonal Help in Keokuk.
- f. Keokuk – 3 layoffs.
- g. Nothing.
- h. Contract Haulers to stock pile rock. Frost Boil problems in Monroe. C- stone from Alliant Energy to fix some at a time. Reshape, ditch and improve surface with C-stone – grader with a ripper going deep. Loads won’t stay off gravel roads so roads won’t heal - used geotextile. Roger Patocka – take rock off – grade then geotextile and then rock. Roger Patocka – recover costs on mud on road and edge rutting. Insurance companies paid – contract haulers – manure on fields. Field tiling – J.D. King – frost boil spots.

**Question No. 2** Is anyone doing routine gravel road rebuilding, as in:

- i. Narrowing width – what width
- j. Road stabilization techniques
- k. What compaction specification is used
- l. Flattening foreslopes

**Group 1**

**Group 2**

**Group 3** Narrowing width - 1 county  
Road stabilization techniques - 3 counties

**Group 4** Counties doing very little rebuilding in-house. Exclusively contract out, if funds are available.

One county places sub-drains in the center of rock roads to stabilize.

No new compaction spec is being used.

No one was doing any fore-slope flattening.

**Group 5**

- i. Road Narrowing – 5/10 miles/yr. 28’ top. Another county goes to 26’.
- j.
- k. Motor grader and wheel loading.
- l. None.

**Question No. 3 Road Maintenance**

- m. Expectations of rural residents – offering any assistance to maintain, are citizen complaints tracked,
- n. What records are being kept of granular surfacing – districts, routes, segments, or specific locations

**Group 1**

**Group 2** Some counties are in the process of narrowing up gravel roads to use existing stone as a cost savings measure. Some counties go all summer long with 3 weeks of blading and 1 week hauling stone to repair damaged roads. If the roads were embargoed this could save some cost. Some counties haul for a week, then blade for a week. Others make it a practice to blade only during or after a rain. Typical plan is to program 500 tons of stone per mile on a 4-year cycle. Without an embargo some counties have to use 200 – 600 tons per year just to hang on.

Public's expectation of rural road and bridge system is changing and not in a down size mentality. Winneshiek County said, "People come from the 'big city' with high expectations of public services... They build \$2,000,000 homes on a rural gravel road with 1 other farm house and 100 milking cows, and expect paved roads maintained 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year... No embargoes... No drifting closed in the winter... No dust..."

Some counties are having problems with hazardous mail boxes again. Massive brick, stone, timber or even some structural steel mail boxes are showing up. Most have been hit enough times the property owners have had it and are putting up these hefty boxes to deflect errant vehicles, baseball bats and the occasioned snow removal wing. Letters are going out to the violators to inform them of the hazard and asking them to remove. Most counties have a policy of replacing mail boxes if hit by their plows. Standard metal box and post are the replacement. Nothing fancy.

**Group 3**

**Group 4** Expectations remain higher than the ability to satisfy. When it comes to seal-coating rock roads, 1 county goes through the special assessment process; money is collected prior to improvement. 2 other counties expect 50% participation by adjacent land-owners for level B upgrades to level A. None of the counties were keeping formal records of complaints.

2 counties keep track of granular surfacing on separate spreadsheet. All counties keep track of maintenance by at-least using the operator's time sheets or road superintendents records.

**Group 5**

- m. Most track complaints.
- n. Rock Haulers keep record. Office folks put it together.
- o.

**Question No. 4** Level of effort in implementing Chapter 318

- o. Inventorying obstructions
- p. Public information efforts
- q. Notifications
- r. Wait and see
- s. Case by case

**Group 1**

**Group 2**

**Group 3** Mail box insurance

Overweight or oversized vehicles are monitored by permit and fee (additional fee is justified)

**Group 4** No county has embarked on a program to inventory obstructions countywide nor have they initiated any public information efforts. When an obstruction is discovered the land owner is notified of the need to remove it.

We ran out of time while discussing No. 4.

**Group 5**

- o. Not occurring.
- p. Notice in paper twice/yr., Spring/Fall.
- q.
- r. Do.
- s. Don't look for them but address complaints case/case. Field driveways are obstructions too. J.D. King – story – farmer's son was killed – father praised flattening driveways.

**Group 6**

County	1. How are counties meeting funding shortfalls?	2. Is anyone doing routine gravel road rebuilding?	3. Road Maintenance?	4. Level of effort in implementing Chapter 318
Palo Alto	Bonding \$10 M for construction, no increase levy, hoping for lower gas prices	10 Miles/year, and 26ft wide finish	Assisted through zoning for project. Track rock and blading maps	Out of time
Story	Bonding \$9M, no increase levy	Less than 1 mile/year, only ditch cleaning	No public assistance, keep granular GIS records, looking at AUL, have maps	Out of time

<b>Benton</b>	No Comment	No rebuilding lately, Used to do 5-6 miles with 28' top	50/50 cost share for new houses on level B roads, no tracking maps, considering GPS	Out of time
<b>Adair</b>	Not at maximum levy, 100% of LOS to bridge	Spot related to install wind turbines but now going back to 26ft surface	Level B upgrading cost share, keeping rock maps and blade maps, looking at GPS mapping	Out of time
<b>Cass</b>	100% of general/rural, 100% LOS	Nothing	Level B upgrading cost share, keeping rock maps and blade maps, looking at GPS mapping	Out of time
<b>Plymouth</b>	At maximum levies, cutting back on services and loss of employees due to retirement	Used to do it -part of cutbacks	No assistance offered, no formal complaints, tracking motor grader-daily logged	Out of time
<b>Washington</b>	General max, increasing rural	2-3 miles of ditch cleaning by confinement sites, 26' top	Upgrade Level B's paid 100% by owners, Motorgrader operators document on timesheets	Out of time
<b>Webster</b>	Within \$150k of maximum levy, 1/2 cent LOS to road and bridge, trying to go up to 1 cent LOS	Quit about 5 years ago	No local assistance, Motorgrader maps, no rock maps	Out of time
<b>Union</b>	Levies both maxed, 1/2 LOS for roads and bridges	2-5 miles reduced to 24'	Log rock locations on rock maps, no motorgrader maps, Level B upgrade to 50% share	Out of time

<b>Marshall</b>	No general basic, close to rural max, 25% of LOS to bridges. Get reimbursement from road clearing fund	No true program	Snow removal by big farmers, contract rock maps, AUL for motorgraders, eliminate dead heading	Out of time
<b>Appanoose</b>	Near Max, 20% LOS for bridges, not replacing retired employees	Do spots when able	Public opinion, track complaints and requests, motorgrader maps, and track rock	Out of time
<b>Delaware</b>	Maximum Rural Basic, no General Basic, LOS is 90% to new paved roads, no longer maintaining driveways, cutback on new equipment, dropped a motor grader district (76 miles per MG district)	1-2 miles, LOS pays to grade and pave 2-3 miles from 36' to 30'	No Response, Out of time	Out of time
<b>Franklyn</b>	LOS not at maximum levies, \$450k bond, GB paying for bond	Ditch cleaning in minor spots	No Response, Out of time	Out of time
<b>Clinton</b>	Minimum for rural levy, no transfer from general levy	2-3 miles/year, fence to fence reshape, contract rock crew regrade, reshaped 16 miles	No Response, Out of time	Out of time

**Additional Topics**

**Group 1** One county inquired how other counties fund building small shops. It was thought that there were ways to roll general fund monies into the maintenance fund. The Iowa Code may address this.

Local Option Sales Tax: Marshall County has done some small CCS bridges and RCB culverts with the share they receive.