

**OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
OF BLAINE COUNTY  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE JANUARY 2014 SESSION**

**BLAINE COUNTY ROAD AND BRIDGE FUNDING**

**Second Day**

**Wednesday, January 8, 2014**

Pursuant to Statutory Provisions, the Board of Blaine County Commissioners (BCC) met this day at 5:30p.m. Present were Chairman Lawrence Schoen, Vice-Chairman Angenie McCleary, Commissioner Jacob Greenberg, County Administrator Derek Voss; County Chief Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Tim Graves; Operations Director Char Nelson; County Road and Bridge Manager Tom Duffy; County Public Information Officer Bronwyn Nickel; Sustain Blaine Executive Director Harry Griffith; Wood River Economic Partnership President Doug Brown; and Recording Secretary Sunny Grant.

Chairman Schoen called the meeting to order at 5:33p.m.

**BLAINE COUNTY ROAD and BRIDGE FUNDING—NEED and OPTIONS  
PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION and CONSIDERATION**

**History**

Blaine County's 1994 Comprehensive Plan directed that 40% of the Blaine County Road and Bridge Department's budget would come from the County's General Fund and 60% from gas tax. Later, the BCC became aware that new development was causing direct impacts on County roads, and directed that developers should pay mitigation fees for roads in their subdivisions. The County would only adopt roads that provided general public use.

In 2007, the BCC passed Resolution 2007-01 that formalized the policy of not using the General Fund to fund the Road and Bridge department. Resolution 2007-01 also states that roads within a subdivision that didn't benefit the County as a whole should be the responsibility of the subdivision.

In 2003, the gas tax was \$.25 per gallon, roughly 30% of the price of a gallon of gas. The price of gas has more than doubled and drivers are using less gas, but the gas tax is still .25 per gallon, so County revenue has significantly decreased. Road and Bridge fuel expense and cost of road materials has increased substantially.

- Blaine County Road and Bridge currently gets \$1.44 million from gas tax.
- Blaine County also gets \$86,500 in Forest Service Secure Rural School funds, which Blaine County can use as a local match for state and federal grants. These funds may disappear as a result of federal budget cuts, threatening Blaine County's ability to get state and federal grants.
- Blaine County Road and Bridge has used Reserve funds to make up for budget shortfalls for the last four years.

The FY-2014 budget is \$1,943,000, of which \$1,000,000 is for labor. The projected revenue for FY2014 is \$1,500,000. Reserves will be used to fund the shortfall.

**Equipment and Facilities**

- Heavy equipment: Road and Bridge equipment is older, and frequently breaks down. Breakdowns are costly in money and resources. Parts are difficult to find and expensive; equipment operators have to act as mechanics, and roadwork stops when equipment is in the shop.
- Carey Road and Bridge shop was built in the early 1900s, and is inadequate for current needs.

**Asphalt Roads**

- Asphalt roads are rated on their Remaining Service Life (RSL). A new well-constructed asphalt road should last 20 years. A well-maintained asphalt road should have an RSL of 10-13 years. Chip sealing a road with an RSL of 7-10 years will add five years of service life. Chip sealing an older road will only add three years of service life.
- 60% of Blaine County's roads are 7 years or less RSL. Even if Blaine County continues its current road maintenance budget and chip seals the roads regularly, they will continue to decline and cost nearly \$11 million to bring them back up to standard.
- Staff suggests an Asphalt Roads annual budget of \$1.4 million for the next few years to return roads to 7-10 RSL. Regular chip sealing will then keep them at a high RSL.

**Gravel Roads**

- Gravel roads deteriorate more rapidly with weather and traffic. Gravel roads are rated 1 (barely passable, needs rebuilding) to 5 (excellent). Maintaining a Grade 4 gravel road costs less than rebuilding a grade 1 or 2 gravel road.
- Some Blaine County rural gravel roads that access residences are nearly impassable in the winter, even with 4WD.
- Road and Bridge has developed a 7-year work plan for 150 miles of its 266 miles of gravel roads. The remaining 116 miles will be updated or rebuilt as soon as there is money.
- The Blaine County Transportation Plan recommends an annual budget of \$1 million to rebuild gravel roads, in addition to \$372,000 for routine maintenance on the County's gravel roads.

Chip sealing and dust guarding are expensive, but improve the roads and save money in the long run.

**Bridges and Culverts**

- Blaine County has 54 bridges, many of which are old and in remote locations. It's difficult to get grants for remote bridges that are low use. The bridges are used by recreationists and people living in those areas and need to be maintained.
- The State of Idaho annually inspects bridges and will close them if they are unsafe.
- Culverts are necessary and can be expensive.

**Capital Improvement Projects**

The Carey Road and Bridge facility needs two new bays, accommodations for employees, a generator in case of a power outage, and shelter for road materials. Blaine County hasn't been able to fund major projects for several years without major grant funding.

**Funding Options**

- Road and Bridge cannot continue to use reserves to make up the budget. At the end of FY2014, Road and Bridge will have about \$500,000 in reserves. The department must retain at least \$500,000 in reserves to pay expenses during the "fifth quarter".
- Utilize State gas tax, Forest Service revenue, and General Fund to fund the budget. Using General Fund money will result in cuts in other areas in the County budget. Without additional funding, roads will continue to deteriorate. The County's likelihood of receiving grants will decline due to insufficient funds to match the grants.
- Create a Highway District, which can levy taxes. This is another layer of government, and would result in additional expenses for the taxpayer.
- Bond for capital improvement program. Bonds are usually for a specific project and may not be available for all of Road and Bridge's needs.
- Two-year local levy, which requires a simple majority. All revenue can go to the County, or the funds received from within a local city can be shared 50/50 with that city for their road and bridge needs.
- Permanent levy, which requires a super majority. Funds can be shared with the cities, or all used by the County.

Staff recommends a .1% two-year override levy, shared with local cities. Four of the five cities have responded that they would support a levy of less than .2% and would like to share the levy revenue for their roads.

County residents paid \$718 per \$100,000 valuation in 2013. Hailey residents paid almost \$1,000 per \$100,000 valuation. Most Blaine County residents do not realize that none of their property tax currently goes to roads.

Road and Bridge proposes a FY2015 budget of \$6,225,000 with a \$1,500,000 capital improvement plan. The .1% shared levy would provide about \$800 less than that. Road and Bridge assesses roads on a regular basis, and applies for grants to help offset costs. The proposed budget will be about the same for the next five years, although annual needs and income will change somewhat. Residents will probably see the benefit of having levied property taxes pay for roads, and may support a permanent levy in the future.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Wood River Economic Partnership President Doug Brown suggested Blaine County avoid a levy that requires a super majority. He encouraged the County to present a bare bones budget for the levy.
- A recent Sustain Blaine Economic Summit Conference polled about 200 attendees. People said roads were "moderately worse" than roads in similar resorts, but roads were at the bottom of the list for what they wanted to invest in.
- Sustain Blaine Executive Director Harry Griffith said sharing cost and benefit of a levy with the cities was most financially efficient.

McCleary supported a two-year temporary override levy, shared with the cities since the majority of cities already support the levy.

McCleary wanted to include bike/pedestrian improvements. The Blaine County Transportation Plan includes bike lanes or, where more appropriate, Blaine County Recreation District bike paths. The proposed budget includes a sweeper, which would make the roads nicer for bicyclists/pedestrians; and a mower, which would help with weed mitigation.

Greenberg said it was crucial that the County and cities and their elected officials work together on education and outreach to pass a levy to improve roads.

Road and Bridge will submit a detailed two-year budget and five-year funding plan.

**ADJOURN**

At the hour of 7:16 p.m., the BCC finding no more business before them adjourned.

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
 JoLynn Drage Lawrence Schoen  
 County Clerk Chairman