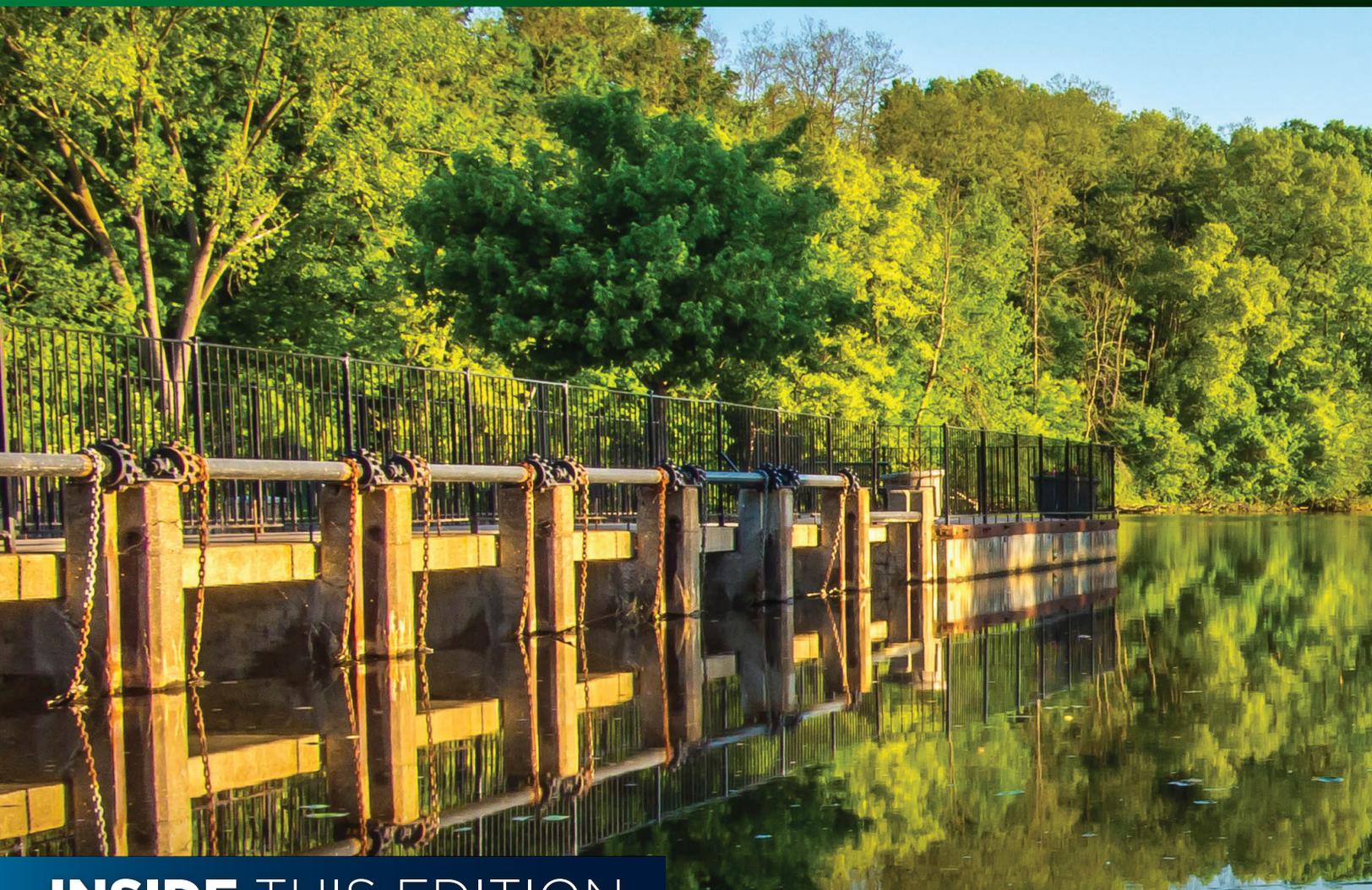


MICHIGAN COUNTIES

Official Voice of the Michigan Association of Counties | April 2019



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MAC

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

At the end of March, I thanked your MAC staff for all their hard work on the 2019 Legislative Conference.

Now, I want to say thanks to you — the members who make MAC the organization that it is today.

Nearly 400 people — county commissioners, administrators, officials, speakers, exhibitors — were on hand for the conference. More than 170 of them were commissioners, or nearly 30 percent of Michigan's 622. The "Gold Star" for attendance goes to the members in Region III (Southwest Michigan), as 54 of a possible 129 commissioners attended (42%) from 13 of a possible 14 counties (93%).



We also had 40 administrators or assistant administrators and a variety of other county officials from around the state.

In our post-conference surveys, 57 percent of attendees rated the conference as "excellent," while another 38 percent rated the conference "good." This fits with the anecdotal evidence I collected while speaking with many of you at the event. Planning is under way for the 2019 Annual Conference and we hope we can once again provide members an educational and entertaining experience.

Let's get digital

If you were not at the conference or unable to attend our Wednesday morning session, you missed out on a wide-ranging report on all our work to use technology to help you do your job.

Our digital hub, micounties.org, received a full refresh this winter and we unveiled the new look at the end of March. On top of getting rid of those annoying personal sign-in accounts, we ensured the site is closely connected to our new advocacy tool, Phone2Action.

I was pleased to see plenty of people at the conference using our MICounties app, sponsored by DTE and which offers conference, legislative and service information — all for a free download.

Pick a summit

Registration is now open on our Regional Summits for 2019. As usual, we are doing four locations designed to give every single commissioner a chance to attend a site within a reasonable distance:

- June 3 - Grand Rapids
- June 10 - Escanaba
- June 17 - Frankenmuth
- July 23 - Gaylord

Personal appearance

One of the great pleasures of this position is traveling Michigan to meet personally with county boards and brief them on all that MAC is doing. The particularly intense winter weather of January and February slowed my pace

Continued on page 23



“In good weather or bad, county road agencies are responsible for three-quarters of Michigan’s road miles.”

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

OK, I like winter as much as any resident of Northern Michigan, maybe even more. I do, after all, own snowmobiles and a **Snowman Cam**.

Still, winter 2019 was a bit much, with **the snow** and **the wind and the ice**.

That’s why, as the sun now shines upon our two peninsulas, I want to take a moment to praise all the public servants — in the county ranks and beyond — who worked night and day to keep us safe on our roads and in our homes this winter.

The same climate and weather that make Michigan so spectacular can make it treacherous, too.

In good weather or bad, county road agencies are responsible for three-quarters of Michigan’s road miles. And, says our friends at the County Road Association of Michigan, we are one of just 20 states “that must manage several freeze-thaw cycles per year and months of snow and ice.”

And sheriff’s deputies and other first responders are expected to be on the scene when needed, regardless of the conditions existing between them and the emergency.

We rely on these folks, so the least we can do, as county leaders, is take the opportunity to thank and praise them.

Riding momentum from Legislative Conference

Speaking of praise, I could not be happier with the results of the 2019 Legislative Conference in Lansing at the end of March.

We had:

- Some of the strongest attendance figures in years
- A detailed and engaging presentation by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, followed by a Q&A session
- Board elections that drew five able and energetic candidates
- A membership vote that approved By-laws revisions quickly and efficiently

Particularly pleasing were the “testimonials” that many county commissioners gave at the microphone when announcing their counties’ votes on the By-laws proposal. Not only did we learn some interesting facts about our various counties, but we were able to share in our pride for our homes. Being a county leader isn’t just about putting together a prudent budget – showing pride is part of the job description.

A bright summer beckons

As the days lengthen toward those spectacular summer spells, the pace is only going to accelerate in coming weeks here at MAC.

Next up is the annual series of Regional Summits held around the state in June and July. We have identified four dates and locations for 2019: June 3 in Grand Rapids; June 10 in Escanaba; June 17 in Frankenmuth; and July 23 in Gaylord.

Registration is now open any day for these one-day “mini conferences.” For only \$35, you get a day’s worth of policy briefings, plus a light breakfast and lunch. We also are inviting legislators in the area of each site to join us for the breakfast session.

In August, our Annual Conference returns to the Grand Traverse Resort, last visited by MAC in 2015. Registration for that gathering will open at beginning of June.

Each and every MAC event is designed to give you, the member, more information and more tools to better serve your constituents and our great state. Please take advantage of them!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ken Borton".

Ken Borton
President, MAC Board of Directors

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Thank you to all MACPAC members. To support MACPAC, please visit our website, micounties.org.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

ROAD FUNDING DEBATE LIKELY TO CONTINUE INTO SEPTEMBER

By MAC Governmental Affairs Staff

With Memorial Day and summer looming, Michigan appears little closer to new dollars for its strained road system than when Gov. Gretchen Whitmer took the oath of office in January by renewing her commitment to “fix the damn roads.”

In the months since, the governor has presented her roads proposal, built on a 45-cent boost to the state gasoline tax, and barnstormed the state in support of it.

That has yet to persuade the Republican majorities in the Legislature or apparently voters themselves.

Twenty-four states are considering 60 bills this year related to state taxes on gasoline, according to the **National Conference of State Legislatures**.

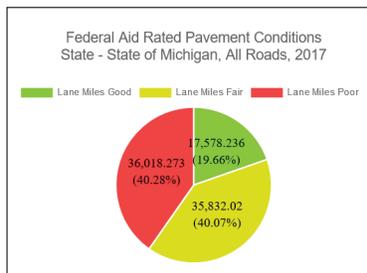
And three of those states (Alabama, Arkansas and Ohio) already have enacted increases to their fuel taxes this year, albeit smaller ones than what Whitmer has proposed for Michigan:

- Alabama boosted its fuel taxes by 10 cents over a three-year span; at the full rate, the boost will raise \$323 million each year.
- In Arkansas, the roads will get a new \$95 million via a 3-cent increase on gas and a 6-cent boost on diesel.
- And neighboring Ohio generate \$865 million each year by increasing its gas tax by 10.5 cents and its diesel rate by 19 cents. “This is something that had to be done,” Republican Gov. Mike DeWine said during a news conference following the deal. “We have some money for safety and some money for new projects. I’m very pleased.”

In Lansing, no one appears pleased.

House Speaker Lee Chatfield, R-Emmet, has labeled the governor’s plan a “non-starter” and suggested taking all the sales tax revenue from fuel sales and holding it for roads. This would divert more than \$800 million a year that now goes to local schools and revenue sharing. Chatfield **said in March** that schools would not “take a hit” in this shift, though he has not explained how that would be achieved.

On April 23, a Senate appropriations panel passed a road budget that pointedly ignored the governor’s proposal, instead “providing the final \$132 million in General Fund (dollars) dedicated to the 2015 road plan a year early to reach the full \$1.2 billion additional funding for roads that



Road funding resources

Video of governor’s road presentation at MAC conference.

Gov. Whitmer’s presentation at 2019 Legislative Conference.
(See 2019 Legislative Conference folder.)

Citizens Research Council of Michigan analysis of Michigan road funding
(February 2019 *Michigan Counties*).

Allocation of federal aid to local road agencies

(House Fiscal Agency Brief).

Michigan Tax System and Budget
(House Fiscal Agency chart).

FY 19 Funding via Public Act 51
(House Fiscal Agency chart).

was to be fully implemented by 2021,” Gongwer News Service reported. These amounts, though, are far below the \$2.5 billion that Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey, R-Jackson, has said is probably the correct figure for road investments.

Shirkey also has stated a road funding piece should be separate from the fiscal 2020 budget and that reforming Michigan’s “no-fault” auto insurance system should be included in the road funding plan.

Republican leaders have told MAC and others that they will have a road plan within the next month.

MAC’s **Transportation platform** does not speak specifically to fuel tax increases, but at its March 25 meeting at the 2019 Legislative Conference, the MAC Board of Directors, after being briefed on Gov. Whitmer’s road proposal, advised the MAC staff to support the search for the necessary new dollars and work to ensure they are distributed via the existing Public Act 51 formula. (Whitmer’s proposal calls for the creation of a new fund, the “Fixing Michigan Roads Fund,” which would send approximately 70% to the Michigan Department of Transportation; 27% to counties, cities, villages and townships; and 3% to transit. It is important to state that all previous revenues would continue to go through the current PA 51 formula.)

Gov. Whitmer has said she is open to other proposals to raise the revenue, but she will not sign an FY 2020 budget unless road funding is included with it. Meanwhile, legislative leaders are sticking to their preference to handle the two matters separately. The expectation in legislative circles is that this will be a long summer as the Legislature and governor continue to debate. The state fiscal year starts Oct. 1, so lawmakers have until then to resolve the dispute without disruption to state operations.

CRC ANALYSIS

STATE'S TAX IMBALANCE LEAVES COUNTIES SCRAMBLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET

By Eric Lupher, President, Citizens Research Council

Tax policy is about balancing the goal of raising adequate revenues to finance services with maintaining rates low enough to maintain competitiveness.

Michigan's recent history illustrates why this balance must be tended to continuously.

For many years, a strong state economy allowed Michigan to levy taxes at limited rates that still yielded adequate revenues to fund services. Up until the turn of the century, Michigan consistently hovered around no. 15 in the country in total state and local government tax revenue per capita, about 4 percent above the U.S. average.

While resources were not infinite, the state generally had enough to fund state departments and external entities, such as universities, health departments and revenue sharing for counties and local governments.

The assumption behind this was Michigan's economic strength would continue indefinitely. In this environment, decisions with major implications were made:

- Local-option taxes, such as income and sales taxes, were pre-empted in exchange for revenue sharing;
- The Headlee Amendment (1978) set limits on state and local tax revenue; and
- Proposal A of 1994 further limited the growth of the property tax base.

But Michigan's reality began to change. Population growth here, vs. the national average, slowed. And per-capita personal income grew at a rate almost 60 percent slower than the national rate.

By the Great Recession in 2009, Michigan had fallen to no. 32 in per-capita tax revenues, 14 percent below the U.S. average. In 2015, Michigan was down to no. 34, 22 percent below the U.S. average. These trends meant the economy no longer could compensate for limitations on taxes; revenues slumped.

For example, state revenues have declined from about 9.5 percent of state income in 2000 to about 7.2 percent in 2018. Between 2000 and 2010, the state's General Fund revenues declined from \$10.7 billion to \$7.7 billion; only recently have they returned to fiscal 2000 levels — and that's not adjusting for inflation. Michigan is collecting fewer resources for public needs.

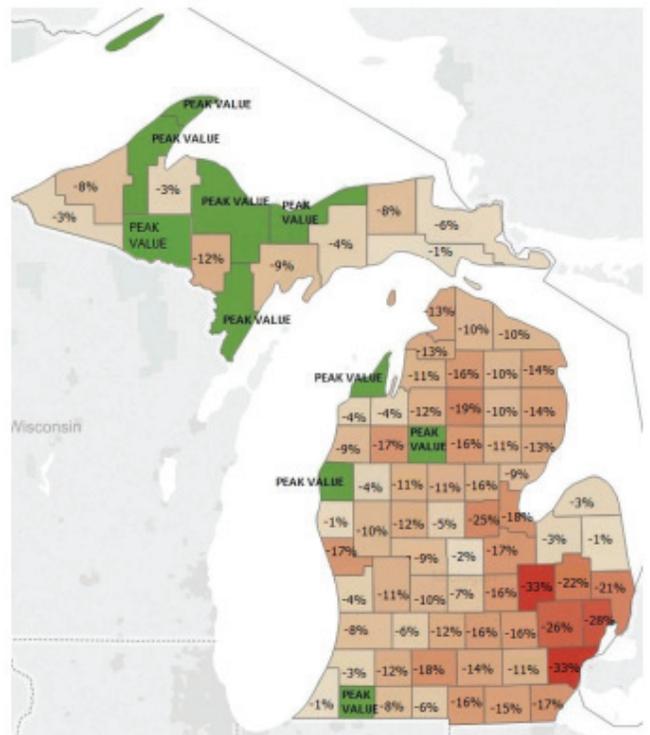


Lupher



MAC strongly supports the work of the **Citizens Research Council of Michigan**, a nonpartisan, independent public policy research organization. MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie currently sits on the CRC Board of Directors.

2016 County Taxable Values Compared to Inflation-Adjusted Peak Values



Source: Michigan State Tax Commission (CRC calculations).

So where does that leave us?

First, Michigan is a state with low state-levied taxes.

Our flat 4.25 percent income tax is no. 37 for medium- and high-income households (out of 41 states with conventional income taxes).

STATE'S TAX IMBALANCE LEAVES COUNTIES SCRAMBLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET from page 6

Our 6 percent corporate income tax is no. 29 among the 44 states that levy such a tax. And this rate is applied to a tax base that is much smaller than those of Michigan's prior business levies: the Single Business Tax and the Michigan Business Tax.

Our 6 percent state sales/use tax is no. 16, so upper half nationally there. But Michigan does not authorize any local sales taxes, as are found in 37 other states. So, when accounting for local taxes, Michigan is no. 38 among the 46 states that levy sales taxes.

What about the property taxes that counties and local governments depend on heavily?

Michigan's property tax rates are among the highest in the nation. Detroit's tax rate ranks among the highest three nationally. And even in smaller cities, Michigan's property tax rate hits the top 10, depending on the type and value of the property subject to taxation.

Elements of Proposal A of 1994 mitigated these burdens for taxpayers but created problems for service providers in the process. Prop A limits the growth of taxable value to 5 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower. The drafters of the measure, though, never conceived of property values falling by massive amounts, as they did during the Great Recession.

The result today is many property owners pay taxes on values far below the actual market value of their homes, which is great for them. But it left counties scrambling. In 2016, counties collected \$2.12 billion in property taxes, which was \$51 million below what they had collected in 2006. And with Prop A's inflation cap, that loss is, for all intents and purposes, permanent.

And they would have been even heavier, had the local average millage rate — the tax rate imposed by local officials or directly by the voters — not risen 7 percent between 2008 and 2016.

This results in today's fundamental imbalance:

- State leaders, with help from the voters, have locked down or curtailed revenue sources, leaving fewer dollars (adjusted for inflation) for the state to do its work and to meet its commitments to local governments.
- Counties and municipalities — barred from using most traditional tax tools, trapped by Proposal's A inflationary cap and shorted billions in revenue sharing funds from state in the 2000s — are now engaged in round after round of budget and service cuts.

The question for 2019, and beyond, is: Will voters live with that arrangement?

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BEST PRACTICES

JACKSON COUNTY'S ROAD RECYCLING INNOVATIONS GARNER NATIONAL RECOGNITION

By Christopher Bolt, Managing Director, Jackson County Department of Transportation

Jackson County's Department of Transportation (JCDOT) recently received a prestigious national award for its new and innovative Road Recycling & Improvement Program. *Roads & Bridges* magazine featured Jackson County on the cover of its February issue in conjunction with presentation of its 2019 Roads & Bridges/Asphalt Recycling and Reclaiming Association Recycling Award. The award was presented for JCDOT's first recycled road project: Rosehill Road, a 1.05-mile stretch of county primary highway near Interstate 94.

The \$329,000 Rosehill project was completed in July 2018 and resulted in an estimated savings of approximately 30 percent over conventional construction methods — yet still produced a road that is 20 percent to 30 percent stronger and more durable. The base of the so-called “super road” is expected to last up to five decades and can be milled, overlaid and re-recycled at any time.

The problem

Even with the road funding bill of 2015, most local road agencies in Michigan continue to struggle with how to best spend limited dollars. The \$1.2 billion was not enough to do what everyone hoped it would — especially for local roads.

JCDOT works tirelessly with its 19 townships to spread its limited funds as far as possible. Unfortunately, Jackson County's rapidly aging transportation network will require more money than will ever be available, particularly when it comes to improving local, rural roads in most of its townships. JCDOT's 1,600-mile county road system is mostly paved (90%), with more than 900 miles (60%) in poor condition, thus requiring reconstruction today. The remaining 500 miles will require reconstruction sometime in the 20 years. At a typical cost of between \$300,000 and \$450,000 per mile (in today's dollars), business as usual was never going to allow JCDOT to catch up — unless it could find a way to build better roads for the same or less money.



A solution

I've followed road recycling technology closely for nearly 25 years. I set out on an extensive research journey in 2017 with members of the JCDOT team to comb through 30 years of literature and reports; talk with agency officials and recycling experts in Florida, New Jersey, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, California, Ontario and Alaska; and travel to witness road recycling in action and to evaluate recycled roads in Florida, Texas and Ontario. The findings were astonishing: recycled roads are robust, durable and cost-effective. Moreover, the equipment, processes and technology have taken a quantum leap forward over the last few years.

Working closely County Administrator/Controller Mike Overton, I reviewed the feasibility of investing in a \$6 million, municipally owned and operated, comprehensive road recycling program, the first of its kind in North America. The economic analysis was particularly compelling: the program builds stronger, more durable roads, while saving an average of 30 percent per mile over traditional methods. Savings are also projected on

Continued on page 9

SHARE YOUR 'BEST PRACTICES' WITH MAC

From challenges come creativity, and boy have Michigan's counties been challenged in the 21st century.

MAC continues to highlight how counties have found ways to continue or expand services in the most hostile of fiscal environments. Our “Best Practices” initiative isn't a competition, but a celebration — of Great Lakes ingenuity, passion and plain ol' grit.

Big or small, technical or simple, we want to hear how you have found a new way to serve your constituents.

Please send a brief description and contact information for the point person of your “Best Practice” to Derek Melot, melot@micounties.org.

For questions, call Melot at 517-372-5374.



HOW COUNTIES ARE TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

JACKSON COUNTY'S ROAD RECYCLING INNOVATIONS GARNER NATIONAL RECOGNITION from page 8

future maintenance due to reduced cracking and far fewer potholes and surface defects to repair (however, those dollars were not included in the analysis).

The bottom line was the first 50 to 60 miles of recycled roads would essentially pay for the capital investment in the program. The return on investment is remarkably quick — slightly over a year given the fact that up to \$6 million will be saved by the end of the 2019, with 12 miles already completed in 2018 and 50 miles planned for the 2019 construction season. With an expected service life of 15 years for the equipment, the program is fully sustainable from a cost perspective starting in 2020 and continuing for the next 30 years or more.

The science: 'It's all about that base'

The road recycling method essentially involves "rototilling" existing asphalt roads to a depth of between 6" and 8", blending together the existing asphalt with underlying aggregate base material and binding agents (asphaltic oil, Portland cement and water). Samples of existing roads are taken and analyzed in JCDOT's laboratory to determine the optimum proportions of binding agents and to ensure the resulting road will be as strong and durable as possible. Administrator Overton summed it up well when he said, "Jackson County is putting science back into road building."

Significant savings on construction costs are achieved through the use of existing road base and asphalt material to create a new, strong "bound aggregate base" (BAB), in conjunction with a need for significantly less virgin hot-mix asphalt material as a wearing surface over the new recycled road base (only 2" thick, versus 3.5" to 5.5" or more over aggregate road base). Even with less asphalt as a cap, the road is 1.2 to 1.5 times stronger — whether it's cold or hot, dry or wet.

In engineering terms, traditional aggregate road base has a structural coefficient of about 0.13 per inch thick (when dry and well-compacted). The recycled BAB material has a structural number of 0.35 to 0.40+ per inch (3 times stronger than aggregate), which is very comparable to that of hot-mix asphalt at 0.43 per inch. With an average BAB thickness of 6" to 8", most of the strength in a recycled road is derived from its base (65-75%), as opposed to traditional roads where the strength is mostly in the hot-mix asphalt at the top. Notably, the recycled BAB retains 80 percent of its strength when its wet — a great advantage during the spring thaw season. Traditional aggregate road base loses the majority of its strength when wet, leaving the asphalt surface vulnerable in trying to support heavy traffic loads.

The vision

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners has made a policy decision to build stronger, more durable roads for the same or fewer dollars than can be done using

conventional construction methods. Properly designed and constructed recycled roads require less hot-mix asphalt and have a road base that is likely to last 30 years or more. This recycled bound aggregate base is literally the foundation for a new, innovative and sustainable program for improving and maintaining a 1,600-mile road network for decades to come.

At a pace of approximately 50 to 60 miles per year, JCDOT plans to recycle nearly every mile of road over the next 30 years. The new, durable road base should allow JCDOT to focus maintenance efforts on replacement of the 2" hot-mix asphalt surface every 10-15 years (via traditional mill and overlay methods). The hope is potholes will eventually become a thing of the past, and any that are discovered on recycled roads will be investigated and carefully repaired — much like a dentist would fill a cavity.

We hope our use of this technology will spur private contractors to invest in the technology, making it readily available for all local agencies throughout Michigan. Meanwhile, JCDOT intends to plug along mile by mile, year after year, as it builds an exceptional road system for Jackson County.

To read more about Jackson's unique program, see the full [Roads & Bridges article](#).

To learn more about Christopher Bolt's work, see his 2017 presentation on multi-county road agencies in the 2017 Regional Summit folder in the [MAC digital archives](#).

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EXPERTCORNER

PAID MEDICAL LEAVE: NEW RULES TO WORK BY

By Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes PLC

Michigan’s Paid Medical Leave Act (the “PMLA”) establishes certain employees’ rights to accrue and use paid leave for personal and family medical needs. The Michigan Legislature enacted the PMLA to amend and (in part) replace the prior legislation on the same topic: the Earned Sick Time Act. Not all employers are subject to the PMLA’s paid medical leave requirements; and, importantly, not everyone on a public employer’s payroll will be eligible for the leave. However, employers subject to the PMLA must review and may potentially modify existing leave policies to meet its minimum requirements by March 29, 2019.

Q: Who is impacted?

Employers with 50 or more employees for whom they are required to withhold for federal income tax purposes (except the U.S. government or another state!) This includes public employers, like townships, cities and counties. Interestingly, while it is clear (as described below) that part-time, seasonal, and out-of-state employees are not entitled to take medical leave, the Act does not exclude them from the calculation of the 50 employee threshold. Until we have a definite answer, you should count such employees. But you need not count independent contractors.

Q: What is “medical leave” under the PMLA?

Leave taken for:

- Personal or family health needs (mental or physical illness, injury or health condition)
- Purposes related to domestic violence and sexual assault, including medical care, psychological care or counseling, victim services, relocation purposes, to obtain legal services, or to participate in civil or criminal proceedings
- Closure of employee’s place of business (or child’s school or place of care) by order of a public official due to public health emergency (or being ordered not to appear at work for contagion/exposure)

Q: How is “family member” defined?

A “family member” under the PMLA includes:

- A child (whether biological, adopted, foster, stepchild, legal ward, or a child to whom the eligible employee stands in loco parentis)
- An individual to whom the eligible employee is legally married to under any state law
- A parent (whether biological, foster, stepparent, adoptive parent, a legal guardian of the employee or his/her spouse, or an individual who stood in loco parentis when the employee was a minor child)
- A sibling (whether biological, foster, or adopted)
- A grandparent
- A grandchild

Q: WAIT: Are ALL employees entitled to paid sick leave?

Not necessarily. Public employers of 50 or more must

provide employees with paid medical leave, unless the employee is:

- Exempt from Fair Labor Standards Act overtime requirements (e.g. department head or county controller)
- Private sector employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement currently in effect
- Individuals whose primary work location is not in Michigan
- Employees who are less than 20 years old and paid a training wage as permitted under Michigan law
- Seasonal or temporary employees (who were employed for 25 weeks or less in a calendar year for a job scheduled for 25 weeks or less)
- Part-time employees who worked less than 25 hours per week on average the prior calendar year
- Certain variable employees (those for whom the employer cannot determine, at hire, whether the employee is reasonably expected to work at least 30 hours per week on average because the employee’s hours are “variable” or otherwise uncertain)

Q: How is leave made available and used?

	Option 1: Accrual of Leave	Option 2: Frontloading Leave
Requirements:	Employees accrue 1 hour of leave for every 35 hours worked, but no more than 1 hour per calendar week if an employee works more than 35 hours in a week.	Provide (at least) 40 hours of paid medical leave at the beginning of the benefit year
Maximum Accrual:	40 hours per benefit year	None
Carryover of Leave:	40 hours	None

Public employers must permit this leave to be used in at least hourly increments, unless it has already enacted a different policy, in writing, in an employee handbook (or other employee benefits document). Some public employers permit leave to be taken only in half-days or full-days, while others allow use by the quarter of the hour!

When processing payroll, note that the hourly rate for paid medical leave is equal to the greater of either the normal hourly wage, the base wage, or the applicable minimum wage rate (which will be \$9.45 per hour as of the Act’s effective date). However, you are not required to calculate into any overtime pay (among other things generally inapplicable to public sector employers).

PAID MEDICAL LEAVE: NEW RULES TO WORK BY from page 10

You may provide more paid medical leave than required and, if the public employer so chooses, establish policies permitting eligible employees to donate unused paid medical leave to one another. (Check with your employment counsel if you seek to establish a donation policy, as there are special rules in play from a federal level!)

Special notes:

- “Benefit year” is defined as any consecutive 12-month period used to calculate benefits. Therefore, you have flexibility to determine the definition of benefit year, whether it’s a calendar year, fiscal year, or any other system.
- Under the accrual option, “hours worked” does not include paid vacation days, paid personal days, or paid sick days. If an employee takes paid leave for any of these reasons, those hours are not counted for purposes of accruing paid medical leave.
- If a public employer chooses to frontload leave instead, there is a rebuttable presumption of compliance with the Act. For employees hired during the year, the employer may prorate leave.

Q: When does paid medical leave begin to accrue?

Accrual of paid medical leave begins on the Act’s effective date (March 29, 2019) or upon hire, whichever is later. A

public employer may impose a 90-calendar day waiting period before a new employee is permitted to use the paid medical leave, but it should accrue (or be frontloaded) immediately upon hire. Existing employees are permitted to use leave as it is accrued.

Q: Can we require notice and documentation for paid medical leave?

The Act requires employees to comply with the employer’s “usual and customary” notice and documentation requirements. Public employers must give employees at least three (3) days to provide documentation.

Where paid medical leave is used for purposes related to domestic violence or sexual assault, the employer may, but is not required to, request supporting documentation. A public employer cannot require an employee to disclose the details of the underlying violence. Acceptable documentation could include a police report, court document, or a signed statement from a victim and witness advocate confirming that the eligible employee (or family member) is receiving services from a victims’ service organization.

If an employee does not meet notice, procedure, and documentation requirements for requesting leave, you may explore disciplinary responses.

Continued on page 12

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NRM-12870M5 (01/15)

PAID MEDICAL LEAVE: NEW RULES TO WORK BY from page 11

Q: We don't offer any leave time — what now?

Public employers have some time yet to review and, if necessary, modify current policies to ensure compliance by the Act's effective date of March 29, 2019. First, evaluate whether you have 50 employees, next determine if you have any eligible employees, and then work with your labor and employment counsel to develop a paid medical leave policy if needed!

Q: How do we evaluate existing current leave policies?

1. Determine whether you have 50 or more employees. Public employers with 50 or fewer employees are not required to provide paid medical leave.
2. Identify the amount and type of leave currently provided. If, for example, you provide more than 40 hours of PTO, you are already very close to compliance! But if you offer 20 hours of vacation and 20 hours of sick/personal time, you aren't!
3. Identify your accrual rate (if you opt to allow accrual and carryover rather than frontloading leave). If it is below the 1 hour per 35 hours / week, changes are needed.
4. Review and adjust minimum use requirements of the policy — and the purposes for which the leave may be used.
5. Review and adjust notice and documentation requirements of the policy.

Note: The Act defines "paid leave" to include vacation days, paid personal days, and paid time off. If all leave is banked together in a PTO bank or something similar, and that bank accrues at the minimum rate required by the Act (or more!), no further action is required. However, vacation time that is granted, accrued, or used separately from sick or personal leave cannot be used to meet the Act's accrual and use requirements. If you choose to combine paid medical leave with other types of leave in a PTO bank, you should update your current leave policy to specify that PTO includes paid medical leave for the reasons permitted under the PMLA.

Q: How does PMLA relate to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)?

Although they are certainly two separate laws, do not worry about any need to offer 40 hours of paid medical leave under the PMLA and 12 weeks off for FMLA, if your FMLA policy provides for substitution of paid leave. The FMLA provides that an employee may elect or the employer may require an employee to "substitute" any paid leave for unpaid FMLA leave. Substitution means that the accrued paid leave (vacation, sick, PTO, or paid medical leave, at the employer's discretion) runs concurrently with the FMLA leave period. The Act does not change any of this.

Q: What do we do with accrued but unused paid medical leave?

Paid medical leave is transferrable, meaning that if an employee transfers (voluntarily or by assignment) but

is still employed by the same public employer, he or she retains the leave. But if the employee resigns, retires or is terminated, and is subsequently reinstated or rehired, you are under no obligation to restore that banked leave. And employers are not required to pay out unused paid medical leave upon the employee's termination, resignation, or retirement because of this Act — although your policy or contracts may require it.

Q: How does this Act impact or relate to existing collective bargaining agreements ("CBAs")?

The PMLA does not preempt or limit applicability of CBAs that provide for greater accrual or use of medical leave meeting the terms of the PMLA.

Required notice to employees

Public employers must display a poster that contains:

- The amount of paid medical leave employees may receive under the Act;
- What paid medical leave may be used for; and
- The right to file a complaint with the Department for violations

This posting requirement is similar to other wage and hour issues for which you probably already have posters and forms. The Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (the "Department") created posters, which can be found [here](#). (While you're there, grab the updated minimum wage poster, too!)

Q: What are the potential penalties and consequences for violating the Act?

- Investigation by the Michigan Wage and Hour Division, who may attempt to resolve the conflict through mediation or other means
- If the Division determines a violation has occurred, it may impose penalties and require payment of improperly withheld medical leave
- \$1,000 administrative fine for all violations, except the failure to display the required poster, which is an a fine of not more than \$100

If a public employer violates the Act, an employee may file a claim with the Division within six months. The Act, however, does not permit an employee to file a lawsuit against the public employer.

Want to learn more?

The new law can be found on the Michigan Legislature's website under **Public Act Number 369, Public Acts of 2018, MCL 408.961, amended**.

If you have any questions about the new law or would like assistance, contact us:

FAHEY SCHULTZ BURZYCH RHODES PLC
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MAC EVENTS CALENDAR

May 3, 2019

MAC Finance Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

May 6, 2019

Health & Human Services Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

May 10, 2019

MAC Environmental, Natural Resources & Regulatory Affairs Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

May 15-17, 2019

NACo Western Interstate Region Conference
Davenport Grand Hotel,
Spokane, Wash.

May 17, 2019

MAC General Government Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

MAC Agriculture & Tourism Committee Meeting

1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
MAC Offices

May 20, 2019

MAC Judiciary & Public Safety Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

May 20, 2019

Judiciary & Public Safety Committee Meeting
2 p.m. to 4 p.m.
MAC Offices

May 21-24, 2019

Michigan Association of County Administrative Officers (MACAO) Spring Conference
Crystal Mountain Resort,
Thompsonville, Mich

May 24, 2019

MAC Transportation Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

May 27, 2019

Memorial Day
MAC Offices closed

June 3, 2019

MAC Regional Summit
Crowne Plaza, Grand Rapids
8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

June 7, 2019

MAC Finance Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

June 10, 2019

MAC Regional Summit
Quality Inn & Suites, Escanaba
8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

June 14, 2019

MAC Environmental, Natural Resources & Regulatory Affairs Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

June 17, 2019

MAC Regional Summit
Bavarian Inn, Frankenmuth
8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

June 21, 2019

MAC General Government Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

June 24, 2019

MAC Health & Human Services Committee Meeting
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
MAC Offices

MAC Judiciary & Public Safety Committee Meeting

2 p.m. to 4 p.m.
MAC Offices



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AFFILIATE CORNER

TREASURERS TAKE FORECLOSURE DUTIES SERIOUSLY

By Karen Coffman, Jackson County Treasurer

My name is Karen Coffman and chances are you've never heard of me -- and that is OK by me! You see, I am the Jackson County treasurer and I and the 82 other county treasurers around our great state often go about our business unnoticed. We are responsible for ensuring the safety of public funds; managing county investments; collecting delinquent property taxes on behalf of townships, cities and villages; and stabilizing the local units' revenue streams by purchasing their delinquent taxes. We take over the collection process and follow the prescriptive process outlined in state law. We also issue county dog licenses; serve on the elections commission and the brownfield authority; and do much, much more. Being a county treasurer is not always glamorous, but it is of critical importance to Michigan citizens!



There is, however, one element of my job I wish I never had to perform: foreclose on properties for unpaid taxes. No treasurer enjoys this task, but under Michigan law, when the Treasurer's Office is the Foreclosing Governmental Unit (FGU), this responsibility falls on us — and we take it very seriously. We take it seriously because, as stewards of public funds, the taxpayers demand it of us. Local units of government set their budgets based on county treasurers advancing them the total amount of all unpaid property taxes, and the local units count on those funds for operating revenues. Most importantly, we take this role seriously because citizens facing tax foreclosure are looking for guidance on what their options might be, AND they deserve it!

I know many of you reading are in a role of public service, and you may already have a firm grasp on the property tax foreclosure process. As such, I may be “preaching to the choir.” However, it is of critical importance that all taxpayers understand this three-year process. Knowing how the process works and understanding the tools available can help avoid foreclosure on the front end.

Cities and townships issue property tax bills that are based on the taxable value of property. Let's assume we're looking at 2017 taxes. For property owners who paid their property taxes before March 1, 2018, the process ends there. When the taxpayer makes their tax payment, the funds are distributed to all of the other taxing entities (such as your local library, your local public schools, etc.). For property taxes that were not paid, there is a legal responsibility for the county treasurer to collect them. These collection efforts last for two years and include numerous notices, personal

visits, certified mail and more.

On March 31, 2020, the two-year collection process ends. If the 2017 property taxes are still unpaid, county treasurers are legally required to take the final step by foreclosing on property.

Unlike mortgage foreclosures, which can be redeemed after foreclosure, property tax foreclosures are FINAL — and there is no redemption period after the foreclosure date.

So, how and why do we want to avoid foreclosures? We want to help keep families in their homes: It's better for families, it's better for neighborhoods and it's better for the long-term financial well-being of our communities and their tax base. County treasurers will use all the tools at their disposal to keep citizens and their families in their homes. These include:

- Setting up payment plans to allow homeowners to catch up on delinquent taxes.
- Assisting with applications to Step Forward Michigan (www.StepForwardMichigan.org) to help qualified homeowners pay off delinquent taxes.
- Working with agencies such as the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Veterans' Administration.
- Partnering with local nonprofits.

In addition, we are dedicated at looking for new and innovative ways to reach, inform and educate taxpayers to prevent foreclosure in ways beyond what is required by law. This includes postings, mailings, phone calls and home visits made personally by county treasurers and their staff. There is a growing emphasis statewide on developing and implementing Public Service Announcement campaigns featuring communications in print, TV and social media.

We are committed to educating our delinquent taxpayers about these important resources available to save their homes. We strive to ensure homeowners are claiming the Principal Residence Exemption and educate them about credits that may be available to them on their taxes.

County treasurers are passionate about serving our constituents and keeping families in their homes. We look forward to continuing to partner and collaborate with state-wide and local agencies as well as other county officials to best serve all our residents!

MAC NEWS

LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE: WHITMER MAKES ROADS PITCH; MAC MEMBERS OK BY-LAWS REVAMP

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer presented a stark choice to county leaders during her keynote address on March 26 to the 2019 Michigan Counties Legislative Conference: Invest in Michigan's infrastructure or watch the state deteriorate.



Whitmer

The governor appeared before a Lansing Center audience of about 400 people to tout her "Road to Opportunity" infrastructure plan, which relies on a 45-cent gasoline tax increase to generate a new \$2.1 billion for Michigan's crumbling roads.

Whitmer outlined how her plan would set the state on course to return 90 percent of "trunk line" surfaces to "good condition," while inaction would cut the percentage of trunk lines in good condition nearly in half by 2029.

"The governor's presentation was clear and consistent — our state needs more infrastructure dollars," said Ken Borton of Otsego County, MAC's Board president. "That same message came out of our discussions during our Board session on March 25: dollars are needed. The complications, of course, are in the sources for those funds and how they are distributed. MAC is ready to work with the governor and Legislature on those issues."

During the three-day event, co-sponsored by MAC and the Michigan Counties Medical Care Facilities Council (MCMCFC), MAC members elected two new Board members and approved the first revision to MAC's operating By-laws since 2008.

Kyle Harris of Saginaw County emerged out of a three-candidate field to secure an at-large seat on the MAC Board. Harris, now in his second term on the Saginaw

Board of Commissioners, has been serving on MAC's Transportation Committee. He will serve until August 2019, when he can run for a full three-year term.

Commissioners in MAC's Region 4 (Thumb and mid-Michigan) chose Donald Parker of Livingston County to fill a vacant regional seat. Parker, who has served for more than a decade on his county's panel, is also a trustee of the Michigan Counties Workers' Compensation Fund. Like Harris, Parker will serve out a partial term to August 2019, when he is eligible to run for a full three-year term.

On March 27, attending commissioners unanimously approved changes to MAC's governing **By-laws**. Under the changes, board members now can serve up to nine years on the board, instead of six, and must notify the MAC office of an intention to seek a Board seat at least 30 days prior to a scheduled election.

The revisions also incorporate two standing committees for the Board: Executive and Finance.

"The overwhelming support shown validates the work of the By-laws committee I created last fall," said Borton. "This is how the system is supposed to work. Members opposed the previous proposal last August, so we went back to the drawing board, created a new plan and got it approved. I'm most pleased."

Presentations are **available online** from the 13 policy breakouts during the conference, ranging from marijuana regulation and Michigan energy policy, to tips on running effective county meetings and jail diversion programs.

The 2019 Annual Conference will be held Aug. 18-20 at the Grand Traverse Resort near Traverse City. Expect registration to open in early June.



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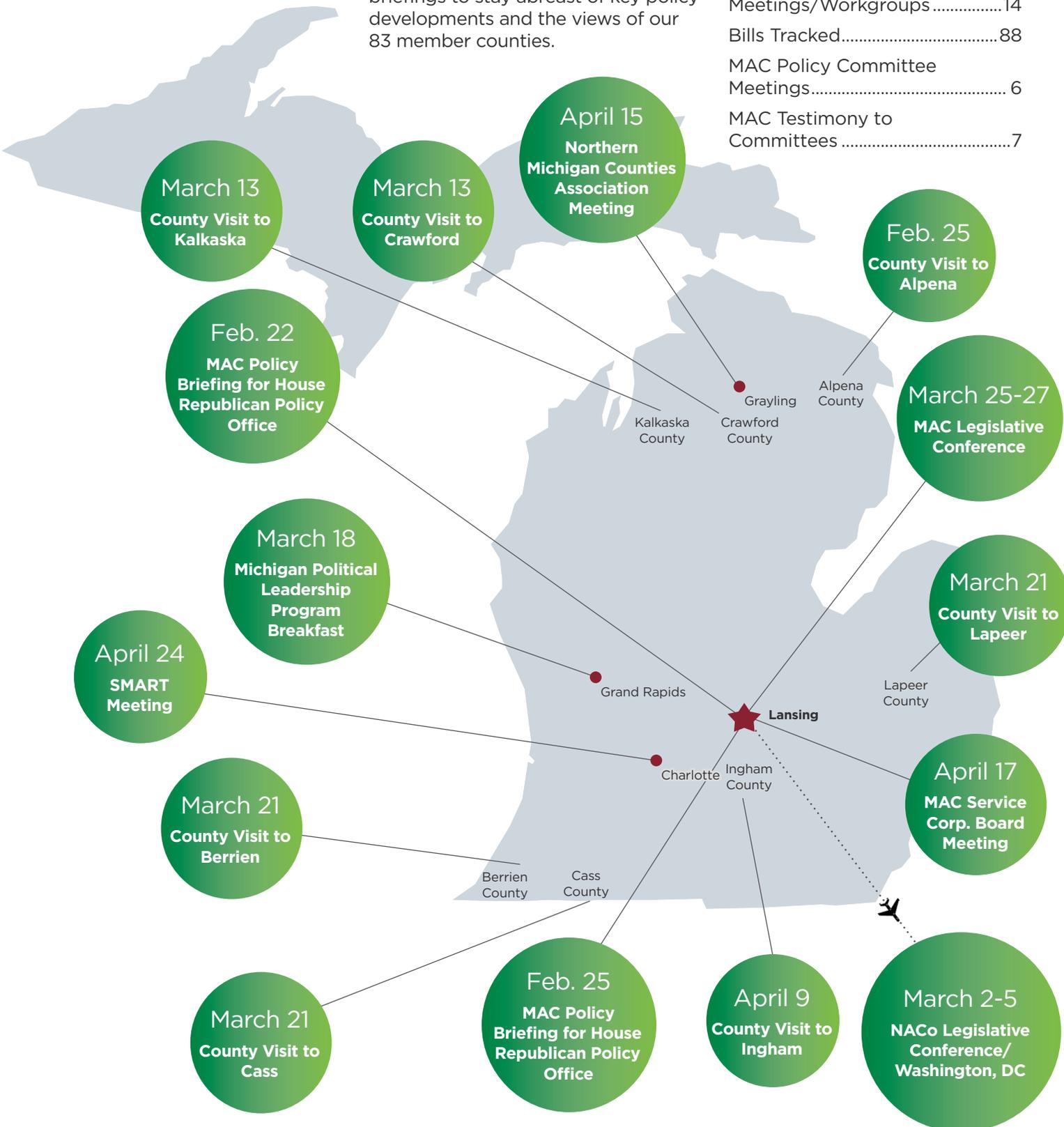
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MAC IN ACTION

MAC staffers regularly attend state and local meetings, events and briefings to stay abreast of key policy developments and the views of our 83 member counties.

- Legislative Meetings..... 53
- Executive Branch Meetings/Workgroups14
- Bills Tracked.....88
- MAC Policy Committee Meetings..... 6
- MAC Testimony to Committees7



March 13
County Visit to Kalkaska

March 13
County Visit to Crawford

April 15
Northern Michigan Counties Association Meeting

Feb. 25
County Visit to Alpena

Feb. 22
MAC Policy Briefing for House Republican Policy Office

March 25-27
MAC Legislative Conference

March 18
Michigan Political Leadership Program Breakfast

March 21
County Visit to Lapeer

April 24
SMART Meeting

March 21
County Visit to Berrien

April 17
MAC Service Corp. Board Meeting

March 21
County Visit to Cass

Feb. 25
MAC Policy Briefing for House Republican Policy Office

April 9
County Visit to Ingham

March 2-5
NACo Legislative Conference/ Washington, DC

MACNEWS

WORKERS' COMP FUND MARKS 40TH ANNIVERSARY WITH GROWING DIVIDENDS, POLICY INNOVATIONS

The Michigan Counties Workers' Compensation Fund marked its 40th anniversary in March. What started as a crisis 40 years ago turned into a major benefit for counties who banded together to protect their employees and their bottom lines.

Michigan Counties asked Tim McGuire, the fund's administrator, to explain how the fund began and what's on the horizon. McGuire, then new to the MAC staff, was involved with the fund from day one:

In the mid-'70s, workers' compensation insurance had become quite expensive due to several factors: an absence of safety programs installed in the workplace; a rise in claims; and a lack of excess insurance carriers willing to take on the risks and willingness to underwrite the policies.

This prompted the Michigan Legislature to permit employers with similar operations to band together and organize self-funded plans.

MAC, along with a few others, such as the Municipal League and County Road Association, seized the opportunity to create self-contained, self-funded plans.

In fall 1978, a group led by then MAC Executive Director A. Barry McGuire began talks with state regulators at the Bureau of Workers' Compensation (now the Workers' Compensation Agency). Initially, our fund would be required to have 10 charter counties and \$100,000 in annual premiums. MCWCF was going to launch on Jan. 1, 1979, but a county dropped out at the last moment.

MAC persevered and, three months later, another county signed up, allowing for our launch in March 1979.

Eight of the original member counties remain in the fund: Benzie, Cheboygan, Delta, Gogebic, Ionia, Livingston, Newaygo and Otsego. As charter members, these counties have



*permanent seats on our governing **Board of Trustees.***

From the earliest days, the Board emphasized safety programs as the top goal, since fewer claims meant lower costs, which meant lower premiums.

Fast forward to today and you can still see the guiding principles remain in play. We have 80 members, \$34 million in assets and a dividend that averages 35 percent of a member's premium. Last fall, we returned a record \$3.3 million in dividends.

Helping us to do is a Loss Prevention Grants Program we started in 2014 that provides money to members to invest in safety equipment. With our latest round of grants this month, we will have issued more than \$200,000 to members.

A Michigan-based firm, Comp One, helps us with the grants program and manages day-to-day claims operations. Midwest Casualty provides the excess insurance for the fund and Public Funds Management guides the trustees in handling our \$34 million in assets and complies with all relevant financial regulation.

I'm happy to report that the fund has never been healthier, which is a credit to the leadership of Board President Douglas Johnson of Otsego County and his fellow trustees.

If your county is not a member of the fund, contact McGuire at 517-712-4899 or mcguire@michigancountieswcf.org to cut a free analysis of your insurance needs.

MACNEWS

COUNTIES JOIN WITH STATE, PEW TO IDENTIFY BEST PRACTICES FOR JAIL POPULATIONS, PRETRIAL RELEASE



Gov. Gretchen Whitmer addresses a press conference to announce a new jail and pretrial release task force at the Hall of Justice in Lansing on April 17 as MAC's Stephan Currie and other state leaders look on.

Michigan's 83 counties helped announce an innovative partnership with the state of Michigan and a national nonpartisan research group today to use data to identify best practices for jails.

The Michigan Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration, (#MICJReform) an interbranch, bipartisan body will develop recommendations to expand alternatives to jail, safely reduce jail admissions and length of stay, support crime victims and better align practices with research and constitutional principles, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced today at a press conference at the Hall of Justice in Lansing.

Speaking at the same event, MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie said, "Our focus is specifically on county jails and easing the burden on county budgets. Although created by executive order, this task force puts counties squarely at the center, and we're very happy to launch this partnership together. We'll all benefit from studying our practices."

Public safety, including jails, constitutes the single largest financial commitment from county governments. As detailed at today's event:

- National sources show Michigan jail populations

have tripled in the last 35 years, growing regardless of whether crime was going up or down.

- With crime now at a 50-year low, hundreds of thousands are still admitted to Michigan jails every year, and people are staying in jail longer on average than before.
- Today, half of the people in Michigan's local jails are un-convicted and constitutionally presumed innocent while they await trial.
- Many of these individuals are in jail because they cannot afford bail, not necessarily because they are a flight risk or threat to public safety.

The task force will be supported by technical assistance staff from the Pew Charitable Trusts.

To watch a video of the event, [click here](#).

"The focus here will be on using data to drive solutions. Everyone is entering this effort with no preconceived notions and we are eager to partner with the state, Pew and others to make Michigan a leader in public safety," Currie said.

MACNEWS

REGIONAL SUMMITS WILL FEATURE COURT FUNDING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BRIEFINGS

Commissioners and other county leaders can network with legislators, learn tips on drafting capital improvement plans and be briefed on cutting-edge economic development tactics at a MAC Regional Summit this summer.

As usual, MAC will offer the summits at four sites across Michigan:

- June 3 - Grand Rapids (Crowne Plaza)
- June 10 - Escanaba (Quality Inn)
- June 17 - Frankenmuth (Bavarian Inn)
- July 23 - Gaylord (Otsego Resort)



“Summits are designed to maximize a commissioner’s limited time by giving a series of briefings on key subjects in a single day,” explained Stephan Currie, MAC’s executive director. “Schedules also allow for plenty of questions so county leaders really can dig deep into a topic with our experts drawn from state government, the nonprofit world and the legal community.”

Topics to be covered at all four sessions include:

- County Commissioner Academy: Planning a Capital Improvement Program
- Tackling Blight and Economic Development Tools
- Funding Michigan’s Trial Courts

Each site’s program will begin with a legislative breakfast mixer. MAC is inviting legislators from the

region surrounding each site to foster relationships with their county counterparts.

The summit will run from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; a light breakfast and lunch will be included for the \$35 fee.

[Click here to start your registration process.](#)

Enbridge to present at Escanaba Summit

Energy company Enbridge will make a special presentation during lunch at the June 10 Regional Summit in Escanaba, focusing on the company’s proposed tunnel project under the Straits of Mackinac and upcoming work throughout Michigan. In 2017, 35 of Michigan’s 83 counties received approximately \$60 million in property taxes from Enbridge.



MAC
MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

2019 REGIONAL SUMMITS

JOIN MAC FOR THESE INTENSIVE, ONE-DAY SESSIONS ON TRENDING TOPICS IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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JUNE 17 – FRANKENMUTH · JULY 23 – GAYLORD

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MEET YOUR MAC BOARD

JOE BONOVIETZ AND RICHARD SCHMIDT



Name: Joe Bonovetz
County/MAC Region: Gogebic/Region 1
Position: Director
County Service: County commissioner, 2006-present
Profession: Retired USPS letter carrier

Previous Public Service: Member, Bessemer City Council, 24 years; Mayor, Bessemer, 12 years

What would you say to a commissioner in another county who doesn't think participation in MAC is valuable?

The longer I serve on my county board, the more valuable MAC becomes. And the more I introduce MAC to our county officials, the more use they are getting out of MAC. Equalization, Prosecutor's Office, Treasurer's Office, Clerk's Office, Administrator's Office and more are contacting MAC on a regular basis for questions or to comment on an issue dealing with their department in our small rural county. With present technology, MAC is not a long way away in Lansing. MAC has a dedicated, experienced team of legislative advocates working every day to benefit every county. From revenue sharing to unfunded mandates, MAC covers them all. MAC also provides a procurement service that can save \$\$\$\$ and reduce the stress and paperwork involved with purchases. And best of all, MAC works for you. No one county can do what MAC does for all 83 counties. MAC is there for you — use them.



Name: Richard Schmidt
County/MAC Region: Manistee County/Region 2
Position: Manistee County commissioner
County Service: 9 years
Profession: Buyer and purchasing agent

Previous Public Service: Manistee Board of Review

What would you say to a commissioner in another county who doesn't think participation in MAC is valuable?

I would highly recommend any newly elected commissioner consider becoming active in MAC. By collaborating and networking with other MAC commissioners, you can gain a vast amount of knowledge and expertise. For example, MAC sponsored a breakout session on Downtown Development Authorities (DDA) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF.) The presenter explained how they were formed, their intent and where they obtain their money. When I became a MAC member nine years ago, I also became an advocate for my beliefs on issues affecting my county. MAC also provides

many services to counties from Co-Pro purchasing, advice from our legal representatives on issues impacting our county and lobbying for what we believe in. Also, by being a MAC member you can help establish policies and adopt platforms. These platforms can range from agriculture, tourism, environment, finance, general government, health and human services, judiciary, public safety and so on. With more input from fellow commissioners we can help shape these initiatives.



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LEGISLATOR Q&A

SENATOR CURTIS VANDERWALL



Name: Curtis S. VanderWall

District/counties: 35th District representing Benzie, Crawford, Kalkaska, Lake, Leelanau, Mason, Manistee, Missaukee, Ogemaw, Osceola, Roscommon, Wexford Counties

Committees: Health Policy and Human Services (Chair); Judiciary and Public Safety (Vice chair); Economic and Small Business Development (Vice chair); Elections; Environmental Quality; Finance; Regulatory Reform.

Term #: 1st in Senate

Previous public service: Michigan House of Representatives, 101st District; Mason County Board of Commissioners

What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan now?

I may be biased as chairman of the Senate Health Policy Committee, but I think access to health care — especially in rural areas — is near the top of this list (see the third question below). We need to find a way to get more doctors to practice in rural communities and provide increased access to their services to residents there.

Education continues to be a top priority. Last year, we increased support to schools to a record \$14.8 billion — the most in state history — and most schools saw the largest per-pupil increase in 17 years. With large portions of the U.S. and Michigan economies developing a new era of advanced technologies, career and technical education programs in particular have become an essential component of education that will drive the economic success of future generations. That is why the Legislature set aside \$60 million specifically for these purposes.

Finally, we must face the crisis of our crumbling roads and infrastructure. We need to continue to invest in our roads and bridges. Since 2017, we have put \$2.8 billion of new investment into fixing our roads. We must find a sensible and long-term solution to improving our roads that is fair to taxpayers and ensures they are built to last.

Based on your experience, how important are counties to the effective delivery of public services?

As a former county commissioner, I know how vital county government is in Michigan. They are constitutionally and statutorily required to provide certain basic functions for our Michigan residents, such as courts, health, and public safety.

That is why we need to ensure an increase in revenue sharing payments. It is critical that we make revenue sharing a priority in the budget to help ensure these functions are funded at adequate levels.

What are the top priorities for you in your role as the Chairman of the Health Policy committee?

My top priority as chairman of the Senate Health Policy Committee is getting more doctors to practice in rural communities and providing increased access to services.

Challenges in maintaining funding to keep rural health facilities open has in some cases prompted consolidation of hospitals. This has led to more residents traveling longer distances for care. Expanding access to telemedicine and tele-pharmacies are some of the easiest methods of resolving access issues.

Finding incentives to attract young medical professionals and doctors, such as assistance in paying down college debt, is one path to addressing the shortage of medical professionals in rural areas.

As a former county commissioner, you understand that counties are on the front lines, from treatment courts to the medical examiner office, when it comes to the opioid crisis. How do you think the state can help support counties to continue to combat this crisis?

The opioid crisis has become the deadliest drug epidemic in our nation's history and all levels governments must be focused on finding solutions this crisis. Certainly, counties have seen increased costs because of this crisis. The current budget included an additional \$1 million dollars to help medical examiners determine the cause of death in opioid related overdoses. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions and state and local governments must continue to work together to find new ways of addressing this crisis while as efficiently as possible.

Road funding has been identified as a top priority for the State. What are your thoughts on the governor's proposal of a 45-cent tax increase?

I don't know anyone who doesn't agree that our roads need improvement. The question comes down to how we fund the solutions.

In 2015, the Legislature voted to incrementally increase road funding over a period of years. Before we burden our hardworking residents with the governor's proposed tax increases, we need to let the previous road funding take full effect.

The governor's 45-cent gas tax increase would make our gas tax the highest in the nation by far. Asking Michigan drivers to pay approximately \$7 more per fill-up is an unnecessary burden.

LEGISLATOR Q&A

REPRESENTATIVE JULIE ALEXANDER



Name: Julie Alexander

District/counties: HD 64, Jackson County

Committees: House Agriculture (Chair), Transportation & Infrastructure, Energy, and Health Policy

Term #: 2nd

Previous public service: County Commissioner (2011-2016), Jackson County Parks, Board of Public Works, Land Bank Authority

What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan now?

The high rate of Michigan's automobile insurance! Law abiding citizens must purchase a policy at the highest rate in the nation. The unintended consequences of our no-fault auto insurance (that was created in 1973) with a medical policy that has no limits or fee schedules in place is creating an environment that is not conducive to moving our state forward. Families are being held hostage to a system that needs reform!

When running for office and at every office hours I host, that is the mandate I receive from my constituents: change Michigan law to lower our car insurance rates by making efforts to reform the existing plan. I am eager to embrace this mandate and appreciate our special House Task Force that is working diligently on this issue. Visit ReduceMiRatesNow.com for more information

As a former county commissioner, what do you think is the greatest challenge counties face in delivering services?

As the largest portion of the budget goes towards human resources, the rising rate of health care can become a major challenge. In addition, the promises made to the retirees and significant unfunded liabilities that many municipalities hold is an issue that must be addressed.

As chair of the house committee on agriculture, what do you think counties can do to support the industry?

First of all, counties need to understand the value and economic impact Michigan's agriculture communities have in our state. With over 300 commodities grown, we rank number two in the nation with the variety of products grown and raised. This industry brings an economic impact of \$104.7 billion dollars annually.

While Michigan's agricultural industry has a great deal to boast of, the challenges are significant for many family farms. As farmers are forced to leave the industry due to financial hardships, the face of our rural communities will be impacted.

Farmers are looking for new ways to bring income to their

farm by diversifying products and services they provide or create. Often this diversification requires special zoning or use permits to allow for new uses to help the family farm survive. It is important for county government to understand the reason for diversification and work with farmers to assist in maintaining farming opportunities.

Because you are a member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, you will have first-hand knowledge of the scope of the problem. What do you think is the most critical infrastructure issue facing the state?

A comprehensive funding plan that aligns to road and bridge conditions is needed for Michigan. Because this is an issue that has NOT been addressed in a proactive manner for too long, we are now placed in a catch-up mode.

While fair and adequate funding is crucial, there are several other conversations that need to take place: labor and workforce, materials to build roads, road innovations, warranties, time lines and asset management. Having better data about the conditions of roads and bridges in Michigan will help policy makers make better decisions about how to allocate scarce resources.

Collaborative efforts to repair water and sewer infrastructure at the same time road repair takes place leads to the best fiscally conservative outcomes. The financial challenges that local communities face should be considered with optional financing made available.

As a very driven member of the House, you have a passion for gathering information and furthering good public policy. What is the top priority you hope to accomplish during your term of office?

Serving is an incredible honor and something I take very seriously. While my first career was in the middle school classroom teaching, farming quickly became my new passion after I met my husband and said "I DO" at the altar. Being involved in professional organizations, our rural community, children's school and civic organizations, I have always respected those willing to get involved.

I have never run for an office to simply move an agenda or complete a specific task. Serving the people that elected me has always been my number one priority.

When I was asked if I would consider running for Jackson County Commission (2010-2016) I thought to myself, "Who do I want creating policy and spending my hard-earned tax dollars? If I don't step up, then who?" Serving six years on the Jackson County Commission created a sound foundation to understand how important it is to be accessible and listen to those that have elected you at the state level.

I am not afraid to ask the question (even if I already know the answer) because I value the discussion and dialogue that leads to good decision making.

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at the start of the year, but more sunshine means more road trips. As always, my goal each year is to visit half of the counties, thereby ensuring everyone receives an in-person MAC report every two years.

In 2019, MAC Board members are working to join me whenever they can for visits in their region; for example, Christian Marcus of Antrim County was able to join me for my visit to Kalkaska County in March. There's nothing better for conveying the value of MAC and our work than to have one county commissioner talk about it with another county commissioner.

As always, if you need any assistance or have questions about MAC's work in Lansing and beyond, please contact me or a member of the MAC staff. We are here to serve you.

Enjoy your spring!



Stephan W. Currie
Executive Director



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