



Saint Louis County

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NEWS RELEASE

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St. Louis County to invest \$119 million in roads and bridges in 2015-16

St. Louis County leaders today announced plans to invest \$119 million over the next two construction seasons to improve more than 420 miles of County roads and replace 47 deficient bridges. Funding for the projects will come from a combination of State Aid and Federal Highway funds, along with a \$40 million infusion from general obligation capital improvement bonds, which will be paid back using revenue from the Transportation Sales Tax.

The County Board gave initial approval to the bond sale at its meeting last week. The bond package will be structured so that the County will pay \$3.5 million in principle and interest annually for 15 years. Meanwhile, the Transportation Sales Tax is expected to raise approximately \$10.5 million per year. Revenue beyond what is needed for the bond payment – approximately \$7 million – will be used to fund additional transportation projects on a pay-as-you-go basis.

“With approximately 500 miles of County Roads rated in poor or very poor condition and 20 percent of our bridges deemed deficient, it’s clear we have major work ahead of us and we need a major investment to jump start the progress,” said Commissioner Steve Raukar, who chairs the Transportation Committee. “After careful analysis, we determined we will save significant money in the long run and make our roads safer by authorizing the bonds to get this work done now.”

“Construction costs can rise dramatically from year to year due to increases in materials and fuel costs,” said Public Works Director Jim Foldesi, “anywhere from two to three percent in a good year, to as much as 10 or 12 percent. So with construction costs relatively low right now, as are interest rates, it makes sense to do this work now. Additionally, performing preventative maintenance on particular roads now will save us from having to do much more costly reconstructive work on them in the future.”

The news conference involving County Commissioners and Public Works employees took place on Arlington Avenue in Duluth, a road that had been slated for a reclaim and overlay preservation project in 2016. However, by using Transportation Sales Tax revenue as a match for federal funding, the project was accelerated and work will be done this year. It is one of more than 100 projects the County plans to tackle in 2015, and one of more than 15 projects that will be funded in part by the Transportation Sales Tax.

Other projects of note in 2015 include:

- 38 miles of County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 16, from CSAH 5 across to the Lake County border will be resurfaced. This is a key route for loggers and others, connecting the Iron Range to the North Shore
- A six-mile stretch of the Martin Road will be resurfaced between Midway Road and Rice Lake Road
- Ash Street and 7th Avenue in Floodwood will see a complete reconstruction
- CSAH 103 (Mud Lake Road) will be resurfaced, along with new curbs and gutters between Trunk Highway 169 and 12th Avenue West in Virginia
- 8th Avenue in Ely will be reconstructed, between James Street and Camp Street

As busy as 2015 promises to be, the 2016 construction season will see even more progress. “For more complex projects, such as those involving bridge design, it takes more advance preparation time,” said Foldesi. “This extensive of a program is going to be a challenge for our team, but we proved in the aftermath of the flood that we can handle challenges. In fact, the next two years will be busier for us than the two years following the flood.”

A breakdown of how the \$119 million will be invested includes:

- \$48.4 million for pavement preservation projects, fixing 152 miles of the worst roads
- \$37.2 million to replace 47 deficient timber bridges
- \$12 million in complete reconstruction projects
- \$5.2 million on system-wide safety projects such as striping, intersection lighting, signing, traffic signals, railroad crossing signals and pavement markings
- \$11 million in preventative maintenance on 215 miles of roads
- \$2 million to strengthen and stabilize 28 miles of gravel roads through the Gravel Road Investment (GRIP) program
- \$1.9 million on culvert replacements
- \$1 million in trails, bicycle and pedestrian stand-alone projects (additional improvements for bikes and pedestrians are incorporated in other projects)

The St. Louis County Public Works Department is responsible for 3,000 miles of roads and more than 600 bridges. A map and the complete list of projects slated for 2015-16 can be found online at stlouiscountymn.gov/publicworks. To learn more about any particular construction project, or to sign up for email alerts, visit stlouiscountymn.gov/construction.

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