WHITMAN COUNTY ROADS

System Details
Issues
Challenges
Successes
Future Management Strategies
Goal:

To inform the WSTC about what Whitman County has done using locally sourced tax dollars rather than just asking for more State money.

There are similar stories for Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties.
Whitman County Road System

- ~1900 Centerline miles road
  ~424 miles paved
  ~1070 miles gravel
  ~400 miles seasonal local access
- ~251 Bridges (plus ~100 short span bridges/structures)
- ~8000 culverts (streams and drainage ditches)
- ~7500 signs and sign posts
Current County Issues

- Large Road System – Freight needs
- Lots of bridges – ageing infrastructure
- Larger Trucks and Farm Equipment
- Cost of New Maintenance Equipment
- Cost of maintenance materials
- Flat or declining revenue
- Dwindling reserves (example 2015-19)
- Dwindling trained workforce
Freight Routes/Grain Storage
Heavy road use seasonally - Agriculture
Old and deteriorating infrastructure
Failures - August 2020
Winter Operations - rural roads
Seasonal Closures to Heavy Traffic
Safety - Rural Road crashes
County Road Department - Challenges

- Flat or declining revenue vs. Inflation
- Maintenance Revenue - gas tax, property tax, CRAB Board
- Workforce - finding and retaining qualified people
- Road user perceptions (i.e., snow removal & grading gravel)
- Complaint Driven Maintenance
- Depleted Reserves and Cash Flow
- Insufficient funds for local match on projects
- Insufficient funds for emergencies
Revenue vs. Buying Power

Buying Power Comparison - $1,000,000 in year 2000

Note: Construction inflation normally outpaces the CPI
County Road Fund - Reserves

County Road Fund Reserve

Jan-07 to Sep-19
County Successes

- Pavement Management – Increased pavement ratings
  - Countywide: 2009 PCI = 59  2018 PCI = 82
- Bridge replacements (graph over time)
  - Wood Bridge Inventory: 92 in 2001, 22 in 2020
- Improved wages – retaining more qualified people.
  - Improved wages, WC is no longer the lowest wages in region.
- Property tax – lid levy lift 2019 ($1.46 to $2.25)
  - 2019 Voter Approved Lid Levy Lift, addition $1.4 M annually
- All Weather/Season Road System
Whitman County Bridge Replacements
Whitman County roads are funded through two sources, property tax and gas tax. Property tax is collected from residents of the unincorporated areas of the county. Gas tax is collected statewide, and a portion is allocated to Whitman County for paved roads. Both sources can be used only for road maintenance, preservation, and construction. For the last 10 plus years, the revenue sources have grown by less than 1 percent per year, and costs have escalated at 3 to 5 percent per year. The Road Fund reserve balance has been dropping steadily since 2016, which means expenditures have been greater than revenues for 3 years now.
Levy Lid Proposal

- The proposal:
  - Current Levy Rate: $1.4525 per $1000 of assessed value
  - Proposed Levy Rate: $2.25 per $1000 of assessed value
  - Single levy increase used for future assessments
  - Example: $200,000 home gets $159.50 annual increase in property tax
    Annual revenue increase to the road department: $1,424,496
Proposed uses of new revenue

- **$300k** – annual purchase of additional gravel to be placed on rural gravel roads.
- **$250k** – hiring new personnel to supplement existing road maintenance staff.
- **$150k** – annual lease or loan cost to purchase approximately 2 new graders.
- **$100k** – annual cost for culvert and drainage structure replacements countywide.
- **$100k** – annual increase in roadside ditch cleaning.
- **$250k** – annual increase to current chipseal program, paved road patching, and improvements to the old concrete roads.
- **$250k** – miscellaneous winter operations and other cost increases.
All Weather/Season Roads
Road Construction - All season/weather
County Future Management Strategies

- Performance Based Maintenance rather than complaint based.
- Revenues - Strive to at least keep up with inflation.
- Gas Tax Increases - seek parity for local roads maintenance and preservation.
- Future RUC Revenues - seek parity for local roads maintenance and preservation.
- Equipment Management – strategic equipment purchases vs leases and rentals. Reduce number of pieces owned.
- Improved training for maintenance equipment operators, based on national training standards.
- Improved road maintenance for safety (ie local roads safety plan).
Performance based gravel road Maintenance
Thank You,
Mark Storey, Whitman County Engineer