PALOUSE REGION
RURAL COUNTY ROADS

System Details
Issues
Challenges
Successes
Future Management Strategies
Goal:

To help inform the WSTC

Where have we been
Where are we today
Where are we headed
What does the rural system look like?

- ~1900 Centerline miles road
  ~400 miles paved
  ~1100 miles gravel
  ~400 miles seasonal local access (dirt)
- ~250 NBIS Bridges
- Plus about 100 short span bridges/structures
- ~8000 culverts (streams and drainage ditches)
- ~7500 signs and sign posts
- Personnel and Equipment
Paved Roads
Unpaved Roads
Bridges - New and Old
Rural County Road Issues

- Large Road System - Freight needs
- Lots of bridges - aging infrastructure
- Larger Trucks and Larger Farm Equipment
- Cost of Equipment & Materials
- Nationwide Labor Shortage
- Road User Expectations
- Funding Reliability: Flat or Declining
  - Property Tax, Gas Tax, future RUC
Failures - August 2020
Winter Operations - rural roads
Seasonal Closures to Heavy Traffic
Safety – Rural Road crashes
County Road Department - Challenges

- Workforce – National Shortage, local crisis.
- Materials availability and affordability – rock, asphalt
- Constituency attitudes – COVID Burnout
- Elected officials focus on general fund issues - rightly so
- Legislators - fund State roads, but very little for local roads
- Funding tools not well suited to rural areas
- Flat or declining revenue vs. Inflation
Revenue vs. Buying Power

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

Note: Construction inflation normally outpaces the CPI
County Successes - WC only

- Preservation Focus – 30% Increased pavement ratings over 10 years
- Bridge replacements (graph over time)
  - Wood Bridge Inventory: 92 in 2001, 18 at end of 2022.
  - No bridges have qualified for federal bridge money in 10 yrs.
- Improved wages – retaining more qualified people.
  - Improved wages, WC is no longer the lowest wages in region. Federal money is allowing for retention incentives.
- Property tax – lid levy lift 2020 ($1.46 to $2.25)
  - 2019 Voter Approved Lid Levy Lift, additional $1.4 M annually
- CRAB Funding – more preservation $$
Property Tax - Levy Lid Lift 2020

- Generated an additional $1.4M annually,
  - additional gravel to be placed on rural gravel roads.
  - new personnel
  - Some new equipment
  - culvert and drainage structure replacements countywide
  - roadside ditch cleaning
  - increase to current chipseal program, paved road patching, and improvements to the old concrete roads
  - winter operations and other cost increases.
Here was my Thoughts 2 years ago: 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 with the state for local roads maintenance and preservation.
- Future RUC Revenues - seek parity for local roads maintenance and preservation.
- Better Equipment Management - strategic equipment purchases.
- Improved training for maintenance equipment operators.
- Improved road maintenance for safety (ie local roads safety plan).
Upcoming Challenges

- **Trained Workforce - CDL drivers/operators**
- **Impacts to employees and tough decisions for managers:**
  - Changing COVID guidance and mandates
  - Masking, distancing, quarantining, mandates – are we really done?
- **Contingency planning (reductions in workforce)**
- **Ongoing turnover and hiring**
  - Engineering Personnel
  - Complex and rushed collective bargaining
  - Prolonged stress and fatigue
- **Retention Incentives**
- **Materials availability**
- **Revenues and Wage Inflation**
Thank You,
Mark Storey, Whitman County