



WASHINGTON STATE

# COUNTY ROAD ADMINISTRATION BOARD



# 2024

**LEGISLATIVE  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
& REQUESTS**

### ***Want to learn more?***

*Specific, accounting-level details for these three requests were provided at the November 2023 Joint Transportation Committee meeting and can be found on our website at [crab.wa.gov/government-affairs](http://crab.wa.gov/government-affairs).*

# RECOMMIT TO THE HISTORIC STATE AND COUNTY PARTNERSHIP

## When you think of transportation, do you think WSDOT?

What you might not know, is that the majority of public roads in Washington are not state or city, but county roads – 59% of them! It is a complex network that includes bridges, ferries, sidewalks, bike lanes, streetlights, and other infrastructure in a diverse range of rural and urban environments. It is managed by 39 county road departments. At the County Road Administration Board (CRAB), we oversee their compliance with state-mandated laws, rules, and performance standards, ensuring their success and accountability

**RECOGNIZE COUNTY ROADS ARE A CRITICAL PART OF THE BIG PICTURE FOR TRANSPORTATION AND BE SURE TO INCLUDE REPRESENTATIVE VOICES, SUCH AS CRAB, IN PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING AT THE STATE LEVEL.**

**Washington State has always looked at counties and their road systems as being a partnership, and even spelled out counties' role as an "agent of the state" in statute. While that partnership has been mutually beneficial, it has changed over time, with more of the burden being placed on the counties.**

This state/county partnership for road operations and maintenance is funded by the state via a portion of the Motor Vehicle Fuel Tax and by the counties via property taxes and road levies. However, in the face of historic construction materials and labor costs since 2010, the increase in contributed resources has been lopsided.

On the *state* side, despite a significant 32% increase in gas tax revenues, MVFT direct distributions have supported a flat 15% of a county's road fund with MVFT-funded grant programs remaining stagnant at 4-5%. On the *county* side, road levies that supported 45% of a county's road fund in 2010 on average are now supporting 53%.

As a result, **the need for increased revenue has been shouldered by the counties through road levy increases and reduced service levels on the county road system.**

**INCREASE STATE SUPPORT OF COUNTY ROADS THROUGH DIRECT DISTRIBUTIONS TO COUNTIES AND INCREASED FUNDING TO CRAB'S GRANT PROGRAMS.**

*State legislators, county officials, engineers and our staff visiting the Bigelow Gulch corridor construction site in Spokane County during our October 2023 project tour.*



*“Lincoln County needs to be able to find funding for local access roads. Many of our local access paved roads are distressed and deteriorated without a funding source; inflation and fuel costs make it nearly impossible to maintain these roads. The rural counties continue to fight to do more with less every year.”*

*- David Orvis,  
Lincoln County  
Public Works Director*

But what if the counties HAD received that same 32% increase to their portion of the MVFT?

**Counties would have received an additional \$50 million per year via direct distributions and \$20 million per year via grant programs for the operation, maintenance, and preservation of the State’s county road system.**

The increase would have helped restore the partnership between the counties and the state with the road levy supporting 50% of the road fund and MVFT supporting approximately 25%, with the balance coming from federal grants, real estate excise tax, impact fees and other local revenue options.

## **RESTORE THE STATE’S INTENDED 50/50 PARTNERSHIP WITH COUNTIES IN PRESERVING COUNTY ARTERIAL AND COLLECTOR ROADS WITH AN ADDITIONAL \$12 MILLION/BIENNIUM INVESTMENT THROUGH THE CAPP PROGRAM.**

Another way to look at the historic partnership between the counties and the State is through the lens of the County Arterial Preservation Program (CAPP), designed for the preservation of arterial and collector roads.

**When it was created in 1990 as a part of a 5-cent gas tax increase, the Legislature designed CAPP to cover roughly 50% of the cost of performing preservation work on these roads.** However, the costs of road construction and preservation have risen dramatically; counties are only able to resurface less than a third of the road miles they could have with the same budget in 1990.

While funding boosts from the Connecting Washington and Move Ahead Washington revenue packages were helpful, the big picture is that the state’s share in the cost of preserving these essential roads has dropped to 41%, transferring the burden to counties. **To restore the 50/50 partnership as it was intended, the Legislature needs to provide an additional \$12 million/biennium to this critical program.**

Average demand is historically **THREE TIMES** higher than CAPP can support and this year was no exception with only \$30.1 million available for \$72.4 million of critical projects.

## **EVALUATE EXISTING TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS TO ENSURE RESOURCES ARE EFFECTIVE, COMPREHENSIVE, EFFICIENT AND BEING DIRECTED TO THE AREAS OF GREATEST NEED.**

Beyond specific programs; **there are holes in the multi-faceted county transportation system that do not currently qualify for existing funding programs and need to be addressed by the state.** Some examples include:

- **Local access roads** are ineligible for CAPP and RAP funding
- **Short span bridges** (under 20’) are ineligible for Federal Bridge Funding; crippling fish passage efforts
- Census boundaries can leave **rural areas officially designated urban** in a funding gap where they are not eligible for either Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) or CRAB programs
- **Gravel roads** are ineligible for the CAPP program
- County roads can be “**orphaned**” in the annexation process between municipalities
- Portions of the grandfathered in road system are trapped in **jurisdictional “doughnut holes”** where it is logistically difficult to service them



# SUPPORT WHAT WE BUILD: INVEST IN PRESERVATION & MAINTENANCE

Our state’s preservation and maintenance disinvestments are unsustainable. Continuing to drive resources into capital projects while turning a blind eye to compounding, deferred maintenance is equivalent to remodeling a kitchen when the whole roof is leaking.

“[Our] crews own the work; this is their roadway. They take a huge amount of pride in ownership; they live and drive on these roads every day... To watch an asset that [our funding partners] paid millions for decay because we don’t have the resources to take care of it feels terrible. We want to take care of these roads.”

- Matt Zarecor, PE  
Spokane County

## FULLY INVEST IN THE PRESERVATION AND MAINTENANCE NEEDS OF COUNTY ROADS AND THE RURAL ARTERIAL AND COUNTY ARTERIAL PRESERVATION PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT THOSE EFFORTS.

Washington needs to do the hard work of developing a long-term plan for maintaining assets, funding the preservation backlog, and not worsening the problem with additional unfunded mandates.

The Legislature already has proven and efficient tools at its disposal to do so. Among them, the high demand Rural Arterial Program and the County Arterial Preservation Program administered by CRAB address critical preservation and maintenance needs in the- state.

## EXPAND EXISTING FUNDING SOURCES SUCH AS THE CLIMATE COMMITMENT ACT AND INDEXING THE MOTOR VEHICLE FUEL TAX.

Unfortunately, over the past three decades revenues have not kept pace with inflation and the demand for these programs.

**The Legislature needs to reassess how current revenue sources are being distributed for the MVFT and consider utilizing other existing revenue sources such as the Carbon Fee to address these shortfalls.**

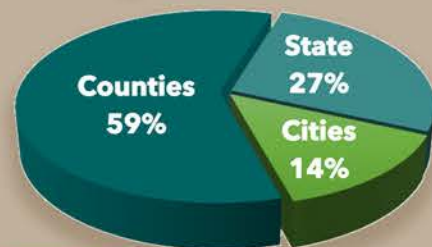
County roads are primarily funded by local property taxes and a portion of the Motor Vehicle Fuel Tax (MVFT).

However, property taxes have been capped at a 1% annual increase since 2007 and the county portion of the MVFT tax has remained nearly stagnant. In fact, since 1999, while the state has more than doubled (23 cents to 49 cents) its own portion of the MVFT, the county share has increased by mere ½ cent.

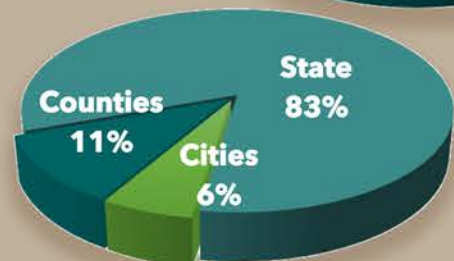
### A disproportionate piece of the MVFT pie...

...is the biggest contributing factor to the **\$1.23 billion transportation funding gap** that counties are facing EACH YEAR to maintain our roads.

Share of Washington Roads



Share of MVFT



**For example, many decision-makers do not realize that the RAP Program, which was established with a funding source of 2.5363% of the gas tax in 1990, has been overlooked during all seven gas tax increases that have occurred since.**

Had the 2.5363% rate simply been applied to the new tax increase...

**...It would have resulted in \$256.8 million over the last 20 years that would have been invested into timely preservation and maintenance,** reducing the costs to counties and the state over the lifetime of those roads.

**...102+ critical RAP projects could have been completed;** it would have been a cost-effective, low-overhead way to put a dent in the most critical projects in the state's project backlog (a current study estimates the cost of deferred maintenance on WA county roads at \$4.7 to 6.3 billion).

## EXPLORE NEW AND ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES SUCH AS THE ROAD USAGE CHARGE.

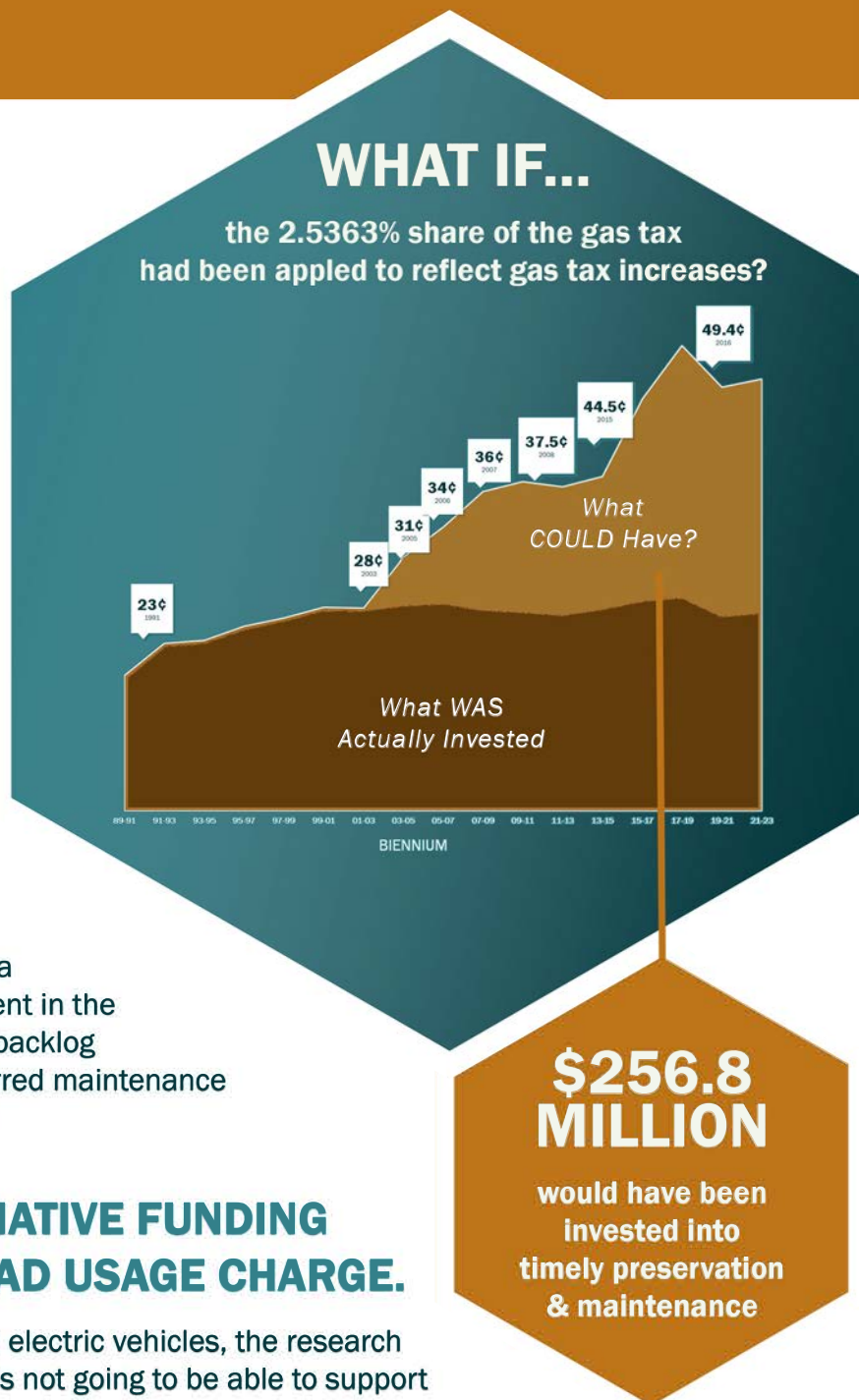
With the trend toward higher efficiency and electric vehicles, the research paints a clear picture that the MVFT alone is not going to be able to support transportation funding in the future.

The Legislature must identify new revenue sources to replace the declining gas tax, ensuring that the change in funding method is revenue-neutral or increased for counties and the County Road Administration Board. **As owners of 60% of the system, acting as agents of the state, the state has a duty to counties in ensuring they are adequately supported and funded.**

Whether it be new revenue, or expanding the availability of existing revenues, the Legislature must do more for counties. The decades-long underinvestment by the state in the county road system is unsustainable and risks the safety and health of our road systems and the residents who utilize them. The state must do more to reinvest in its partnership with the counties so that we ensure all Washingtonians have safe, reliable roads, now and in the future.



*The agency is directed by law to provide the Legislature with recommendations for improving the administration of county road programs. This document will summarize our ideas and highest priority proposals for addressing the present transportation challenges in Washington.*





## PRIORITIZE SAFETY ON OUR ROADS

Since 2010, roads benefiting from the RAP Program have seen a dramatic

**56%**

decrease in collisions and a 32% reduction in serious injury/fatality collisions!

**The county road system is not only the largest in the state, but also the most dangerous.** Despite a pandemic-driven reduction in vehicle miles traveled, fatal and serious injury crashes continued to rise 12% in 2017-2021. During that time, county road users were 88% more likely to be involved in a fatal collision than on a city street and 92% more likely than on a state highway.

### INCREASE FUNDING TO THE RURAL ARTERIAL PROGRAM, A PROVEN WAY TO SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE SAFETY ON COUNTY ROADS.

As Washington works toward the goal of Target Zero, the data is clear that most crashes on county roads occur on rural, two-lane roadways. The RAP Program is specifically designed to assist counties with addressing these priority projects on a competitive basis, with safety being one of the top scoring criteria.

Combined with CRAB's exemplary transparency and remarkably low 3.1% grant program administrative overhead, the RAP Program is a high ROI means of producing real results in the county road system – not bureaucracy and process bloat.

#### How do preservation and maintenance projects directly impact fatality collisions?

By prioritizing investments in countermeasures related to rural, run-off-the-road incidents.

Studies show the most common Target Zero factor for fatality crashes is run-off-the-road, averaging 35-40% of reported crashes. Road projects can eliminate known safety hazards or, if a hazard cannot be removed, construct countermeasures such as guardrails or warning signage. Improvements to road geometry (banking, curves, narrow lanes, lack of shoulders, sight lines) and surface conditions (bumps, cracks, potholes, visible delineation, reflectors) give vehicles a better chance of staying on the road, especially in hazardous conditions. It is by this multi-pronged approach to improvements that roads are made safer for the movement of people and freight.

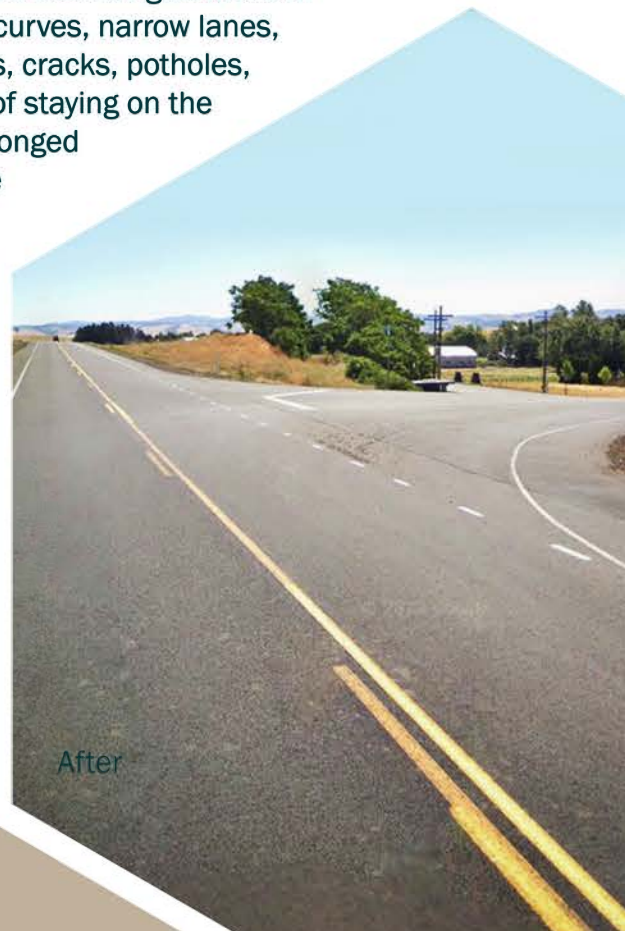


Before

#### The Geometry of Safety

Collisions on county roads are **TWICE** as likely to be fatal or serious compared to those occurring on state highways.

Due in part to poor road geometry, this stretch of Mill Creek Road surrounding a Y-shaped intersection had seen 45 collisions since 2009. In June 2023, the road was redesigned by Walla Walla County and reconstructed into a T-shape intersection with widened shoulders for improved safety and visibility and an improved clear zone.



After

## **PRIORITIZE A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO SAFETY AND RECOGNIZE THE KEY ROLE PLAYED BY COUNTIES IN SUCCESS.**

**Safety does not exist in a vacuum and Washington needs to identify and address the holes in our road system safety net that are contributing to the broader challenges in the state.** For example, no funding is currently available for ADA accommodations such as sidewalks, curbs and crosswalks on rural roads. Additionally, a lack of funding for local access roads further exacerbates health disparities and inequities for vulnerable populations and tribes. Safety is always of primary concern for counties and they are often on the frontlines of tangibly addressing controllable safety factors. However, the resources available to tackle safety issues and correct them continues to significantly lag behind the need.

*"If our transportation network cannot safely and efficiently support commerce, we cannot succeed."*

*Washington State  
Senator Mike Padden*

## **BREAK DOWN BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP ACROSS JURISDICTIONS IN WASHINGTON.**

Washington's residents rarely know or care where invisible jurisdictional lines are as they exit a state highway, navigate city streets and travel across a county road – they just expect the transportation system to get them safely and efficiently where they need to go. **Washington needs to explore ways to break down silos and promote a team approach to managing our transportation system.** Our agency is committed to these efforts and is leading by example with our Federal Facilitator Pilot Program, which will benefit multiple jurisdictions.

## **SUPPORT THE WTSC AND ITS PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO KEEP OUR ROADS SAFE.**

Safety challenges are felt across all jurisdictions of the Washington's transportation system and our partners at the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) have identified systemic factors and ways to address them.

**What does the safety data look like in YOUR legislative district?**

**Check out our interactive dashboard to take a look!**



*The agency is directed by law to provide the Legislature with recommendations for improving the administration of county road programs. This document will summarize our ideas and highest priority proposals for addressing the present transportation challenges in Washington.*



*The Washington State  
County Road Administration Board  
is a unique, innovative agency that  
ensures the success and accountability  
of the state's 39 county road departments.  
The agency administers transportation  
funds, collects and certifies statewide data,  
and provides support to reach compliance  
requirements with engineering  
training, cutting-edge  
technology, mentorship  
and support.*



**Our agency offers a variety of resources and services for legislative and government staff.  
Please reach out to us with any inquiries at [crab.wa.gov/government-affairs](https://crab.wa.gov/government-affairs)  
or by phone at 360.753.5989.**