

Federal stimulus funding will help some but can't cover many road repairs, says Flint Journal letter writer

by Flint Journal reader

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Since the first of the year, I have been making the rounds of township board meetings to introduce myself to the many newly elected officials and to discuss our common concerns relating to roads and bridges in Genesee County.

One question I have encountered in nearly every meeting is also the same one reflected in the comments of letter writer Denise Smith of Flint Township [["Letter writer: West Maple Avenue needs repairs,"](#) Your Letters, April 3]. She states that "It would be very, very much appreciated if the Road Commission and the federal government would spend the stimulus money where it is needed much more by considering road repairs to West Maple Avenue."

While I cannot argue that West Maple Avenue, like many local roads, is not in need of maintenance, I would like to make two points. First, it is important to understand that restrictions in the federal stimulus legislation limit stimulus funding to federal-aid-eligible roads only, meaning that the section of Maple Avenue in question, and all county local roads, are not eligible for stimulus funding. Nor are maintenance activities eligible -- on any road. And secondly, the Michigan Transportation Fund, which is the funding source for maintenance activities on county local roads, is increasingly inadequate to the task, decreasing another 4.77 percent this year.

The stimulus funding does not have as its principal goal the execution of an infrastructure repair program. Rather, it is a jobs-creation program. Its main goal is to get people working and do so as quickly as possible. And while there are many components to the legislation, for transportation projects speed meant using the federal aid funding procedures already in place, with their efficiencies and restrictions. One restriction is that only federal-aid-eligible roads qualify for funding. This means only county primary roads and city major streets. The section of Maple Avenue in question is a county local road and therefore not eligible for stimulus funding. Additionally, maintenance activities on any road are ineligible.

The MTF, from which all road agencies in Michigan receive money for road maintenance activities, will be decreased by 4.88 percent from 2008-2009 fiscal year level -- which was itself down nearly 4 percent from 2007. This means that the Road Commission will have \$1 million less to spend on road maintenance in 2009 than in 2008 -- and almost \$2 million less than in 2007.

MTF revenues are decreasing annually while the roads crumble more every day. The good news is that there does seem to be some recognition of this in Lansing. But until the amount of funding for road maintenance is increased, road agencies will be forced to prioritize routine services to

local roads, choosing among the various necessary activities based upon ensuring the safety of the public.

The bottom line is that the stimulus money, while definitely a shot in the arm, amounts to only about one year's federal aid allocation and will not have a significant impact on the primary roads in Genesee County. And it will unfortunately have no impact on the maintenance of the local roads, including West Maple Avenue, that are not eligible for funding. In fact, until funding for road maintenance is increased to the point that road agencies have adequate resources to perform needed maintenance, we can and should expect to see continual deterioration of roads in Michigan.

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