

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
WORK SESSION HELD ON
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2025**

A work session of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors was held on Friday, February 7, 2025, at 12:30 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Frank Antenori, Chairman; Tom Crosby, Vice-Chairman; Kathleen L. Gomez, Supervisor

Staff Present: Sharon Gilman, Interim County Administrator
Joe Casey, Interim Deputy County Administrator
Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board

Attendees: Jackie Watkins, Engineering and Natural Resources Director
Jason Faccio, Public Works Director
Fred Nixon, Public Works Highway Superintendent
Joaquin Solis, Assistant Director of Highway & Floodplain

Chairman Antenori called the meeting to order at 12:35 p.m.

ANY ITEM ON THIS AGENDA IS OPEN FOR DISCUSSION

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Board of Supervisors

1. Discussion and possible direction regarding Public Works and Engineering and Natural Resources Departments current operations, ongoing projects, and future initiatives.

Joe Casey, Interim Deputy County Administrator, introduced a discussion on the county's road management approach, covering the methods for adding and removing roads, the various road types, and seeking the board's direction on future maintenance philosophy.

Jackie Watkins, Engineering and Natural Resources Director, presented this item using a PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Watkins provided an overview of the different types of roads in Cochise County, including state highways managed by ADOT, local agency roads in incorporated areas, and various categories of county roads. The county maintains about 1,400 miles of roads, while approximately 3,680 miles remain non-county maintained, many of which originated from old subdivision plats or unregulated lot splits. Additionally, 431 miles of dirt roads are classified as primitive under state law, requiring them to have been opened before June 13, 1990.

Jason Faccio, Public Works Director, explained that the county blades primitive roads about twice a year, with some receiving more frequent maintenance if they provide access to public lands. Roads like Middle March, Turkey Creek, Davis Road, and Leslie Canyon are maintained more often, sometimes up to three or four times a year, to ensure accessibility.

The Board and staff discussed road maintenance challenges, particularly regarding

public lands access and the impact of off-road vehicles on roads. While the county does not receive direct funding from the Forest Service for blading these roads, they maintain them more frequently to ensure accessibility. Mr. Faccio stated staffing changes have led to less experienced graders, but efforts are underway to train new personnel and improve road conditions. The discussion also touched on the designation of primitive roads, liability concerns, and the significant costs involved in upgrading non-maintained roads to county-maintained status.

The Board and staff discussed the county's GIS maps for maintained roads are available online, with color-coded lines indicating paved, dirt, and primitive roads, while white lines represent non-county-maintained roads. A discussion arose about unused roads, such as those north of the Douglas golf course, where some graded roads see little to no traffic and are primarily used for illegal dumping. Staff confirmed that roads with minimal or no residential use can be considered for removal from county maintenance, following established criteria outlined in the county's road policy.

The Board and staff discussed funding sources for road maintenance, including Highway User Revenue Funds (HURF) and local taxes like gas, sales, or property taxes, noting that HURF tax revenue is low due to Arizona's low gas tax rate. The conversation also covered road maintenance issues, such as roads in subdivisions with little or no growth, and the possibility of using chip sealing and asphalt millings to improve roads like Ronald Reagan Way. Staff explored the process for adding and improving roads, which involves subdivision plats, public-private partnerships, and strict legal limitations on spending public funds for road projects.

Chairman Antenori and staff discussed exploring ways to fund road improvements, including potential cost-saving measures, general fund revenue, and creating temporary agreements for road maintenance in underdeveloped areas. They also considered the possibility of developing lower-standard roads, such as Grade B roads, which could be more cost-effective but still meet safety requirements. The discussion touched on the challenges of road design standards, particularly with limited funding, and the legal complexities involved in road engineering, including the need for a statutory fix to allow for more flexible engineering approaches for certain county roads. Additionally, staff reviewed existing options like public-private partnerships for road improvement and the potential use of asphalt or chip seal.

Ms. Watkins explained that for a road to be declared a County highway, a petition must be submitted to the Board for approval. If accepted, the County engineer surveys the route, acquires necessary right-of-way deeds, and conducts an engineering report. The road must meet a certain standard, which can influence the cost, though low-volume roads with minimal drainage needs might cost around \$300,000 per mile, with a significant portion of the cost often going toward drainage and raising the road for proper grading.

Ms. Watkins explained the road add/drop process, referencing Resolution 19-01, which allows roads to be dropped from maintenance if they have less than 20 daily traffic, encroachments in the right-of-way, or if the road users no longer want it maintained. She stated the Board has the authority to change this resolution, with the added consideration that there are limits on how many roads can be added or dropped based on available funds and current maintained road mileage.

Mr. Casey stated that they have been working on a list of roads based on engineering recommendations, prioritizing the top 20 roads according to factors like traffic count and other relevant criteria. He stated the goal is to present this list to the Board for review and recommendations on road maintenance priorities.

Mr. Faccio explained that the county is implementing a new road management technology, which will be mounted on seven trucks to provide real-time pavement performance analytics. He stated the system would measure the Pavement Condition Index (PCI), track deterioration, and produce detailed maps with color coding (green, yellow, red) to indicate road conditions. It will also provide imagery to help with identifying issues like cracks or potholes, and assist engineering in evaluating the best and most cost-effective repairs.

In response to the Board, Mr. Faccio explained that the road score ranges from 0 to 100, with 100 being perfect and lower scores indicating poorer road conditions. For roads with scores as low as 20 or 30, a chip seal may not be effective if the base is already damaged. He clarified that milling can be useful for small repairs, such as filling potholes, but the effectiveness depends on the road's condition and base.

The Board discussed a potential plan for temporarily designating a road as county-maintained, with maintenance subject to the current rotation but lasting longer until a subdivision can establish a Road Improvement District (RID). The agreement would require residents to pay for road maintenance and commit to forming an RID as part of the contract. This agreement would be formalized through a covenant or similar condition in the subdivision, and over time, as more residents move in, the maintenance costs could be reduced. After the three-year temporary period, responsibility for the road would revert to the subdivision, leaving residents to manage ongoing maintenance.

The Board and staff discussed the process of Road Improvement Districts (RIDs) and Road Improvement and Maintenance Districts (RIMDs), where residents organize to fund, improve, and maintain their roads. In an effort to address challenges with subdivisions and road development, Chairman Antenori proposed a potential solution involving bonds, where developers would put up a bond to cover road costs in case they do not fulfill their development obligations. Additionally, the conversation shifted to concerns over the enforcement of agreements with solar farm developments and the follow-through on promises made by developers, such as tree planting and fencing. Staff will work to provide more clarity on how planning, zoning, and development services handle such issues and explore potential changes in the approval process to ensure better accountability.

The Board and staff discussed several ongoing and upcoming road projects, including the challenges of managing and funding infrastructure improvements. Chairman Antenori emphasized the importance of advocating for highway improvements, especially regarding the Port of Entry and surrounding roads, and the need to collaborate with elected officials to secure federal funding for necessary infrastructure. The Board would like to seek funding through a federal block grant system to bypass bureaucracy and focus on road improvements, particularly on critical routes like 191, which could facilitate economic development. The Board acknowledged the complexity of the situation and the importance of unified advocacy to ensure sufficient funding and support for these vital projects.

Chairman Antenori adjourned the meeting at 1:51 p.m.

APPROVED:

Frank Antenori, Chairman

ATTEST:

Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board