



State of Oregon
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January 26, 2023

Regarding the State Transportation Block Grant (STBG) HB2101:

Following is a breakdown of what the STBG funds have helped Wallowa County's Road Department accomplish in the past three and a half years.

2019 – Purchase of a Broce self-propelled broom. This has sped up our asphalt roadway spring cleaning and post-wind event clean-up. The ease of cleaning asphalt by a single employee makes for safer driving conditions from spring through fall and has allowed more gravel to be applied at high traffic intersections, hills and curves during winter operations, reducing accidents and keeping traffic moving. We work with city and state agencies to allow them the use of our machine to complete their jobs more quickly and help keep their operating costs down. The use of this machine allows local agencies to stretch their funding to get more repairs and other work done.

2020 – Assist with installment of a new county asphalt plant. Producing asphalt locally cuts logistic costs and provides a more pliable product that leads to a smoother lay-down operation and better quality final product. This allows Wallowa County to help local and state agencies save money or cover more asphalt areas for the same cost. Wallowa County can start work on the worst roads by laying down a good mat. We can then implement a chip seal program to provide quality surfacing and better longevity of the asphalt (permanent surfacing) with minimal maintenance. A new mat with two chip seal treatments has an 18 to 25 year life span.

2021 - Purchase of a Caterpillar telehandler. The vast capabilities of the telehandler allow us to implement a safety culture to prevent injuries. It speeds up bridge re-decking by several days, keeping road closures to a minimum. It also handles sheeting in a much safer manner than the old clamp method and keeps the crew out of dangerous pinch/crush points. Using it at the asphalt plant reduces down time and allows for high-reach work to be done safely.

2022 – Purchase of an asphalt zipper grinder. The zipper allows Wallowa County to grind and use asphalt as gravel on substandard asphalt roads. This keeps money already spent on those stretches of road in place and saves on hauling in new rock. This also allows us to make smooth sections of repair instead of a rougher overlay or patch work. It also helps the County and other local agencies do culvert, water and sewer line replacements with smooth section patches.

Using STBG funds for these purchases and projects, Wallowa County now has the right equipment for our future projects. Future STBG monies will buy the materials (asphalt, gravel) to start getting Wallowa County's roads back into good shape for easier and more cost effective maintenance. For years, minimal monies were expended just to maintain roads at the lowest

possible standards. In the long run, utilizing these new tools, maintenance costs and time to maintain these roads will go down, allowing time and materials to keep improving conditions on these important but outlying roads. As we gain on improvements with this system, we can look to bigger projects that currently require grants to fund. As we have less reliance on these grants, we can step back from competing for them, freeing up more funding for other counties that need funding for their projects. We can become a maintenance crew, rather than first responders trying to deal with daily catastrophes.

The STBG program is very important to those of us who are in Frontier Counties. Our budgets are tight, but we still have to provide safe travel routes for the public who like to visit and enjoy Northeast Oregon and our rural beauty. Bringing our roads up to standard is also a benefit to emergency crews who protect private investments (land, livestock, homes) from our ever increasing mega-fires.

If the STBG program is reduced or abandoned completely, it will decrease the ability of the county to complete the upgrading of our road system and mor the funding burden to already overloaded funding streams. Highly competitive grants will become the norm as the 36 Oregon counties are all forced to try to get funding for maintenance. Roadway quality will drop even lower than it is currently. This will lead to a chain reaction involving first responders, law enforcement and our Frontier Medical Facilities as accidents increase due to poor infrastructure. We must find a balance. Substantial reduction or removing the STBG funding streams altogether is not the answer.

Sincerely,

Brandon Tanzey
Wallowa County Road Supervisor

Susan Roberts, Commissioner
Wallowa County