

Intercounty Coordinating Committee (ICC)
December 19, 2005
UW-Extension, Jefferson County Office
Jefferson, Wisconsin

Introductory Business

Call to Order – Vice Chair Orrin Helmer called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Attendance

John Tramburg and Sue Martin, Columbia County; Russell Kottke and Dave Neuendorf, Dodge County; Orrin Helmer, Dan Priske and Jeff Hoffman, Green Lake County; Sharon Schmeling, Steve Grabow, Steve Nass, and Gary Petak, Jefferson County; Kathy Schauf and Halsey Sprecher, Sauk County. Also present were: Michelle Koehler, Sauk County; Steven Muenow, Sauk County Highway Commissioner; T.O. Boge, Columbia County Assistant Highway Commissioner; Dennis Helihg, Jefferson County Economic Development Corporation; Don Reese, Jefferson County Highway Committee Chair; Matt Stohr, Wisconsin Counties Association; Phil Restow, Jefferson County Corporation Counsel; Bill Kern, Jefferson County Highway Commissioner; Bill Buglass, Payne & Dolan; and Steve Nass, 31st State Assembly District Representative.

Certification of Open Meeting Notice

The Secretary confirmed that the requirements of the Wisconsin open meeting law were met.

Adoption of Agenda

Motion by Dodge County, second by Columbia County to approve the agenda. Motion approved.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Sauk County, second by Jefferson to approve the minutes of the November 21, 2005 meeting of the Intercounty Coordinating Committee. Motion approved.

Reports from Visiting Officials

State Assembly Representative Steve Nass

- Many bills have gone through
- The Piers Bill has been significant
- Lowering the hunting age has been proposed
- Snowmobile speed limits are under consideration
- Bigger Issues:
 - County Nursing Home Bill went through Assembly; money will stay with County nursing homes
 - Eliminate gas tax indexing
 - Ethanol Mandate in gasoline – if signed would go into effect in Fall 2006
 - Deficit – still a looming issue. Financial situation may be a bit better
- Next Session
 - Focus could be on Education and Health Insurance

WCA – Matt Stohr (Transportation and Land Use Issues Focus)

- Gas Tax Index Issue – Repeals automatic increase which had been implemented in 1985 to take politics out of the revenue stream. WCA has concerns about removing this source of increase in the revenue stream. WCA had suggested repealing the “minimum mark-up” requirement of 9% as a better alternative. WCA thinks the Governor will sign the bill. Hoping that federal government doesn’t change allocations as a result.

- Pot Hole Bill made it through the Assembly. WCA would like a hearing scheduled in the Senate as soon as possible. The bill had been vetoed by the Governor.
- Assembly Bill 802/Intergovernmental Transfer Bill passed the Assembly unanimously. This bill is important to retain federal reimbursement to public, County nursing homes.
- Liability Shield Bill was approved and signed. Courts must consider costs of in-home/out-of-home costs for developmentally disabled.
- Department of Transportation has appropriated \$16 million more to counties/local government. This is a great victory for counties.

Q & A and Open Discussion

Q: Why did the legislature go after indexing rather than the minimum mark-up?

A: *The legislature will likely go after the minimum mark-up next.*

Comment: Jefferson County is spending \$500,000 in Courthouse security. Wonder how conceal and carry will help Jefferson County since it adds to security problems. Will the County need a secure safe for checking guns?

A: *The Bill may have exceptions for public buildings.*

Comment: There may be efforts to “lock-in” the Transportation Fund revenue to make sure funds cannot be transferred for other purposes. WCA is against transferring money out of the Transportation Fund.

Comment: Several counties did not receive funds for drug enforcement

ICC Agenda Format:

The ICC Chair directed that the agenda should not include a 12 Noon adjournment time on it. It was suggested that agenda items be numbered.

PROGRAM: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT OF COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENTS - JEFFERSON COUNTY CASE STUDY OF ITS RECENT REORGANIZATION

Phil Ristow, Corporation Counsel: Questions of reorganization were driven by property tax concerns. Jefferson County had a “full service” department which came at a cost. County did quite a bit of work for other governments, i.e. Cities and Town. The County looked at staffing and mission. What are costs relative to other counties? The County Clerk’s office queried other counties. Then, used a rough measure of tax levy costs per mile. Revenue came from State for State work, work for its own needs, work for several Towns. The County did not “downsize” in the winter.

Jefferson County’s costs appeared high so a consultant was hired for recommendations (Hand out of Study by Phil Ristow for each ICC county). Jefferson County had excess capacity. Negotiations with the Union commenced. Tonnage of mixture plants will also be looked at in the future to assess needs. Other future issues will involve snow plowing for Towns. Budget constraints will affect future decisions. The County has adequate staff for State and County-level requirements. The future of the Highway Department will be wrestled with to come up with optimum service levels for County, but this may change relationship with the Towns. The methodology is sound in the study even though the data is getting old (2002).

Don Reese, Highway Committee Chair: The County initially looked at scope of work and possible consultants. The County staff used Virchow-Krause to help compile initial data. The major Committee action was a reduction in the work force. They developed a new labor-management committee to work with the Union. They have made adjustments in “administrative costs” and monitoring. The study reviewed cost effectiveness of equipment use. It did a best practices session with several other counties. The real challenge has been working with the employees. He sees the changes as positive.

Bill Kern, Highway Commissioner: He came in when the study was already being implemented with the downsizing of around 20 employees already underway. He has compared the organizational structure before and after the reorganization. Crews now go back and forth between units. Shop operations were significantly downsized. Now people from the shop are trained to do field operations including snow plowing. They are still trying to figure out the new organization. The staff is quite stretched with the early snow and the new training requirements.

They continue to review the recommendations of the study and monitor current status. Many recommendations have been put in place. Shop operation is the most significant area to reassess and monitor. The study was a good document. Once a number of employees is established, then try to make it work. They are looking closely at the Department’s ability to work with Towns and at a review of equipment operations. They have sold off many pieces of equipment. A lot of equipment requests are based on the winter requirements.

Gary Petre, County Administrator: They will take another look at staffing after a year of experience. They will also look at how the other County departments can work with highways.

Q. How were attitudes during transition?

A. *Morale was low. Some looked for other jobs right away. Some took early retirements. First year only laid off one person. Second year only laid off two more. There has been a lot of stress with staff.*

Q. Has this affected morale in other County departments?

A. *Countywide reorganization had already alerted employees to change in the County. There will be a deliberate audit of all County departments. Now there are concerns about what other Department to be looked at next. There is an awareness that there is no guarantee in long-term County employment. There are more management challenges as a result of the reorganization. The County Committee had to assure good leadership and be more up-to-date on business and management practice. The Committee members need to be open to change.*

Comment: Reorganization required a lot of cooperation among several County committees. There had to be a lot of communication with Town government and relevant business concerns.

SUMMARY OF OTHER COUNTIES’ ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

Columbia County – T. O. Boge, Assistant Commissioner

- Described the organizational structure
- Has 78 employees
- 1,673 miles including I-43/I-90
- 21 Towns are provided service
- 54,500 population
- Two people take care of six County parks (snow, garbage)

- No seasonal employees (used to have 5 to 11 seasonals)

Dodge County – Russ Kottke, County Board Chair

- Combined two shops and will sell the Beaver Dam shop
- 79 employees
- Have tried to downsize
- Highway Commissioner will retire
- Are looking into a Director of Public Works
- Planning and Development Department takes care of Parks
- Very little Town work
- Plow for three Townships and couple of Villages

Green Lake – Orrin Helmer, County Board Chair/Chair of Highway Committee since 1974

- 20,000 population
- 354 sq. miles
- 690 miles of roads: 231 miles CTH; 142 miles Collectors/88 miles Local; 70 miles State Trunk
- Main highway shop is in Green Lake
- Storage in southern part
- Total budget - \$3.5 million with \$2 from levy
- 24 employees (Had 60 employees in 1950 with old manual systems)
- Only limited work for other units of local government
- Do some re-grading or redevelopment of County roads
- Six small County parks that one person helps with
- Three towns are now asking the County to do some of their work
- Five Committee members elected by the full County Board
- Have a five-year plan for road work and equipment
- Almost everyone helps with snow plowing

Sauk County – Steve Muchow, Highway Commissioner

- 60 employees
- 54 Union
- 4 branches – Office/Shop/State Maintenance/County Maintenance
- Detailed the job duties of the individuals
- Large work gets bid out
- Only maintenance paving by the County
- 1992-83 full-time; 10 seasonal
- Now – 60 employees
- Laid off seven people a few years ago (high quality workers, but low seniority); five of them are now back
- Morale was low, but Department efficiency improved
- All Union employees are now available to plow snow and more people have been cross-trained
- 303 miles of County Trunk roads
- 250 miles of State Highway roads
- 380 miles of Town roads (for seven Towns)
- Municipal workers cannot strike, which makes the situation different than private sector (This is why seniority is in place for public workers.)

Q: Are many highway employees nearing retirement?

A: Jefferson County – Yes; Sauk – Not so much. Age is pretty spread out; Columbia – No. Age is pretty spread out; Green Lake – No, not a factor now. It had been in the past.

Open Discussion on County Issues

Columbia County - Has done a 28-page “Budget in Brief” done by the Accounting Department. Call Sue Martin if counties would like a copy. This has been handy for County Supervisors.

WCA – offered an open invitation to summarize the Highway Reorganization for the Wisconsin Counties Magazine.

Issue – Reduction of County Board size can be a concern for having enough members on committees. Senate Bill 4 would have a lot of problems according to WCA. WCA is working with the Governor and will suggest a veto. WCA is hopeful that the Bill will be vetoed. WCA is looking into an alternate proposal.

Another bill has been proposed to downsize the number of counties from 72 to 18, but this Bill would create a task force.

Adjournment

The ICC meeting was adjourned by Vice Chair Helmer at 12 Noon.

Respectfully submitted

Steve Grabow
Community Development Educator
UW-Extension, Jefferson County