



# City of Norton

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Ohio House Finance Committee  
House Bill 62 Testimony  
Robert Fowler, M.P.A. City of Norton, Ohio  
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Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Minority Member Cera, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee:

I am Robert Fowler, the Administrative Officer for the City of Norton, in Summit and Wayne Counties. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today, and provide you with some information on the current challenges local governments face with the Highway funding crisis in the State of Ohio.

To help familiarize you with our community, the City of Norton is a community of 12,085 residents, located in Summit and Wayne Counties at the intersection of Interstate 76 and State Route 21. We are approximately 20.49 square miles and have an active farming presence in our community as well as suburban residential neighborhoods. The few pockets of suburban density increased our overall density to 589 persons/sq. mile.

We have the responsibility for the maintenance of 280 lane miles, including State Route 21, State Route 585, and State Route 261. Of this 280 miles, 33.2 lane miles are part of the state highway system. The city of Norton is responsible for twenty percent (20%) of the pavement installation on the state routes, and one hundred percent (100%) of the costs for maintenance and snow/ice control.

Maintaining the highway system has adversely changed over the last few years. Our revenues from intergovernmental transfers have remained relatively flat since 2013, while the cost to maintain the same road miles has increased 137% over the same period. In 2013, the average cost to maintain a lane mile was \$3,497 and the cost of new construction was \$89,000 but today it costs \$4792 to maintain and \$112,000 per lane mile for resurfacing.

While a perfect storm has led us to where we are today, this situation is both critical and dire. Local governments are not able to sustain the infrastructure with the cost increases associated with maintaining our roads in a safe and passable manner. Ultimately, this will impact our ability to attract the economic development necessary to address the future needs of our state, the region, and the city of Norton.

## **Maintenance**

The city of Norton uses two crews, of four individuals, for highway maintenance. The two crews are responsible for a variety of activities including but not limited to mowing, patching, crack sealing, and snow/ice control. With over 280 lane miles of road to be maintained, the city would average more than one lane mile of maintenance day. While newer roads require less maintenance, the primary concern is keeping the roads passable and free from significant defect.

These responsibilities does not reflect matters such as storm water maintenance, snow and ice control, vegetation maintenance and other necessary activities.

### **Reconstruction**

The cost to reconstruct portions of road have significantly increased. A recent bid to increase Cleveland Massillon from two (2) lane miles to three (3) lane miles was awarded to a contractor for a total amount of \$7.9m. The project was bid at 9.93% over the engineering estimate. While this project was funded through Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS), the city is responsible for \$3.4m plus any additional construction costs. Due to the extent and duration of the project, we may have to limit our resurfacing program in 2020 to address any additional expenses.

Often times a street will reach the end of the useful life and require full depth reclamation. The cost associated with a full depth reclamation will increase the total project cost by over 200%. Based on the construction estimate to resurface, the total cost would now exceed \$62m, or \$6m per year. Often, municipalities limit the amount of reconstruction due to the significant price difference. The goal is to achieve the best road surfaces possible for the best price, thus limiting the scope of the full depth reconstruction projects.

### **Equipment Costs**

Associated with maintenance and repair is the need for the proper equipment. Due to the increased need for traffic safety in construction zones, measures such as a barrier to protect workers, high visibility clothing, and safety equipment, the cost of patching equipment, dump trucks and other necessary appurtenances have increased. The cost for vehicles to maintain the highway are higher than that which will be used on a municipal side street (tandem vs single axel dump trucks). All of these expenditures come from the allocation of funds for road improvements and reduce our ability to spend money on resurfacing.

### **Funding**

The city will spend approximately \$11m in fiscal year 2019 on road construction projects. These projects varies from full depth reclamation to something as simple as an asphalt overlay. The \$11m will only address a very small portion of our 280 lane miles.

The funding for the rehabilitation and maintenance comes from a variety of sources. The current projects are funded through the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS), Ohio Public Works Commission, permissive taxes (license plate tax) and through local income tax. In 2018, the City of Norton generated the following amounts for various projects: \$5.3m from AMATS for Medina Line Road & Cleveland-Massillon Road, \$665,000 from OPWC for New Park Drive, and \$1.1m from the general fund (income and permissive taxes) for resurfacing.

The 2019 general fund budget for the city of Norton is \$7.2m. Of this \$7.2m, \$1.5m is allocated to the service department for operations and maintenance of the highways. We have also budgeted \$500,000 in state highway money, and \$55,000 from the permissive tax fund for maintenance and snow/ice control.

In 2009, the city of Norton received \$478,212 in highway gas tax and in 2018, \$515,324. In ten years the city received an increased allocation of \$37,092 from the state highway fund.

Even if we used all permissive taxes and state highway funds for resurfacing projects, we would only realize \$550,000 in roadwork or 17% of the necessary resurfacing budget. This is not sustainable way to finance the current infrastructure.

## **Summary**

The state of Ohio has seen transportation funding stagnate for the last several years. The associated costs have increased significantly over the same period. I believe this has led us to where we are today. While reductions of funding from the Federal Highway Administration have caused delays in our construction projects, these delays have increased our cost for maintenance. The increased cost to maintain the roads, decreases the amount of money the city has to spend to resurface and reconstruct our streets.

Based on the current bidding climate, the City of Norton would need \$31.36m to resurface the 280 lane miles. Based on a generous ten (10) year life expectancy, the city would need to spend over \$3.14m annually. This does not include the necessary storm water upgrades, traffic signalization, or other costs associated with these improvements. Each one of these items increases the amount for construction from \$3.14m, and varies depending on the type of improvement.

Based on the 280 lane miles, the cost to resurface in 2009, was approximately \$24m. Based on these numbers, the cost associated with resurfacing projects in our area has increased over 30% while the funding has increased a mere 7% over the same period of time.

The City of Norton has committed itself to preventative maintenance program to extend the life expectancy of our streets. This preventative maintenance still only helps preserve the pavement for a certain period of time. In the City of Norton, we are seeing roads deteriorate at a faster pace than prior years. Roads paved two and three years prior are showing signs of wear, including cracking and failure. We believe this to be a compilation of factors including lower quality asphalt and the severe fluctuations in temperatures.