



McHenry County Division of Transportation *Celebrating 100 Years, 1913-2013*

Each month this year, a new article celebrating the 100 year anniversary of the McHenry County Division of Transportation will be featured in the Northwest Herald. The third article, printed on March 26th, covered construction at the MCDOT. Watch for the fourth article on pavement preservation to be published at the end of April.



Construction of Rakow Road

Construction at the MCDOT

The need for road construction projects have been around for a long time. Archeological finds have shown that as far back as the ancient Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks, public road improvement projects were built for commerce and military movement. As time has gone by, the desire to move faster and more efficiently for everyone has pushed the need for more durable roads to carry heavier loads.

When America was being settled, the roads served well for small local trips with longer trips being handled over water and then rail with the invention of the steam locomotive. It wasn't until about 100 years ago that these trips needed to become more efficient. The only problem was local roads were nothing more than that dirt path wagon trails.

From 1913 when the McHenry County Division of Transportation (MCDOT) was established well into the 1950's, the MCDOT built the County Highway system from scratch with the County's own labor forces. To do this, a lot of gravel was needed. Fortunately, McHenry County has plenty of gravel thanks in part to the glaciers that once covered this area some 20,000 years ago. To build the new County Highways, 12 gravel pits were strategically located throughout the county. Of those, four went on to become commercial gravel processing facilities and are still in existence today.

During the 1950's, it was determined that the County could be more efficient and cost effective if it contracted out the construction of the highways. The MCDOT engineers supervised the contractors to make sure the projects were properly built. This method is still in place today and is very effective.

Although it sounds simple, there is so much that goes into a project during construction. On any given project, the County's engineers have to monitor the contractor and inspect the work performed as the project moves along. The engineers have to keep up on all of the required paperwork documenting what has been done every day so that the Illinois Department of Transportation can sign off on the finished work.

In addition, the engineers have to coordinate with the utility companies. Phone lines, cable TV, gas pipes, electricity wires, water pipes and sewers are often relocated for a roadway project to be built. With several companies involved, coordination is essential to make sure service disruption is minimized.

Depending on the project, the County may also have to obtain permits from other agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and the McHenry County Soil and Water Conservation District to name a few.

Let's not forget Mother Nature. In the upper Midwest, we are blessed with varied weather patterns. Periods of continued rain can hamper most tasks on a job. Cold weather can limit when asphalt can be placed. As the saying goes in Illinois, there are two seasons, winter and construction. Because of the seasons, it makes for a very tight window to get projects done.

Some projects are completed within one construction season, as is the case with many of the bridge projects on both County and Township Roads (yes, the MCDOT handles the township bridge projects as well). Some go on for multiple years, such as the recently completed James R. Rakow Road project or current Charles J. Miller Road and the new Western Algonquin Bypass projects.

Overall, the goal for every project is to be ahead of schedule and under budget. A simple statement but when you consider all the outside forces such as contractors, weather, and multiple agency coordination, it can be a challenging task but one that the engineers are up to.

As we are about to embark on another construction season, there are things you can do to minimize your frustration and stay safe. Plan ahead and give yourself extra time. There are many ways you can find out about construction projects coming your way. At the MCDOT, you can visit our website (www.McHenryCountyDOT.org) and take a look at our interactive construction map. Some of the more major MCDOT projects have dedicated websites (www.JohnsburgRoad.com and www.CharlesMillerRoad.com) where you can sign up for email updates or you can use Twitter and Facebook to connect with us. Agencies such as IDOT and local municipalities often will have information on their websites too. Check those in your area to stay informed.

Remember that cell phone use is restricted in construction and school zones. It's not just for your safety but also for those workers in the construction zone.

In the end, the goal of the project is to make travel better for you and others in the future. Plan ahead and set the phone down. To all of our readers in this Centennial Year and in the future, happy and safe travels.

The McHenry County Division of Transportation is now on Facebook!

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