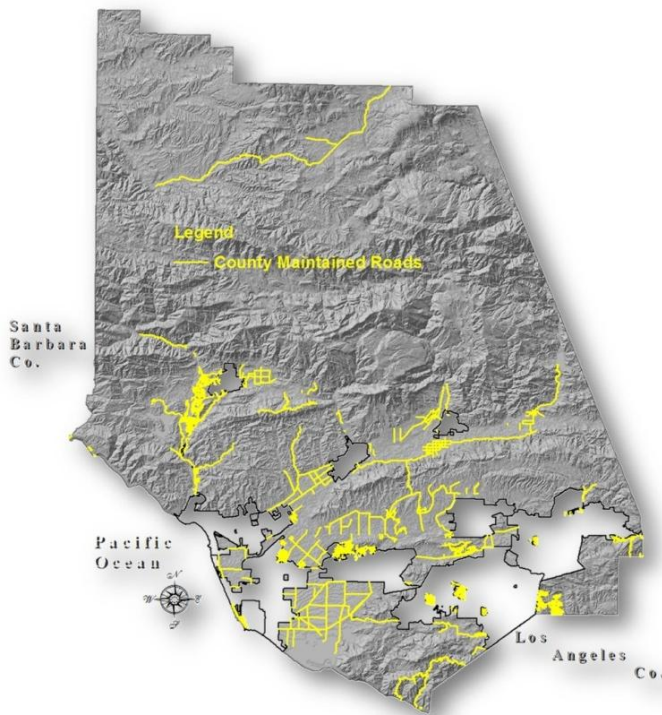


Transportation Issues for the County of Ventura Unincorporated Areas

by David Fleisch



The unincorporated road network traverses 1,873 square miles of Ventura County from sea level up to over 8,000 feet. The same crews that plow snow in Lockwood Valley clear sand from beachfront roads in the Silver Strand area. The network of over 540 centerline miles is comprised of a unique blend of scenic rural roads with incredible ocean vistas and sweeping views of agricultural crops (a key economic engine of the County); urban roads in areas such as El Rio, Oak Park, and Newbury Park; and several regionally significant arteries that connect to the cities and the state highway system. In addition to the roadways, the transportation infrastructure includes 158 bridges, 700 miles of unpaved shoulders, 340 miles of concrete curb and gutter, 80 miles of storm drain pipes and culverts, 40 traffic signals, and over 12,000 signs.

A dedicated team of 113 professionals in the Ventura County Public Works Agency Transportation Department (VCPWATD) is responsible for designing, constructing, planning, operating, and maintaining all of the components of this capital asset known as transportation infrastructure. This is accomplished year round through operations headquartered at the Hall of Administration in the City of Ventura and maintenance facilities in Saticoy and Moorpark, with a satellite facility in Lockwood Valley.



There are several current and emerging challenges that the VCPWATD (along with most municipal agencies) is facing that provide cause for concern about this vital capital asset. These are: inadequate funding, aging infrastructure, increasing public expectations and mandated requirements, and regulatory requirements.

Inadequate Funding. The VCPWATD receives no property tax or County general funds. We are funded almost entirely by the state gasoline tax through the Highway User Tax Account (HUTA). This tax was set at 18 cents/gallon in 1994 and has not been increased since. Inflation aside, the amount of HUTA received is declining based upon the increased fuel efficiency of today's cars and the growing number of hybrid and electric vehicles (which do not pay gas tax to use the roads). Locally as well as statewide, current funding is inadequate to meet the basic needs of transportation infrastructure. The California Statewide Local Streets and Roads Needs Assessment (available at: <http://www.savecaliforniastreet.org/>) concludes that



there is an annual shortfall of almost \$8 billion statewide to maintain statewide basic transportation infrastructure. There are various initiatives pending in the state legislature that to some degree address this issue, but none have a certain future.



To augment this dwindling income, VCPWATD applies for federal grant funding for a variety of projects, including bridge repair and replacement, safety improvements, and active transportation projects (bike lanes and pedestrian facilities). Recently the federal government passed a multi-year transportation bill, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. When the president signed the FAST Act into law in December 2015, it had been more than 6 years since the previous long-term bill. For all grant programs there is a local funding match requirement from 12% to over 50% of the project cost. This local match is currently provided for from VCPWATD's HUTA funds.

Aging Infrastructure. The majority of the 543 centerline miles of roads in the County road network were constructed more than 70 years ago, with some at or nearing 100 years old – Telegraph Road was constructed in 1916, Hueneme Road in 1917, and Grimes Canyon Road in 1926. Some roads date back to when Ventura County was founded in 1873 – Yerba Buena Road to name one. Almost all of the

current roads were in existence when the network was created in 1947. As such, they do not meet current design or construction standards relating to lane and shoulder widths, curve and slope geometry, and drainage requirements. The VCPWATD also manages and maintains 158 bridges. Eighty-five bridges (54%) are over 50 years old, with 10 of those being over 80 years old, and 5 being over 100 years old.



Old Creek Road before bridge was subject to flooding, cutting off residents.

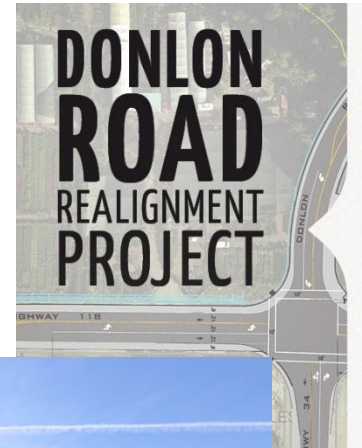


New Old Creek Road Bridge keeps residents connected to HWY 33

Increasing Public Expectations and Mandated Requirements. Unincorporated County areas are not provided with municipal transportation services – street lights, street sweeping, sidewalk and street tree maintenance, and storm-drain systems, unless separate assessment districts are established. Yet public expectations for these services are increasing and are being expressed through media, statements at public meetings, and requests to elected officials. Further, statewide mandates for increasing multi-modal requirements (Complete Streets) and increased usage of this aging road network by bicycles and other non-automobile uses are setting the stage for demands for significant improvements, which have inadequate grant funding opportunities.

Regulatory Requirements. Increasing state and national laws and regulations regarding water quality are calling for substantial un-resourced improvements to existing infrastructure to capture and treat storm water and prevent various elements (trash, bacteria, and pollutants) from entering the surface and ground water from the road surface. In addition, similar laws and regulations legislate improvements in air quality and safety that necessitate unfunded transportation infrastructure projects to reduce congestion, improve traffic flow, and increase safety for all road network users.

Outlook for the Future. While all this may seem to paint a gloomy picture, there are several recently completed projects that have provided significant improvements to County roads: the realignment of the intersection of State Routes 34, 118 and Donlon Road; signal installations at Wendy Drive and Gerald Drive, and Rose Avenue and Collins Street; bike lane additions to Las Posas Road; repairs to Santa Susanna Pass Road Bridge; and various pavement resurfacing projects. Upcoming projects include: signal installation at Rose Avenue at Simon Way; pedestrian improvements in El Rio near Rio Real Elementary School and on Central Ave near Rio Mesa High School; bike lane additions to Santa Ana Road; replacement of Bridge Road Bridge, and repairs to Wheeler Canyon Road Bridge and Mupu Road Bridge; significant guardrail installations on the Yerba Buena area roads; and various additional pavement resurfacing projects throughout the County. There are many more planned projects to maintain and improve the transportation infrastructure in Ventura County. However, they all depend on available funding.



A ½ cent sales tax for transportation purposes is being considered by the Ventura County Transportation Commission for placement on the November ballot. Information on this initiative can be found at: <http://keepvcmoving.org/>. This tax would provide funds to meet the on-going maintenance requirements and many projects throughout the County that will improve travel on a daily basis, and the funding for the local match as mentioned above.



David Fleisch has been the Director of the Ventura County Public Works Agency Transportation Department since March 2010. Prior to joining the County, he completed a 28-year career in the U.S. Navy, retiring as Captain in the Civil Engineer Corps. David holds a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Engineering from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and Master's Degrees from the University of California and the Naval War College. He is a registered Civil Engineer in the states of California and Washington.