

Minutes of the Transportation Committee

The Transportation Committee of the McLean County Board met on Tuesday, March 1, 2005 at 8:00 a.m. in Room 404 of the Government Center, 115 E. Washington Street, Bloomington, Illinois.

Members Present: Chairman Bass, Members Cavallini, Dean, Baggett and O'Connor

Members Absent: Member Hoselton

Other Members Present: Member Bostic

Staff Members Present: Mr. John Zeunik, County Administrator; Mr. Terry Lindberg, Assistant County Administrator, Ms. Christine Northcutt, Recording Secretary, County Administrator's Office

Department Heads Present: Mr. Jack Mitchell, County Engineer; Mr. Eric Schmitt, Assistant County Engineer

Others Present: Mr. Lafe Epperson, Fleet Manager, County Highway Department, Mr. Mark Leake, Highway Maintenance Coordinator, County Highway Department; Ms. Christine Brauer, Regional Planning Commission; Mr. Jason Lay, Mr. Andrew Jacobs, Mr. Larry Heck, Ms. Jeanne Morris, League of Women Voters

Chairman Bass called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Chairman Bass stated that first item for business is the approval of the Minutes from the February 1, 2005 Meeting of the Transportation Committee. Chairman Bass asked if there was a motion to approve the minutes of the February 1, 2005 meeting.

Motion by Dean/Cavallini to approve the Minutes of the February 1, 2005 meeting of the Transportation Committee. Motion carried.

Chairman Bass informed the Committee that there are several members of the public present at today's meeting. Chairman Bass stated that he is aware that the group is here to express concerns about weight limits on the roads. He asked if there was a spokesman for the group that would like to make a brief presentation.

Mr. Andrew Jacobs stated that he would like to address the Committee.

**Member O'Connor entered the Meeting at 8:07 a.m.

Mr. Jacobs stated that as a concerned farmer, he wanted to address the issue of lack of fairness between all residents in McLean County. Mr. Jacobs stated that he obtains permits whenever necessary throughout the course of operating his business. Mr. Jacobs stated that he and others are upset with the weight limits that are posted on the County roads during the Spring thaw. Mr. Jacobs sited that, for instance, he began a project on February 7, 2005 in which he was trying to receive a load of seed. He is a licensed seed dealer in McLean County. Mr. Jacobs stated that he knew that the roads are posted this time of year, so he didn't push the issue. Later that same day he saw a load of fuel traveling toward Olympia High School to be delivered, so he assumed that the County Highway Department was writing permits or changed the limits. Mr. Jacobs stated that he called the County Highway Department the next day and spoke to Mr. Eric Schmitt, Assistant County Engineer and Mr. Keith Franz. They informed him that the Highway Department is not issuing any overweight permits at this time. Mr. Jacobs asked why Olympia High School was able to receive a truckload of fuel just the day before. Mr. Jacobs stated that he was advised that the Highway Department made an exception for the fuel truck, but that he was not allowed the same exception. As a result, Mr. Jacobs load of seed had to be pushed back to a later date. Mr. Jacobs stated that the sooner he is able to receive loads, as a dealer the more bonuses he is eligible to receive. Mr. Jacobs informed the Committee that he finally received a permit on February 15, 2005 to use his pick up truck and trailer with his forklift to meet the semi-trailer at the Tazewell County border. The idea was to manually shuffle the individual pallets of seed from the Tazewell County border to a holding area. Mr. Jacobs stated that he was not able to get the truck and forklift organized to get the load in that day. Mr. Jacobs did say he was able to get one load in that manner a bit later that week. This process took approximately two hours. This was the only way in which he could receive a load and maintain compliance with the law.

Mr. Jacobs stated that the County needs to maintain a level of fairness. The County should either inform all residents and/or business people that they cannot use the roads unless they stay under the posted limits or they need to make exceptions for everyone. Mr. Jacobs stated that he is aware that school busses are overweight and travel on County roads five days a week whether the roads are posted or not. He provided a picture to the Committee with the empty weight posted on it.

Chairman Bass asked Mr. Jacobs how long he has owned and operated his seed dealership. Mr. Jacobs replied that he has been in business for nine years. He stated that he has always been able to work and get permits through the McLean County Highway Department in the past. Mr. Jacobs stated that he does not understand why there is less leeway this year.

Chairman Bass asked if there was any other member of the audience that wanted to address the Committee. Mr. Jason Lay stated that he is also a farmer in rural McLean County. Mr. Lay asked if there should be a more rational way to go about figuring weight limits on the County roads. Mr. Lay stated that, for example, he has a wagon that he can legally pull, but will do more damage to the road because it has smaller tires and fewer axles. Mr. Lay asked for clarification on how the weight limits are decided and asked if the Committee could review some of the current policies and weight limits.

Chairman Bass asked if Mr. Mitchell could respond to these questions. Mr. Mitchell stated that first and foremost, weight limits are in place to protect the roads. Mr. Mitchell stated that as the frost lifts and the ground thaws, the roads and ground become very soft. Mr. Mitchell stated that this particular year has been both very warm and very wet. These conditions have made it very difficult for the Highway Department to allow loads between the time of January 15th through April 15th. Mr. Mitchell explained that the County Ordinance states that the roads be posted during that time, but many years the roads do not get posted until the end of February because it stays cold. Therefore, the Highway Department doesn't put the signs up and doesn't enforce the posting until the thaw starts. Mr. Mitchell stated the posting has never lasted until April 15th during the time that he has been the County Engineer. Mr. Mitchell stated that the weather has made things difficult this year. Mr. Mitchell added that if the County did not post weight limits on its, then roads the roads would deteriorate very quickly. Mr. Mitchell stated that it may have been an error on the Highway Department's behalf to allow the fuel truck into the school. Mr. Mitchell stated that the Highway Department attempts to keep school busses running each year.

Mr. Mitchell stated that the Highway Department did a survey of its neighboring Counties. Several Counties have higher weight limits and some of those Counties have additional funds available to fix the roads, such as DeWitt County due to the Clinton Nuclear Plant being located in the County. Tazewell County's limits are also higher. Mr. Mitchell stated that he spoke with the Tazewell County Engineer. Mr. Mitchell stated that his counterpart at Tazewell County has stated that they have done some additional work on some of their hot-mix roads and their drainage issues are much different than they are in McLean County.

Mr. Mitchell stated that this is a condition that happens each spring. Mr. Mitchell asked Mr. Jacobs if he could work with his distributors so that they could make deliveries in December. Mr. Jacobs stated that under normal circumstances he could do that, but this year everyone was behind. Mr. Jacobs stated that he cannot take deliveries until allocations are met. This year, allocations were not completed until after January 15th.

Chairman Bass asked if there are any comments from any Committee Members.

Mr. Baggett asked if the farmers/residents would be willing to help defray the costs via higher permit fees or a bond of some sort.

Mr. Dean stated that it would be unsafe to shut down the school busses. Mr. Dean stated that as Mr. Mitchell stated, some of what is happening here is beyond the Committee's control. It is due to the very warm and wet January and February. Mr. Dean asked if Mr. Jacobs still has some loads yet to be delivered. Mr. Jacobs stated that he does still have approximately two loads left.

Ms. O'Connor stated that when the County's Ordinances are impacting the livelihood of farmers in the area, the County needs to take a look at its policies and Ordinances.

Chairman Bass asked if there was any way that Mr. Jacobs could take additional trips with less weight in order for the loads to remain legal. Mr. Jacobs stated that there is a load that needs to be delivered to St. Louis, Missouri. Mr. Jacobs stated that the cost to take more than one trip to St. Louis would be very high. Chairman Bass stated that he respects Mr. Jacobs and the Committee sympathizes with his dilemma, but his business costs are really not the Committee's main concern. The Committee is charged with maintaining the County roads first and foremost.

Mr. Lay asked why the County would not consider examining their weight Ordinances, especially because they have been in effect for a long time. Mr. Mitchell stated that, with the Committee's direction, the County Highway Department would be delighted to examine the Weight Limit Ordinance and bring a proposal to the Committee in the fall of this year.

Ms. Bostic stated that she would like to see the County Highway Department look into the possibility of revamping its current Weight Limit Ordinance.

Motion by O'Connor/Cavallini to direct the County Highway Department to study the County's Weight Limit Ordinance with the possibility of raising permit fees and revising the weight limits to weight per axle.
Motion carried.

Mr. Larry Heck stated that he wanted to quickly inform the Committee that he has been farming in McLean County for 30 plus years and has not had any problems with the Highway Department in the past. Mr. Heck added that he would be agreeable to paying a higher fee to acquire a permit.

Chairman Bass thanked the members of the public for sharing their concerns with the Committee.

**Ms. Bostic left the meeting at 8:40 a.m.

Chairman Bass advised the Committee that he would resume the normal order of the meeting and the next item for action is payment of the February, 2005 bills. Chairman Bass informed the Committee he has a letter from Ms. Jackie Dozier, County Auditor, recommending payment of the bills.

Motion by Cavallini/O'Connor to recommend approval of the bills for February, 2005 as submitted by the County Auditor. Motion carried.

Chairman Bass stated that the next item for action is the proposed additional 2005 equipment purchases. Chairman Bass stated that the items include 2 snowplows, 1 salt spreader, 1 six-inch wood chipper, and 1 nuclear density gauge for a total of \$32,218.00.

Mr. Cavallini asked what is a nuclear density gauge. Mr. Mitchell stated that it is a gauge that is used to check the density of asphalt and dirt. Mr. Mitchell stated that this machine is used in place of taking "cores". In addition, this gauge shows the density of the asphalt immediately. When using cores, it took a full day to receive the results back from the lab.

Ms. O'Connor stated that she would like to say that she is in favor of the wood chipper because it is environmentally friendly and, in the long run, it will save money on manual labor.

Mr. Mitchell informed the Committee that this item was deferred from last month's meeting. Mr. Mitchell added that the Highway Department is asking for these additional items due to large savings seen due to the competitive bidding process this year.

Motion by Cavallini/O'Connor to approve the additional 2005 Equipment purchases.
Motion carried.

Chairman Bass informed the Committee that this concludes the Committee's items for action. Chairman Bass stated that there is no road work presently, so the first item for information is the public meeting notice for the Danvers/Carlock road work meeting. Mr. Mitchell stated that the Committee has been interested in when this meeting would be taking place. The meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 9, 2005 at the White Oak Township Community Building in Carlock from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Ms. O'Connor asked if Mr. Mitchell wants the Committee Members to attend. Mr. Mitchell responded that the Committee Members are perfectly welcome to attend if they wish.

Chairman Bass stated that the last item for information is a road-posting article. Mr. Dean stated that he thought that was a well-written and informative article. Mr. Dean added that he thinks that Mr. Mitchell and the Highway Department do a good job protecting the loads. Mr. Dean asked Mr. Mitchell if they will be letting some loads go because there has been a temporary freeze. Mr. Mitchell stated that the Highway Department had been discussing letting a few loads go since it is presently cold and the weather forecast predicts a warming trend soon.

Mr. Mitchell also informed the Committee that the year-round posting is a per axle posting. The spring posting is the only posting that is not a per axle posting.

Chairman Bass asked if there were any further comments or questions. With no further business to come before the Committee at this time, Chairman Bass adjourned the meeting at 9:04 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Northcutt
Recording Secretary