

## SYNOPSIS; Draft Report (12-10-09) Highway Service Cooperation in UC.

### OVERVIEW

The investigations of opportunities were for service sharing, service consolidation and cost saving for Ulster County highway services. Participating communities: Towns of Denning, Gardiner, Hardenburgh, Hurley, Marbletown, Marlborough, New Paltz, Rosendale, Saugerties, Shawangunk, Ulster, Wawarsing, City of Kingston, and Ulster County.

### INFRASTRUCTURE SUMMARY

Networks vary across the state because of variations in the following factors: population density, topography, regional location, and in the mix of state, county, town, village, and city road miles in each community's transportation network.

Of upstate counties (excl. NYC) Ulster Co. ranks 15<sup>th</sup> in population, 14<sup>th</sup> in local mileage (county, city town and village owned miles) and 15<sup>th</sup> in county owned road mileage. Table 1 provides road mileage for the participating municipalities. Over 90% of town road miles are paved. In all study towns (except Rosendale) 70% of local road mileage is town owned.

### FISCAL SUMMARY

Own source revenue (property and sales taxes) is used by municipalities for building and maintaining roads. However, towns rely mostly on property taxes. Only 3% of UC sales tax is shared with towns and villages while 11.5% is given to City of Kingston. UC ranks 21<sup>st</sup> in the percent of sales tax retained for county purposes. Table 2 shows property tax resources of municipalities in the study. On average county roads carry more traffic and cost more per mile of road. Annual spending varies mainly for the fact that some communities may require replacement or repair of major equipment, at any given time, while others may not. Using local budgets as a means for comparing local costs is also frustrated because of varying local practices in constructing budgets. One example of variations in budget construct is the use of the seasonal approach in allocating highway department payrolls. A standardized budgeting process to be adopted by all is recommended.

### SERVICE DELIVERY

Winter maintenance—Table 3 shows winter maintenance. The number of plow routes and miles per route varied across the towns largely because of different population densities. Road mix (salt/sand/other) is also illustrated in this table.

Summer Maintenance—Table 4 shows summer maintenance. This includes routine maintenance as well as major projects and paving activities. Paving and road reconstruction is carried out by all the participating departments. This activity is dependent on a number of

factors one of which is the amount of investment made by each community for this activity. Given a number of assumptions, paving or treating about 10% of a road network is a useful benchmark for comparative analysis and also could be considered close to the volume of work needed to keep pace with annual investment needs. All managers claim that they survey their roads each spring for needed repairs and maintenance. However, only 3 have a formal pavement management system. All towns have investment in sign replacement but only ¼ have a formal sign inventory, two of which are computerized. All but two towns do most of their truck and equipment repair in house.

Highway garage facilities—Map 1 shows the location of all garage facilities and county highway facilities. Table 5 shows the age of garages, quality of sites, and the age of salt and fuel storage facilities. Ages of town facilities range from new to 79 years old. Only four indicated problems with sites. Some discussions between Rosendale and Marlboro about joining facilities have occurred. All towns have gas and diesel fuel facilities less than 20 years old. The county has 11 regional facilities grouped in 4 maintenance regions; 6 to 8 employees are assigned to each and 3 full time mechanics are shuttled to wherever repairs are needed. A compilation of equipment lists for the towns is in a separate document.

Human resource summary—Staffing across the towns varies significantly because of the obvious differences in factors such as geographic conditions, amount of road mileage, amount of residential streets and hamlet areas, traffic density etc. Table 6 summarizes the number of staff and their compensation. In all there are 164 employees 60% of whom are equipment operators; the rest are supervisors, laborers, mechanics and office workers. Not included in the table are part time employees who are used for various seasonal needs such as summer road and highway maintenance and winter snow plowing and removal. All towns provide benefits for full time employees with some variations.

## COOPERATION SUMMARY

Informal cooperation—County and town highway depts. informally cooperate extensively to share manpower, materials and equipment on a regular basis. A regional county group or a town dept. often have specialty equipment that is shared with nearby depts. However, sharing practices vary significantly in extent and scope. (Examples are given in this report of exchanges and sharing of manpower, services and equipment among the participating communities). MOST OF THESE LIMITED, FREQUENT EXCHANGES WOULD BE GREATLY HINDERED, OFTEN EVEN AVOIDED, IF A WRITTEN AGREEMENT WAS REQUIRED IN EACH INSTANCE. As a result county and town depts. have developed “umbrella agreements” among themselves to facilitate sharing or exchange. Concern was expressed by some interviewees about the currency of these agreements and if they were still in force. It is recommended that a county effort be made to standardize and streamline a county agreement in which all town

depts. would participate. Agreements to effect standardization have been adopted by other counties in the state, notably, Allegany and Erie. A model agreement is included in the appendix.

Formal agreements—There are a limited of formal sharing agreements among departments in this study. Two examples are noted on p. 14 of the study. Table 7 p. 14 lists resources that could be helpful to others as recommended by highway managers.

Opportunities for cooperation—Several highway managers mentioned specific examples of cooperation between neighboring depts. Details on p.14.

Factors in cooperation—Willingness to share based on trust and respect. Arranging scheduling and sharing costs. Some managers suggested that the county engineering staff could help in providing technical assistance on town highway issues.

#### POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several approaches to cooperation and sharing are in current use throughout the state. The approaches are meant to improve service and reduce costs. Cited in this study are the approaches of three counties, Monroe, Jefferson and Chemung. Details are included in pps. 15-22.

#### COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ulster County's Highway and Bridges Division already has a regional approach re. roads and bridges. There is a centralized operation in the Kingston facilities and the county maintains 11 regional facilities some of whose personnel serve subareas of the county; these 11 are grouped in 4 larger sections under regional supervisors. This regional structure reduces the cost of equipment and personnel deployment, compared to deployment from one central facility. Other advantages: more efficient management in assessing and prioritizing highway and capital improvements also, closer communication and coordination with other municipal depts. The question remains are there changes that could be made to reduce costs and improve services? The approaches of Monroe, Jefferson and Chemung counties provide guidance in determining changes for Ulster. Six key areas follow.

- 1 The road network in Ulster Co. is a single network--While the legal responsibilities and constraints of municipal road ownership have to be respected, the Ulster County local government should seek to make the entire county road structure run effectively. This is best achieved by initiative of the County government. An example of change would be a single set of plow routes for snow removal.

- 2 Updating regional cooperation—More direct contracting and cooperation between county facilities and town highway departments should be examined. Multi-season service contracts may be the most efficient. Examine the potential for eliminating the number of county regional facilities. Recognize and allow for differences in capabilities resources and motivations of town highway partners. Contractual arrangements should be made with compensation standards that are clear and fair. Recognize the need for stability with a competitive environment.
- 3 Improved cost accounting and performance information—A revised regional approach can be an opportunity for improved performance information and improved cost accounting as well as improved computer and highway technology. New town-country partnerships could help improve cost and performance information for both town and county managers.
- 4 Human resources needs for an updated regional approach—There will be an increased need for skills in: contract development, cost analysis, contract monitoring, evaluation and negotiation.
- 5 Mechanism for monitoring and maintaining agreements—Agreements mechanisms for board members and/or operating personnel to interact to effect any needed adjustments or changes.
- 6 Estimating the potential for cost saving—Experiences of Monroe and Jefferson counties provide benchmarks that might be achieved by a revised regional approach. Table 8 contains population, highway and area characteristics of Ulster co. compared to those of Jefferson and Monroe cos. Table 9 illustrates highway personnel and projected savings under regionalization for the same three counties. Table 10 has the comparative county highway expenditures (3 year average 2005-07) for the same three.

#### TARGETED RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLIMENTATION GUIDANCE (p. 31)

- 1 Development of single county-wide umbrella agreement for routine sharing of personnel, equipment and material.
- 2 Improve project and activity costing practices and implement payment managing system.
- 3 Revised regional approach: Contracting out major maintenance and construction responsibilities to towns in Ulster county.

APPENDIX CONTAINS:

Table A1 Ulster county road mileage by municipality and road ownership type.

Table A2 N Y State counties' 3 year average costs per mile and per mile cost ranking.

Sample county-town agreement used in Monroe co.