



Highway Department

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Cass County Commission

FROM: Jason Benson, County Engineer

DATE: May 8, 2023

SUBJECT: Agenda Item for May 15th, 2023 Cass County Commission. Update on the Winter of 2022-2023 Snow and Road Conditions, Plowing Costs, and NDDDES Reimbursement

The winter of 2022-2023 was one of the most challenging winters since 1997 and the 2009–2011 time frame. The winter season started with a significant winter storm and snow event in mid-December that left significant snowfall amounts throughout the County. From early January to late February we were back to normal snowfall amounts. However, all of that changed in late February.

Starting in late February, we had our full snowpack and the winter snowpack never melted or settled until mid-April. Throughout March and early April, we had significant snow and wind events, with temperatures well below average. This resulted in a six-week period of intense wind, snow storms, and a full winter snow pack that continued to blow and drift.

Within the first week or so of March the blowing snow began to make road conditions impassable and often impossible to keep up with our fleet of nine plows, five motorgraders, and two snow blowers. This resulted in us having to hire six separate contractors to use dozers to push snow back and open roads up. These contractors supported efforts County wide, but most specifically on east-west roads north of I-94.

While we maintain 630 miles of gravel and paved roads, roughly 125 miles of these roads became unsustainable to keep open without the contracted dozers. Without these dozers, numerous rural residents would have lost access to their homes and they would have been snow bound in their houses. This was a life safety issue to keep access along these roads. While the hardest hit roads were gravel, we also struggled on several paved roads including Cass 10 between Casselton and Mapleton, Cass 4 west of Argusville to west of Ayr, and Cass 26 from Gardner to Page (including the segment near Northern Cass School). Without the contractor dozers, segments of these paved roads would have been closed.

In getting the contractor dozer support we contacted more than 10 companies to request hourly rates. Due to the demand for dozers within the region from other Counties and Townships, six contractors provide hourly rates and were available to work. The six contractors were hired on

an hourly rate that averaged \$222 per hour with a range of \$190-\$275. The six contractors hired were DM Enterprises, Gowan Construction, Industrial Builders Inc., KRB, Midwest Snow, and TW Inc. The total cost for this snow dozing was \$332,910.75. These costs were taken from the Routine Repairs and Maintenance line item which is budgeted for \$350,000.

In addition to the snow dozing costs, we have also had significantly higher usage and costs related to fuel, salt, sand, and overtime hours. Our fuel budget is \$350,000 and our current fuel expenditure year to date is just under \$200,000. I may have to submit a budget adjustment for my fuel budget within the next few months depending on fuel consumption.

Fortunately, the North Dakota Legislature passed SB 2183 which provides \$15 million in funding for reimbursement grants for snow removal costs from October 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022 and an additional \$5 million for reimbursement for the period of October 1, 2022 through April 30, 2023. The legislation will allow for reimbursement up to 60% of costs exceeding 150% of the average of four of the last five years' snow removal costs.

ND Department of Emergency Services will oversee this Snow Removal Assistance Program and all funds will be disbursed by June 30th. We are still compiling our October 1, 2022 through April 30, 2023. However, our October 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022 costs were compiled and the five year average was \$71,195 and the actual 2022 cost was \$342,302. Based on the formula above, 150% of our 5-year average is \$106,792. We expect to get 60% of what's above that for a total reimbursement of \$141,305.

The reimbursement for the period of October 1, 2022 through April 30, 2023 is still being calculated and must be submitted to NDDES in early June. We are hopeful that we may get another \$100,000 or more reimbursed. While the ND Legislative Funding is helpful, our highest costs were incurred in the late February to mid-April time frame for which only \$5 million is allocated statewide.

Finally, our operations personnel staffing is based on our nine snowplows and five motorgraders. This personnel level has been consistent for the last 15 years except in 2008 when we didn't replace our second motor grader operator in Buffalo, reducing this from two to one, and when an operator from our Bridge Crew retired in 2007 and we consolidated two groups reducing one employee. As a result, we are not staffed for extreme years like this year. We are reviewing our snowplow routes and routine to see how we can improve and plan on making some changes or budget requests this year.