

## **THE BRIDGES OF DAVIESS COUNTY**

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Several years ago in Daviess County, our Commissioners discovered that their bridges were "falling down on the job." They convinced our county council to adopt the maximum cumulative bridge tax allowed by law at the time which was \$.30 per hundred dollars of assessed evaluation. Over the years as the evaluation has gone up the commissioners have been able to keep the \$.30 rate and the bridge fund has increased. In 1967 Daviess County had 260 bridges longer than 20' in its inventory and only 59 were rated at 15 tons or more capacity.

In 1995 we had 122 bridges, and only 11 are rated at less than 15 tons. In the last 10 years alone we have eliminated 32 bridges by using culverts or concrete boxes.

In 1994 our assessed evaluation was \$193,363,480 and this generated \$582,450 from property taxes and \$102,381 from the license excise tax for a total of \$684,831 for the bridge fund in 1995. Our selling point to the public is that with a county population of 27,533 it only costs \$25 per person per year to have excellent bridges.

One of the main benefits to our county highway department is that our bridge fund pays a full time, three man bridge crew, consisting of two bridge carpenters and a bridge equipment operator. Also in the summer we use four summer bridge laborers to spray and trim weeds around the bridges and guard rails and they assist the bridge crew on bridge projects.

But the biggest benefit to our "blacktopping fund" is the money that we receive from the bridge fund when we use our highway forces on bridge projects. We have constructed (or replaced with other drainage structures) 110 bridges in the past 10 years at a cost of \$3,500,000.

We purchase piling in vast quantities and pay a contractor to drive it, fill it with concrete and construct and pour reinforced concrete pile caps. We then purchase and set the bridge deck. The deck consists of prestressed or precast concrete box beams or our own O.K. bridge beams. Then we use our manpower, trucks, and equipment to haul and place the fill and construct the approaches and road surface

at each location. Our paving contractor will then pave the bridge deck and 500 feet on each approach which is also paid from the bridge fund. We feel that we have saved over \$3,000,000 by constructing our bridges in this manner. An added benefit to our highway department are the funds that we receive from the bridge fund by performing this bridge construction with highway forces. All of the labor, overhead on labor, and equipment charges are reimbursed to the M.V.H. fund on every bridge. We have filed claims against the bridge fund for almost \$1,200,000 during this 10 year time frame which amounts to \$120,000 per year, and approximately 40 miles of blacktop roads that we would not have otherwise had. This also extends to every culvert pipe installed. Not only does the bridge fund purchase all the culverts, the stone used for backfill, flowable fill and in some cases pavement over the newly installed culvert, but we file a claim each quarter for all the labor and equipment costs involved in the culvert installations. The equipment rates are set each year by our commissioners and are comparable to the rates charged by contractors in our county. In 1995, the culvert installation claims alone amounted to over \$63,000.

In addition to the benefits already covered we also include in the bridge budget items to cover CDL physicals, drug and alcohol testing, workman's compensation, hardware, concrete, steel, and any other employee benefits for our bridge crew.

This is the second year that we have included \$50,000 in the budget for equipment to use around our bridges. Last year we purchased an air conditioned, all wheel drive backhoe and a hydraulic concrete breaker as an attachment for the backhoe. This machine has saved much wear and tear on our Badger hydroscopic ditching machines during bridge demolition. This year we will purchase another Badger or track backhoe to be paid for over the next few years by lease purchase agreement from the bridge fund.

In the winter when the weather is too nasty to do anything productive, we use our bridge crew and county highway forces to tie up rebar and pour our own bridge beams and we are now producing precast backwalls using our own design. This will eliminate the need for pile driving on some bridge projects and will save about \$5,000 per bridge.

It can easily be seen how our bridge fund has been a very effective tool for our county highway department. Perhaps it could also work for yours.