

Planning commission seeks input for \$14 million TIP program

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The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is encouraging Berrien and Cass County residents to provide input on an approximately \$14 million Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

The TIP features 37 proposals to be completed between 2011 and 2014, according to Southwest Michigan Planning Commission transportation planner Anna Rahtz.

The biggest local road project proposal for 2011 is a resurfacing of Bertrand Road from Weaver to Mayflower roads, estimated to cost \$350,577. In

2012, plans are to continue resurfacing Bertrand Road from Mayflower Road to Red Bud Trail. A hot patching and single seat coat will be added to Niles-Buchanan Road from 0.3 miles west of Mayflower to Niles City limits.

There are also plans to resurface Front Street and do work on sidewalks and streetscaping from Red Bud Trail to the eastern city limits in Buchanan in 2013. 2014 may see the resurfacing of 17th Street from Oak Street to Eagle Street in Niles.

Rahtz says the local road projects will mainly be funded by the Federal Highway Administration Surface Transportation Program with 20 percent financed by local governments, which might be a problem.

"We're not sure we will have enough local money (to meet the local match)," Rahtz said.

She also said the state might not have enough money to match federal money, which might lead to cutting projects or hiking a statewide gas tax.

Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) projects include a \$1.47 million bridge replacement on U.S. Highway 131 business route over the Dowagiac River in 2012 and a \$7.86 million resurfacing of U.S. Highway 132 from M-60 to Edwardsburg in 2013.

The commission also plans to improve public transportation in the county by adding a new bus in the Niles Dial-A-Ride system in 2013 and 2014.

None of the plans are final, as the commission considers public input and waits to see how the budget shakes out.

"It wouldn't be transportation plans if it doesn't account for all the needs of community members," Rahtz said "It's very important."

To read all of the proposed projects and their costs, visit: <http://swmpc.org/2014tipprojectsn.asp>.

The public can offer input by sending comments to Anna Rahtz at rahtza@swmpc.org or calling (269) 925-1137. Residents can also attend the next public Niles-Buchanan-Cass Area Transportation Study meeting on June 22 at 1:30 p.m. at the Niles City Council Chambers.