

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2026
BENTON COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT, 7752 HIGHWAY 25 NE, FOLEY, MN

Present: Commissioners Scott Johnson, Steve Heinen, Jared Gapinski, Pam Benoit, and Ed Popp. Also present: Montgomery Headley, Beth Stay, Steve Backowski, Karle Meyer, Mark Ebnet, Missy Paulson, Adam Ritsche, Allie Patrin, and resident Mark Lepinski.

Chair Heinen called the meeting to order at 8:04 AM.

Introductions:

Staff provided brief introductions, and Interim County Engineer Steve Backowski acknowledged and thanked the Public Works/Highway staff for all their efforts and accomplishments despite staffing shortages.

Project Reviews:

Backowski started with an update on the CSAH 7 project. A previously identified weak spot remains under review, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) must complete a final inspection before the project can be officially closed. Project closeout requirements include inspection verification, materials testing, and confirmation that the contractor is in compliance. It was noted that project bonds expired upon closure of the project. Once final approval is granted, a warranty may be added; however, this would involve additional cost.

An update was provided on the Gilman project. Due to late-season paving, a walk-through meeting with the city engineer is scheduled for the 18th to review outstanding concerns raised by the Gilman City Council. Some repairs are anticipated due to late-season work. Bituminous edge protection was installed, though snowplows have impacted the area. Cleanup and corrective work is expected, including installation of remaining joints and implementation of a unique solution to protect the curve edge. Bridge work associated with the project was reported to be complete and in good condition. A highway safety improvement project on County Road (CR) 13 was also noted.

Staff reviewed upcoming transportation projects for the year, noting that five federal projects are currently scheduled—an unusually high number compared to prior experience. While maintaining federal funding eligibility is a priority, staffing limitations present challenges in managing the workload. After discussion among staff, a recommendation was made to adjust project timelines.

For CSAH 13, including the extension and the CSAH 29 extension, compliance challenges related to a required noise wall necessitated rescheduling; however, funding has been preserved. The CSAH 13 bridge replacement and resurfacing project was identified as difficult to complete simultaneously due to detours, costs, and potential public confusion. Staff recommended completing the bridge replacement first and postponing paving work until the following year, moving the overall project timeline to 2027 to allow sufficient time for approvals and coordination.

The condition of Trunk Highways 10 and 23 in the Duelm area was discussed. Approximately one and a half miles of roadway are in poor condition and staff recommended milling and overlaying that section, while the remaining roadway is expected to remain serviceable for approximately five more years. To better align staffing capacity and potentially benefit from improved pricing amid market volatility, staff recommended postponing related work until 2027.

Bridge Priority Resolution:

Backowski shared that plans and certificates for two bridges were submitted, and the project is expected to receive 100% funding, with costs estimated based on the structure designs and funding eligibility. Additional Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IJA) funding is available, which is viewed as a positive development for covering the increased expenses.

Safe Streets and Roads for All:

The Task Force project is being let by HDR as the consultant. The Safe Streets for All initiative requires increased public participation, and a project website has been launched to allow the public to submit safety concerns. The task force is currently being organized and may include one to two County Board members, with four meetings planned for this year.

County State Aid System:

Backowski reviewed year-end balances and discussed maintaining funds within the Highway Fund rather than allowing excess balances to default to the General Fund. The County Board discussed recovering engineering and construction costs to stabilize fund balances, noting current highway balances are relatively lean. A consensus was reached to recover eligible costs and retain them within the Highway Fund balance where possible.

Next, Backowski provided updates on upcoming road projects, and noted that the BUILD Grant was submitted, but is waiting on Letters of Support from Representative Emmer and Senator Tina Smith.

The Committee of the Whole Meeting was adjourned at 9:05 AM.

Steven J. Heinen, Board Chair
Benton County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Montgomery Headley
Benton County Administrator