



WCRC Tree Removal Safety Projects

Projects on Mast Road in Webster Township and North Territorial Road in Northfield and Salem Townships

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What exactly are you doing?

A: The goal of these projects is to proactively make the road environment safer for drivers. To do that, we are removing approximately 100 trees along a 2.8 section of Mast Road in Webster Township and approximately 340 trees along an 8.3 mile section of North Territorial Road in Northfield and Salem Townships. These trees are within approximately 10 feet from the edge of the pavement in the public road right-of-way. In addition, we will be removing numerous dead trees and brush in the public road right-of-way. All tree work will be completed by March 31, 2018.

We will also be replacing two failing culverts, one on Mast Road near Strawberry Lake Road and one on North Territorial Road over the Wagner Drain. The culvert replacements will be completed this summer.

Q: Why are you cutting down all these trees?

A: We are not cutting down all the trees along these sections of road. We have strategically selected trees that are simply too close to the road and need to be removed. These sections of road will remain heavily-wooded roads.

The goal of these projects is to proactively make the road environment safer, allowing the driver more space to correct an error.

Q: Why is this project necessary?

A: Cars leaving the roadway and hitting trees or other objects is a problem at the county, state and national level. A large percentage of fatality crashes in Washtenaw County are from these types of crashes. Between 2007 and 2016 there were 2,105 injury and fatal crashes in Washtenaw County from drivers leaving the road and hitting a fixed object. 60 of those crashes were fatalities. The majority of these fixed objects were trees.

This project is a chance for us to help improve the safety of the road environment along these specific sections of road.



Q: Distracted driving is the cause of most crashes, why not just teach people to be better drivers?

A: Distracted driving is a major problem in the county, state and country. We support any effort to try and teach people to be safer, less distracted, drivers.

As a road commission, we don't have control over how people drive but we can help to make the road environment safer. This grant allows us to be proactive and try to make these roads safer for the traveling public.

We all make mistakes while driving, whether we are distracted or not, and this project will help to provide more space to correct a mistake before hitting a fixed object like a tree.

Q: Why not just lower the speed limit?

A: We cannot just arbitrarily lower speed limits. Michigan State law governs the methods by which speed limits are established on the county road system and requires that county road commissions set speed limits jointly with Michigan State Police. The methods for establishing speed limits are based on empirical evidence and practices that are used throughout the country. These methods are designed to promote uniform operating speed across the driving population and to provide the safest conditions possible.

Read more about how the Michigan State Police sets speed limits here:
http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Establishing_Realistic_Speedlimits_856257.pdf

Mast Road has an unposted speed limit, meaning it is 55 mph. North Territorial Road's speed limit is 50 mph. We expect both sections of road to remain at the current speed limits after these projects are completed.

In addition, arbitrarily lowering the speed limit does not make a road safer. If we were to lower the speed limit without the data to support it, we would be creating two sets of drivers – those who drive the lowered speed limit and those who drive the speed they feel is safe on that road. The safest speed limit is one that establishes a smooth flow of traffic.

Q: Why not just increase speed enforcement?

A: Speed limit enforcement is out of our control. An increase in enforcement would be a decision for local officials and the sheriff's department and is likely to only change behavior for a brief period of time.



Q: Won't clearing the trees actually make people go faster on the road?

A: In theory, when there is a dramatic change in the character of the driving environment speeds may increase.

In regards to these projects, we are only removing approximately 30-40 trees per mile (on average), there will remain 1000's of other trees along the road. Because there will be so many trees remaining, it will not significantly impact the driving environment and we don't believe it will cause drivers to increase their speed.

Q: Why can't you put guardrail in front of trees instead of removing trees?

A: Putting guardrail in front of a large tree that is already too close to the road does not mitigate the risk. The guardrail itself acts as a fixed object and is not an appropriate solution.

Guardrails are the appropriate safety choice in certain situations, including on top of a steep slope or near a body of water. Guardrails are appropriate where the hazard itself is a greater risk than the risk of hitting the guardrail.

Q: Why not just put "deer crossing" signs up to warn people of potential hazards?

A: While deer crossing signs show no evidence of reducing crashes, upon request, we will conduct a study to determine if a deer crossing sign will be installed. The process of requesting and installing a new sign can take a few days up to several weeks depending on our current workload.

We do not plan on installing any deer crossing signs in conjunction with these projects.

Q: Why is there a rush to do this work this winter?

A: All tree removal work must be completed by March 31, 2018. This timeline is dictated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in order to protect two species of endangered bats in Southeast Michigan. The Northern Long-Eared Bat and the Indiana Bat may roost in trees in this area and so all trees must be felled by March 31 ahead of the bat's known roosting period.

Read more about these bat regulations:

[https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/Considerations for Projects Affecte d By Several Bat Species 533033 7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/Considerations_for_Projects_Affecte_d_By_Several_Bat_Species_533033_7.pdf)

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/Local Agency Threatened and Enda ngered Species Review Process 011818 611752 7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/Local_Agency_Threatened_and_Enda ngered_Species_Review_Process_011818_611752_7.pdf)



Q: How was the public informed of this work?

A: In March 2017, MDOT selected the North Territorial Road and Mast Road safety projects, from a number of other projects, as worthy of grant money. These projects were designed by our engineering staff using data and engineering judgement, reviewed by the Safety Program at MDOT and bid through MDOT. Our board approved and authorized the signing of this contract at our January 3, 2018 board meeting.

Before the work began, we notified the residents along those stretches of Mast Road and N. Territorial Road about the project.

The project details have been posted to www.wcroads.org since mid-January.

Q: How did you select which trees will be removed?

A: We looked at the proximity of the tree to the road's edge. All trees within approximately 10 feet of the edge of the road are on the list to be removed. In addition, dead trees in the public road right-of-way within these stretches of road will also be removed.

Traffic standards actually recommend a 20 – 30 foot clear zone for this type of road but we compromised with 10 feet instead, knowing the importance of trees to the community and character of the road.

Q: How is this project funded?

A: We were awarded Federal Highway Safety Improvement Funds (HSIP) to improve safety along N. Territorial Road and the High Risk Rural Roads (HRRR) Program for the improvements to Mast Road. The proposals were reviewed by MDOT and funds were granted.

These funds were awarded specifically to remove trees that are too close to the roadway, posing a safety risk, and replace two failing culverts.

The grants from the 2018 Federal HSIP and HRRR Program were awarded to cover 90% of that amount. The remaining 10% will be covered by Michigan Transportation Funds in our budget.

All the work on Mast Road is budgeted for approximately \$560,900, \$445,100 of that is for the replacement of the culvert. The remaining funds will be used for tree removal, trimming, traffic signage and other miscellaneous costs.



Q: Why not use the money to remove dead trees from around the county?

A: The Federal grant (funding 90% of these projects) is specifically for these two sections of road and includes funds for removing dead trees within the public road right-of-way along these sections of road. The grant funds cannot be used for any other purpose.

WCRC does remove dead trees from the public road right-of-way around the county using maintenance dollars. These trees are removed if they are deemed to be a safety hazard. Historically there has been a major backlog of this work and we are trying to catch up. In the last 5 years (2012-2017), we have spent more than 20,000 hours removing trees that have fallen into the road.

Grant opportunities like this one allow us to remove the backlog on these specific sections of road.

Q: Why not just pave county roads instead of spending money on cutting down trees?

A: Every year, we are resurfacing miles of county roads using various funding sources. See the list of the major projects planned in 2018 here: <http://www.wcroads.org/road-work-construction/projects/>

The funds for the projects on Mast Road and N. Territorial Road are from a Federal Highway Safety Improvement Fund. This is a competitive grant program designed to fund projects with the best cost-benefit analysis, they want to fund projects that will improve safety in a cost-effective manner.

In our experience, while paving projects provide a more desirable driving surface, there are few safety benefits and a very high cost per mile. Other efforts, like removing trees in the public road right-of-way have been shown to improve safety at a much lower cost per mile.

Q: What happens to the wood once the tree has been cut down?

A: Property owners within the project limits were contacted in advance and asked if they wanted certain types of the wood. If they opted in, they will receive the wood specified. All other trees, limbs, stumps, etc. will be chipped and removed from the area by the contractor.



Q: There are other fixed objects along the road, like mailboxes and signs, are you going to removing all of those too?

A: Not necessarily. We do have strict standards for mailboxes and road signs that are placed along the roadside.

Mailboxes:

Most rural mailboxes are located adjacent to the road to allow for efficient delivery of mail, but placing mailboxes adjacent to a road can be a hazard to the motoring public. Accordingly, we have adopted standards for the placement of mailboxes and newspaper delivery boxes along county roads that balance the need for mail delivery and a safe roadside environment.

Read more about mailbox rules here: <http://www.wcroads.org/faq/mailboxes/>

Road Signs:

Signs maintained by the road commission are designed for safety. Their posts are required to have a break-away section to help reduce injury if they are struck.

Q: Who is doing the work?

A: The tree work will be completed by an MDOT-certified contractor. The culvert replacement work will be completed by a different MDOT-certified contractor.