

# County Highway Unit Wasting Millions; Find Loafing Rampant

Many county highway pay-rollers are spending much of their day loafing on a road maintenance operation that will waste \$3.3 million this year.

TRIBUNE Task Force members and Better Government Association [B. G. A.] investigators followed scores of road workers on their daily rounds in the last several months. They saw the ritual of men in a rut, working sporadically and listlessly with one goal in mind—the day's end.

## Roots of Loafing

To find out why, the investigators dug into the proposed budget for county highway maintenance and compared the costs with dozens of highway departments thruout the country.

They found that the roots of loafing lay deep in a budget designed to find jobs for peo-

## ▶ Task Force Report

This is the last in a series on waste in county government uncovered by THE TRIBUNE and the Better Government Association. The series was compiled by THE TRIBUNE's Task Force which includes director George Bliss and reporters Philip Caputo, William Currie, William Jones, and Pamela Zekman.

ple, rather than people for jobs.

An exhaustive comparison was made using Oakland County, Michigan. Highway experts say that the county has a model road maintenance department. As part of Detroit's industrial area, it provides routes for heavy truck traffic servicing the auto industry.

Oakland County's 201 road workers maintain 2,700 miles of road, including 8-lane cement superhighways with daily traffic loads of up to 39,000 ve-

hicles. The county spends \$5.5 million to keep the roads in repair.

## \$200,000 More Spent

Cook County's 290 workers maintain only 580 miles of roads, most of which are two-lane asphalt with a maximum daily traffic flow of 30,000 vehicles. The county spends \$5.7 million a year to maintain its roads.

To account for the wide differences in costs, investigators

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# County Highway Unit Wastes \$3.3 Million a Year



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first traveled to Oakland County to study budget costs and inspect the roads. Later, in Washington, they consulted engineers and management experts involved in the fiscal reorganization of similar road maintenance departments.

A thoro check of roads, records, and statistics showed that 740 miles of the Oakland County roads are remarkably similar to the two-lane asphalt roads in Cook County.

\$6,000 Extra a Mile

An itemized comparison of the two systems revealed that Oakland County spends \$3,000 to maintain each mile of asphalt road. Cook County expends at least \$9,000 per mile.

Thus, if Cook County were to maintain its roads for \$6,000 a mile less in 1972, it could save \$3.3 million.

Much of the waste was found in a maintenance work force twice the size needed. One measure of overstaffing is how much money the counties spent yearly on materials and equipment per man.

"The labor salary is fixed," one management expert said. "How much you spend per man is an indication of how much you get that man to do."

Oakland County spends \$18,539 on materials and equipment each year for each road worker.

Cook County spends \$9,060 for materials and equipment each year for each road worker.

Another measure of overstaffing, the experts said, is the number of men used to remove snow.

Snow Removal Top Job

Highway officials, including those in Cook County, agree that snow removal and salting is their biggest job and takes the largest work force.

Oakland County officials base their 201-man work force on the 2,600 miles of lanes they have to salt and plow—or 12.4 lane miles per man.

Cook County employs one man for every 5 lane miles of snow plowing.

But county officials here say they base their work force on what they call patrols. There are five in each of the five districts and one for the expressway frontage roads.

To man each of the 25-mile patrols with six to eight men and a labor crew for each district, Cook County hires 55 to 60 men for each district, twice as many men as they need, experts say.

Cook County officials were unable to say how they determine how many men are needed for each patrol or work crew.

With less work than Oakland County workers and 80 more men to help them, Cook County highway workers are hard pressed to find work to do, investigators found.

No Coffee Breaks

Time and again, they watched from a distance as the payrollers spent hours on unauthorized coffee breaks, extended lunch periods, personal shopping excursions, and long rests in their trucks.

In an interview, Hugh McAdiff, assistant head of secondary roads, said the county highway workers are expected to be working in all kinds of weather from 7:30 a. m. to 4 p. m. with a half hour for lunch at 12:30 p. m. They are allowed no coffee breaks, he said.

Here are some examples of what investigators saw during days of following county workers:

On Nov. 18 truck No. 269 left the county district garage in Des Plaines shortly after 8 a. m. Two men were in the cab.

Hour and Half Lunch

They headed straight to Bob's Snack Shop near Greenwood and Glenview Roads, Glenview, a favorite haunt of county workers. The two spent 37 minutes in the cafe before returning to their truck.

After working slowly for two hours, they drove six miles and entered a home in Northbrook where they spent an hour and a half.

After the lunch break, they



Two county highway maintenance workers leave Bob's Snack Shop near Greenwood and Glenwood Roads in Glenview at 9 a. m. on Dec. 29 after a half hour breakfast break. The two were driving truck 226. Workmen are expected to be out on the roads from 7:30 a. m. to 4:00 p. m. with a half hour lunch break at 12:30.

were back at a work site on Illinois Street near Laramie Avenue in Wilmette. But the crew members sat in their truck for an hour smoking and talking until they finally put in five minutes of work before returning to the garage at 3 p. m.

On Dec. 8 investigators followed two men in truck No. 215 from the La Grange Park garage to a liquor store from which one of the men returned with a small package.

Work Until 2:30 p. m.

These two workers spent their morning working very slowly on a few road shoulders until 11:15 a. m. They sat in their truck for another 45 minutes, then drove to a nearby residence.

One of the men spent 15 minutes in the house. They returned to work where they stayed until 2:30 p. m.

Investigators followed the truck to an auto supply store which one of the workers entered. He came out several minutes later.

Before leaving the parking lot, the crew spent 15 minutes picking a large bunch of leafy green vegetables in a nearby garden. At 3 p. m. the two headed back to the district garage.

8 in Snack Shop

On Dec. 10 a reporter and a B. G. A. investigator watched as truck No. 288 left the Orland Park district garage at 8:40 a. m. and drove with three men to Rosy's Service Center Snack Shop near Southwest Highway and 143d Street.

Two other county trucks, No. 251 and 259, soon arrived at Rosy's. Eight county highway workers were in the snack shop at 9 a. m. Except for one man who left the place and sat

in his truck reading a newspaper, each of the men spent at least a half hour in the shop.

Later, the team followed truck No. 289 out of the same garage.

They tailed the truck to a barricaded bridge at 86th Avenue and 123d Street in Palos Heights, where the driver and another man sat for 15 minutes.

Go on Shopping Spree

Then the two drove to the other side of the bridge and sat for another 15 minutes. Leaving the bridge at 11:30 a. m. they stopped in a drive-in restaurant, and then went to a drugstore. They were back in the garage at 12:20 p. m.

Ten minutes later one man drove truck No. 289 to the same bridge and sat there until 1:45 p. m. reading a newspaper until he met with a supervisor. He was back in the garage at 2 p. m.

On Dec. 29, after watching another two-man crew enjoy a leisurely breakfast in Bob's Snack Shop in Glenview, a surveillance team followed truck No. 248 in a shopping spree.

Their first stop was at a grocery store. Then they parked their truck in the Lawrencewood Shopping Center in Niles and entered a department store. During a half hour in the store one of the men bought a necklace and a cameo.

Savings of \$1.5 Million

"You've got two problems in Cook County," one highway expert told a reporter. "You've got too many people to start with and they're not doing enough. They can easily go with half."

If the highway maintenance force were cut in half to 145 men it would result in a payroll savings of \$1.5 million. But

that is only part of the \$3.3 million in waste.

The remainder should be found in a total reorganization of the maintenance program, said one management consultant.

"It is buried in administrative and impersonal services typical of this type of budget which is designed to pay people," he said. "The Oakland County budget is designed to get the job done."

Moreover, the maintenance of roads in Cook County is less than half of the \$23-million highway department budget which is rife with fat payrolls and obscure appropriations.

An example is the department's Traffic Safety Commission which the B. G. A. exposed last year for assigning payrollers to nearly useless jobs, while they were working second jobs.

The B. G. A. called the commission "totally useless" and recommended that it be abolished completely as a haven for patronage jobs.

Before this Task Force series began on Jan. 9, nevertheless, George Dunne County Board president, had recommended that the Traffic Safety Commission be appropriated \$423,452 for 1972. This is part of the \$14.2 million in waste uncovered by THE TRIBUNE-B. G. A. investigation.

On Jan. 10, Dunne announced that he had cut the equivalent of 18 commission jobs from the recommended 1972 budget as a result of moonlighting traffic investigators. This will save \$231,303.

That is the only wasted money that has been permanently eliminated from the budget since this series began, leaving \$13,996,697 of waste in the recommended 1972 budget.