
Lewis County improved their average network condition by an estimated 40% over 3 years by revamping their approach to network management and budget allocation. By flipping the old mindsets on their head implementing a preservation-first plan, today the network looks completely different than before.

BACKSTORY:

Lewis County, New York is made up of 250 miles of public roads, which equates to about \$70 Million worth of asphalt pavement. In 2020, the county didn't have a strong understanding of their network condition, but it was clear the network was deteriorating significantly. Leaders estimated the network had an average PCI of 50 at the time.

The county historically used a "by feel" approach to assessing pavement condition, with teams riding the pavements and documenting what the ride felt like on paper.

Without objective data and no official maintenance plan, the county was hoping to "pave the way out" of a long-standing trend of deterioration. Their approach was to pave as much as their budgets would allow, about 12.5 miles annually. With roads in their area lasting only 8-12 years, they knew something needed to change to repair the 250 mile network.

PROBLEM:

Highway Superintendent Tim Hunt began to apply a shift in mindset to Lewis County's network planning, thanks in part to his background in resource allocation. Hunt understood that roads needed to last 20 years or more for the community to outrun deterioration trends with their current budgets. In addition to getting more creative in securing funding, Hunt began "building backwards" to set the county's road maintenance targets.

Teams started collecting accurate pavement condition assessments and began a preventative maintenance-first plan (shown in slides below). This approach required expanding the county's treatment toolbox to better addressing pavements at different points in their deterioration lifecycle -- essentially "keeping good roads in good shape." Under the same plan, paving was re-labeled internally as a "last resort," turning the old mindset completely on its head.

Goals were identified for maintenance activities on multi-year cycles, which allowed teams to check their progress year-over-year and better allocate resources (see slide labeled "2022 Report Card").

SOLUTION:

In 2023, the difference in network condition is already apparent, with an overall average network PCI of 91, a drastic improvement from the situation only three years earlier.

In addition to resident satisfaction, Hunt says that legislators have articulated gratitude for having a rational plan in place, where Lewis County isn't planning reactively based on complaints or demands.

Today, Tim teaches other municipalities around New York tips for budgeting and creative use of funding through the LTAP program. For more information on Lewis County's plans, including several applied examples of resource reallocation and decision-making, watch the recorded webinar "Stretching Resources Further to Maximize Your Budget" on RoadResource.org.