



TOWN OF PRINCETON

Office of the Selectboard

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December 28, 2018

Letter from the Selectboard regarding Road Funding

Dear Princeton Residents,

Our roads, bridges, and culverts are the Town's largest capital asset. We have about 77 miles of road (7 of which are unpaved). Using current road reconstruction costs, the 70 miles of paved roads have an estimated worth of about \$37 million.

The Highway Department is in charge of maintaining and reconstructing roads. The Road Advisory Committee assists the Highway Superintendent in identifying the medium- to long-term needs of the Town's roads, culverts, and bridges and works to secure local, state, and Federal funding for them. It also helps prioritize projects and maintains a multi-year road plan. Since the formation of the Committee in the late 1990s, approximately 59 miles of roads have been reclaimed or reconstructed at a cost of about \$24 million.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, once a local road is in a state of good repair, every dollar invested to keep it properly maintained will save \$6 to \$10 in avoided repair costs that become necessary to rebuild the road when it fails due to a lack of maintenance. This is a powerful argument for adequately funding our roads because a lower level of investment in the short term will certainly cost taxpayers much more in the long term.

The Committee will complete a study in 2019 which will identify all major culverts and their location, diameter, and condition. Based on this data, they will prioritize which culverts will need replacing first to avoid emergency situations.

The Committee taps many sources of funds for our roads:

- **Small Bridge Grant Program**

This is a 5-year state program to assist cities and towns in replacing or preserving bridges with spans between 10' and 20'. Each municipality may qualify for up to \$500,000 per year. These small bridges are not eligible for Federal aid under existing programs.

We received one grant for \$500,000 in 2017 to replace the failing bridge on Route 31 near the Highway Barn.

- **Federal Grants (Transportation Improvement Program or TIP)**

We have received the following grants through this program:

- Brooks Station Road \$ 3,300,000 in 2003
 - Mountain Road \$ 4,400,000 in 2006
 - East Princeton Village \$ 6,888,640 in 2018
- Total: \$13,480,640

- **MassWorks Infrastructure Program**

The MassWorks Infrastructure Program, formerly the Small Town Road Assistance Program or STRAP, is a competitive grant program that provides a flexible source of capital funds to municipalities and other eligible public entities to support and accelerate job growth and economic development throughout the Commonwealth.

Communities with a population of under 7,000 are eligible to apply under this category for roadway safety in small towns Grant funding in this category does not exceed \$1 million per award. If awarded, towns are eligible to receive 1 grant every three fiscal years.

We have received STRAP funds for the following:

- Mirick Road (1 mile) \$477,128 in 2013
- Route 140/31 \$1,000,000 in 2016

Note that we also received \$52,499 for Houghton Road in 2015 through a rapid recovery grant and \$243,643 for Mountain Road engineering in 1999 through a special earmark in the Governor's budget. It was considered to be an extraordinary feat to secure this last earmark and it was primarily due to the importance of Mountain Road to the region.

- **Chapter 90 Funds (State)**

Chapter 90 funds are for capital improvement such as highway construction, preservation and improvement projects. These projects create or extend the life of capital facilities. This program is supposed to share gas tax revenues with cities and towns in order that local officials can improve our vital infrastructure, which, in turn, leads to improved quality of life, ensures public safety and stimulates economic development. The amount is based on a formula consisting of road miles, population, and employment. One beneficial aspect of these funds is that they do not need to be used right away and can be banked for a future large project.

We have received \$6,073,790 in Chapter 90 funds over the past 20+ years.

- **Town Funds**

The town includes \$350,000 for roads in its budget. These funds must be used in the fiscal year they are appropriated and are used to match grants or cost sharing required by some of the above programs. This funding is essential because the \$341,000 we receive in Chapter 90 funding simply does not cover the cost to maintain our roads in good driving condition.

The Town usually pays for engineering so that our projects are ready to go. In some cases, this allows our project to be selected over other projects that aren't ready. Engineering typically is about 10% of project cost.

One of the projects that the Roads Advisory Committee has been working on for about 10 years is a good illustration of the road funding process. There is a bridge on 140 in East Princeton that needs to be

replaced. It would have cost the town \$1,000,000 - \$1,500,000 to replace it and the Town at the time didn't have the money.

Because of its short span, it didn't qualify for the STRAP program. Instead, the Committee and the Highway Superintendent, working together with Mass Highway and Central MA Planning, managed to secure federal (TIP) funding for a much larger project (\$8M in total cost) that will replace the bridge and also introduce many other improvements (such as traffic calming, sidewalks, and beautification) to that part of the road. The Town paid around \$600,000 for the upfront engineering and will end up paying only about \$108,000 more for this larger project. Because of the Federal funding, the road will be constructed to Federal standards and we will end up with a much better built road that should last much longer.

A bit north of this project, again on 140, the town paid \$400K of \$1.5M to rebuild the road from around Captain Bob's to the 140/31 fork.

According to the Road Advisory Committee and the Highway Superintendent, we should be spending about \$2.4 million each year on our roads to keep them in good condition. This is based on an estimated life span of 15 years and an average cost of \$100 per linear foot to reclaim or reconstruct. We have been spending only about \$350,000 per year of Princeton tax money. Fortunately, we have been able to make up the difference through grants. and State Chapter 90 money.

Sincerely,

The Princeton Selectboard



Richard C. Bisk, Chair



Edith M. Morgan, Clerk



Karen G. Cruise, Member