Dealing with the Public and Elected Officials

Greg Vavra
South Dakota LTAP
Items of Interest

• Commissioner Complaints
• Public Complaints - Entitlements
• Skill Sets of Elected Official
• Communication
• Public Meetings
• What have you done for me lately
Dealing with the Public and Commissioners (Panel)

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33rd Annual North Central Local Roads Conference
Rapid City, SD - October 17-18, 2018
What was an issue you had to deal with the public and/or County Commissioners?

Saltillo Rd, Lincoln NE

1. Safety concerns from the public and school district.
2. Crashes resulting in injury or fatality.
3. Close to city limits with urban traffic.
4. Being used as bypass for south side of city.
Proposed South Beltway

Source: City of Lincoln

SHEILA STORY/Lincoln Journal Star
Saltillo is Lancaster’s ‘most deadly road’

DRIVE CAREFUL

COUNTY ROAD MEETING - CITY COUNTY BUILDING

OCT. 29 - 6:30PM
Norris High School student dies after accident on Saltillo Road

COUNTY-WIDE PROBLEMS...

INFRASTRUCTURE IS UNDERFUNDED...AND THERE ARE COUNTY WANTS TO IMPROVE SALTILO ROAD
10/11 News, Lincoln NE

AFTERNOON AFTER A CRASH NEAR

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT BRIANNA TITTERINGTON DIED THIS
What’s the background?

- Safety study of Saltillo was underway prior to the 2018 crash.
- Speed study of Saltillo and adjoining roads.
- Commissioners didn’t have a designated public meeting.
- Meet with Commissioners twice at regular weekly meetings for traffic study & signs.
What about the media?

• Media contact with our department.
• Media contact with public & family.
• Media contact with law enforcement.
• Social media
  – Facebook, Twitter, Change.org, Journal Star, Messenger, School forums, etc.
Deadly stretch

Since 2012, crashes along Saltillo Road between 27th and 84th streets have killed six people.
Time for a Change to the Deadliest Road in Lancaster County

With yet another serious car accident on Saltillo Road, it is time for a change. How many more accidents must there be before we make real changes to ensure this road is safer to drive on? It is time for the county engineer to put time and resources into this deadly road. Reduce the speed limit, widen the road, put decent shoulders along the road, or put one of your famous roundabouts in. Anything is better than nothing.
Updates

County Engineer receives $7.2 million grant for Saltillo Project

Our voices are being heard!! See attached article. It’s a step in the right direction.

Cindy Nelson
6 months ago
How was issue addressed?

• Use facts to communicate clearly.
• Don’t allow emotions to lead reactions.
• Speed limit lowered in some areas.
• Direct contact with the family to listen.
• Started our department Facebook page.
• Roadside Memorial program approved.
Lancaster County Engineer announces reduction in speed limit on Saltillo Road
Please Drive Safely

IN MEMORY OF
Ryan Margaret Post

Ryan Post
What is Your Best Practice for Communicating with the public/Commissioners?

- I feel the best practice is to communicate quickly and accurately.
- Don’t give information you shouldn’t release, and/or isn’t confirmed factual.
- If you don’t work with the media and give some information, they will find other sources to write their story.
Has this Best Practice been Successful?

- Yes - Everyone involved in this process will interpret your level of achievement or failure with their own measurement. I respond to Commissioners, Public, Media, etc., in a timely manner with solid answers. Don’t give inaccurate information.
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What was is an issue you had to deal with the public and or County Commissioners

2017 Spring flood in Bottineau County

- 3 bridges in the county were destroyed
- 115 small sites across several townships
How was issue addressed?

- Needed to communicate with each township board to explain how the repairs will be addressed, also how it might become a FEMA disaster.
- Communicating about road closures and rerouting was important with the following:
  - The Media
  - Locals
  - Emergency Service
What is Your Best Practice for Communicating with the public/Commissioners?

- All of the flooding issues were also relayed to my commission board on a regular basis.
  - The County Commissioners were aware of my plans and what the next steps that would take place
  - I addressed the County Commissioners concerns or questions on a regular basis

2018 North Central Local Roads Conference
Has this Best Practice been Successful?

I keep my County Commissioners informed as much as possible.

It takes the guesswork out of their job and mine.
Ritch Gimbel
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