

ACHIEVING INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

John M. Kirtland, Chief, Maintenance Division,
Hennepin County, Minnesota, Department of
Transportation

Today's growing demands and diminishing revenues make sharing our resources (equipment, manpower, special services) more desirable than ever before. Sharing resources with others is certainly not new or unique, but often it is used only in the simplest forms. In some cases this may result from a reluctance to change the status quo. However, more likely it is a concern for the legal and administrative entanglements involved. Perhaps the biggest deterrent to achieving intergovernmental cooperation in resource sharing is the legal aspect. Is it permissible under present laws, ordinances, etc.? In some instances state laws have to be revised or new ones drafted to provide for such sharing. For protection, most any sharing policy will require an official written agreement. We, at Hennepin County, are fortunate in having developed a variety of resource sharing programs encompassing a diverse field of services. Hennepin County has been very receptive to cooperative agreements and the rewards have been more than worthwhile. The following are descriptions of a few such areas of sharing, and comments regarding the results.

Hennepin County loaned its staff of labor negotiators to assist Scott, Wright, and Anoka Counties in their first formal negotiations. These services were provided under formal agreement, and continued until Hennepin County's own needs became too great. With demands growing throughout the state, the Association of Minnesota Counties then hired professional help to serve all Minnesota counties upon request. Hennepin County presently handles labor negotiations for the Hennepin County Park Reserve District and the Metropolitan Mosquito Control Commission, both independent agencies. Besides the obvious advantages of uniformity in the bargaining field, the added work allowed Hennepin County to enlarge and develop its resource staff to better respond to its own future needs. The other agencies gained through the use of trained, knowledgeable and interested negotiators at a cost far less than they could have provided individually.

Through a formal cooperative agreement the county maintains a portion of state highway that runs common with a county freeway. It also, by formal agreement, maintains three river bridges joining Scott and Wright Counties with Hennepin County. In the same manner, the City of Minnea-

polis provides routine maintenance on the county system within the city limits. By informal agreements, many trade-offs are made between the Minnesota and Hennepin County Transportation Departments, such as splitting the winter maintenance of an intersection (ramps and clover leafs) to eliminate deadheading, or in other ways improving service or efficiency. Through informal agreements, the county, with assistance from the cities, loads and hauls snow from the heavily traveled, multi-lane county highways within their borders. By this cooperative effort, the county and the cities provide snow-free traffic lanes, gutters and sidewalk areas for the convenience of the motorist and pedestrian. All of these measures tend to reduce equipment and manpower needs through better utilization of present facilities and help maintain a level of service not always possible by one agency alone.

Hennepin County, by formal agreement, maintains traffic control signals for some of the cities. This is beneficial to both parties, because through this arrangement the county can better afford to maintain a first rate signal repair shop with highly trained technicians, test equipment, and parts supply, plus adequate field equipment and personnel. Independently, the cities could not justify the necessary expenditures for this activity and therefore, the level of service provided would generally fall below desirable or acceptable, and could result in accident claim losses.

Today the county's computer systems are receiving great attention and demand for participation sharing. The engineering functions for highway design have been shared, and in some cases jointly developed, through formal agreements with the City of Minneapolis. The engineering graphics system promises many exciting possibilities. Demands for program and time sharing are already challenging. As software is developed for properly descriptions and roadway and utility information is incorporated, it adds to the one call utility program prospect. Sharing of this information is eagerly awaited by both governmental agencies and utility companies. Further programs will make possible accurate data by location for such things as crimes, accidents, fires, etc. Computerized traffic accident reports are now being furnished to the county by the Minnesota Department of

Transportation. To upgrade the present system, through a federal grant, the county is purchasing a microfilm reader/printer. This traffic information will, upon request, be made available to cities for use in their accident prevention and safety improvement programs.

There are many more examples of intergovernmental cooperation I would like to review, but I want to cover two programs that have a long proven track record. First is the Hennepin County Cooperative Purchasing Program. In 1967, seven Hennepin County suburbs, ranging in population from 23,000 to 77,500, joined with the county to form the Cooperative Purchasing Group. All municipalities in Hennepin County were invited to join in mid-1968. The next year the invitation was extended to school districts and other governmental units, such as the Metropolitan Sewer Board and Metropolitan Sports Commission. In 1970, communities from adjoining counties joined the program. In four years, the number had grown to forty-nine agencies. As stated earlier, a legal basis is needed to permit the existence of a cooperative purchasing membership agreement, as well as to commit members to the terms of the agreement. In Minnesota this is possible under a state law permitting a 'joint exercise of powers agreement'. This statute allows two or more governmental units to cooperatively exercise any power common to all and allows one governmental unit to act in behalf of the other participating members. The county was selected to act as the lead agency, taking advantage of their existing purchasing department and greater experience. The first major purchase for the group was automobiles. Gaining consensus for standardization of equipment specification is perhaps one of the toughest of all items. The group, working together, had to compromise to arrive at eight standards for vehicle and engine size, styles, etc. Upon completion, the request for bids was advertised. Nine dealers submitted quotes and orders were made for a hundred and twelve automobiles. Estimates indicate the participating agencies saved from one hundred to seven hundred dollars per unit. Much the same procedure is being used today, except that now the group holds a public auction to dispose of a variety of mobile equipment rather than accept a generally lower trade-in credit. Some of the other major commodities jointly purchased are rock salt, diesel and heating oil, gasoline, signs, grass seed, fertilizer, chemicals, traffic paint, batteries, office furniture and supplies. The cooperative purchasing membership now numbers over seventy. Of this number approximately 50% are very active. Insurance of several types is also purchased through the cooperative group. However, this is handled as a totally separate program. Except for the auction of the vehicles, which costs each participant approximately twenty dollars per unit, the county absorbs the full cost of all administration. The added expense above purchasing solely for the county has been vastly offset by lower prices through combined volume purchases. An article describing this multi-agency purchasing procedure, written by Richard Ryberg, Executive Director of the Hennepin County Cooperative Program, appeared in the April, 1980 issue of American City and County.

The second and most far reaching of the intergovernmental cooperation projects is the Minnesota Local Roads Research Program. The legislative framework was established in the Minnesota rules and regulations for state aid operations under Chapter 500, laws of 1959. Perhaps it is stretching a point to call this a truly intergovernmental cooperative project. However, it was brought about through the democratic process and operates on cooperative ef-

forts and principals. Briefly stated, the Commissioner of Highways (now Commissioner of Transportation) is responsible for the program's administration. The State Aid Screening Committee annually determines and recommends the amount of money the commissioner shall set aside from the state aid funds to be used solely for conducting research in methods of, and materials for, the construction and maintenance of county and municipal state aid streets and highways. The regulation further provides that the commissioner shall appoint a local roads research board consisting of the following: four county engineers, two city engineers, two department of transportation staff engineers, one University of Minnesota staff engineer, and one ex-officio secretary, who shall be the department's research and development engineer. Many needed research projects have been, or are being carried out through this intergovernmental cooperative plan. Suggested research projects are submitted by the county and city engineers. From this list the board makes its selection of research projects and submits its recommendation to the commissioner. The commissioner makes the final determination. I would like to point out two research projects that I feel indicate the "home town" value of the program. Project 618, "REVIEWING AND ABSTRACTING TECHNICAL REPORTS": Technical reports and magazine articles thought to be of interest to state and local transportation engineers are abstracted. About twelve reports are published yearly. Project 645, "IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS": Selected research reports by various agencies are digested and assistance given to county and municipal engineering personnel in implementing appropriate findings. Methods include slide presentation, summary reports, and field demonstrations.

This brief presentation gives an indication of the wide variety of intergovernmental cooperative sharing programs we enjoy. They range from the very complex, as just described, to the very simple. The results have more than justified the effort through convenience, higher levels of service, and dollar savings.