

**Director's Board Report
February 2017**

Thank you Chairman Whitehead.

Good morning members of the Idaho Transportation Board.

I would like to begin by commending our employees for their excellent response to the most severe winter in many decades.

Here is a short video showing how the public views their amazing performance this winter.

As the governor stated, our employees' efforts paid off.

Whether they were driving a plow, ordering materials, or keeping the 511 system running, they helped ITD keep drivers safe and the highways clear of snow and ice 73 percent of the time during storms.

The snow from those storms is now beginning to melt.

So far we have closed several major highways due to flooding and avalanches.

One avalanche covered several hundred feet of Idaho 21 with snow 40 feet deep.

The Office of Communication implemented a comprehensive public-outreach winter driving campaign in November, before the big storms arrived.

The proactive campaign is very popular with the public and the media.

We now communicate directly to thousands of Idahoans using Facebook and Twitter.

This allow us to provide up-to-the-minute information, photographs, and video showing driving conditions or why highways have been closed to protect driver safety.

Three separate Facebook posts reporting avalanches, flooding, and pothole hazards reached over **110,000 people** each.

Many of our social media posts drive users to the 511 Traveler Information System as a resource.

Since December 1st., the 511 site has had more than **3.4 million** visits, more than doubling the total from the same period last year.

This shows that Idahoan's are learning to rely on ITD for their travel information.

When people receive ITD information via 511, Facebook, or Twitter about a recent avalanche or road closure, they often spread the information via retweets and word of mouth to their friends, families, and coworkers.

The public has been very understanding and supportive of the issues we face, as long as we are quick to respond and explain **EXACTLY** what the issues are.

And show them what we are doing in both the short term and long term to resolve the issues.

Here are three quick news reports showing some of the issues we faced this winter.

Bonnors Ferry Foreman George Shutes sent an e-mail to District 1 Engineer Damon Allen, about a recent meeting.

He wrote, and I quote:

"The Operations Manager from Southern British Columbia, Marc Dale, stopped by my office last week.

He introduced himself, and said

"We need to visit, I am tired of you making me look bad. Your roads are always in excellent shape."

He wanted to know how we were performing our Winter Maintenance at such a high standard.

We talked for about two hours.

Great conversation.

I just wanted to pass this on to you.

Recognition from other countries is REALLY COOL.

Have a great day."

End quote.

Damon responded to George's e-mail with a statement that I think we all echo.

He wrote, and I quote:

"I can never appreciate you guys enough, and the roads have been fantastic.

Thank you and your crew.

Lives are really being saved every day because of your diligence."

End quote.

I received an e-mail from Jeff Anderson, Director of the Idaho State Liquor Division, about a recent meeting he had with a vendor.

Director Anderson wrote, and I quote:

"I wanted to share kudos for you and your team.

I Just finished a meeting with Calvin Filmore, owner of Diamond Lines, who delivers all of the state's liquor for the Idaho State Liquor Division.

We were discussing his per-hundred-weight adjustment for the coming contract year.

The subject of how he gets product to northern Idaho came up.

Calvin said ITD does a "FAR" better job than either Oregon or Washington on keeping roads open and clear in the winter.

And in maintaining the roads throughout the year.

He particularly called out the service ITD does on Hwy 95.

Way to go!"

End Quote.

* * * *

I shared our success at dealing with winter storms with the House and Senate Transportation Committee in January, and the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee on February 6th.

I explained that we have increased the time highways are clear of snow and ice during storms from 28 percent in 2010 to 73 percent in 2017.

And that is during one of the most severe winters in 30 years.

I also presented the Governor's recommendation for a Fiscal Year 2018 budget of **\$723.9 million**.

And I told the committees that Idaho is providing input to the Trump Administration on the funding needs of rural states.

Two days after my budget presentation to JFAC, the Washington Post printed an article about the Trump Administration's plans for infrastructure improvement.

The article quoted Wyoming Senator John Barrasso, chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, who said at a hearing, and I quote:

“Funding solutions that involve public-private partnerships, as have been discussed by administration officials, may be innovative solutions for crumbling inner cities, but do not work for rural areas.”

Idaho helped develop the testimony on rural states that Senator Barrasso was referring to.

The message from rural states is being heard.

During her Senate confirmation hearing, the Trump Administration's new Transportation Secretary, Elaine Chao, stated the administration would ensure equal access to transportation opportunities among rural and urban areas.

ITD will continue to work with our Five-State Coalition to ensure the voice of rural states is heard in Washington D.C.

* * * * *

While funding is one of our top concerns, so is the safety of our maintenance crews.

Our plow operators are on the front lines of winter driving.

They have a lot to contend with, including inattentive and dangerous drivers.

Here is a traffic camera video showing one of our plows being struck by a vehicle in Pocatello.

Luckily, no one was injured in the crash, but both vehicles did sustain damage.

On a more positive safety note, I received a letter from **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Regional Administrator** Greg Frederickson, commending ITD for its highway safety accomplishments.

He wrote, and I quote:

" Dear Director Ness:

I am encouraged to see that Idaho's observed seat belt use rate increased 1.8 percent.

From 81.1 percent in 2015 to 82.9 percent in 2016.

I was also pleased to see that Idaho is making good use of social media outreach for distracted driving.

Distracted Driving accounts for 23% of motor vehicle crashes in Idaho.

I appreciate the continued hard work and dedication of you, your staff in the State Highway Traffic Safety Office, and your partners across the state to make all roads safer in Idaho."

End quote.

* * * * *

I would now like to Introduce Chief Deputy Scott Stokes for his February report . . .

* * * * *

Mr. Chairman and members of the board, this concludes my Director's report for February.