

Covid-19 Survey of Highway and Public Works Departments

April 3-10, 2020

Cornell Local Roads Program

Ithaca, NY

The Cornell Local Roads Program surveyed the primary highway officials with the Town, County, Village and City Highway and Public Works Departments across New York State in early April 2020 to determine how they were responding to the COVID-19 outbreak and the associated Executive Orders from Governor Andrew Cuomo. This report provides summary data of the anonymous replies from the over 300 respondents. The tool used was Qualtrics, but some agencies sent their replies in via email.

The questions asked were

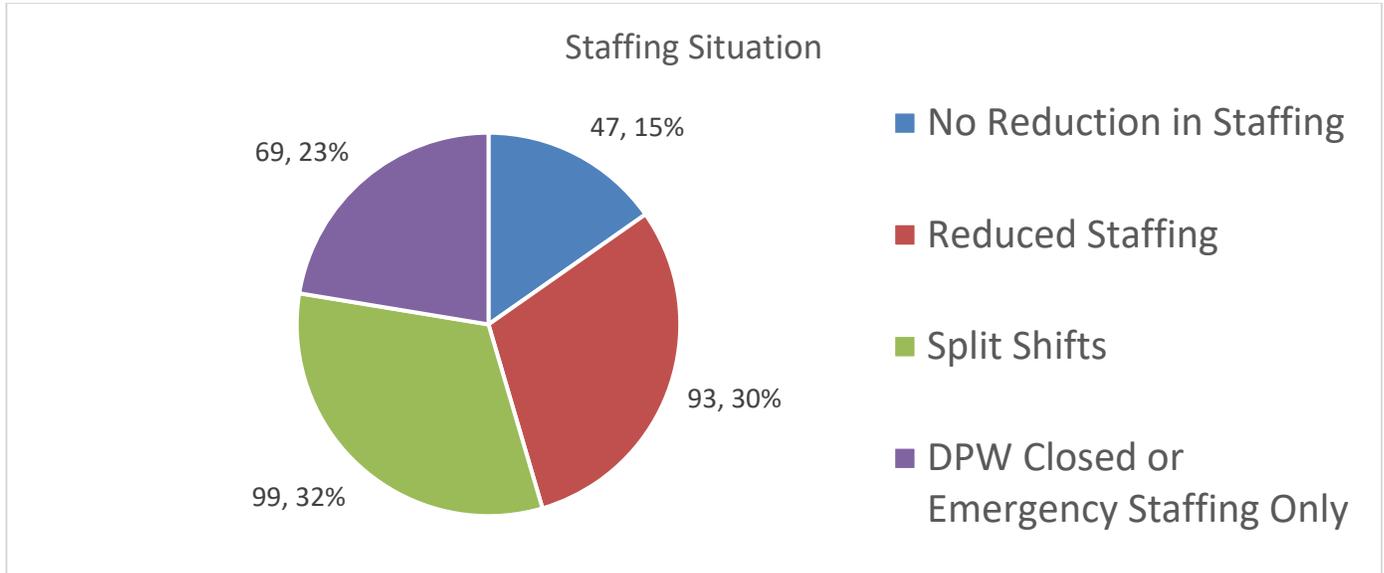
- What is your agency's level of government?
- Which of the following best describes your staffing situation?
- Do you plan to reduce staff further?
- How are you dealing with paperwork?
- Are you continuing with major projects such as paving, bridges, sewer and water replacements?
- Are you continuing with highway maintenance work?
- Has anyone on your crew come down with COVID-19?
- A place for comments was also provided.

No conclusions are to be implied or reached in this survey. The goal was to inform everyone of the various practices being utilized by the local highway and public works agencies across New York State. The 311 replies received is 20 percent of all local agencies in the state.

What is your agency's level of government?

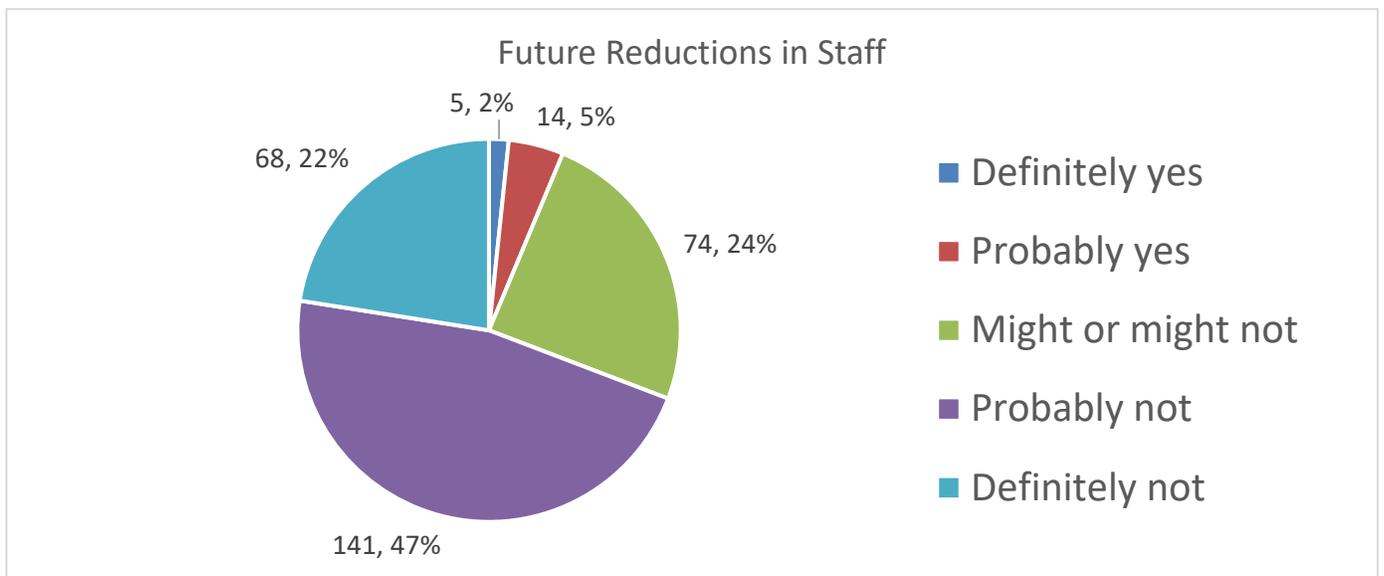
Answer	Survey Respondents	Number of Agencies in NYS	Percent
City	7	62	11%
County	35	57	61%
Town	197	933	21%
Village	72	534	13%
Total	305	1586	20%

Which of the following best describes your staffing situation?



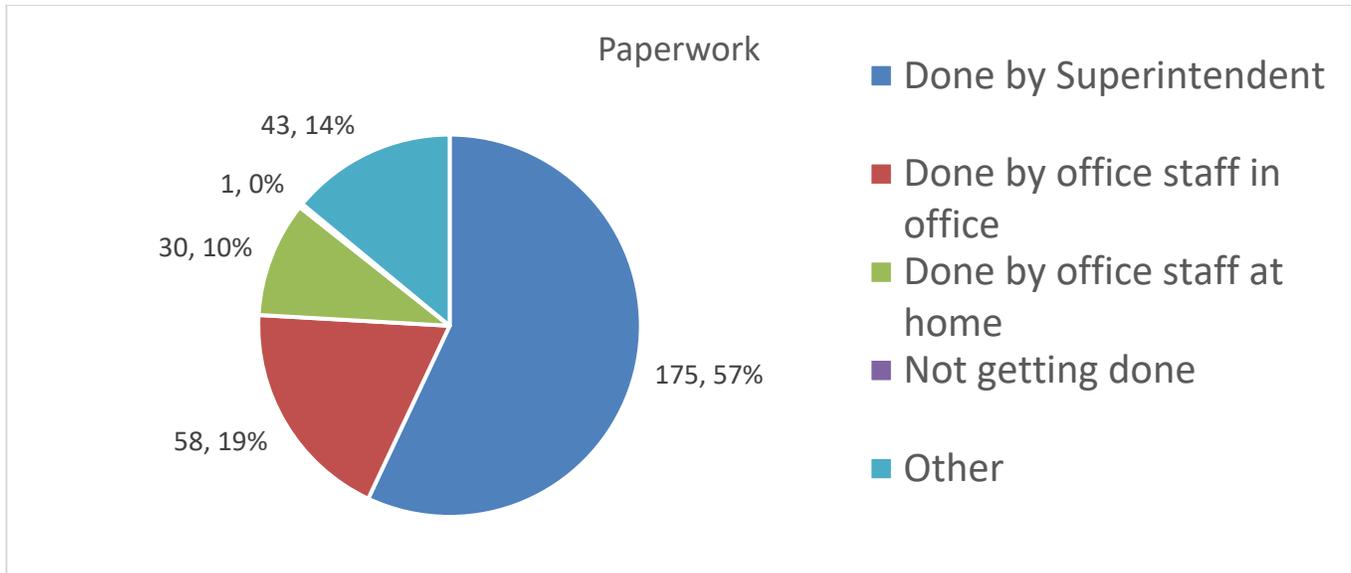
Agencies are doing all four of the possible choices for current staffing and it is likely these numbers will change as the pandemic changes over time. Currently, the most common staffing situations are split shifts (99 respondents or 32%) and reduced staffing (93 respondents or 30%). However, a significant portion of respondents are not reducing staffing (47 respondents or 15%) or are closed except for emergencies (69 respondents or 23%).

Do you plan to reduce staff further?



Most agencies are definitely not, or probably not reducing staffing in the future (209 respondents or 69%). A quarter said they might or might not as the pandemic plays out (74 respondents or 24%). A small percentage said they were likely to reduce staff in the future (19 respondents or 7%).

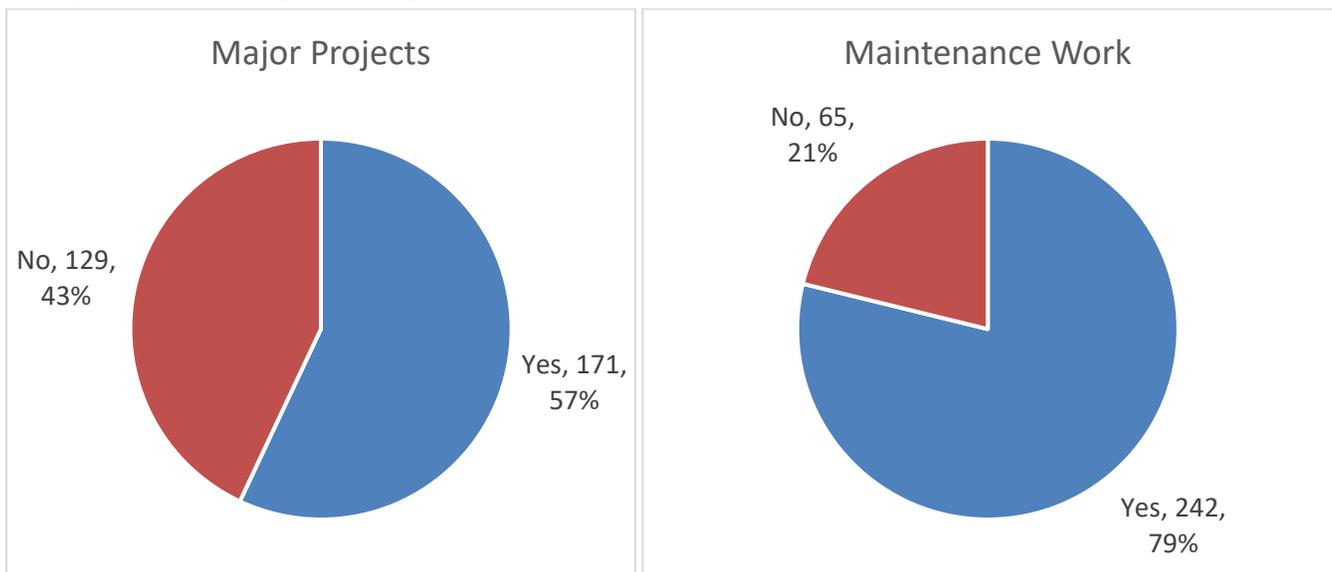
How are you dealing with paperwork?



Most paperwork is being done by the department head (Superintendent), but some is being done by office staff either at home or the in the office. The respondents who said “other” had a range of answers, but in summary; high-priority items (payroll, bills, contracts, daily work reports) are getting done and other low-priority paperwork is on hold. Most office staff are working from home, but may come in to do some critical functions if they cannot be done at home (such as payroll or invoices). In some case, all four of the choices are being done for different types of paperwork.

Are you continuing with major projects such as paving, bridges, sewer and water replacements?

Are you continuing with highway maintenance work?



Covid-19 Survey of Highway and Public Works Departments April 3-10, 2020

Most agencies were continuing with major projects and maintenance (57% and 79% respectively. Breaking down the municipal type showed some variations. Almost all of the county respondents [91 and 85% respectively for major work and maintenance] were continuing with projects. For towns, the percentages dropped to 54% and 82% respectively. Towns are continuing maintenance, but not as many are continuing with major projects. For villages and cities combined (since only 2 cities replied), the percentages were 48% and 66% respectively). The data breakdowns are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

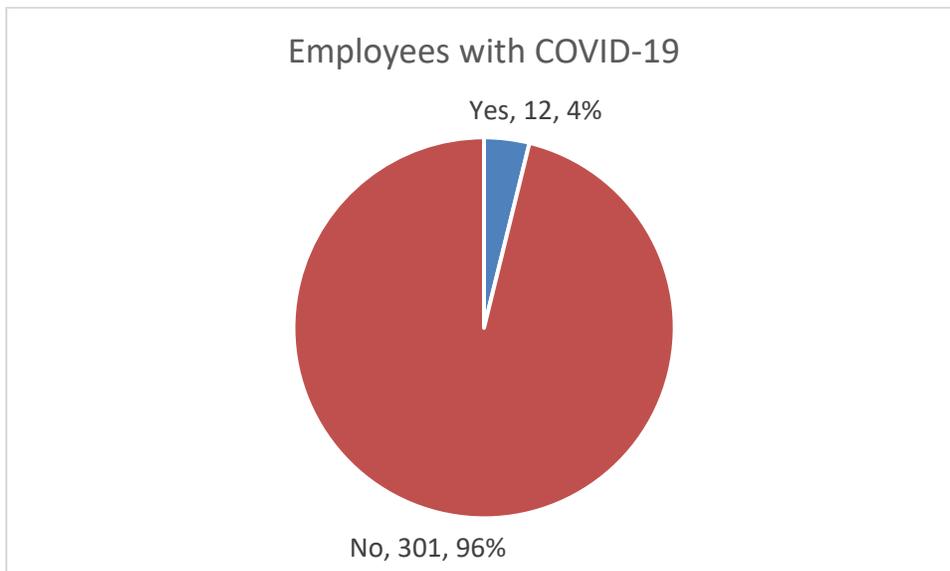
Table 1. Continuing Major Work by Municipal Type

	Yes	No	Total
City	2	5	7
County	31	3	34
Town	102	86	188
Village	36	35	71
Total	171	129	300

Table 2. Continuing Maintenance by Municipal Type

	Yes	No	Total
City	3	4	7
County	29	5	34
Town	162	34	196
Village	48	22	70
Total	242	65	307

Has anyone on your crew come down with COVID-19?



Very few agencies had someone with COVID-19 as of April 10 (4%), but this may change over time.

Comments

94 comments were received regarding the survey, but some were really multiple comments. The Cornell Local Roads Program grouped the comments as much as possible and removed any municipal references to keep the answers anonymous. From the comments, most agencies are adjusting to the new reality, but there are some who still are very concerned about the safety of both themselves and their staff. Many agencies are worried about budgetary issues.

Concerns of or with elected board

- Elected board or municipal leader feel changing hours isn't needed
- Board put DPW on call but bringing employees back due to claims of “fake news” and “false panic”
- Municipal leader held a meeting with board members without the Highway Official. I am seeking information to find out if I can bring half the crew back and alternating weekly.
- The municipal leader at first deemed that the highway crew was non-essential but on April 6 we were deemed essential so we went from split shift to full shift. I believe we should have stayed on the split shifts.
- We are worried about contracting the covid-19 virus, however our municipal leader told us to work as normal, and to get work done.
- We have reduced hours, but one board member thinks we should be at full staff

Health Concerns

- 1 employee coming back from vacation came down with symptoms before returning to work
- A sanitation worker has tested positive for COVID-19, but no highway workers to date.
- Anyone must remain home who have any illness or if anyone in family is ill.
- Employees have family members at high risk, so we temporarily suspended operations.
- I feel we all have to do our part to keep our community safe. If there is an emergency, we WILL be there. I check my messages and E-Mails every day. Our workers and constituents' health come before anything else!!!
- I have had 1 worker out for 10 days with some illness. It was not confirmed
- I want all departments to close (emergency only!)
- one employee quarantined due to association of a family member, no contact with other employees
- Spouse of one of crew members has symptoms and told to self-quarantine and monitor symptoms, but has been improving already. Hwy Maint Work has been prioritized as essential versus 'it can wait.' Sweeping is essential and getting done now.
- We have a couple in precautionary quarantine, but no positive tests.
- We have had two employees who had to quarantine.

Covid-19 Survey of Highway and Public Works Departments April 3-10, 2020

- we only have three employees, working with one now. Others have medical conditions. Staying home at this time. Very limited work. Trying to keep major project in plans??

Miscellaneous Answers

- These are current answers, could change any day depending on situation
- We are evaluating week by week on capital projects starts
- we will progress slowly

Monetary Concerns

- All projects are being examined for need due to anticipated revenue shortfalls
- If CHIPS monies aren't received, we would not be able to pave.
- Bridges and paving projects will only be done to the extent that funding is available from the state or locally to pay for the work.
- Major Projects contingent on CHIPS Funding.
- Projects will depend on the availability of Chips Funding, Highway maintenance is based on available crew size.

Social Distancing and Keeping Folks Apart

- Continue work as normal. Crew of three work three days the take three off with pay and other three come in and do same routine. We will be doing this until mid-April unless State tells us something different. We are practicing social distance and cleanliness.
- have a small crew and have taken all precautions to stay away from everyone including each other, all in separate vehicles just to keep moving forward as you understand our time to fix and maintain our road systems are very limited at best.
- Only doing projects that permit workers to work 6 feet apart. Water main repairs as needed, and building/equipment repairs. Snow removal as needed.
- Separation, no more than two people in lunchroom at the same time, separated vehicles, some staff report to different locations for work.
- we are a small rural municipality, with a small 4 man department, so far we have been off for the initial two week force reduction, but as of Monday we will be back to work using good hygiene and social distancing practices to be safe amongst ourselves. We have just too much work to do to ensure safety to our public.
- We have divided DPW into 4 divisions and assigned them to 4 different buildings with their own vehicles
- We have scaled maintenance work back to only tasks that keep crews separated: ditching, mowing, etc. Crews are only 3-4, and are reporting directly from home to the job sites. Office staff are either working from home, or if unable, splitting days or working in the evenings. Some staff have been reassigned to support other departments as to maintain support services. Facilities, including Highway, are closed to the public.
- We split shifts weekly to minimize possible spread should employee be infected.

Covid-19 Survey of Highway and Public Works Departments April 3-10, 2020

- We're a small crew (4) I do send guys home on rainy days etc... we try to maintain social distancing. It's difficult breaking habits.

Staffing-Related Concerns

- At this time, we plan on being back to work after mid-April, with minimal staff on a rotating basis. This is all subject to change depending on the resolutions enacted by the board
- Hopefully I will go back to full crew after mid-April if no one has come down after 21 days of separation in shifts
- I am the only staff in my department. Present time only having emergency projects done.
- It would be great to have a newsletter out on what scope a Superintendent of Highways has with shutting down his Department.
- My men have been on emergency standby but in early April will come back to work to get some needed work done,... ditching, haul materials, etc.
- Neighboring towns have shut down or reduce staff
- Shifts are 1/2 staff one week, 1/2 staff following week. Staff members are assigned a vehicle for the week they are working and are responsible for disinfecting that vehicle daily. Maintenance activities are such that allow for proper social distancing.
- split crew in half, 7 guys work mon-tue 6am-4pm other half wed-thur. Fridays off, everyone gets paid 40 hours
- Staff is on Emergency Leave until mid-April which may run longer. We have been and are continuing Critical Services. As the nice spring approaches, we will be bringing in workers for maintenance.
- Start date early April but only one person per piece of equipment and staggered starting times
- thank you, we are working under Emergencies Only.
- The situation will be re-evaluated the end of this week by the Highway Official and municipal leader.
- Took two weeks off are back to work now. HWY official worked during the two weeks off to keep up with emergency service and road repair
- tried split shifts but got shut dow
- Up until this week it was a call in as needed, basin repair this week and pothole repair starting next week
- We are running at 50% staff until mid-April when we will re-evaluate.
- we are very short handed, so we are doing minimal work culverts, potholes, etc.
- we are very small, only 3 men and supt.
- we are working remotely as much as possible. having some staff go into office on an as needed basis, emergency repairs and pothole patching being done as needed by crews.
- We assigned trucks/equipment to the two shifts to limit possible exposure.
- we did not work one week because of COVID -19

Covid-19 Survey of Highway and Public Works Departments April 3-10, 2020

- We had a 50% reduction of 2 people on for a week and 2 people at home for a week for 2 weeks. Now we have implemented 2 shifts with a 1/2 hr. separation.
- we have 12 employees, week on for six and six off- we have 120 miles of hwy so staying split up seems to be working
- We have been closed for two weeks, I Believe Monday April6th I will have two-man crews doing small odd jobs.
- We have many miles of Gravel Roads that need to be graded now. Daily outdoor meetings, Health, safety & welfare checks, a query of where have you been & with whom.
- We have public works staff coming in as needed, only one employee at a time.
- We have reduced maintenance work from 17 March till present to essential or emergency work. As of next week, limited staff will be coming into service and change over equipment from winter to summer operations. We have implemented Social Density and Distance procedures; no more than two to a truck, one preferred and shifting personnel to 10 a shit.
- We have split our staff into two teams and they rotate weekly. We are moving forward with our capital projects, but with caution. We have cancelled a few of our low priority locally funded projects.
- We plan on starting back to work on mid-April.
- We shut down between two weeks, when we started regular shifts again
- we were shut down for two weeks, but are back due to leaf and brush pickup. Will go day by day

Work-Related Comments

- All our work is contracted out
- Continued projects when our work force has the all clear to be able to work together.
- Engineering is continuing on a few major projects.
- essential and non-essential are in the eye of the beholder.
- I have selected No on the projects Question but I'm slowly working on it. (cutting edges, Flood repairs etc.)
- I have the understanding that highway maintenance is not considered essential unless there is a hazard such as a tree or snow in the road. Anything that is a safety issue.
- Major projects have been limited and reduced, highway maintenance is limited and reduced
- major projects/paving scheduled for June/July - Maintenance with reduced staff
- my guys are on call for major repairs that cannot wait. anything that can wait will get done later this summer.
- No big road or water projects are planned at this time
- No projects started in April. Blacktop plants not open
- Only working on essential duties. Or emergency projects
- Operating most services.
- Operating many operations at full strength. Fleet maintenance operations to support other essential departments.

Covid-19 Survey of Highway and Public Works Departments April 3-10, 2020

- Reassess every two weeks, subject to change
- Some major projects may be out on hold. We will assess later.
- We are a 4-man crew. On days that we can't work outside we are sent home
- We are a tiny municipality. We have a contractor that does our road maintenance.
- We are doing call in only, snowstorms, downed trees and water problems.
- we are hoping to get some pipes changed and have at least one road that needs to be finished
- We are keeping all federal aid projects going, paving requiring staff prep work has been put on hold
- We are operating our municipal systems without interruption. The DPW staff is "on-call" for emergency situations only. Office is staffed by one employee, but is not open to the public.
- We continue to work on these essential services.
- We have cancelled a big project for now but plan on doing paving and culvert work when possible
- We hope to get our work done but will see what the future holds
- when needed crew will report for work, we still maintain essential facilities