

# Mass transit tax bill irks suburb groups

By CAROLINE PRICE

It was another round of "Detroit versus the suburbs" at a state highways and transportation committee hearing on a bill that would increase the property transfer tax (and to pay for an urban mass transit system).

The hearing, held April 12 at Detroit's City-County Building, drew protesters from suburban, real estate and home-owners groups. Detroit interests also were represented at the hearing on the controversial bill.

The bill under fire is an attempt to raise matching funds—\$25 million annually—for a potential \$700 million federal grant for mass transit in the metropolitan area. It was introduced in the Michigan Senate by Sen. David Plawecki (D-Deerborn Heights) and Sen. Gilbert Bursley (R-Ann Arbor).

Sen. Plawecki is vice chairman of the highways and transportation committee and was present at the hearing with committee member Harry DeMaio (R-Battle Creek) and Chairman Arthur Cartwright (D-Detroit).

Some of the strongest opposition to the bill, which would increase the property transfer tax of 0.11 per cent now paid as part of closing costs by sellers of property to 1.1 per cent, came from Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy.

MURPHY'S STATEMENT, read by the director of planning and physical development for Oakland County, Milton Handorf, called the tax "unfair, discriminatory and unworkable."

The proposal being considered would, if enacted, raise the tax on a home selling for \$20,000 from the present \$22 to \$222, Handorf said.

"It is an insidious, hidden tax. At a time when personal finances are strained to a limit, the seller will find he has to pay for mass transit."

Murphy also took exception to what he felt was an unequal distribution of the tax burden.

"Due to variations in the number and type of property transfers, Wayne County, with 63.5 per cent of the population, would have only 43 per cent of the tax last year. Oakland, with 21.8 of the population, would have paid 39 per cent of the tax, and Macomb, with 15 per cent of the population, would have paid 18 per cent of the tax."

"Oakland residents are willing to pay their fair share of the financing for mass transit, but they will not accept a tax measure which extracts more than twice as much per capita from their county as from Wayne County."

According to Handorf, Murphy proposes instead a \$7.50 surcharge on all license plates statewide to raise the funds. The proposal was met with some objections by DeMaio, who asked Handorf how many license plates were sold each year in Michigan.

"I don't have those figures," Handorf answered.

MACOMB COUNTY has many of the same objections to the bill as Oakland, according to Arthur Gavin, chairman of Macomb's transportation committee. Gavin said the county also was opposed to an aspect of the bill that would redistribute membership on SEMTA.

At present, SEMTA is set up for nine members—three appointed by the governor and six by SEMCOG.

The new bill would give Detroit's mayor power to appoint five board members, suburban Wayne County three (one appointed by the Wayne County Board of Commissioners, one by SEMCOG and one by the governor), Oakland County three, Macomb County two, and Livingston and Washtenaw Counties, one each.

"The Macomb County Board of Commissioners is opposed to SEMCOG appointing the second member of Macomb's representatives to SEMTA. We can't justify a bill which gives one community (Detroit) more control than others," Gavin said.

According to Gavin, Macomb also advocates a statewide tax. "We should have a

mined bag of tax increases," he said. Gavin's alternatives included a 20 per cent vehicle tax increase combined with a one-half-cent-per-gallon gas tax increase.

"Putting all the burden on one aspect of the economy is wrong," Gavin said.

REAL ESTATE interests from all parts of the tri-county area voiced their objections before the committee.

Steve Passon of the North Oakland Board of Realtors in Pontiac calls the tax bill an "arbitrary tax."

"The bill singles out one industry," Passon said.

"Most citizens would never know of the huge increase until they bought or sold a home."

As an alternative to the tax, Passon cited a proposal by Rep. Thomas Brown (D-Westland) that would call for special state lottery games in seven counties to raise funds.

"Everyone is beating the lottery to death," DeMaio interjected. "Pretty soon someone is going to propose we tax sex to pay for mass transit."

Other realty and home builders associations which spoke before the committee share the view that the bill would detrimentally affect their area of the economy and refused to support it.

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**Commissioners OK tax budget**

By TIM RICHARD

It's a play all county governments, township and school districts make each year. They pass an "allocation budget" which is far bigger than they expect to get and send it to the county tax allocation board. That board divides the 15-mill "winter" property tax between the local units, and everybody gets busy passing realistic budget requests.

But some conservative Oakland County commissioners are tired of the game. They want to pass what they consider a "realistic" budget the first time around.

THE BOARD of commissioners gave 15-4 approval to the "allocation budget" presented Tuesday by County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and Finance Committee Chairman Lawrence Pernick (D-Southfield).

But first there was an argument.

Commissioner Henry Hook (R-Troy) called the \$29.8 million budget inflated. Commissioner Mary M. Dearborn (D-Birmingham) got more specific. She argued 1) the county's tax base is rising each year, bringing in more revenue; 2) the county is offering few new services that would require vast budget increases; and 3) there has been a "great infusion of outside funds" from the state and federal governments.

"OTHER LEADS of government could use the money more," Mrs. Dearborn said. "This county has too much money."

Oakland County government, she said, has been getting \$25 mills "under a gentleman's agreement—with the tax allocation board to that effect. This budget would require 6.31 mills."

But other commissioners went along with the practice and passed it.

Missing on the vote were Commissioners Paul Kampers (R-Bloomfield Hills), Joseph Montante (R-Orchard Lake) and Patrick Nowak (R-Farmington Hills).

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