

Highway fate lies in state's hands

By JUDITH BERNE

The tempest surrounding the proposed extension of Northwestern Highway could be resolved during an upcoming meeting of the state highway commission.

Chairman Peter Fletcher announced Friday the commission will tackle the Northwestern question at its 10 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 23, session in Lansing.

At that time, the state highway department will recommend whether or not to go ahead with the Northwestern project, Fletcher said.

In addition, the state attorney general's office will report the status of legal proceedings on the highway. These revolve around an Oakland County Road Commission suit against the state for delaying construction.

THE COMMISSION'S recent decision not to build M-275 linking I-96 in Novi to I-75 in Springfield Township has brought the Northwestern extension into the limelight.

The proposed extension, which has pitted area environmentalists against developers and the county road commission, was to have linked up with M-275. As it now stands, extension of Northwestern would dead-end into a black spruce bog.

Fletcher said the kinds of situations involved in M-275 decision would reap-

pear in the Northwestern case. "I would say that M-275 would have an impact," Fletcher said.

GEORGE SNYDER, in the forefront of the environmentalist stand against both M-275 and Northwestern, said his group "may want to appear at the meeting."

"We are in the process of studying the matter very carefully," he said, when informed of Fletcher's announcement.

Snyder said his group is up against proponents more formidable than proponents of 275.

"They are better organized and more powerful," he said. "M-275 was a brainchild of the highway department; Northwestern is the brainchild of developers."

The pending lawsuit for which briefs have been filed is an added ingredient.

The county road commission has charged the state highway department with failure to keep its bargain to build the Northwestern extension. Until now, Snyder said, the highway department's response has been: "We haven't said it won't be built."

MEANTIME, ALL OFFICIAL planning for the Northwestern extension is in abeyance until the commission makes a decision.

"I am sitting with my desk clean

and all my files on Northwestern closed," said Edward Kozenko, highway department consultant to two committees studying the project. "It's an uncertain type of situation."

Kozenko had a hand in cancelling February meetings of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) which just completed preparations for a Northwestern environmental impact study.

They were about to choose one or more consultants to carry it out. Letters from William D. Wagoner, TAC chairman, and Walter Cisler, CAC head, mailed by the highway department, were identical.

"The February meeting . . . is hereby cancelled. This cancellation is made necessary by the highway commission's decision to cancel the construction of M-275 . . . You will be notified of future meetings."

SNYDER, REPRESENTING the Eastern Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC) on CAC, complained about the terse cancellation.

"That's the extent of the communication of the department to the committee," Snyder said. "Many of us feel the department should at the very least explain to the public what they're considering."

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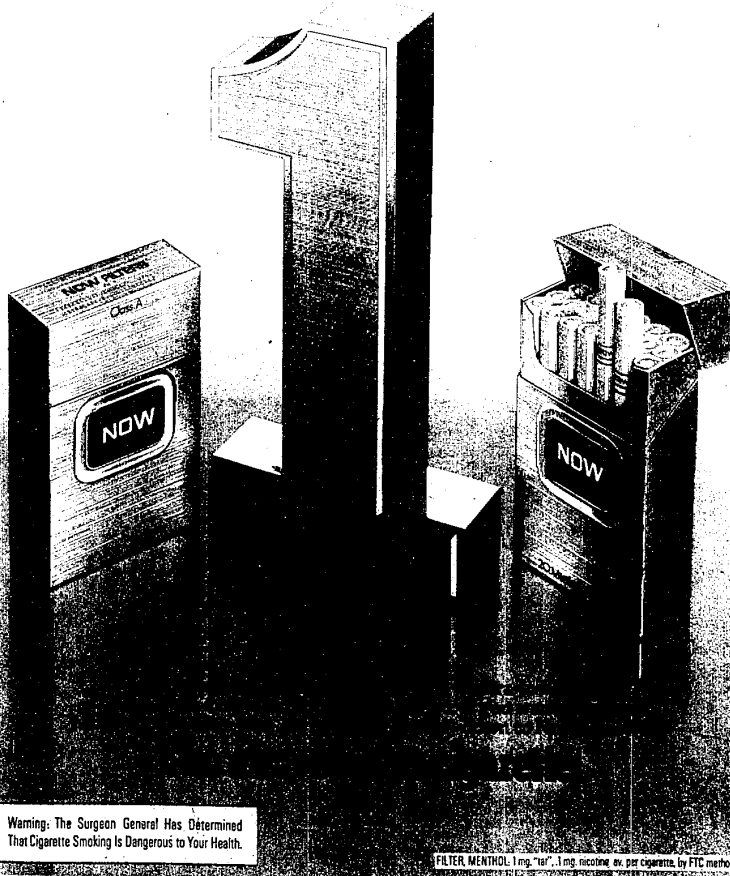


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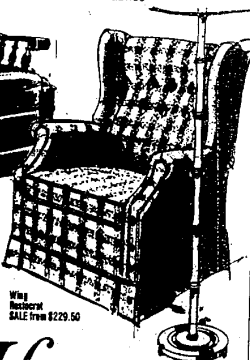
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