

M-275 study continues; choices will be narrowed

By TIM RICHARD

The State Highway Commission has a traffic analysis and is awaiting an environmental analysis on what, if anything, will be built in place of M-275.

"Hopefully, in our Sept. 27 meeting, we can narrow the choices," said Peter Fletcher, chairman of the four-man highway commission.

The commission is pondering four options: The original freeway plan through western Oakland County; a parkway plan with speeds of 45 m.p.h. proposed by county Commissioner Robert McConnell (R-Farmington Hills); improvement of existing roads, proposed by Citizens in Opposition to M-275; and the null alternative (doing nothing).

Fletcher said the decision isn't entirely the highway commission's. The Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Interior Department and the Environmental Protection Agency have to approve a choice. It was a devastating Interior Department analysis which originally sunk the M-275 freeway plan in 1977.

Fletcher admits being frustrated at the "very complicated" and "politically inadequate" way the federal bureaucracy moves.

The federal agencies will only accept or reject a specific plan. Fletcher would like to lay down all four options before each agency and get some guidance about which way the state should move.

"If they'd follow my approach," he said, "we could make a decision by the end of the year."

IF THE STAFF had its way, the state would go ahead and build M-275 from the intersection of the I-275 and I-696 freeways on the Farmington Hills western border through to I-75 at Davisburg.

Otherwise the staff finds far fewer faults with McConnell's plan than with the Citizens in Opposition proposal. That emerges clearly from a staff report describing and analyzing the alternatives. The staff has several good things to say about he McConnell plan and only had things about the Citizens in Opposition plan.

The chief differences are that McConnell's plan would tie into the freeway intersections while the Opposition plan wouldn't, and McConnell's plan calls for much new construction which would add to the road capacity of western Oakland County while the Opposition plan would use existing roads.

McConnell's plan would parallel Haggerty's north from the freeway intersection, then pick up much of the M-275 route north-northwest through Oakland County to M-59. It would continue on a reduced roadway to White Lake Road. It would be a six-lane boulevard with an 84-foot landscaped median, shoulders, continuous bicycle path and landscaped berms. One railroad crossing would have a grade separation.

The Opposition plan would be in two segments: The Haggerty-Union Lake-Williams Lake chain of roads from Twelve Mile north to M-59, and a six-lane boulevard along existing Four-

teen Mile from Haggerty to North-western Highway.

Estimated costs for the McConnell plan are \$45 million to \$49 million; of the Opposition plan, \$51 million to \$58 million.

THE McCONNELL plan presented some problems to the highway engineers, but it got generally good marks. On the plus side, engineers said it would provide direct access to the massive intersection of I-275 and I-696 on the border of Farmington Hills and Novi.

Its limited access would aid its capacity and safety.

"The almost continuous curvilinear alignment has been developed to provide angles of crossing at intersections as near to 90 degrees as possible. This will provide optimum sight distance at intersections and minimum exposure to traffic crossing the boulevard," they wrote.

"A maximum speed of 45 miles per hour is the stated desire of the sponsors of this proposal. The frequent use of five degree curves in the alignment will tend to reduce speeds on the facility."

Another good point was that "interruptions to local traffic patterns will be minimal both during and after construction due to the fact that most of the alignment will not follow existing roads."

Moreover, because the boulevard would be separate from existing roads, the capacities of such existing roads as Haggerty, Union Lake and Williams Lake would be increased.

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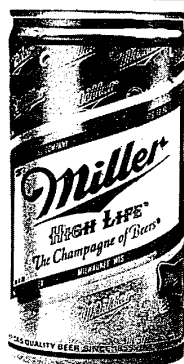
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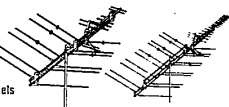
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