

Van Pool Help Offered Employers

In this era of subway mania most discussion of alternatives to the private automobile centers on grandiose and expensive schemes. The taxpayers' burden in comparison to transportation benefits gets the last, if any, consideration.

Were it not for the Oakland County Road Commission's efforts in late 1976 and into 1977 and 1978 that demonstrated an "affordable" tri-county transit system is possible, it is likely that all available money—and more—would already be committed to a one-corridor, heavy-rail subway system.

Now the Oakland County Road Commission has gone one step further. It is showing that a significant alternative to the one-person, one-vehicle private automobile trip can be implemented—without soaking the taxpayer. That alternative is van pooling. Several persons with common originating points and destination points share rides in a systematic, self-supporting program.

The Road Commission in early October 1978 offered to help employers in the Big Beaver Corridor of Troy set up such van pools. That corridor has one of the most heavily congested roadways and intense employment. The Road Commission program has been endorsed by the Troy City Council.

Drawing upon expertise of existing staff and without significant public cost, the Road Commission makes direct contact with employers, provides assistance in setting up van pools and trains employers and employee participants to manage their own van pool programs.

"Van pooling is a positive means to address road congestion, pollution and energy consumption problems without large expenditures of public funds. It is a proven method of providing a comfortable, convenient and flexible alternative to the automobile, particularly for work trips," said John R. Gnau, Jr., Road Commission chairman.

RAID AND

The raid on highway user taxes to pay for mass transit will lead to ruin of the highways, roads and streets.

William M. Richards, Vice Chairman of the Oakland County Road Commission, explains:

"The highway user taxes are no longer sufficient for road needs, let alone the massive costs of transit. Yet a transportation package adopted this year by the Michigan Legislature and Governor Milliken increases transit's share of those taxes from 3.6 percent to 8.3 percent of the total fund.

"That package will cost motorists two cents more per gallon of gasoline and 30 to 35 percent more for vehicle license plates.

"It will boost transit's share of the gas and weight taxes from \$20 million annually to \$60 million annually, which is a 200 percent increase.

"It will increase the Oakland County Road Commission's share

Five-Year Contracting Proposed

A supplemental \$1.5 million road construction program in 44 cities, villages and townships was launched during 1978 when the elected Board of Oakland County Commissioners contributed \$500,000 as a one-third share.

Actually, the communities said they would contribute one-third toward a total of \$4 million worth of county road improvements, but the County Board's \$500,000 one-year commitment forced selection of only \$1.5-million worth.

"Therein lies one of the frustrations of your Board of Oakland County Road Commissioners," said Chairman John R. Gnau, Jr. "We know there is a need for more road construction than funds available to us allow, and we know there is willingness of the people locally to pay for more.

"However, we do not have taxing authority. We have to depend on other units of government for our funding. We have to rely, particularly, on the elected Board of County Commissioners because it alone has the power to place a countywide road funding proposition on the ballot — or to contrib-

ute for countywide road-purposes from its general fund.

"The County Board has contributed an average of \$433,000 annually to road construction since it became an elected body in 1969 — using its general funds.

"We think there is a better way and we are working on it," said Gnau.

"We were asked early this year by County Board Chairman Wallace Gabler to propose ways in which the Road Commission and the County Board could better work together to improve the county's transportation system. One way, we recommended, is to commit the County Board's road funds on a multi-year basis, which is legally possible through contracting.

"We pointed out that this will give all areas of the county fair and equitable opportunity to make use of the County Board's contributions. It will also make possible advance efforts to multiply the seed money with Federal matching funds for some projects, and thus to do more significant construction programs.



ELECTED COUNTY OFFICIALS attended Road Commission seminars early this year. Pictured while hearing an equipment explanation by Maintenance Director William "Bert" Mercer (at right, facing camera), are (from left) County Commissioners Patrick Daly of Waterford Township, Chairman Wallame Gabler of Royal Oak, John Peterson of Rochester, and Dennis Aaron of Oak Park. At right, back to camera, is Road Commission Managing Director John L. Grubba.

"Part of our proposal is that the elected county officials will be able to decide which projects will be undertaken throughout the five-year program.

"We purposely avoided suggesting an amount of annual contribution by the County Board, preferring not to put the Board members on the spot. Even if the Board committed only \$500,000 a year, which is its usual amount, multi-year programming would be more beneficial than the surprise method thus far practiced. The need for an even greater amount for countywide projects is so obvious it doesn't really need to be officially pointed out."

Seminars Held For Teamwork

Wallace Gabler, Chairman of the elected Board of Oakland County Commissioners, seemed to signal a new era—a "Rebirth of Teamwork"—at the beginning of 1978.

He called for greater cooperation between his Board, the Board of County Road Commissioners and the County Executive.

"We welcomed and accepted Gabler's proposals," said Fred D. Houghten, Road Commissioner. "As he suggested, we recommended ways to implement better teamwork.

"One such way was for us to hold seminars on Road Commission matters in an effort to promote better understanding. We did hold such seminars, on two different dates to maximize opportunity for elected officials to participate. Gabler, 13 others of the 27 elected to the County Board and the elected county executive did participate.

"Our seminars featured tours of our main operating facility on Pontiac Lake Road in Waterford Township; a slide-show presentation of our overall programs, accomplishments and problems; and a chance for the elected officials to ask any questions they wished. We also offered tours of our other facilities.

RUIN: State Actions Deprive Roads

by only 23 percent, from \$17.5 million to \$21.5 million annually.

"The package covers neither the needs of transit nor of roads. There is nothing in the package for transit operating costs, which are projected to require \$50 million annually of additional taxes. The money coming to the Road Commission falls far short of the \$89 million annual need of Oakland County roads identified by the Citizens Research Council of Michigan.

"For some time now the State Highway Commission has been gearing for its participation in transit programs, loaning highway money to transit and cutting future highway obligations by reniging on long-standing plans. The reniging is especially notable in western Oakland County.

"In January of 1977 the State Highway Commission cancelled its plans for an M-275 freeway north-south. Under a storm of protest that included a better than 2-1

vote in eight communities for the freeway, the State Highway Commission appeared to resurrect the original freeway plans just before the November elections. Actually, that appearance was a bamboozle attempting to deceive the public, because the Highway Commission neither indicated its choice among five alternatives nor submitted the alternative to the proper federal agency.

"The alternatives were submitted to the U.S. Department of the Interior, and even the Interior Department says 'a decision on the M-275 matter is the responsibility of the U.S. Department of Transportation.' The State Highway Commission's diversion to the Interior Department and refusal to indicate a preferred alternative will delay the project at best or cloak intended final cancellation in buck passing at worst.

"During 1978, also, the State Highway Commission continued to

balk against extending Northwestern Highway as a freeway through western Oakland County as called for in a 20-year-old contract with the Oakland County Road Commission. The Michigan Supreme Court refused to mandate the State Highway Commission to build the freeway. Instead, the Supreme Court said the Road Commission can sue for specific performance in Oakland County Circuit Court or can sue for damages in the State Court of Claims.

"Such remedies are being studied by our Legal Counsel, but a decision cannot be easy. For example, how do you place a cost figure on damages suffered by the public over 20 years during which county and local agencies adopted zoning ordinances and other official actions based on anticipation of a planned freeway?

"How, indeed, do you determine a course of action regarding roads in a climate of raid and ruin?"