

Oakland officials stump for M-275 revival...

By TOM LONERGAN

Yet another effort to revive the twice-presumed-dead M-275 freeway through western Oakland County picked up some steam last week.

A group consisting mostly of village and township officials, organized by Oakland County Commissioners Robert McConnell and Robert Gorsline, endorsed a "modified" M-275 plan that would connect at I-696 in Farmington Hills and extend to I-75 north of Pontiac.

The old State Highway Commission cancelled the controversial freeway in January 1977 and asked that alternatives be studied.

PENDING BEFORE the new State Transportation Commission, which replaced the highway commission after the 1978 election, are five alternatives to the original M-275, including the modified freeway plan.

The transportation commission was scheduled to discuss the freeway and alternatives at its late August meeting in Lansing but announced Friday that the issue will be discussed at the commission's Sept. 26 meeting to be held in the Oakland County Board of Commissioners auditorium in Pontiac.

A commission spokesman said members wanted to give area groups and residents more time to study the various proposals.

THE MODIFIED plan puts the six-lane freeway west of the environmentally sensitive black spruce bog near Maple and Haggerty roads and includes landscaped noise berms.

The other major difference from the original plan, according to Michael Flajoie, the state's M-275 project coordinator, removes the Commerce Road interchange near the Dodge Park No. 5 area.

Steven Rosman, spokesman for the Citizens in Opposition to M-275, accused local officials of "beating a dead horse" in supporting a modified freeway.

Rosman said it's "not impossible" but highly unlikely that the new transportation commission would approve

the freeway.

The only highway commissioner who supported M-275 in January 1977 remains on the six-member transportation commission, which has three newly-appointed members including Roger Young, Republican from Rochester.

McCONNELL, a Republican from Farmington Hills, said his compromise plan, one of two ordered for study after M-275 was cancelled, was moot because the modified freeway would be "less (environmentally) damaging today."

The McConnell compromise, a six-lane boulevard with an 84-foot landscaped median, a bike path and

wide landscaped shoulders, would follow the original M-275 route, but only to M-59 in Pontiac.

The Citizens in Opposition alternative, also ordered for study after the M-275 cancellation, would be a six-lane boulevard from 12 Mile Road to M-59 and also would extend along 14 Mile Road from Haggerty to Northwestern Highway.

SINCE THE two main alternatives were ordered studied, two more were added. These were: the five-lane "Vivian" extending from I-96 to M-15, south of Clarkston; and the Union Lake Freeway, from I-96 ("through the community of Union Lake," according to Flajoie) and on to I-75.

The transportation commission will also consider two other options — a freeway with no local access and not building anything.

Rosman said last week's meeting, which drew 100 people, represented the proponents of M-275 "getting their act together."

He said the only modification the new freeway plan provides is it "tries to evade some of the damage to the black spruce bog." Dodge Park 5 would still be adversely affected, the freeway would pollute the lakes in the area, and

it would exceed federal noise regulations, Rosman said.

He predicted the U.S. Department of Interior would veto the modified freeway for many of the same environmental reasons it nixed the original plan.

FLAJOIE, the project coordinator, said the modified freeway would require an updated environmental impact statement. All of the alternatives' environmental impacts have yet to be studied by federal officials.

Because the survey and design work, plus some right-of-way acquisition, have already occurred with the original freeway plan, the modified version could be built more quickly than the others, Flajoie said.

And last August, 73 percent of the voters in western county townships approved the idea of a I-96 to M-59 connector along the M-275 route. The referendum was advisory.

White Lake Township Supervisor James Reid summed up the local officials' support for the freeway:

"I can't see a road for 10 to 15 years" if an alternative to a freeway is selected, Reid said.

"The dye's already been cast," he added. "People have come out here to raise their children."

...as state group lends freeway an ear

By TIM RICHARD

The original M-275 plan has been dead since January 1977. But another freeway plan could still be approved for western Oakland County.

That assessment comes from Roger Young, a Rochester attorney who was appointed to the new State Transportation Commission this year when the old Highway Commission went out of business.

"The original plan is dead," said Young, "but there could be a road of the same class, above grade."

Young, contacted between court appearances this week, was asked whether proponents of a freeway were realistic or dreaming when they voted last week to recommend a new freeway plan. M-275's most vocal opponent, Steven Rosman, accused proponents, mostly local officials, of "beating a dead horse" in resurrecting a freeway plan when they met Aug. 2 in Commerce Township.

M-275 was to run from the I-96 and I-275 intersection in Novi northward to I-275 near Davisburg. Together I-275 and M-275 would make a 60-mile bypass around the west side of Detroit.

YOUNG FEELS a freeway plan is

alive. He recounted its history:

"After the original proposal was killed, the matter was sent to the Federal Highway Administration and then to the Michigan Department of Transportation for further analysis. This was not to say the matter would not or could not be presented again."

"It was felt it might be appropriate (to reconsider a freeway) because a majority of voters (in 1978 polls) felt a north-south artery ought to be built."

"We began to prepare for this scenario two months ago. I went to the department last month and spent two days studying the various alternatives — the modified freeway plan, the McConnell (parkway) plan, the Rosman (upgrading local roads) plan, and the Vivian (east-west, five-lane road) plan — with the staff."

Then Young, Transportation Commission member and staff members spent an entire day examining every proposed route in western Oakland County. Young called it "as complex a problem as any in the United States right now."

TWO MEETINGS coming up are of major importance.

On Aug. 22, the Transportation Com-

mission will meet with officials of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, the seven-county regional planning agency, to get their position. That meeting begins at 10 a.m. in the Transportation Building west of the State Capitol in Lansing.

No public hearing has been sched-

uled that day. But if past practice is any guide, many friends and enemies of M-275 will ask to speak and will be heard.

Officially, alternatives to M-275 will be on the agenda at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 26, when the Transportation Commission moves to Pontiac.

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