

# M-275

## If there's a will, there's a way

The Michigan Department of Transportation has issued its report to the State Transportation Commission analyzing alternatives to M-275, a project the old Highway Commission cancelled in 1977. This newspaper presents the report in a series of three articles prior to a Sept. 26 public hearing. Here is the first article.

As directed by the commission and the director, the Michigan Department of Transportation staff has developed and studied several alternatives to the original M-275 freeway during the past two years. Several reports have been prepared and presented to the commission as studies of specific alternatives were concluded.

Alternatives suggested by local individuals and citizens groups, a commission, and others have included freeways, boulevards, five-lane pavements, and seven-lane pavements with assorted termini on various alignments within two basic corridors. A meaningful comparison of alternatives is difficult, but it is hoped that this short paper will clarify the issues.

This report has been prepared to provide a synopsis of the M-275 controversy for new members of the commission; to summarize the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative; and to provide recommendations for commission action.

**THE NEED FOR AN M-275** element in the State Trunkline Plan is evident on a statewide, regional, and local level. There are no continuous north-south roads with an overall width sufficient to carry more than two lanes of traffic through western Oakland County between US-23 and US-24, a distance of about 22 miles. This places a heavy burden on the existing road system.

The local road system is composed primarily of narrow, winding, and disjointed low-lane highways. This is caused by the rolling terrain and countless lakes, wetlands, potholes, etc., conditions which are not conducive to inexpensive road construction techniques. Local and county authorities simply do not have the financial resources available to reconstruct the local road system.

Traffic volumes continue to grow on I-96 and I-696 between US-23 and US-24 resulting in frequent overloaded conditions on these important interstate routes. The US-24 (Telegraph Road) widening project will be filled to capacity the day it is completed. In fact, only six lanes are being constructed on Telegraph Road in anticipation that M-275 would provide relief to that corridor.

A comprehensive analysis of statewide, regional,

and local impact on energy consumption, travel time, accidents, and air quality with and without M-275 was conducted by the MDOT staff and reported in the addendum to the draft environmental impact statement of January, 1977.

The conclusions of that study, using computer simulation techniques run by the SEMCOG staff, showed that the construction of an M-275 freeway would have the following effects regionwide in the year 1990: decrease the total miles driven per day by 223,000 vehicle miles; reduce travel time by 51,600 person-hours per day; reduce accidents by 3,250 per year; save about four million gallons of fuel per year; and reduce hydrocarbon emissions. An energy short economy would have an effect on the magnitude of these savings but it is reasonable to conclude that adoption of the "do nothing" alternative would not be prudent.

**THE PLANNING** for a high type arterial through western Oakland County has been conducted in response to a demonstrated need which was first documented in the Detroit Metropolitan Area Traffic Study of 1955 and later refined in the TALUS Plan (Transportation and Land Use Study) conducted during the mid '60s.

The current regional transportation studies of SEMCOG continue to show the need for a freeway to connect I-275/I-69/I-696 to I-75, west of Clarkston.

The transportation plans of local, regional, and state jurisdictions have included a freeway through this corridor for (15) years. At the time of the cancellation, the MDOT staff had developed design plans and had begun to purchase right-of-way in this northern section. A public hearing had been held and a revised draft environmental impact statement was being finalized for the southern section.

The cancellation of the freeway prompted local officials and citizen groups to organize and propose alternate routes and alternate types of highways to serve the traffic needs of western Oakland County. The State Transportation Commission directed the Department to develop these alternatives in cooperation with the sponsors and to study the relative merits of each plan.

## Redlining rustlers roam

Redlining has been prohibited by Michigan law for more than a year, but the practice is still going on in the state, according to an insurance specialist.

Steve Weiss, from the Statewide Coalition Against Redlining, said that although the red lines of demarcation (designating areas not to be insured) have pretty much been erased, they still exist in more subtle forms.

His comments were made during a recent Housing Information Workshop at Michigan State University. The daylong event was sponsored by the Michigan Outstate Chapter of the National Association of Human Rights Workers in cooperation with the Community Relations Bureau, Department of Civil Rights and MSU's Institute for Community Development.

Michigan's anti-redlining law took effect on July 1, 1978. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of geographical area, neighborhood ethnic background, a building's age or the condition of other buildings more than 750 feet away from the home in question.

However, for insurers, "there is nothing in the law that says you can't turn someone down," according to Weiss.

He doesn't find fault with insurance companies which refuse to insure a home with unsafe equipment like bad wiring, or a driver with a history of violations.

Although discrimination in home insurance is evident throughout the state, Weiss said the problem is particularly intense in Detroit, affecting the decay of a number of urban areas.

Instead of a red line on a map, some insurance companies now use address zip codes to determine whether they will insure a home, Weiss said.

In Detroit and elsewhere, other companies will only give home insurance if the dwelling is occupied during the day.

Weiss added that one company has gone to the extreme of refusing to issue any new automobile insurance policies to anyone in a three-county area due to factors such as an alleged high crime rate.

A stewardess or automobile salesman could have trouble obtaining home insurance from one company, which has a list of occupations thought to be insurance risks, he said.

In essence, the insurance underwriting process is a subjective one, Weiss said. An underwriter can always decide that the prospective client isn't a good risk for any number of personal reasons, he explained.

Weiss concluded by calling for "increasing awareness" of housing redlining problem.

He noted that Michigan has the largest number of people in the "property pool" (a substandard property market people are referred to when they can't obtain housing any other way) than any other state.

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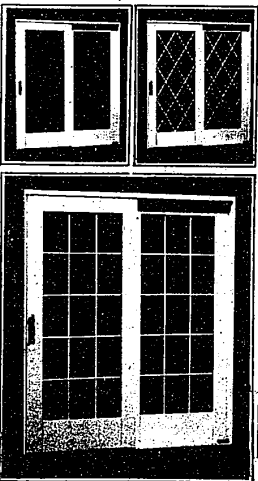
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