

editorial opinion

Parkway: Common sense compromise

It is not enough to say "nay" to M-275, Detroit Free Press-style, without saying what should go in place of the freeway project that was cancelled by the old State Highway Commission in 1977.

An M-275 freeway, to be sure, was and is a bad idea. Common sense should tell us all that. Just drive through western Oakland County from Novi to Clarkston and mentally picture what would happen to this area of river headwaters and lakes with all the earthmoving associated with a freeway.

Western Oakland doesn't need another throughway for Detroit-Flint travel. It does, however, need a road for travel into and out of its communities and recreation spots.

The new State Transportation Commission will hold a public hearing at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 26 in the Oakland County Board of Commissioners' auditorium, Pontiac, to ponder this immense problem.

WE BELIEVE THE BEST plan is neither the re-designed M-275 nor the myriad of "local road" improvements advocated by the no-growth people.

The best plan is the so-called "McConnell Parkway," an idea born out of a spirit of compromise

after rejection of M-275. It would follow roughly the route of M-275 from the I-696/I-96/1-275 intersection in Novi to M-59 in the middle of the county. In time, it would probably have to be extended from M-59 to I-75, which is fine with us.

The fact that former Oakland County Commissioner Robert McConnell, who chaired the ad hoc committee which proposed the parkway, has backed away from it also doesn't bother us. The McConnell Parkway has multiple advantages, with or without an individual's support. Among the advantages:

- It would serve existing local traffic with its six lanes, limited access and moderate speed.

- It is unlikely to attract high-speed Detroit-Flint traffic, which could use existing I-75 or I-96 and US-24.

- A parkway is less likely to generate development that would result in the depopulation of older communities and destruction of the character of western Oakland.

- It would use much of the M-275 route, around which western Oakland communities have done their land use planning for nearly a generation. Honest investors wouldn't get rich, but they wouldn't lose their shirts either.

- The parkway would displace only 41 structures compared to 82 for the freeway and more than 300 for the plan proposed by Citizens in Opposition to M-275. Even if extended past M-59, the parkway would be cheaper to build and cause less disruption than any other plan.

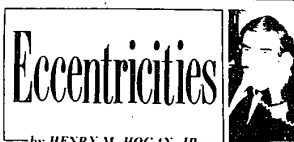
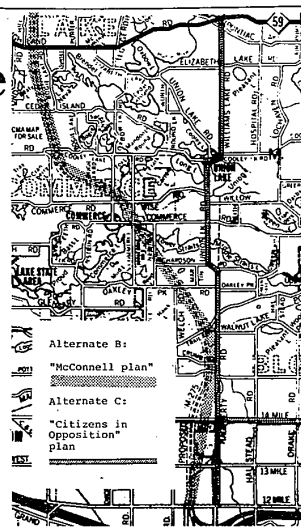
- By being at grade, for the most part, the parkway would mean much less bulldozing around the woods and waters of western Oakland than a freeway.

OTHER THINGS would need to be done by our road builders.

Orchard Lake Road should be four and five lanes in Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield. West Bloomfield planners would like Maple Road to be a boulevard, and that makes sense to us. I-696 should be widened from four lanes to six in Southfield and Farmington Hills. I-96 from Novi to Brighton needs some repaving.

Finally, the McConnell Parkway is a compromise between two political extremes. Neither extreme seems happy with it.

And that's probably the best reason of all for building a parkway.



by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

How traveler becomes a VIP

I'm always amazed when I run across that strange breed of animal called a traveler.

You take a meek, mild-mannered person with an inconsequential job, give him a briefcase and expense account, put him on a plane, and you'll never recognize him.

Whether he seeks an escape from the hum-drum world of reality or whatever, many times an assistant sales manager when traveling will pass himself off as sales manager; if vice president, he'll pass himself off as president.

Apparently when one is surrounded by strangers he never expects to see again, he will give in to the fantasy that he is a Very Important Person.

WHEN THE TRAVELER arrives at his destination, whether it be a hotel or motel, you might think that he came directly from a palace with full staff. He stands around waiting to be waited on.

When he gets to his room, he overtops the bellhop, hoping in his imaginative world the word will get around that he must be something special because he is such a big tipper (with company money).

Once he's alone in the room, he fills his suitcase with everything in the room not nailed down — the postcards in the drawer, stationery, those little pads by the side of the phone and, of course, the individually wrapped soap for the kiddies back home.

Speaking of soap, when our traveler is at home, he probably uses a little sliver of soap or two because his wife forgot to buy some, but if he doesn't have a fresh wrapped bar each day in his hotel room, the housekeeping department hears about it.

And bath towels, too. At home, he probably uses the same towel for a week, but if a hotel towel is used once, it is dirty.

If he takes two showers in one day and there is only one bath towel, he irately calls housekeeping about it.

WHEN HE IS ABOUT to head for home, after eating meals and drinking wine he couldn't afford at home, he puts his expenses on the credit card that is the slowest to bill him. That way, he can collect his expenses from his company immediately and have the use of the money for a while.

Flying home, he tries to romance the stewardess.

The next morning at the office, he enters into creative finance as he prepares his expense account. Large tips become cab fare. Bar friends become customers.

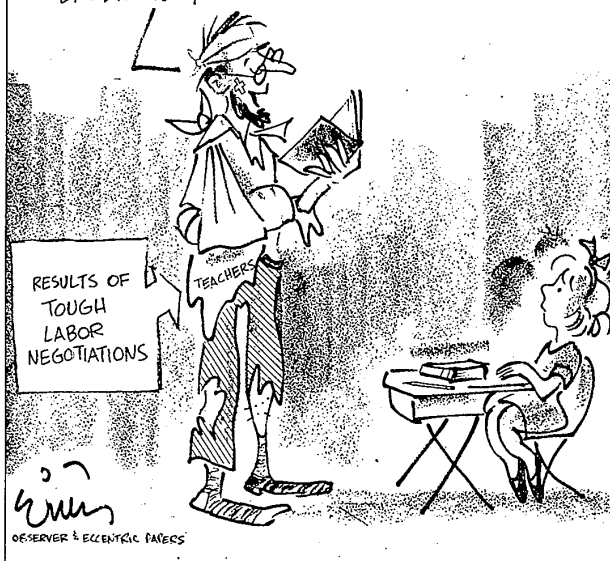
And the fantasy ends until the next trip.

Yellow jacket peril

After dealing with the lamprey, Michigan hardly needs another lesson in what can happen to the environment when creatures migrate. But it's happening again. This time it's the yellow jacket.

Michigan State University entomologists say the European yellow jacket was introduced into the northeastern United States sometime during the last 70 years. It was discovered in Michigan two years ago, and the MSU folks are trying to chart its spread.

OUR LESSON TODAY IS HOW TO BEHAVE IN SCHOOL...THERE WILL BE NO NAME-CALLING, NO LAUGHING AT AUTHORITY, NO HECKLING, NO UNDUE AGGRESSIVE TENDENCIES, NO....



An alliance takes shape

Western Wayne County shook hands with Oakland County last week.

They had never been at war. They hadn't had an argument.

They had, however, been ignoring one another, going their separate ways on such metropolitan issues as public transportation, water and sewage and a long list of other problems.

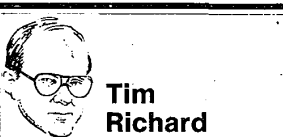
In past efforts, they had been picking up allies hither and yon instead of consulting each other first. Now they are getting together, and the teamwork should bear fruit on both sides of Eight Mile Road.

THE OCCASION was a foray by Oakland Drain Commissioner George W. Kuhn to round up support in western Wayne for legislation to regionalize the Detroit Water and Sewer Department.

He met in Livonia City Hall with representatives from 13 Wayne communities, including Redford Township, Livonia, the two Plymouths, Garden City, Westland and Canton Township.

A conservative Republican, Kuhn was in Democratic territory. "Democrat" and "Republican" may mean something in electing a president, but they fade when it comes to metropolitan issues. Livonia Mayor Ed McNamara has had his battles with the Detroit Water and Sewer Department. He once served on the Detroit Water Board. McNamara sees "raging incompetence" there.

Gas, electricity, the telephone — all utilities are regulated by the state Public Service Commission.



Tim Richard

But water, the most basic utility of all, is "controlled by one single individual," he said.

That single individual — Detroit Mayor Coleman Young — controls a department that sells water to about 100 communities and sewage treatment service to about 70. No one but Detroit residents may work in the DWSD. The mayor appoints all Detroit water board members, even the suburban minority, and can fire them at will.

He once fired McNamara.

OTHER COMMUNITIES have had their problems with the DWSD.

Westland and Canton have low water pressure and can't get completion of a DWSD project that would send them more water. Detroit says suburban lawsuits are upsetting things. The suburbs say they're being held hostage.

Their neighbors in West Bloomfield Township of Oakland County know the feeling. They had sewer projects held up until 1978 because the DWSD was in federal court facing Environmental Protection Agency charges that the Detroit sewage treatment plant was the single worst polluter of Lake Erie.

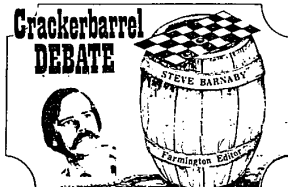
THE DETROIT Water Board has seven members — four Detroiters and three suburbanites, all appointed by the mayor.

Kuhn visualizes a nine-member board, with each member representing 500,000 persons served by the DWSD. Under that arrangement, Detroit, with a population of 1.25 million and falling, would get only two or three of the nine members.

Just how the suburban representatives would be picked is uncertain. Personally, I would be inclined to make use of an existing mechanism — the caucuses in the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

Any reform would mean regionalism.

An alliance and regionalism make sense.



Trucks don't pay their share

Trucks — we can't live with them and we can't live without them.

Those are the sentiments of many state drivers. On one hand we curse the highway behemoths for clogging the narrow arteries of city streets, for nearly blasting off our gas saving compacts from the highway, or for mercilessly tearing the roads to shreds.

But we know that when those 18-wheelers stop rolling, our economy will grind to a halt. Neither trains nor planes can handle as efficiently and economically the loads that need to be hauled across our state.

While those 82-ton trucks may be economically efficient when it comes to hauling, they are devastating to state roads. Studies indicate that each 82-ton truck has the same effect on a road as 16,000 cars.

In short, trucks just aren't paying their way when it comes to road maintenance.

You can imagine what the same 82-ton vehicle will do to passengers of a 2,500-pound vehicle in a head-on encounter.

BUT THE STATE, for whatever reason, has put itself at a disadvantage when it comes to monitoring the weight of these vehicles.

Take a look at the facts:

- Michigan's 82-ton limit is twice the national average.

- There are only 10 truck weighing stations around the state and 46 patrol officers to enforce the weight limit.

- Last year there were 2,830 registered trucks in Michigan weighing between 65-82 tons.

- State employees are reluctant to write citations in some areas of the state because the traffic courts don't enforce the tickets they write.

The result: It will cost Michigan \$85 million to repair the roads damaged by these trucks over the next 20 years.

THE PROBLEM is compounded in the Detroit area. City ordinance permits trucks to weigh 5,000 more pounds than the state allows.

The state legislature should examine this situation closely.

First of all, Michigan should consider getting in step with the rest of the country by reducing weight limits. At the least, weight limits should be uniform around the state.

Michigan was exempted from the national limit in 1956 because states which had established higher weights were allowed to keep their own limits. But the cost has been too high.

Enforcement should be beefed up. The money spent on salaries for an increased number of state inspectors would be more than repaid with decreased repair costs.

More weight stations should be built. Those already in existence should be open more often.

Truckers will argue they need the big trucks to make out economically. Doubtless they will put great lobbying pressure on state lawmakers with the argument that smaller trucks would mean higher prices for goods.

But truckers must be made to realize that if they want the economic advantages of using the state's highway system, they must at least be willing to pay for the damage inflicted by their vehicles.

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