

State transit board favors M-275 alternative A

This is the final installment in the Michigan Department of Transportation's report on alternatives to M-275, a project cancelled in 1977 by the old State Highway Commission. The project will be subject of a public hearing Sept. 26 in the Oakland County Board of Commissioners' auditorium in Pontiac.

The Department of Interior and the Federal Highway Administration were requested to review the various M-275 alternatives.

The Fish and Wildlife Service and the Heritage, Conservation, and Recreation Service of the DOI both favored the Rosman Alternative C because the route would be located in an area where the natural environment has already been impacted by development.

The FHWA commented that the observations of the DOI should be considered along with other social, economic, and environmental impacts not addressed by the DOI. The FHWA further observed that Alternative C would be a

local service facility whereas the other proposals would attempt to provide both local and regional service in varying degrees.

The regional transportation plan of SEMCOG calls for a freeway in this corridor, and any change from this type of facility would require a revision of the SEMCOG plan before federal approval could be obtained.

No conclusion can be drawn from the comments by the DOI and FHWA. All of the alternatives have advantages and disadvantages. Approval or disapproval can be received from the federal government only after the MDOT submits a plan with recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The M-275 freeway had been included in the transportation plans of local, regional, and state agencies for many years. The cancellation of the freeway in 1977 has created confusion and has stymied planning efforts in the region.

The MDOT staff has developed and studied alternatives to the M-275 freeway as directed by the commission. However, these alternatives are not fully comparable as they have differ-

ent termini, cross sections, right-of-way access, and functions.

An advisory referendum was placed on the Aug. 6, 1978, primary ballot in eight communities of western Oakland County. The voters approved the idea of building a connector from I-96 to M-59 "along the approximate route of M-275" by a margin of 7-to-3. It is clear that there is wide support for a trunkline arterial to relieve the congested system of two-lane, two-way roads which serve an area which has a population of nearly 200,000.

The needs and concerns of the local people must be considered, but the needs of the motoring public outside of the area are also of prime importance. The Michigan Department of Transportation has the primary responsibility of planning, constructing, and maintaining a state trunkline system, which will meet the needs of regional, intrastate, and interstate travel. The construction of a road to serve primarily local traffic movements should be the responsibility of county and local authorities.

THE POSITION OF THE MDOT staff of professional planners and engineers has been consistently in favor of a freeway.

Numerous studies have shown that freeways have the safest and most efficient operational characteristics of all highway types. Fuel consumption, travel time, and injuries and deaths from traffic accidents will be much lower with a freeway than with boulevards or other types of roads.

It is uncertain how the construction of a freeway would affect the rate of development in the region. Accessibility is just one of the factors that affect growth.

Sewers, for instance, are required before intensive development can take place. Development is now taking place at a rapid pace in western Oakland County without the freeway. The

construction of any one of the alternatives would improve accessibility to the area and it would be difficult to predict the marginal difference that one route would have over the other.

Studies by SEMCOG show that the bus will be the only practical means of public transportation in western Oakland County. A demand responsive system (dial-a-ride) will be the system for the near future. The freeway will provide efficient service for public transit, van pools, car pools, private cars, and trucks.

THE FREEWAY on Alignment A is not without problems. The location has been chosen to minimize the impact on the lives of the people in the area. Additional efforts would be required to minimize the impacts on the natural environment.

New governmental regulations are in the process of development that will require that the study process be initiated regardless of which alternative is selected. New FHWA regulations to implement the National Environmental Policy Act will be in effect for all projects as of July 30, 1979.

Regulations are in effect that give federal agencies "veto power" over projects that impact wetlands, such as the present alignment of the freeway north of M-59. It is anticipated that these new regulations will add additional time to the study and approval process.

Of course, the studies and plans are much more advanced for the freeway alternative than for the other alternatives. Preliminary design plans were prepared several years ago. If one of the other alternatives is chosen, extensive environmental studies, surveys, and design plan preparation will need to be indicated, further delaying the project.

IN CONCLUSION, it is the opinion of

the director and the professional staff of the Michigan Department of Transportation that the interests of the vast majority of Michigan residents would be served best through the design and construction of the modified freeway Alternative A.

Proponents of the McConnell and Rosman alternatives stressed the idea of a parkway concept. Every effort would be made to effect a parkway appearance for the freeway that would blend with the natural environment through

close cooperation and coordination with local interest groups and governmental agencies.

The following commission actions are required:

- Determine if the State Trunkline Plan will include an "M-275" link.
- Determine the termini and corridor location of the link.
- Determine the type of facility, e.g., freeway, boulevard, seven-lane pavement, etc. that will connect these termini.

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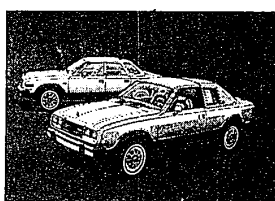
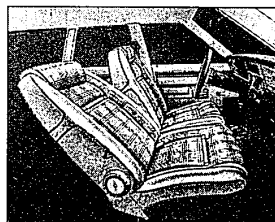
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