

Rough roads ahead

No improvements in sight for county street system

Oakland County roads are disintegrating, and they aren't going to get any better.

That depressing message from Richard V. Vogt, chairman of the board of the Oakland County Road Commission, was delivered last week to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

"The combined impact of declining gas and weight tax revenues and inflation has reduced our capability to about two-thirds of what it was in 1979. Our projections are that by 1985 we'll be at half the 1979 capability," said Vogt.

GASOLINE AND weight taxes are collected by the state and distributed by formula to the Michigan Department of Transportation, county road commissions, cities and villages.

Revenues from this source have been declining steadily since 1979 as autos become both more fuel-efficient and lighter.

Gov. William G. Milliken's plan to use part of an income tax increase for transportation was dropped in negotiations with legislators. And legislative efforts to raise the gasoline and weight tax rates also appear doomed for 1982 as the state moves to increase other taxes to balance the general fund budget. Thus, no new money from Lansing is likely this year.

These taxes provide more than half the annual income and the only substantial income for county road maintenance. For Oakland County, gasoline and weight tax revenue has fallen from \$21.7 million in 1979 to \$18 million this year, Vogt added.

PROJECTIONS ARE that by 1985, Oakland County's road commission will get only \$17 million.

The amount left over for construction has fallen from \$8.2 million to \$1.4 million and will continue to decline steadily to an estimated \$557,000 in 1985.

As a result, the road commission is unable to provide the necessary match for any available federal aid.

"Except for our commitments to the Tri-Party program with your board and local communities and commitments to federally aided projects, we won't have any money for construction in 1983, 1984 and 1985."

"This year, we are forced to discontinue 50-50 matching programs with townships for local road construction, and next year we'll be forced to discontinue contributing 10 percent to special assessment subdivision street improvements," Vogt said.

Aside from cutting construction, the road commission froze wages and cut 65 staff positions, which will reduce maintenance. Cuts in gravel-road grading from an average of 12 to 10 times annually were made, and ditching work

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— Richard V. Vogt,
Oakland County Road
Commission chairman

on local roads was reduced by 25 percent.

"TO PREVENT further reductions of maintenance and traffic-safety programs in 1983-84, the prospects are now that we'll have to cut wages and salaries 5 percent, from managing director on down, in 1983 — plus lay off 23 more employees and reduce fringe benefits," Vogt told the commissioners.

The road commission doesn't see any solution to the road financing problem, Vogt said. Local governments will be forced to assume more of the road repair burden and taxpayers, through special assessments, may have to finance road projects.

"The road system in Oakland County is both financially and physically deteriorating, and the trend will continue until an assured source of long-range funding is created," he said.

Teachers may merge with support unions

Declining memberships due to teacher layoffs and rising costs plagued 700 Michigan Education Association delegates at their annual spring assembly in Flint.

MEA President Keith Geiger said delegates will be asked to approve a constitutional change which would permit teachers in MEA locals to merge with locals of school support personnel, which include bus drivers, secretaries, custodians and food-service persons.

Several thousand support employees already are members of the Michigan Education Support Personnel Association (MESPA), one of MEA's sister organizations. MESPA was to hold its own assembly Saturday in Flint.

Last year, MESPA voted to join the National Education Association, which entitles it to vote for Michigan's members of NEA's board of directors.

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