

County may look to business for road costs

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Business developers — not general taxpayers — may be asked to foot some of the 10-year bill for road improvements required by Oakland County's economic boom.

"We've got to approach developers in Michigan at a conference," said John L. Grubba, managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission.

Grubba wants to talk about New Jersey-style "cooperative development contracts" and "impact fees" to build roads, interchanges and bridges required to move workers and goods.

"They (business developers) know what the costs are going in. Then we hear, 'You people with the \$40 million budgets, build us \$100 million worth of roads.'"

"They've got the wrong level of government. We don't own the printing presses," Grubba said in an interview.

IN A NUTSHELL, Grubba's agen-

cy, after talking to officials from 58 local units, concluded that by 1986 county road needs will be \$740 million, but revenue will fall \$625 million short.

On Jan. 20, in a series of well-publicized meetings, the OCCRC suggested six alternative methods of raising the megamillions.

Among them were a voted two-mill property tax (\$15 million per mill annually), a voted cent-a-gallon increase in the gasoline tax (\$6 million annually), and a voted one-cent sales tax on automotive items (\$12 million annually).

"The general reaction from the public is that they don't like the property tax. They're more inclined to support the gasoline tax or any kind of user tax," Grubba said after meetings with mayors, township supervisors, chambers of commerce and civic groups.

Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman serves on a committee of managers and county officials pondering the alternatives. "No decision has been made yet," Deadman said.



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—John Grubba, managing director Oakland road commission

"It may be a myriad of alternatives."

LATE IN MARCH, Grubba went to a national conference on site development and transportation impacts. With him were some city managers and traffic specialists.

There they bumped into the idea of asking industry to pay for infrastructure improvements caused by the second generation of suburban expansion.

"When I said we in Michigan are giving tax abatements (tax cuts to new industries), they said, 'You're crazy. We are getting impact fees.' This we hadn't heard in Michigan."

"I'm visualizing a conference in Oakland to discuss how we're going to address this."

THE IMPACT fee idea isn't totally new. Examples: Most subdivision developers now are required to install streets,

sewer and water lines. Troy has required business developers to build flare lanes on roads leading to their buildings and is working on having developers pay for widening two lanes of Crooks Road.

U.S. military bases can't be taxed, but the federal government has made payments in lieu of taxes to school districts that have been impacted by the children of military personnel.

THE LESSON Grubba learned: "When the private sector realizes that a congested road system lowers productivity and morale, they're willing to make contributions."

He noted that in New Jersey's Somerset County, an arrangement was worked out whereby the cost of an I-76 interchange was apportioned, by contract, among developers.

"We're looking at that alternative, too," said Deadman, of the city managers group. "A developer can put in such a huge development that it impacts roads all around."

One method of assessing cost, Deadman said, is to calculate the number of work trips generated by an industry.

GRUBBA UNVEILED the impact fee idea in an interview in which he was asked a single question: "What has happened since your January news conference on county road needs and funding alternatives?"

In those presentations, he said officials figured that 200,000 new jobs would come to Oakland County in the next decade; two-thirds of all 1985 office development in Michigan occurred in Oakland; and that there was \$1 in existing revenue for every \$6 of road needs.

Hard-hit corridors will be Northwestern Highway in West Bloomfield, Big Beaver Road in Troy, Woodward Avenue in several communities, 12 Mile Road in Farmington Hills and Novi, and I-75 freeway.

THE BIG picture is that of a "second suburban migration," said Grubba, citing speaker Ken Orski, a former federal transportation official who is president of Urban Mobility Inc.

"The first was to the suburbs after World War II. The new migration will be as significant or more — jobs and employment are coming. There is a new American city emerging."

Pontiac airport gets grant

The Michigan Aeronautics Commission has allocated \$555,000 for improvements at Oakland-Pontiac Airport. The funds will be used to rehabilitate the apron and for land acquisition

reimbursements. The state's announcement said \$466,000 came from the federal government, \$36,000 from the state and \$53,000 from local sources.

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