

State eyes county-option tax for roads

By Tim Richard
staff writer

State lawmakers and officials from county road agencies are exploring a plan for local-option gasoline taxes for their crumbling roads. "I have been delegated," said Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, "to talk with groups of people to explore the possibility of putting together a revenue package." Fessler, who heads the Senate Transportation Committee, will meet Thursday with the Oakland County Board of Commissioners' new Transportation Committee and road commission leaders. Fessler said he and Sen. Connie Blinfield, R-Muskegon City, have met with County Road Association leaders and urban leaders from Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Genesee counties.

"THEIR PLAN was to levy an additional state gasoline tax and give 40 percent of a fiscal of options which I thought that was wrong. There would not be sufficient revenue to meet needs in Oakland County. If you're going to levy a new tax, it should all go to urban counties." In Oakland County, a penny per gallon gasoline tax increase would add about \$8 million, according to estimates made by the Oakland County Road Commission a year ago. Voter approval would be necessary under the state constitution, Fessler said.

A local-option gasoline tax was one of a list of options which OCRRC Managing Director John Grubba asked political leaders to discuss. Among the others were sales tax, property tax, development districts and business fees.

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"We want to see what he has in mind," said a spokesman for the OCRRC.

WESTERN OAKLAND leaders, meanwhile, have put together a list of three trunks for their growing

area, Fessler reported.

Top priority is the Haggerty Road corridor on the Farmington Hills-Novri border northward. Second priority is the Millford Road corridor from I-96 to M-59. Third is White Lake Township from M-59 to I-75.

The idea of allowing Michigan's urban counties to levy a local surcharge on gasoline was made public in Lansing last week by Senate Majority Leader John Engler, R-Mount Pleasant. He said it is under consideration by Gov. James Blanchard.

Fessler said neither Engler nor the Senate GOP caucus has taken a position on the idea. Long exploratory discussions are needed. That's why Fessler and Blinfield are meeting with officials from the counties.

"If you take a look at the needs of Oakland County," said Engler, "there isn't a package at all that conceivably could pass this Legislature that would be able to address the severity of the problem in that county."

ENGLER SAID he hopes Blanchard will remove his opposition to raising the state's 15-cent per gallon cap on gasoline taxes across Michigan to pay for the repair and expansion of Michigan's streets and highways.

But Engler added that if the governor refuses to support a statewide increase, a local gas tax may be a promising alternative. "I think that's something everyone is open to," Engler said. "We're very concerned about Oakland County because it has been a bright growth spot in southeastern Michigan."

He said Oakland and western Wayne County "need the opportunity to take care of some of their own problems."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Area reps keep committee chairs

AP — State Rep. Mary Brown, D-Kalamazoo has been named to chair the Insurance Committee for the next two years in the Michigan House of Representatives. She succeeds retired Rep. Matthew McNeely.

In another change announced Thursday, a new committee was established to handle legislation on the Constitution, Interstate and Federal Relations. Freshman Rep. Ken DeBeauvoir, D-New Baltimore, will head that panel.

All committees are headed by Democrats because the party has a 64-46 advantage.

Observer & Eccentric area committee chairs are: Corporations and Finance: Rep. John Bennett, Redford. Education: Rep. William Keith, Garden City. Elections: Rep. Maxine Berman, Southfield. Senior Citizens and Retirement: Rep. Justine Barnes, Westland.

OTHER COMMITTEE chairs are: Agriculture and Forestry Committee: Rep. Thomas Hickner, Bay City. Appropriations Committee: Rep. Dominic Jacobetti, Negaunee.

Civil Rights: Rep. Ethel Terrell, Highland Park. Colleges and Universities: Rep. Burton Leland, Detroit. Conservation and Environment: Rep. Thomas Scott, Flint. Corrections: Rep. Floyd Clark, Flint.

Economic Development and Energy: Rep. Virgil Smith, Detroit. House Oversight: Rep. Lewis Dodak, Montrose.

Judiciary: Rep. Perry Bullard, Ann Arbor.

Labor: Rep. Juanita Watkins, Detroit. Liquor Control: Rep. Stanley Stopczynski, Detroit.

Marine Affairs and Port Development: Rep. Vincent Porreca, Trenton.

Mental Health: Rep. Debbie Stabenow, Lansing. Military and Veterans' Affairs: Rep. Robert DeHars, Lincoln Park.

Public Health: Rep. Michael Benane, Detroit. Public Utilities: Rep. Alma Stallworth, Detroit.

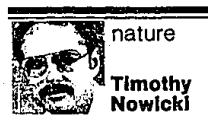
Social Services and Youth: Rep. Toola Hunter, Detroit. State Affairs: Rep. Joseph Young Jr., Detroit.

Digger ponders value of soil

By Timothy Nowicki
special writer

ANY ASPECTS of the natural world are subtle and inconspicuous, but have enormous consequences. For example, bacteria are everywhere, but because they are microscopic we seldom reflect on their importance — except when we consider infections and disease. The very soil we walk on while hiking through the woods is a product of the natural world. It is the nurturing substance for all the food we eat, but we seldom think about it as we eat an eggplant.

Last summer I spread five yards of topsoil over our yard. Adding soil to our garden and filling depressions in our lawn, I had plenty of time to think about the importance of soil. OUR GARDEN was in desperate need of soil because the Livonia area is very sandy. Livonia is located along the beach of an ancient lake that once covered Detroit and many suburbs thousands of years ago. Its soil is markedly different from the clay soil found in Dearborn where my father lives. Dearborn is closer to the center of the lake where fine particles were laid down to form clay.



Glaciers that covered Michigan until about 10,000 years ago were responsible for the major features of the land we see today. Hills, valleys, lakes, bays and plains are the result of these two-mile-thick masses of ice scouring the land.

Builders, stones and small rock particles that lie beneath the top soil were deposited by the glacier. These particles were brought down from northern Canada and covered the bedrock that formed Michigan before the glaciers arrived.



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On top of the glacial deposit is the organic material from years of plant decay that is very important to today's farmer. It takes about 500 years to form one inch of topsoil, which harbors many of the nutrients for plant growth.

At 10 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 17, there will be a program discussing the "Lay of the Land" at Heritage Park in Farmington Hills. For reservations, call the Farmington Hills city offices.

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