

Grubba 'encouraged' by gas tax movement

By Tim Richard
staff writer

The head of the Oakland County Road Commission is "encouraged" by movement in the Michigan Legislature to make more tax money available.

"Both legislative authorization to seek a local gas tax and an increase in the statewide gas tax are necessary," said John Grubba, managing director of the OCR.

Grubba's agency has been waging an information campaign for a year to convince state and local leaders that Oakland's economic growth boom can be hurt by inadequate roads. It offered a package of possible solutions.

LAST WEEK Senate Majority Leader John Engler of Mount Pleasant made statewide news with a statement that the Legislature should consider giving Wayne and Oakland counties permission to ask

voters for a penny a gallon increase. All revenues would be retained within the county.

Grubba said both a statewide increase, with 40 percent going to counties, and a local increase are needed.

"These are important elements of a broad package of funding options which have a way to go. No single source is adequate," Grubba said.

"We have to move promptly to address road funding to continue Oakland and Michigan's economic growth. We are working with our legislators and are encouraged by their positive response."

COUNTY AND state officials are scheduled to huddle today to explore the possibilities.

The forum will be the newly created transportation committee of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners. Its chairman is Jack McDonald, R-Farmington, who gave up a 10-year position on the person-

nel committee to take the new post.

Also under consideration will be ideas for three state trunklines in western Oakland.

Representing the Legislature will be state Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, chairman of the Senate transportation committee.

Fessler already has said no to a plan to increase only the statewide gasoline tax.

"I thought that was wrong. There

would not be sufficient revenue to meet needs in Oakland County," Fessler said. "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 raise about \$5 million. Voter approval would be necessary.

A THIRD OPTION, which Grubba has asked Oakland leaders to look at,

is TIFAs — tax increment financing authorities.

The Legislature last year expanded the power of so-called "urban townships" to create TIFAs. The new act allows townships to create TIFAs without first setting up a downtown development authority.

"Until now, this was a power granted only to cities, leaving townships at a disadvantage," said Karen Holcomb, legislative assistant for

the Michigan Townships Association.

HOLCOMB OUTLINED how a TIFA would work:

"After a district is set up, the TIFA 'captures' the increased property tax revenues within the development district that are attributable to activities by the TIFA. The funds 'skimmed off' by the TIFA in each development area are used to finance the implementation of that area's development plan."

Oakland traffic toll dips in '86

Traffic deaths fell 20 percent in Oakland County last year, and Bruce Madsen thinks he knows two reasons why.

First reason is more safety belt use. Second reason is less drunk driving, said Madsen, managing director of the Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County.

There were 129 traffic fatalities in '86 vs. 161 in 1985, TIA reported.

"THE COUNTY'S relatively low fatality record last year is particularly remarkable when we consider the substantial increase in traffic volumes today compared to 20 years ago," Madsen said.

In the late 1960s, traffic deaths hit the 200 mark. Since then, traffic volumes have increased 85 percent.

"If fatalities had kept pace with miles traveled, we would have reported nearly 300 people killed in traffic in Oakland County last year instead of 129," Madsen said.

Surveys show nearly 60 percent of Oakland drivers and their front seat passengers buckle their safety belts. Statewide, the rate is only 47 per-

cent. Alcohol was a factor in 46 percent of the fatalities, compared to 57 percent prior to the county's drunk driving program begun in 1980, Madsen said, adding, "Our reduction in alcohol-related fatalities is among the highest in the state."

THE RECORD in area communities is shown below. The first number is the three-year (1983-5) average number of traffic deaths; the second, 1986's toll:

- Beverly Hills: 1-1.
- Birmingham: 1-1.
- Bloomfield Hills: 1-1.
- Bloomfield Township: 8-2, the biggest percentage drop in the county.
- Farmington Hills: 8-4, another

big drop.

- Franklin: 0-1.
- Lathrup Village: 1-1.
- Oakland Township: 2-3.
- Orchard Lake: 2-1.
- Rochester: 0-1.
- Rochester Hills: 4-5.
- Southfield: 4-4.
- Troy: 11-7.
- West Bloomfield Township: 3-2.

Waterford Township again recorded the highest number of fatalities in the county — 14 last year compared to an average of 16 in previous years.

Pontiac's toll jumped to 13 from a three-year average of eight.

Madison Heights' toll jumped to seven from two; Novi's, to six from four; and Commerce Township's, to seven from four.

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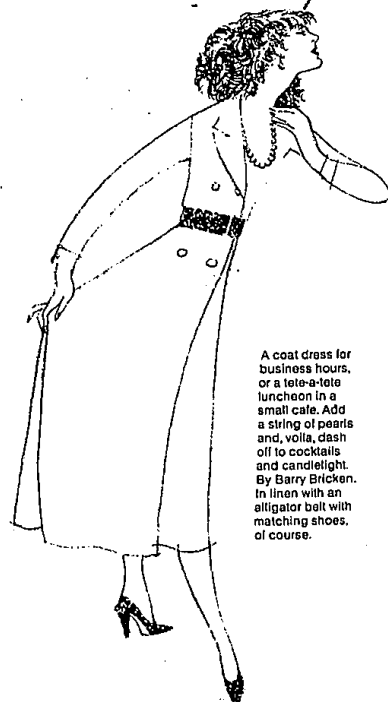
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