

Oakland panel backs road fund principles

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Slowly but surely, Oakland County commissioners are joining the parade to Lansing asking more sources of road funds.

"This is the year," said Commissioner Ralph Nelson, R-Rochester Hills, "to get either part of a package or the whole package through the state Legislature."
Nelson is a member of the transportation committee, which earlier endorsed the package of state Senate bills. Monday he persuaded the general government committee to endorse it, too.

The bills are sponsored by Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee.

THE VOTE was 4-3, with the panel's three Democrats dissenting.

"I don't see where a voter-approved tax (on fuel) is going to work when they don't support school millages now," objected Commissioner Paul McPherson, D-Farmington Hills.

"I don't see a great deal of support from my area or the area that is built up," said Commissioner Dennis Aaron, D-Oak Park. "Until I can tell my people what they're going to get, I will have to vote no."

They were joined by Commissioner Larry Pernick, D-Southfield.

REPUBLICANS, however, said they are getting a lot of demands to "do something" about bad roads and traffic congestion, particularly in the growing areas around the Oakland Technology Park and the west

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side of the county.

"I get a lot of calls," said general government Chairman Richard Skarritt, R-Milford, "asking, 'what are you as a county commissioner going to do?' I support it."

"There are concerns in the growth

area as well as concerns for reconstruction," said Commissioner Joseph Calandro, R-Novi.
"Personally," said Nelson, "I'm not too excited about raising the statewide cap on the gas tax (now 15 cents) because we're a donor county"

which gets back less than it pays into the state treasury.

But he urged Oakland officials to capitalize on the political momentum building up in urban counties.

THE ROAD Commission already has proposed a package of taxes and fees that would raise \$740 million a year over 10 years.

That is the amount local officials have said is needed to make roads able to handle the high technology boom.

The package endorsed by the two Board of Commissioners panels supports the principles contained in the Road Commission package but without using specific numbers.

THE PRINCIPLES they endorsed are:

- "Allow counties, cities, villages and townships to receive matching funds from the state for transportation improvements necessitated by local development" — a principle tailored for Oakland.
- "Allow counties, cities, villages and townships to impose impact fees." These are would be paid by developers of commercial and industrial projects. They would pay for widenings, resurfacings, turn lanes and other improvements necessitated by new workers and shoppers.
- Allow counties to levy a voter approved countywide gas tax to be distributed to the county, cities, villages and townships within that county." Each penny per gallon would yield an estimated \$6 million.
- Ask the state to pay for trunklines "necessary to meet Oakland County needs."

WHILE THE resolution doesn't mention specific trunklines, Fessler has three in mind which he intends to write into the "bollerplate" of this year's highway bill.

They are 1) Haggerty Road from the end of I-275 in Farmington Hills to M-59; 2) the Milford Road corridor from I-96 freeway to M-59; and 3) a connector from M-59 in the center of the county to I-75 in the north, somewhere between Haggerty and Milford roads.

State road cash snarl in Capitol

AP— The scene unfolding in an obscure conference room on Capitol Hill in Washington is making Michigan highway officials increasingly nervous as March arrives and warmer weather approaches.

House and Senate negotiators are haggling over a massive transportation bill that has been bogged down for months. They are holding up more than \$300 million a year for Michigan and billions in federal highway dollars nationwide.

The urgency of the situation is heightening with the approach of spring, which heralds the start of a limited construction season for cold-weather states.

such urgent importance to so many people in Michigan" as immediate passage of the legislation.

"The continued safety of all of Michigan's citizens relies on the rapid passage of this bill," he added.

Bob Morris, an aide in the state Transportation Department, warned last week that "for states with short construction seasons, they're going to start to get nailed. They're going to start losing time."

Major projects in Michigan planned for this year include:

- Reconstruction work on the John Lodge freeway in Detroit.
- Completion of Interstate-696 in Oakland County.
- Work on I-69 between Flint and Lansing.
- I-96 in western Michigan.
- The long-unfinished Zilwaukee Bridge (I-75) near Saginaw.

MORRIS SAID the holdup on federal highway dollars hasn't placed Michigan in as difficult a situation as some states, because the state has approved short-term bonding to get some highway projects under way this spring even if federal dollars are delayed.

But the hold-up on federal dollars for highway work and mass transit assistance is particularly frustrating to state officials because Congress is bogged down on the same issues this year that produced a stalemate in 1986.

Highway bills passed both House and Senate last year, but the two chambers never settled their differences. Key points of contention were the Senate's proposal to let states raise their speed limits to 65 mph in some areas and the House's addition of dozens of special "demonstration" projects popular with folks back home.

This year, the House has passed a five-year, \$91 billion bill, and the

Senate, a four-year, \$65.4 billion version. And the same differences over speed limits and demonstration projects have emerged.

HOUSE PUBLIC Works and Transportation Committee Chairman James Howard, D-M.I., told fellow negotiators the speed limit provision threatens the entire bill, and "I want to have it dropped."

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