

Fessler road bills give 6 local options

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Sen. Richard Fessler will urge the Michigan Legislature to act by Easter on his 10-bill package overhauling state and local transportation funding.

Key ingredients are:

- A small batch of state fee increases that would yield \$59 million.
- A package of six local option revenue measures that voters would have to decide on (see list on this page).

There would be no increase in the state's 15-cents-a-gallon gasoline tax. Nor would there be a change in the formula distributing the revenue between the state, the 83 counties and local units.

"THE GOVERNOR is opposed to an increase in the gas tax. That's one mountain we can't climb," said Fessler, R-W 6 at Bloomfield, a second-term senator who chairs the Transportation Com-

Sen. Richard Fessler

"People will vote for a tax if it's going to be spent in their area," he said. "Oakland County needs road improvements rapidly."

During their joint news conference in Lansing, Sen. Connie Binfield, R-Maple City, co-sponsor of the package, added, "It's responsible. It's comprehensive. It's complex. It allows local options."

A spokesman for the Oakland County Road Commission said the agency is "encourage" by Fessler's

bills. "We're analyzing them. We're willing to work with them," he said.

A FELLOW Oakland County fire publican reacted with disappointment.

Sen. Doug Cruce of Troy, with some of the worst road problems in Oakland's high technology boom, said, "There's nothing specific for Oakland except saying 'you've got a problem, solve it yourself.'"

Cruce, interviewed in his office, said the package as containing "bill-in opposition." Trucks will oppose a state attempt to get more from them; real estate people will oppose a transfer tax, and so on.

He agreed with Binfield that it was complex. "If the Legislature can't understand," said Cruce, "I wonder how we'll get the public to understand it. It's not clear enough."

And he saw the amount to be raised at the state level — \$59 million — as too small, a 6 percent hike for a fund that's near the \$1 billion mark.

"That (new revenue) is less than \$1 million per county. Troy could spend that much on one intersection. It costs \$500,000 per lane for a mile of road. It's not anywhere near the amount that needs to be raised," said Cruce.

BOTH WERE disappointed at Democratic Gov. James Blanchard's announced decision last month against raising the state gasoline tax.

Blanchard, burned politically by the 1983 income tax hike (now repealed), cited a 1986 re-election pledge.

Officials from some larger counties had urged a 6-cents-a-gallon increase — 2 cents a year spread over three years.

Each penny tax yields about \$40 million. Their proposal would have brought in \$80 million the first year, \$160 million the second and \$240

million the third and subsequent years.

Instead, one Fessler bill will allow counties to levy their own gasoline taxes, with voter approval, of up to 6 cents. "I don't think it will be widely used except to capture tourist dollars," said Fessler.

Cruce was cool to a local fuel tax. When Washington, D.C., levied one, he said, drivers bought fuel elsewhere, local stations went out of business, and gross revenue actually dropped.

NO CHANGE in the fuel tax distribution formula was proposed by Fessler. Road revenue is split between the state, 39.1 percent; the 83 counties, 39.1 percent; and municipalities (cities and townships), 21.8 percent.

Here is how \$59 million in state

revenue would be raised under Fessler's bills:

- Increase title transfer fee, from \$2 to \$10 — \$34 million. Binfield said the fee hadn't been increased since 1927.

- Change vehicle registration reduction rate — \$7 million. (Currently your registration declines each year as the car ages; this bill would make the fee level beginning the second year.)

- Raise truck sticker fee from \$12 to \$25 — \$7 million.

- Eliminate the "shrinkage allowance" — \$11 million. (Wholesalers of fuel deduct a shrinkage allowance for evaporation, spills and other losses of fuel; Fessler says this deduction is obsolete with modern equipment.)

HERE IS how the \$59 million

would be spent:

- Increased distribution through the state-county-local road formula — \$27 million.

- A new Transportation Economic Development Authority — \$35 million. This separate board would make matching grants to local units

for road work necessitated by economic development — a provision likely to help Oakland County.

- Other new program requirements, such as a truck driving institute — \$7 million.

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How would you vote?

A key ingredient in Sen. Richard Fessler's package of transportation funding bills is one which gives local units six options for raising more road money.

Here are the six options as outlined in a Senate staff memo. You as a voter may be asked if you favor:

- 1) Local option (probably county-wide) gasoline tax of up to 5 cents a gallon? (Current state tax is 15 cents a gallon.)

- 2) Local vehicle registration fees of up to \$10?

- 3) Local real estate transfer fees of up to \$10 per transfer or up to \$3 per \$1,000 of property value?

- 4) Allow counties to form charter taxing authorities which can levy up to five mills (\$5 per \$1,000 of state equalized valuation) for five years for road improvements?

- 5) Allow counties to use unlevied millages for road improvements?
- 6) Allow "impact fees" on new developments for the purposes of road improvements?

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