

Road campaign group forming

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A campaign to win voter approval of new county road revenue is in first gear.

Fourteen business and local government officials agreed Tuesday to organize a formal ballot question committee, seek funding from businesses and hire an expert public relations firm to guide the campaign.

"The law says every dollar raised in Oakland County must be paid to the county treasurer," said a reassuring Brent Bair, director of planning and development for the Oakland County Road Commission.

The OCRC is seeking voter approval of a \$25-per-motorized-vehicle fee for 10 years. If approved Aug. 2, it will raise about \$10 million a year. Some fear — incorrectly, he said — the money would be used elsewhere.

THE BALLOT question meeting drew two real estate firms, a chamber of commerce representative, two township supervisors, three members of the Coalition On Road Enhancement from Troy, a representative of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority and three OCRC staff members.

The 27-member elected Oakland County Board of Commissioners has avoided taking a position on the issue and shied from the meeting.

Many members fear they will draw primary opponents if they en-

dorse it. Republicans are wary of getting too far in front for fear Democrats will use the issue against them. Democrats are split, with some "south end" commissioners seeing little benefit to their communities.

The Road Commission is unable, by law, to spend its own money on the campaign. Organizers will seek campaign contributions from builders, real estate agents, contractors, heavy equipment operators, chambers of commerce, financial institutions — any business that could benefit from better roads.

HOW THE new revenue will be spent is up to local communities, Bair said.

"We've asked them by June 15 to choose the projects they want from cost lists we have provided them," he said.

The missing bit of information, Bair added, is how much the \$25/vehicle fee will raise in each city, village and township. The OCRC board has pledged to pump the money back in proportion to how much each unit generates. So far, however, the Secretary of State in Lansing has been unable to provide a unit-by-unit breakdown because records are kept only by postal ZIP codes, which cross governmental boundaries.

WHILE MANY Oakland drivers see roads as the county's prime need, committee organizers sense that the \$25 fee may be unpopular.

House OKs tax plan

But Senate GOP may balk at school tax shift-hike

By Tim Richard
staff writer

It's up to the state Senate today to decide whether to place before voters a constitutional tax shift that will pump \$500 million more into public schools.

House Republicans late Wednesday reluctantly gave the House Democratic majority enough votes to put the proposal on the Aug. 2 ballot. Deadline for Senate action is Friday.

"Only a handful believe it will pass," said House GOP leader Paul Hilleleggs, R-Holland, who urged a yes vote "most reluctantly."

"Even fewer will campaign for it," he said. "A \$500 million tax increase won't go down with the voters," he warned House Speaker Gary Owen that "if the Senate doesn't accept this, school finance reform isn't going to go away. The speaker declared it dead. It won't die."

THE HOUSE VOTE was 79 in favor and 25 against, with 74 needed

for a two-thirds majority. Oakland representatives from the Observer & Eccentric area voted 2 in favor and 5 against. Supporting it were Mat Danakakis, R-Lake Orion, and Willard Webb, D-Grand River. Opposed were Maxine Berman, D-Southfield; W.V. Brotherton, R-Farmington; David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield; Judith Miller, R-Birmingham; and Gordon Sparks, R-Troy.

On the Senate side, Sen. Dan DeGroot, R-Port Huron, doubted his GOP colleagues would bow to the Democrats' demand that the issue be put on the Aug. 2 primary ballot, when voter turnout is low.

REPUBLICAN thinking generally is that the proposal's "constituents" — school officials, teachers, PTAs and parents — will be inactive during July, when the campaign must be conducted. Breaking with her party was Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, whose school district receives no state aid and is considered one of Michigan's wealthier districts.

"I feel very bad," said Berman, "that after 87 fiscal changes, the Legislature has something we can't vote for."

"I don't believe the way to equity is to dig away at those who have. This will cost my district \$2 million a year. It is a bad shift in policy. I don't think the voters will buy into this," Berman said.

THE BALLOT proposal would amend seven sections of the state constitution and is tied to several statutory changes which the Legislature would have to make.

Known legally as Senate Joint Resolution K (15th House substitute), the Aug. 2 ballot plan would:

- Raise the sales tax from 4 percent to 6 percent. Three-fourths of that revenue would be used to reduce property taxes, and one-fourth to increase state aid to local schools.
- Cut school operating taxes by at least eight mills (\$8 per \$1,000 of state equalized valuation).

- Raise \$500 million in new revenue.
- Earmark for schools all beer and wine taxes, the first 8 percent of liquor taxes and 18 cents per pack of cigarettes.
- Capture 45 percent of new commercial and industrial school operating taxes into the school aid fund.

THE BUSINESS tax sharing feature particularly bothered suburban lawmakers in the high-tech belt stretching from Auburn Hills across western Wayne County to Ann Arbor.

The Michigan State Chamber of Commerce called it "unacceptable" because it will penalize "those communities that are active in economic development."

But Speaker Owen, D-Vpsallanti, blamed the inequities in resources between districts on ancient school boundaries. "That reform (boundaries) would require political courage — or political stupidity — that's not present in this body today."

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