

# trapped in TRAFFIC

## 'It can be quite a parking lot'

### Trying for better flow

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Tailoring a road to satisfy each community through which it runs is the focus of the Oakland County Road Commission's traffic management program, spokesman John Joy said.

The commission is installing computer-operated traffic signals to better control traffic flow, he said. Engineers also are developing programs such as California's "Pathfinder," a network of computerized signs that alert motorists to traffic snarls down the road, Joy said.

THE COMMISSION hopes such alternatives will help ease the traffic crunch where money cannot. "We have a budget of \$80 million a year and a \$40 million problem," Joy said. "There isn't the money to widen all the roads, and there isn't the desire everywhere to widen them. We're trying to work



On the "road" with traffic reporter John Sherwin, finds clearer sailing in the air than when he is earthbound, driving Oakland County roadways.

with all 61 communities. Instead of taking a totalitarian approach, we're taking a democratic approach.

"You can't regulate humanity. People should be able to go where they want to go and do what they want to do."

Regulations may indeed be part

of the problem, said Oakland County's Jay. Zoning laws adopted to protect the serenity of home life from the bustle of industry may have contributed to this year's gridlock, he said.

"Years ago, you could walk to school, you could walk to get a haircut, you could walk to the

store, you could walk to get a newspaper," Jay said. "Now, everyone's driving everywhere for everything."

A recent University of Michigan study suggests Oakland's growth spurt since the 1980 recession has reached a "healthful cruising altitude" by increasing about 3 percent a year, said Joseph D. Joachim, director of the county's community and economic development division.

THAT OFFERSIDE sole to the road, "Maybe somebody turned down 10 degrees," Joy said. "It's still really hot — and it's boiling."

For Oakland County's Jay and hundreds of other busy residents, moving closer to red has proven the only way to avoid a bumper-to-bumper commute.

"I used to drive 10 miles to work," Jay said. "Then I moved and drove 19 miles to work again, and now I drive 30 miles."

Until the coming age of Oakland County's road construction companies and radiation traffic monitors may be only ones to profit from the bustle of gridlock.

"Actually, I only it," WWJ's Sherwin said. "It keeps me employed."

## Emergencies require savvy

By Philip A. Sherman  
staff writer

"The traffic's bad. I bitch about it. But I don't think we ever stopped moving in my history as a paramedic."

— Tom Gahan, president, Paramed Ambulance

With traffic the way it is in Oakland County, it's not unfair to wonder if some of the back of an ambulance died of a traffic jam instead of a heart attack.

But Gahan says that hasn't happened and isn't likely to. That doesn't mean he thinks traffic problems will improve. A smoker, Gahan just exhales and shakes his head when he thinks about traffic in Southfield. To him, it's the worst in Oakland County.

He should know. As president of Paramed, he oversees 200 emergency medical technicians, paramedics and support staff members.

Paramed and its subsidiaries, Riverside, Fleet and Suburban ambulance companies, cover all of Oakland County. They average 175 calls daily. The goal is to get the patient, as rapidly and safely as possible, to the nearest hospital accepting accident cases.

SOME CASES are grisly. Near a training room at their headquarters in West Bloomfield, Gahan has a photo gallery of their more spectacular calls. Some look as though they were taken at night. Most are black-and-whites. All reflect the immediacy of the job.

Almost as a defense against time and gridlock, ambulances have become rolling emergency rooms. Gahan and Tom McElmurry, Paramed's special events coordinator for the Palace and the Silverdome, stock their "crash boxes" with the same 32 medications found in most hospital emergency rooms.

Electrocardiograms now are sent via phone from ambulance to emergency room so doctors can get a head start on treatment. Less serious accidents are handled by emergency medical technicians, who, while

trained professionals, are not allowed by law to administer medication.

That's something reserved for paramedics. They use portable phones to stay in immediate contact with doctors and, after relaying the patient's condition, follow the doctors' instructions regarding medication and treatment.

"Rush-hour traffic is the major concern," Gahan said. Ninety percent of their patients can be stabilized, which means traffic patterns, while important, have ceased to be a breakdown problem for ambulance crews.

But that doesn't mean it isn't aggravating.

"YOU LEARN to be aggressive," McElmurry says. He admits that an occasionally might be nice to flip off an exceptionally bad driver, but never has because it's unprofessional. "You just learn to be aggressive, inch up, blow the siren and watch to see which way they'll go to get out of your way."

They both agree the county has areas that are impossible to navigate at rush hour. Drivers regularly call their base and other ambulances with news of areas to avoid.

To Gahan, that means all of Southfield, although, like all hospitals, he thinks Providence is easy to get to. Personally, though, he won't set up meetings in Southfield before 8 a.m. or after 3 p.m. — the traffic's just too bad.

LT. ROBERT OZIAS, coordinator for Southfield's paramed units, says the traffic is bad at rush hour — so bad he occasionally stations an ambulance at one intersection about 4 p.m. because if there is an accident, he wants to be close.

"We have to go where we have to go," Ozias said. He also agrees that despite traffic, Providence is readily accessible and adds that while there are several problems involved with emergency care, he doesn't let traffic become one of them.

Usually accidents play out in a prescribed order. The call comes in, and Gahan says "somebody's at pa-

tientside in an average of three minutes." That's likely to be the police, followed closely by the emergency medical unit from a local fire department and then one of Paramed's ambulances.

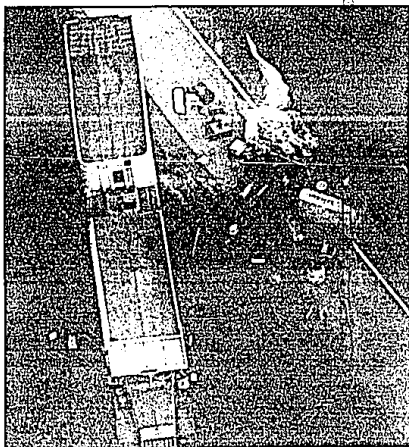
The fire department units work with the patient at the scene, it's the ambulance company's job to keep the patient stable and get them to a hospital.

Another fun area is Troy. Gahan and McElmurry roll their eyes when they think of driving I-75. "The ambulances have a top speed of 70 mph, but if you drive that speed, you're causing a traffic problem. It's too

slow — most of the people are passing you," Gahan said. It's easier on I-75 to just turn the siren and siren off," he added. "When they're on, traffic slows. You cite your own traffic problem. It's just to just go with the flow."

THEY HAVE nightmares about the Palace, Silverdome and Pine Knob letting out suddenly. McElmurry says it opened once.

"We just stayed off the expressways, period," and used back roads to get around, he said. To be circuitous that problem, Paramed has opened a new station between the Palace and the Silverdome.



An overturned truck pulling a trailer backs up traffic along eastbound I-96 for two to three miles — creating both the need and a problem for emergency vehicles.

## Using your head: Car pool

By Alice Collins  
staff writer

One way to relieve some of the stress of traffic congestion and also cut expenses is to join a van or car pool provided through the Ride Share program sponsored by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

The program was started in 1980 and is still operating today. It's served more than 20,000 applicants during its nine years.

The number of vans in use has ranged from a high of 80 to a low of 30. Currently, there are 52 vans in use and an unknown number of car pools.

"We like to think we're having an impact," said Anita Ste. Marie, manager of Ride Share.

Ride Share matches commuters based on their home and work locations and the hours they work and helps them put together their own car pool or, if there are at least nine people involved, provides them with a van.

"We're able to match up 85 to 90 percent of those who contact us," said Ste. Marie. "The vans go suburb to suburb, city to suburb, suburb to city — back and forth between residential and work centers, wherever they are in southeast Michigan." Many Oakland County residents use the service, she said.

RUDE SHARE WAS started on a national scale and operated by various governmental agencies in the early 1970s during the oil embargo, which was creating serious shortages of gasoline and sending gas prices up. SEMCOG joined the program in 1980.

"It's had its ups and downs based on gas prices and it fluctuates according to season," said Ste. Marie. But it's still going strong.

Today, with gas abundant and its cost stabilized, most of those pooling do so to save money. Some don't have access to a car. Others do it to avoid the stress of getting into traffic jams, or would rather snooze or get caught up on some work by letting someone else do the driving," according to Ste. Marie.

Parker Moore lives in Rochester and works in downtown Detroit and has commuted daily in a Ride Share van since the inception of the program.

"I do it for several reasons," he said. "It's economical, it's convenient, and a very pleasant way to spend two hours a day."

"You form friendships within the pool and you arrange to sit next to friends. You talk, read, sleep."

Moore has three cars that he loves, he said. "This saves wear and tear on them. The \$50 a month I pay is less than it would cost me to park downtown."

HERE'S SOME information on how Ride Share works:

• The vans are leased to the project from the Van Pool Services Inc.

• A van is available to any group of nine to 15 commuters. One member serves as the driver and keeper of the van and rides free. The others pay a monthly fee based on the distance of the round trip.

• The driver receives the fares at the beginning of each month, retains enough to pay for maintenance and gasoline and turns the rest over to Ride Share.

• Those who prefer car pooling or have too few members for a van will receive help from Ride Share in finding participants and in setting up their individual car pool.

• The number of vans leased fluctuates with the need.

For more information, call 963-RIDE.

## Looking around: Toll road

The eyes of traffic and highway officials throughout the country are focused on the state of Virginia where a new concept in highway building and maintenance is about to be tried — privatization.

That state, in its struggle to build new highways to keep up with new development, is about to turn over the construction and maintenance of a 14 mile, four-lane highway in the Washington, D.C. area to a fully-private group — the Virginia Toll Road Corp.

The road would be an extension of the east-west Dulles Toll Road that runs from the Capital Beltway around Washington west to Dulles International Airport. The extension would carry traffic west to Rt. 15, the bypass of Leesburg, a rapidly developing residential area in northern Virginia.

Oakland County officials are among those watching the Virginia experiment, but there has been no discussion of such a project here, according to road commission spokesman John Joy.

In fact, Virginia is believed to be the only state in the country to have such a plan under way.

"IT'S AN extraordinarily enticing kind of proposal and there are pieces of Oakland County that might benefit from such a plan," said Joy.

The proposal is the brainchild of Ralph Stanley, once head of the U.S. Urban Mass Transit Administration. He put the private corporation together and heads it.

While some state approvals on aspects of the project remain, the

final go-ahead is expected. Work could begin as early as this fall.

Following is an outline of how it will work.

• The private corporation will build the highway and maintain it through the years.

• The corporation will be allowed to charge a use toll to pay off its debt and bring in its profit.

• Legislation enacted by the Virginia General Assembly in 1988 to pave the way for this project will allow the private company to continue collecting the toll for 10 years beyond the 30 years the repayment of debt is expected to take. When the 40 years is up, the road will revert to state ownership. There are additional provisions that will allow a time extension if debt must be added for maintenance of the road.

"THE CORPORATION will acquire the land on its own. Public hearings won't be required, neither will competitive bidding," according to Oscar K. Mabry, deputy commissioner of the Virginia Department of Transportation in Richmond, Va. One drawback is that the private group won't have the legal tool of condemnation that is available to government.

The project — its design, its estimated \$155 million cost and the route — was approved in July by the Commonwealth Transportation Board. The next step is to go before the State Corporation Commission for various approvals.

The only other place in the world where such a thing is happening today is Japan, according to John Joy. "Japan's turning road building projects over to private corporations, exactly like they're doing in Virginia."



Of course, you've been here — this line up of traffic extends along Orchard Lake Road from West Bloomfield High School to Pontiac Trail.

DAN DEAN  
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