

# County townships don't want to control roads

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Township officials in Oakland County are lined up solidly against legislative bills that would allow them to take control of local roads that have been under the county road commission for nearly 60 years.

"Duplication . . . waste . . . lack of coherence . . . adversely impacting the coordination of traffic management, construction scheduling and snow removal" — those were some of the terms they used during a recent Senate Local Government Committee public hearing in Milford.

The testimony was orchestrated by John L. Grubba, managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission, who presented a resolution from the Oakland County Association of Township Supervisors.

"Lack of adequate funding" is the

chief road problem, Grubba said. Allowing townships to take over county roads would result in a nightmare of capital equipment, liability, safety and coordination problems, he added.

NO ONE SPOKE in favor of Senate Bills 638-691.

Their sponsor, Sen. Harmon Cressey, R-Deerfield, chair of the committee, was unable to attend. Vice chair Edgard Fredricks, R-Holland, was the lone member to hear testimony.

Gene Thornton, lobbyist for the Michigan Townships Association, which supports the bills, attended but declined to speak in favor.

Some of the larger townships think they can do a better job than the counties' on roads, Thornton said in an interview. But he said he couldn't identify any that actually wanted to.

Senate staff member Jerry Vand-

er Roost, outlining the bills, said, "All we're doing is letting townships have the same rights and responsibilities as cities and villages."

COLLIN WALLS, supervisor of Springfield Township, said the state had good reason to take away road control from townships in the 1930s and give it to county road commissions.

"The reason was to cooperate and increase funding. These bills would not do it," Walls said.

Supervisors of Addison, Commerce, Highland, Milford and Oakland townships sent letters of opposition.

Two Teamsters Union officials,

who represent county road employees across the state, opposed the bills.

"As you travel across the state, you can notice the difference between counties. We have 83 different systems," said Henry Mueller, business agent for Teamsters local 214.

"These bills would allow thousands of systems."

Mark Gaffney, state director of community affairs for the Teamsters, said county road crews and their managers "are established, experienced people" with good equipment. Townships that take over roads and hire private contractors would find inexperienced people without adequate equipment tending their roads.

GRUBBA PROVIDED the longest and most detailed list of reasons why townships shouldn't be allowed to take over county roads within their boundaries:

- Townships "could pick and choose" which roads they wanted.
- Townships lack the staffs, spe-

cial equipment and buildings to maintain roads. A county operation can make more efficient of resources.

Liability could devastate a township budget. "The three largest liability losses, ranging from \$1 million to \$3.4 million, incurred by the road commission for Oakland County, resulted from accidents on roads in townships."

Safety could become a problem. "In more rural areas where speeds exceed 50 mph, traveling from bare pavement to snow-covered pavement across a township line could cause serious problems."

A township utilizing a consulting engineer would be ineligible for federal road funds because the federal government allows design work to be done only by a publicly employed engineer.

Traffic engineering — signing, signalization, pavement markings — is a specialized discipline for which townships would lack expertise. Even some consulting firms lack

traffic engineers.

Township officials who think they can spend road money better than the county road commission quickly learn there's not as much money available as they need.

Grubba told of Avon Township, which incorporated as the city of Rochester Hills and gained jurisdiction over 300 miles of roads. The county lost \$440,000 in state revenue for those roads. The new city began receiving \$1.25 million for the same roads — and even then it had to seek a special tax to provide the level of service it desired.

WALTER CLINK, superintendent of the Shiawassee County Road Commission, also criticized the bills.

Township governments, he said, judge road needs "on a head-count basis — how many people live on a road. They don't consider the traffic or the condition of the pavement."

Clink was cool toward other Cressey bills that would allow counties to enlarge the number of road commission board members.

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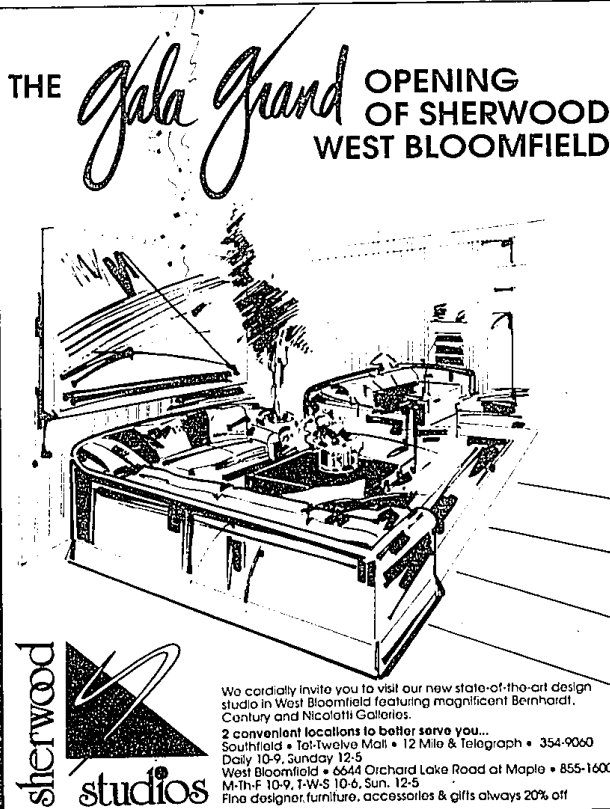
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