

Engler, Nowak see more privatization for efficient MDOT

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Gov. John Engler and the Oakland County man he selected to be the next director of the Michigan Department of Transportation see eye-to-eye on one major goal for the state highway system.

Engler and Patrick Nowak both insist MDOT must become more efficient... possibly through privatization, the system of cutting costs by contracting some government services to private sector companies.

Engler prompted discussion on MDOT goals Monday when he announced that Nowak, Oakland's deputy county executive, would head the agency that oversees a \$1 billion annual budget and employs about 3,900 employees.

The new governor announced his selection during a press conference at the executive's office at the Oakland County complex saying, "Pat's experience in government and transportation will serve him well."

Nowak, 52, was a county commissioner from Farmington from 1973 to 1976 and became one of two deputies to County Executive Daniel T. Murphy in 1977. He now lives in Bloomfield Township.

ONE OF THOSE congratulating Engler on his selection and Nowak on his appointment was Murphy himself.

"As you all know, Pat has been my right hand man for 14 years," the executive said in a letter read on his behalf. Murphy suffered an apparent stroke on Jan. 5 and continues to recuperate at home after a three-week stay at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, much of it in intensive care.

"It gives me great pleasure to know that Oakland County's deputy county executive Pat Nowak has been appointed director of the Michigan Department of Transportation," Murphy wrote.

"Over the years Pat has been in the trenches with elected and appointed officials in Oakland County, the State of Michigan and the federal government," the executive continued. "He's been a coalition builder, a team player, an innovative thinker, and many times the guy who delivers 'bad news' on my behalf."

Nowak is scheduled to begin his new duties toward the end of February when Murphy is expected to be fully recovered.

NOWAK SAID he was "surprised and honored" to be appointed director of MDOT.

"I've known John (Engler) for a number of years," Nowak said. "During that time we haven't been particularly close... or distant. I think I will enjoy working with him."

When asked what he wanted MDOT to do under Nowak's direction, Engler was general in a specific way. "I want all aspects of state government to be more efficient," he said. "Privatization might be a way to achieve that goal."

Asked if he didn't expect something more innovative from MDOT, Engler quipped, "Many people would say being more efficient would be a big innovation for state government."

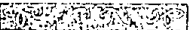
Nowak said he had talked with Engler and his advisers on several occasions, and the only goal they discussed is making MDOT more efficient.

"It's not going to be business as usual," Nowak said. "We want to

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Sympathetic ear

New MDOT director knows local roads

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

With one of its favorite sons as director of the state highway system, Oakland will get a more sympathetic ear - and maybe more help - from the Michigan Department of Transportation for the county's beleaguered road system.

At least that's the opinion of Lawrence E. Littman, a Troy businessman who is also chairman of the Road Commission for Oakland County.

"Pat Nowak is an excellent selection," Littman said Tuesday. "He's an excellent administrator and he knows the importance of roads in attracting and maintaining businesses."

Littman made his comments one day after Gov. John Engler held a press conference at the Oakland County complex to announce that Patrick M. Nowak would be the new MDOT director.

Nowak, who was a general agent for the Connecticut Mutual Insurance Co. for 16 years before being twice elected as a county commissioner, has been deputy county executive since 1977.

AN SECOND-in-command to County Executive Daniel T. Murphy, Nowak has vast experience in county government, Littman said, and first-hand knowledge of Oakland's transportation needs.

Nowak has been, for example, chairman of the Detroit area mass transit system, SMART, or Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation since 1989.

He also promoted and encouraged county involvement in the so-called "smart highway" pilot program for southeast Oakland County. That's the \$70 million Advanced Traffic Management System (ATMS) that proposes to ease congestion by computerizing and automating highways.

The ATMS initially targets traffic in Troy. But if it's successful, the ATMS is expected to be expanded to include most of the entire southeast corner of Oakland County.

Because of his experience, Nowak will likely bring a different and more welcomed perspective to MDOT, said Littman.

The outgoing MDOT director, James Fitz, seemed to focus on building and maintaining expressways, Littman said, often at the expense of local highways.

"AND I DON'T think he fully understood the relationship between the state highway system and county roads. But Nowak has a full understanding of how those two agencies are supposed to work together."

As director of MDOT, Nowak has a governor to serve and a state to serve, Littman continued. But I

'Michigan's got 83 counties. But I certainly understand the congestion in Oakland County.'

— Patrick M. Nowak
new transportation director



definitely think Oakland County will get a better hearing in Lansing.

Asked if he would be more receptive to Oakland County, Nowak said, "Michigan's got 83 counties. But I certainly understand the congestion in Oakland County."

And I certainly understand that the governor wants to do all he can to help every congested area move traffic more efficiently."

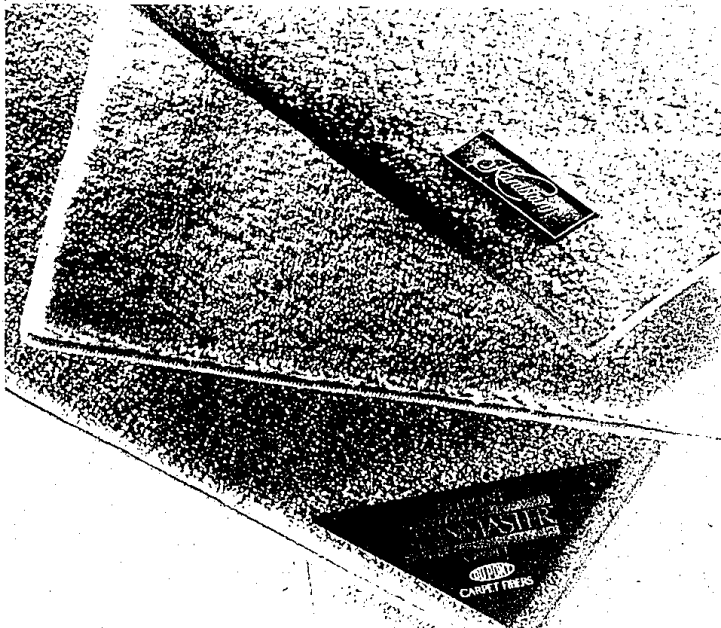
With what is perhaps a hint of his personal preference for better traffic management (via ATMS) over more expensive paving, Nowak

said, "I certainly don't think Oakland or anybody else can pave their way out of congestion."

Asked if there is any particular area that needs attention, Nowak cited the Hagerly Road extension, a project calling for a six-lane boulevard from the intersection of I-275 and I-696 north to Maple Road.

There, "certainly a great deal of pressure building from congestion in that area," he said. "There's also pressure for something to handle congestion north from Maple. But we'll have to see what happens."

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