

State looks for remedies for local congested roads

BY BILL COULTANT
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills city officials are calling the state's progress on road improvements for 14 Mile, 15 Mile, Orchard Lake and Northwestern Highway a good beginning.

The Michigan Department of Transportation concluded three fall meetings with a meeting Nov. 29 to take suggestions for the public and from Hills and West Bloomfield officials concerning plans for the roads. The state has said that if enough public interest is shown, it could spend up to \$26 million to improve roads in the area.

"I think the state will come to the two councils sometime in January," said Hills Assistant City Manager Dave Call. "They'll take up those issues (from the meetings and other studies) with the council."

Although the Haggerty Connector project, which now connects M-5 with 12 Mile has alleviated a lot of traffic, the Orchard Lake, 14 Mile and Northwestern area has become a traffic tangle for area residents.

Northwestern Highway had been planned as a connector with US-23 in Fenton but fell by the wayside as the interstates and other roads took priority, said MDOT administrator Bill Hartwig.

In the meantime, growth in Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield and points west and north have outpaced improvements to those roads.

The state has already proposed several alternatives including widening the intersections of Northwestern, 14 Mile, Orchard Lake and Maple (15 Mile) to relieve congestion, adding left turn lanes and passing lanes along 14 Mile, widening 14 Mile to a six-lane boulevard and making Maple a four-lane boulevard from Orchard Lake to Haggerty, Call said.

The support for the changes has been there, Call said. The state will now prioritize the needs for turn lanes, traffic signals and congestion relief and present those findings to the city and township before any decisions are made.

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to be able to call people from home," Goss said.

Farmington Hills Fire Department has a paid-on-call volunteer system. Volunteer fire departments are exempt from the bill.

Hills' full-time fire personnel, though, are required to live within a 12-mile radius of the city limits.

Hills police officers are required to live within a 25-mile radius of police headquarters. Command officers — lieutenants and sergeants — have to live within 12 miles.

Farmington Hills prefers a residency requirement opposed to a residency requirement, which is "outmoded," said assistant city manager Steve Brock.

"You look at a couple who are working in both communities, and if you have residency requirements in both, it becomes impractical," Brock said. "We think that doesn't work."

Farmington officials view their firefighting situation as similar to that in the Hills. Though employed full time, public safety officers are often called from home to fight fires.

Last year, Goss said Farmington had 42 call-back fires where an average nine full-time officers and five reserve officers came in from home.

Honigman appears willing to listen.

Cities like Detroit and Flint impose such requirements to prevent middle class flight and a loss of tax base, Honigman said. If it's for safety sake, the senator said that's another matter.

"If it's rational and makes sense, that's fine," Honigman said.

City officials contend the bills infringe on home rule and run against Public Act 312, which allows cities and unions to collectively bargain on residency issues. The U.S. Justice Department and local courts have upheld that, officials said.

Unions have been behind such legislation in the past, Farmington City Manager Frank Lauffhoff said.

"Normally, they have been concerned about gaining something from legislation they couldn't gain through collective bargaining," Lauffhoff said.

Honigman said there's a more fundamental issue involved: Governments shouldn't be able to tell people where to live.

"The Berlin Wall has come down, but we still have laws like this in Michigan cities," Honigman said.



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