

Senate paves way for \$50 million road-repair plan

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

State Senate Republicans used mostly party-line votes to push through a package of bills to raise \$50 million more for road repairs.

The key bill retained the 6-cent diesel discount for commercial truckers, a tax break Michigan gives to compete with Ohio's lower rate, but raised quarterly diesel fuel tax for truckers pay from nine cents to 12 cents.

The Senate acted Oct. 2, then returned until Nov. 7. The House won't get the package until its December session.

"I oppose this bill because it is revenue neutral," said Sen. Jim Berryman, D-Adrian, an announced candidate for the Democratic nomination for governor. "How fair is that to the truckers who drive and buy in Michigan?"

"Obviously, the last speaker doesn't understand what the bill actually does," replied Sen. Jeanne Emmons, R-Big Rapids, chair of the Senate Finance Committee which wrote the bills.

"Right now, truckers drive on our roads. I think the one thing to do agree on is they probably hurt the roads a whole lot more than our 2,500-pound cars. If they (truckers) don't buy gas in Michigan right now, they get out of paying for the damage they do to our roads."

"Now, they will be paying a

tax on the miles they drive in Michigan, so I disagree that we are letting people get away with this."

"Twenty-one million dollars more will go into the road fund. I don't know how to make it any clearer," Emmons said. Currently the diesel fuel tax yields nearly \$100 million a year.

That bill, SB 746, passed with 21 Republican yes votes and 16 Democratic no votes.

All area senators voted with their parties except Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, who was absent.

Other bills will:

- Reduce the 2 percent deduction that wholesalers receive for evaporation and spillage of gasoline to about 0.5 percent.

- Cap the state's liability in lawsuits claiming that road conditions contributed to an accident at \$500,000 for non-economic (pain and suffering) damages. If the suit involved bodily injury or property loss, the non-economic cap would be \$280,000.

- Speed up the process for condemning land for public projects, including highways. The bill could aid land acquisition for new baseball and football stadiums in Detroit.

• Provide for audits of how county road agencies use their funds, require competitive bids for all road projects and limit administrative costs of road agencies.

Senate Democratic leader John Cherry of Clio complained that Democrats were left out of negotiations over the package, and his party would find it harder to vote for a fuel tax increase if such a bill comes up.

Michigan's fuel tax has been at 15 cents a gallon since 1982. Road groups are urging the Legislature to increase it to repair roads. Gov. John Engler is at odds with lawmakers on whether the increase should go only to the Michigan Department of Transportation or be split with county and municipal road agencies.

The Associated Press contributed to this story. Refer to SB 746 and the road package when writing to your state representative, State Capitol, Lansing 48909.

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KALEIDOSCOPE

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EDUCATION EXPO

Education Expo '96 will be held from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 20, in the atrium of the Buell Management Building at Lawrence Technological University, 21000 W. 10 Mile, just west of the Lodge Freeway, in Southfield.

The fair showcases schools, preschools, educational software, tutoring services, extracurricular programs, learning workshops, museums and other related exhibits aimed at providing kids with an added edge. Now this year are hands-on, educational activities for children ages 2 to 16. The free event is presented by Metro Parent Magazine and sponsored by Health Alliance Plan, Star 97.1 FM, WWJ Newsradio 950, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Radio Anths 1090 AM, Association of Independent Michigan Schools and Lawrence Technological University.

PTA ONLINE

The Lansing-based Michigan PTA announces the opening of its new web site at: <http://www.michiganpta.org>. The site provides information on parenting programs, upcoming workshops, special events, legislative updates and links with other sites of interest to parents, teachers and students across the state, including Oakland County.

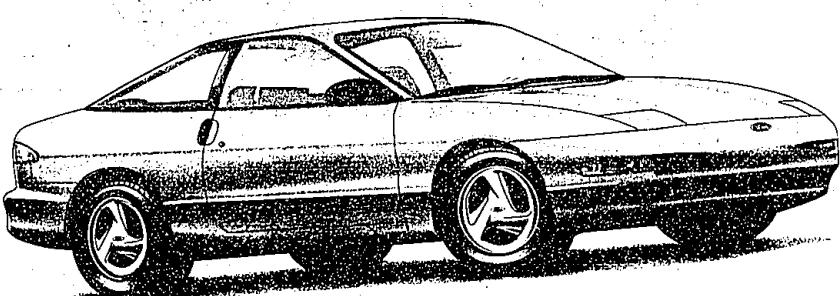
The site will be updated on a regular basis and will include information previously available only through a subscription to the Michigan PTA Bulletin. Child advocates can subscribe to the Michigan Legislative Alert list server at the web site to receive free E-mail updates of current legislative issues in Lansing and Washington, D.C. The Michigan PTA has 100,000 members and is the largest child advocacy organization in the state. It is affiliated with the 100-year-old National PTA, which can be found on the Internet at: <http://www.pta.org>.

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