

Road plan could face rough ride in county

By SANDRA AMERSTUTZ
OAKLAND COUNTY EDITOR

One day after Gov. John Engler announced his plan to bring in more funds to repair roads, some county officials had questions that could indicate the proposal will have a rough ride to the July 1 deadline for passage imposed by the governor.

"I have real doubts about the tax increase," said Donn Wolf, R-Farmington Hills, Oakland County Board of Commissioners Republican caucus chair.

Among new revenue sources, according to the plan, would be a 4-cent a gallon gas tax hike to 19 cents. Engler predicts that will amount to \$22 a year for the average driver.

That wasn't the only area of concern for Wolf. "There are rumors the state would be taking over county roads. (But) the devil's in the details. A lot depends on what they would take over."

In recent years, officials such as County Executive L. Brooks Patterson and the county road commission, Republicans like Engler, have disagreed with the governor over road plans. In March 1996, the issue of road funding brought an outcry over the governor's previous plan for road spending: Where would the funds go to state highways or local/county roads? A lawsuit



Brent Blair
road commission manager

was even threatened by the state.

"He (the governor) takes a state view on this issue, and I take a local one," Patterson said in 1996. The week of the governor's announcement, the executive was in New Orleans, according to his office. While he was informed of what the governor's plan called for, he wanted to study details before commenting when he returns.

Patterson initially called for a 6.5-cent a gallon tax increase; however, that figure was later trimmed to five a gallon, with some of the current sales tax on gas going into the pot. Since then he has repeatedly called on the governor to act on a gas tax.

The state-versus-county road funding issue is also a concern of Brent Blair, managing director of the county road commission.

Under the Build Michigan II plan of Engler, the state's control of roads would grow from 9,000 to 33,000 miles. The also would transfer all state and federal funds those roads receive to the Michigan Department of Transportation.

"Governor Engler is known nationally as a champion of less centralization, yet this proposal would produce much more of it," Blair said.

"This whole issue may again come down to concerns about the loss of local control. Without wanting to appear overly critical, I cannot envision MDOT having the same level of sensitivity to local communities..."

Commissioner Wolf also was concerned about "what money would be left to go for local roads." He said the board would be discussing the governor's plan, bringing the road commission into the talks.

According to MDOT, Oakland County revenue per mile would increase from \$7,300 to \$16,029. The governor's talking points to Build Michigan II report that the plan would simplify "complex jurisdictions" and raise fees in non personal vehicle areas such as trucks.

Telecommunication Act by rejecting various tower site proposals made since 1994.

OXFORD

Water work to begin: Progress in supplying water to residents affected by contaminated water for more than two years may be slow, but it has been measurable. Oxford Township officials recently approved the construction of water lines to the contaminated areas of Minnetonka, Mechanic, Nipigon, Pochahontas and Pontiac streets. Construction will be paid for with Michigan quality of life bonds. Genack Construction of Holly, the low bidder, was awarded the contract at \$793,267. The township and developers are still negotiating to complete the water main.

ROCHESTER

Portables at school: Twenty portable classrooms will be added at Rochester High by the year 2001 to help decongest crowded hallways. Another 10 trailer-style classrooms will create elbow room at Adams High School that same year. The district will add portables at both schools every year beginning in September regardless of the outcome of the June 9 bond issue election. It also plans to divide Rochester High School enrollment and by 2002, the district will operate three high schools.

SOUTHFIELD

Heroes to be honored: Heroes who volunteered their help during a fiery May 4 traffic crash at 12 Mile and Greenfield will be jointly honored by the Southfield police and fire departments. A firm date has not been set, but a ceremony is expected later this month. Recipients include: Philip Smith, 29, of Independence Township; Rodney Dean Frank, 62, Dr. W. H. Everett, 54, and Stanley Pittman, 38, all of Southfield, as well as David Czarnota, 34, and Larry Stocker, 47, of Berkley.

TROY

Hunger walk a success: More than \$18,000 was raised during the CROC Walk May 4 in Troy. Walkers raised money by having sponsors pledge money for their participation. The funds go to hunger-related projects all over the world.

WEST BLOOMFIELD

SMART buses halted: The plan to operate a joint bus service between West Bloomfield and Bloomfield Township was stalled May 5 by the West Bloomfield Town Board. The board tabled the plan until June 2 after raising questions about liability and responsibility of a transportation coordinator yet to be hired.

—Compiled by staff writer Jennifer Placinto



Road paving and expansion work is progressing in many Oakland County communities, including those listed below:

■ **Birmingham** — Beginning May 12, Brown Street (also known as Ring Road) between Chester and Pierce will be reconstructed due to the addition of new sewers and new pavement. The work is expected to continue for two months, with a detour for eastbound Brown Street traffic to Maple Road.

■ **Bloomfield Township** — Resurfacing work is scheduled to begin this month on Square Lake Road, between Bloomfield Crossing and Adams Road. The project is set to be completed by mid-summer.

■ **Farmington** — Detouring concrete in Elizabeth Court, Mary Court and Twin Valley Court is being removed and replaced. Work is in progress in Twin Valley Court, which is expected to be completed May 30. In St. Mary's Court, work should be completed June 12, and in Elizabeth Court, work is expected to be completed June 13.

■ **Farmington Hills** — The 1996 widening project along Eight Mile, between Haledale and Farmington roads, to five lanes, is continuing. The remaining one and a quarter miles through the Farmington Road intersection is expected to be completed Aug. 22.

■ **Intermittent lane closures are possible.** Expansion of the Hagerty Connector (M-5) has closed 18 Mile Road, between Hagerty and Meadowbrook, until July. When that section of roadway reopens, 14 Mile, between Hagerty and Welch, will be closed until July 1998. Beam repair work has started on the 10 Mile bridge over I-96/275 with an expected completion of late October. There will be hourly closures on I-96/275 and a permanent lane closure on east and westbound 10 Mile during construction. Three subdivision paving projects are planned to begin this month: The gravel roads of Forestbrook and Grand Duke, off of I-96/275 and a permanent lane closure on east and westbound 10 Mile during construction. Three subdivision paving projects are planned to begin this month: The gravel roads of Forestbrook and Grand Duke, off of I-96/275 and a permanent lane closure on east and westbound 10 Mile during construction.

■ **Independence Township** — White Lake Road near Andersonville Road is closed to through traffic for the realignment of the roadway with Nelsley Road and the widening to three lanes. Detours route White Lake Road drivers down Dixie Highway to Andersonville on the western border of Lathrup Village, east of Berkley between Winchester and 11 Mile, are being replaced with an expected completion in mid-September. Concrete sawing has begun on residential roadways, which will undergo spot concrete replacement of Leasher and west of Arlington between Winchester and 11 Mile. Removal and replacement of roadway is expected in late May.

■ **Novi** — Expansion of the Hagerty Connector (M-5) has closed 13 Mile Road, between Hagerty and Meadowbrook, until July. When that section of roadway reopens, 14 Mile, between Hagerty and Welch, will be closed until July 1998. Beam repair work has started on the 10 Mile bridge over I-96/275 with an expected completion of late October. There will be hourly closures on I-96/275 and a permanent lane closure on east and westbound 10 Mile during construction.

■ **Orion Township** — The bridges on Baldwin Road, between Lake Angelus Road and Morgan north of I-76, are being resurfaced with an expected completion date of June 1.

■ **Oxford** — Continuation of the 1996 paving project is ongoing with the final layer of roadway being laid on the following residential roads: Maple, Dayton, First, Willow, Depot, Church, Powell, Mill, East, Hovey and Louck. Work should be completed June 15.

■ **Rochester** — The first phase of the Sheldon Road Extension is under construction to create a bypass through the city of Rochester. The half-mile stretch of two-lane roadway is being constructed from east Second Street to Parkdale. The roadway will be east of Miller and is expected to be open for traffic in July.

■ **Rochester Hills** — The reconstruction of Hamlin Road to a four-lane boulevard from M-59 to Crooks Road is under way and is expected to be completed by the spring of 1998. The project will include the completion of the east-west link from the new M-59 ramp to various business facilities. The roadway is closed with detours around M-59 and Avon Road. The remaining 13 miles of 28 miles of roadway in the following subdivisions are receiving a pavement overlay or will receive the overlay later this month: Dross Pine, Fairview Farms, North Fairview Farms, Brookdale Woods No. 2, Bellarmine Hills and Hunters Creek. Work should be completed June 1.

■ **Southfield** — Twelve Mile Road at Telegraph is being widened to include a right-turn lane from eastbound 12 Mile to southbound Telegraph. There will be intermittent lane closures, but during rush hour from 6-9 a.m. and 3-7 p.m. weekly, all lanes will remain open. Construction is set to be completed May 25 with final cleanup by June 15. Greenfield bridge over the Lodge Freeway (M-10) is under construction for deck replacement with northbound Greenfield closed and traffic detoured along Pembroke. Lanes are expected to reopen Oct. 30, 1997. Detouring residential roadways on the western border of Lathrup Village, east of Berkley between Winchester and 11 Mile, are being replaced with an expected completion in mid-September. Concrete sawing has begun on residential roadways, which will undergo spot concrete replacement of Leasher and west of Arlington between Winchester and 11 Mile. Removal and replacement of roadway is expected in late May.

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NOTE: Unless otherwise stated, detours are unknown or not planned.
Source: Local, county, city and village road officials.
—Compiled by staff writer Jennifer Placinto

'Growth districts' could see increase in school aid

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County forces are working quietly to pry loose more money from the state school aid budget for "growth" school districts.

"Two weeks from now, things will start to happen," predicted Rick Simonson, deputy superintendent and legislative agent for Oakland Intermediate School District.

The vehicle is House Bill 4310. Gov. Engler recently vetoed \$9.02 billion for K-12 schools, up 2.6 percent over the current year. The House raised that by \$138 million to \$9.16 billion, or a 3 percent hike.

But the debate is less over the total than the parts inside.

Schools get their aid on a per-pupil formula based on a "blend of count" — part last year's enrollment, part this year's, Simonson said. "The money ought to be where the kids are," he contends, pointing to White Lake, which adds 500 pupils per year but never recovers the money.

Growth areas in western Wayne and Livingston counties also would benefit along with western and northern Oakland County.

But no one wants to take much from districts losing enrollment because they still have overhead costs — and plenty of political clout.

Engler put in \$3 million extra aid for "growth" schools. The House raised it to \$8 million. Simonson has a figure of \$10 million to \$20 million in mind.

He has allies. Republican state Sen. Michael Bouchard of Birmingham, Willis Bullard of Milford and Dan Dumas of Lake Orion are working with the Senate's key school money man, Dan DeGroot, R-Port Huron, chair of the Senate Appropriation subcommittee on K-12 school aid. They are also working with the governor's office.

Another ally is Al Short of the Michigan Education Association, the state's largest teachers union. "We would support a categorical line item in the budget"

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Rick Simonson
—deputy director, Oakland Intermediate Schools

for growth. It should be \$28.5 million instead of \$6 million," Short said in public testimony May 6.

Now, said Short, is the time to add growth districts. "Foreign is a state with families moving in. We have to recognize these districts are growing."

Simonson said a total shift to a "current year" formula would cost \$80 million. "It can't be done in a single year. So he is hoping for a five-year phase-in starting with \$20 million or so this year."

"We had 50 votes in the House to do it," said Simonson, with 55 Democrats in opposition, which includes Sen. John Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, and Joe Conroy, D-Flint, will hear more testimony at 1 p.m. Tuesday, May 13, and report out the bill a week or so after that.

The final decision will be made by the so-called "third branch of government" — the joint House-Senate conference committee that tries to compromise difference between the two chambers' versions.

May 22 is another key date, Simonson said. That's when top administration and legislative leaders hold their revenue estimating conference — a multi-branch, bipartisan effort to agree on what state revenues will be for the fiscal year starting Oct. 1.

Helping growth districts is just one of many sticking points in Michigan's largest single budget bill. Some others:

• **Adult education** — Republicans last year cut it to \$80 million. House Democrats voted to restore it to \$185 million.

• **Third grade guarantee** — House Democrats voted \$10 million for a handful of schools,

mostly in large cities, to lower K-3 class sizes and involve parents.

• **Career preparation** — The House agreed to Engler's proposal for \$9.5 million to coordinate vocational programs within local Workforce Development Board regions. Many traditionalists, however, will fight the plan as producing "factory fodder" for corporations.

• **Career preparation system** — The House specified the elected State Board of Education should approve career preparation standards. Engler wants to give control to the appointed superintendent of public instruction.

• **Proficiency tests** — Engler proposed making the state superintendent responsible for selecting proficiency tests. The House deleted this. The House also provided that students' transcripts will include their state proficiency test scores rather than the cryptic "proficient," "novice" and "not yet novice" notations.

• **Charter schools** — Engler wants them funded the same as public schools, up to \$5,945 per pupil. House Democrats capped the allowance at \$5,608 for charter schools that don't operate a 12th grade, reasoning that higher grades are more expensive to teach.

Tests tested

The House Education Committee will hold public hearings around the state for comments on the Michigan High School Proficiency Test that 11th graders must pass to get state-endorsed diplomas. Those nearby:

• **Flint** — Friday, May 23, from 1-4 p.m., Erwin L. Davis Education Center, 2413 W. Maple.

• **Dearborn Heights** — Friday, June 6, from 1-4 p.m., Annapolis High, 20629 Annapolis.

Oakland Digest provides a summary of headline stories from around the county during the past week.

BIRMINGHAM

\$100 million may be sought: Birmingham School District residents may be asked to approve a \$100 million technology and building renovation and construction plan, including a bond issue. The majority of bond money is planned to be used for exterior and interior high school improvements, while some \$31 million is slated for elementary and middle school improvements and technology upgrades in the elementary schools. The board is expected to vote on the final bond amount and set a finance plan at its May 20 meeting.

Meters take debit cards

Rather than scrounging around for change, Birmingham is offering debit cards for downtown parking meters. The debit cards will be on sale beginning Monday at the treasurer's office, located on the first floor at Birmingham City Hall. There is a \$5 deposit on the cards and people can purchase meter time in increments of \$5 to \$50. The cards were created, in part, to accommodate drivers since the \$20 meter increase to \$1 per hour in the core downtown area.

Parking fee compromise:

They wanted to reduce the parking rate from \$1 per hour at municipal lot number seven to 50 cents, but the Birmingham City Commission settled on 75 cents. Angry Community House users staged a letter-writing campaign to return the rate to its former 50 cents. The core downtown area parking rates were changed Jan. 6.

BEVERLY HILLS

Sewer ballot sets: On Aug. 5th, Beverly Hills residents will be asked to approve an additional 2 mills, or \$2 for each \$1,000 of taxable value, for a period of 12 years to finance road and sewer repair and replacement. The level of deterioration for both sewers, in some areas, and roads is so great and the costs to correct the situation so large that council unanimously has concluded the only solution is the millage.

CLARKSTON

Public hearing set: Resident comments will be solicited at a proposed land use/master plan at a June 2 meeting of the Clarkston planning commission. Multiple family residences are proposed at the borders of the city along M-16 and in two or three other areas where apartment complexes already exist. The goal of the proposal is to cultivate and encourage pedestrian traffic through the city, said McKenna Associates Inc.

Cafe seeks to serve alcohol: Clarkston Cafe owner Randy Lincoln is seeking city approval