

# Counties join forces to ease wintertime travel worries

The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments Executive Committee July 31 gave the nod to an historic, multi-jurisdictional project that will unite the four main agencies responsible for winter road maintenance in Southeast Michigan through cutting-edge technology.

The project, known as South-eastern Michigan Snow and Ice Management (SEMSIM), unites the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC), the Wayne County Department of Public Services, the city of Detroit Department of Public Works and the Road Commission of Macomb County in an effort to employ the latest fleet and weather monitoring technology. The goal of the project is to provide better, more efficient winter maintenance on major roads throughout southeast Michigan — regardless of jurisdiction.

**Agency link**  
SEMSIM will link the four agencies electronically and allow the monitoring of all winter maintenance activities so that equipment and manpower can be used most efficiently. It will also involve the agencies assisting each other when needed.

A SEMSIM test location is planned to be established in 1999, with the full project to be implemented in 2000 and beyond.

Last week, the SEMCOG Executive Committee unanimously voted to include the SEMSIM project in its 1998-2000 Transportation Improvement Program. The project must be included in the TIP in order to be eligible for federal funds.

Congress has already allocated

\$1.15 million for the first phase of the project. Those dollars require a 20 percent local match, and the four agencies have agreed to contribute \$287,500 to bring the 1998 SEMSIM funding total to \$1.43 million.

RCOC Managing Director Brent Bair noted the initial \$1.15 million federal allocation was the result of the assistance of U.S. Senator Spencer Abraham. "It was thanks to the vision and diligence of Senator Abraham that we are able to move ahead with this project. He fully understands how technology and collaboration can help ensure safer roads for all of us."

These funds will be used for project administration, systems integration, systems implementation, communications and project evaluation. The SEMSIM partners have asked Congress to authorize an additional \$4 million to fully implement the project.

In addition to the four main partners, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration are also involved in the project.

"This project represents the first time ever that these agencies have collaborated on such a significant project. SEMSIM will introduce new technologies, to be shared by all four agencies, that will mean safer roads and more cost-efficient winter road maintenance for the entire region," Bair said.

**Mobility boost**

SEMSIM will help to provide increased mobility for motorists in the metropolitan area, said Robert Mahoney, Wayne County

**'This project represents the first time ever that these agencies have collaborated on such a significant project.'**

**Brent Bair**  
—Road Commission for Oakland County

roads director. "The better the job we do managing winter snow and ice," Mahoney said, "the more likely it is that motorists will be able to safely reach their destinations in a reasonable amount of time." He added that the project will also benefit those using mass transit, by ensuring that buses are better able to meet their schedules during inclement winter weather.

The project should result in safer roads for the region. "Because we will be more efficient in our winter road maintenance," said City of Detroit DPW Director Clyde Howell. "We will be better able to ensure that major roads are plowed or salted in a timely fashion, making them safer for motorists."

Carlo Santia, highway engineer for the Road Commission of Macomb County, added that the project should save the state money as well. "Because RCOC, the Wayne County DPS and the Road Commission of Macomb County are all under contract with MDOT to maintain the state highway system in the metro area," he explained, "we anticipate SEMSIM's efficiencies will mean a smaller winter maintenance bill for the state."

# Parties unite in supporting state environmental bonds

By TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

The state's two major political parties are united, more or less, on the Clean Michigan bond issue on the Nov. 3 ballot.

Republicans and Democrats both say "yes," and both say "give us the credit."

Gov. John Engler tapped U.S. Sen. Spencer Abraham, a fellow Republican, to chair the campaign, saying he "can't think of a more appropriate person."

"Abraham has been a leader on the federal brownfields cleanup, he has worked to ensure continued research funding for the Great Lakes Environmental Research Labs and Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, and has worked hard to secure funds for pollution-ridden rivers and improve the quality of drinking water."

Engler didn't mention another Abraham skill: As a former state party chair, he knows how to raise money and run campaigns.

Abraham's term doesn't expire until 2000, so his calendar is relatively free this year.

Abraham also uses a term Engler won't admit exists: "urban sprawl." The senator said the ballot proposal will "create jobs, roll back urban sprawl, improve environmental health and safety, and enhance quality of life for our families."

Among Democrats, only former state Sen. Lenn Pollack, now president of the Michigan Envi-

ronmental Council, deplored the Abraham appointment, saying he had no identification with environmental issues.

But her organization now supports the proposal, now that the governor has adopted Democratic amendments.

Democratic House Speaker Curtis Hertel of Detroit put this spin on the issue: "Thanks to action by the House Democratic majority, the environmental bond initiative ... is more than an economic development tool. If approved by Michigan voters, it will invest millions not originally sought by the governor in clean water, pollution prevention and lead cleanup."

The major components, if voters say yes:

■ \$335 million for urban industrial brownfields.

■ \$50 million to upgrade facilities and roads at 53 state parks.

■ \$50 million for nonpoint source pollution control (runoffs).

■ \$26 million for sediment cleanups of nine rivers.

■ \$50 million for waterfront redevelopment.

■ \$50 million for local parks and recreation.

■ \$20 million for pollution pre-

vention.

■ \$5 million for lead contamination abatement.

■ \$90 million for clean water to protect rivers, lakes and streams.

All suburban area legislators supported the package of bills to put the bond issue on the ballot, except Sen. Mike Bouchard, R-Birmingham. Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Redford, missed the vote.

Meanwhile, another group is pressuring Engler and big-city mayors to reveal more than required under a federal Safety Drinking Water Act.

The group is called Michigan Clean Water Action. CWA says the federal law doesn't go far enough.

"The EPA rules say that only people who get a water bill have to get the report (of chemical contaminants in their tap water), though the rule asks that utilities make an effort to get the report to all of their consumers."

The federal act requires reports to be sent annually, beginning in October 1999. The Michigan group wants Engler and Lansing Mayor David Hollister to respond by this Oct. 15 whether they will require more information in the clean water reports.

So far, no comment from the governor's office.

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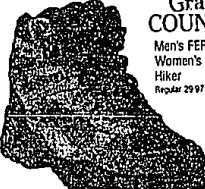
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