

Implications of Transit Decisions Call For Sound Judgments, Affordability

Taxpayers and transit-dependent citizens throughout Michigan could be shortchanged if the "wrong" decision is made on a regional transit system for southeast Michigan, cautions John R. Gnaul, Jr., chairman of the Board of Oakland County Road Commissioners.

Gnaul said Governor William Milliken and legislative leaders recognize that the state's transportation system needs a substantial financial transfusion if it is to meet the transportation needs of Michigan citizens and Michigan industry.

"One tentative plan being considered is to raise \$130 million a year in new money for improvement and maintenance of highways, roads and streets, and \$70 million more a year to bolster public transportation, such as railroads and public transit," Gnaul said. "The new money would

have to come, of course, from taxes collected throughout the state."

Gnaul said SEMTA's preferred program under consideration is based on a subway system in Detroit. He said construction costs of such a system are estimated at more than \$2.4 billion for just the portion to be completed by 1985. To complete the program for 1990 and beyond will obviously cost billions more, he said.

"If the subway prevails," Gnaul said, "it takes little imagination to figure what would happen to a lion's share of the \$70 million annually planned for public transit purposes statewide. A disproportionately large share of it would be swallowed by Detroit area transit construction costs."

"If, on the other hand, sound judgment prevails and southeast Mich-

igan opts for a transit system that can do the job adequately at reasonable cost, a greater portion of the \$70 million in new money for public transportation will be available to meet transit demands in other parts of the state."

Gnaul said the Tri-County Alternate transit plan substitutes light rail for heavy rail service and proposes laying light rail tracks within existing railroad rights-of-way to pare construction costs and avoid displacing people. He said the Tri-County transit plan could be completely constructed within four years at a cost of only \$824.7 million.

"Best of all," Gnaul said, "our plan is affordable. It can be constructed on monies presently committed from Washington and pledged by the Governor."

Transit Is Needed

A balanced and affordable regional transportation system is required in the tri-county area to satisfy regional transportation needs.

We need a public transit system which will meet the travel needs of people with mobility problems.

We need a transit system that will provide an equitable distribution of services throughout the 129 governmental entities of the tri-county area, which all have transit needs.

We need a transit system to save energy by reducing fuel consumption, and to serve as a backup system in case of future fuel shortages.

We need to stimulate our economy and provide jobs for the unemployed, and a useful transit construction project will contribute toward that goal.

We're Grateful, Says Chairman

Cooperation Of Others Helps Improve Roads

As you can see in this report, your Oakland County Road Commission is a busy and complex public service agency.

It is annually involved in numerous transportation projects costing close to \$30 million.

The projects range from issuing permits for uses of the right-of-way to \$6.9 million worth of road maintenance in 1976 and \$10 million worth of road construction and reconstruction in 1976.

Doing that has required cooperation of federal, state, county and local governments and private citizens; for which we are very grateful. Little could be done without this cooperation. For example, if we had only guaranteed revenues from the Michigan gas and weight tax during 1976, the road construction program would have been only one-quarter as extensive. Maintenance — the priority item — would have become the greatest activity.

By designing construction and reconstruction projects that qualify for outside aid, the Road Commission was able to generate \$3.3 million of federal funds, \$150,000 of state funds, \$305,000 of city funds, \$1 million of township funds, and

\$1.8 million of residents' special assessment funds.

None of your local property taxes come into the Road Commission unless specifically noted by the County Board or the local unit of government.

Last year was the first year in at least the current decade that the Board of Oakland County Commissioners, the County's elective representatives, did not contribute from county general funds towards road improvements. Between 1969 and 1975, inclusive, the County Board contributed a total of \$2.9 million.

For 1977, the County Board is contributing \$500,000 directly and has authorized bonding for \$3 million to be used for road projects in subdivisions under the special assessment procedure.

Despite indications to the contrary, we believe the County Board members recognize the advantages of having an appointed road commission. For one thing, as intended by the Legislature, a policy-making road commission appointed for specific terms is free from direct political pressures and thus can make decisions on objective criteria.

As decided by the County Board in 1972, Road Commissioners appointed and paid for only part-time duties, must retain the services of professional management — as we have.

Elected county officials are aware also that we have carried out or are in the process of carrying out most of the 135 recommendations for improving the Road Commission's organization and pro-

grams, as suggested after a "no-hold-barred" study by the Citizens Research Council of Michigan.

This process of professionalizing and upgrading the Road Commission began before I became a Road Commissioner, but I know from what I've seen in two years that the Road Commission is performing as well as it possibly can.

The only major weakness now is that — despite the funding that does come in — much more is needed to do all that the public rightfully expects on its crucial road system.

Sincerely,

John R. Gnaul, Jr., Chairman
Board of County Road Commissioners

We Help Community Services

Several departments of the Road Commission earned "Gold Awards" from the Oakland County United Fund for outstanding contributions to that one-for-all fund drive. Total contributions for 1976 by employees was \$4,077.

Also during 1976, Road Commission employees contributed gifts and personal visits at Christmas to 20 patients at the Oakland County Medical Care Facility. Following a practice begun several years ago, the employees created the Christmas fund rather than exchange gifts or cards among themselves.

Meet Your County Road Commissioners



JOHN R. GNAUL, Jr.
Chairman

Chairman John R. Gnaul, Jr. is a business executive and former Bloomfield Township trustee appointed an Oakland County Road Commissioner in 1975. He was elected chairman this year by fellow road commissioners.



WILLIAM M. RICHARDS
Vice Chairman

Vice Chairman is William M. Richards, a Royal Oak businessman who joined the road panel in 1973 and was chairman in 1973-74. He chaired the elected Board of Oakland County Commissioners in 1971 and served as Oakland County Drain Commissioner in 1972.



FRED D. HOUGHTEN
Commissioner

Fred D. Houghten is a Rochester businessman. He was chairman of the Board of Oakland County Commissioners in 1975, having served on that elected body from its inception until joining the Road Commission this year.