

New transit panel OKs M-275

By TOM LONERGAN

The Michigan Transportation Commission voted 4-2 Wednesday to build a modified M-275 freeway through western Oakland County.

By reversing a 1977 decision of its predecessor, the State Highway Commission, the transportation panel set up a possible battle with federal officials over the environmental impact of the controversial freeway.

If finally built, the \$98 million freeway would connect I-275/I-696 near Farmington Hills with I-75 north of Clarkston. As a 22-mile extension of I-275, it would form a giant bypass around Detroit.

Action came an hour after the meeting opened in the commission's Lansing headquarters. There were almost no comments from the audience, and the vote was greeted with silence from both supporters and opponents of a freeway.

THE THREE new members of the transportation commission — Rodger Young of Rochester, Lawrence Patrick of Detroit and William Marshall of Lansing — joined highway commission holdover Carl Pellonpa of Ithaca in approving a modified version of the freeway, which had been cancelled nearly three years ago.

Commission Chairman Hannes Meyers Jr. of Zeeland and Weston Vivian of Ann Arbor voted against M-275, as they had while serving on the old highway commission. The four-member highway commission was replaced this year by the six-member transportation commission.

Young, an attorney in Southfield, repeated previous statements that residents in western Oakland County lacked adequate roads.

"It is not only not adequate today, but it will get worse by the end of this century," he said.

Young was not convinced by arguments that the freeway would hasten urban sprawl from the county's older



Rodger Young influenced other commission votes for M-275.



Newcomers Lawrence Patrick Jr. (left) of Detroit and William Marshall, president of the state AFL-CIO, voted to reverse past State Transportation Commission policy and go ahead with M-275. (Photos by Dwight Cendrowski)

southern cities. Noting existing development in the popular lakes and recreation area, he added: "It does not follow that utilization of existing roads will deter development."

THE EXISTING development in western Oakland and the need for a north-south highway apparently convinced Patrick, an attorney, and Marshall, head of the Michigan AFL-CIO, that a modified freeway was the best of six alternatives proposed after the old highway commission killed the original M-275.

Patrick credited Young with influencing his decision. He said Young, who had served on the state's Environmental Review Board for several years, had "demonstrated his concern

for the environment."

Marshall said he didn't think building M-275 "necessarily means we're going to continue blanketing the state with brick, mortar and concrete."

If nothing were built in western Oakland, "in 15 years, the area is going to be so choked up no one's going to be able to move," Marshall added. State officials said the modified freeway, if approved, probably wouldn't be ready to use for at least 10 years.

THE MAJOR opposition group to M-275 said it would continue lobbying against the freeway before state and federal environmental officials. An adverse environmental impact statement from the U.S. Department of Interior was influential in killing the original freeway. Most of money for M-275 will

come from the federal government.

Stephen Rosman, spokesman for Citizens in Opposition to M-275, said after the vote that the transportation commission's decision was "not totally unexpected." The commission, Rosman said, was "under an extreme amount of pressure from developers and the real estate lobby."

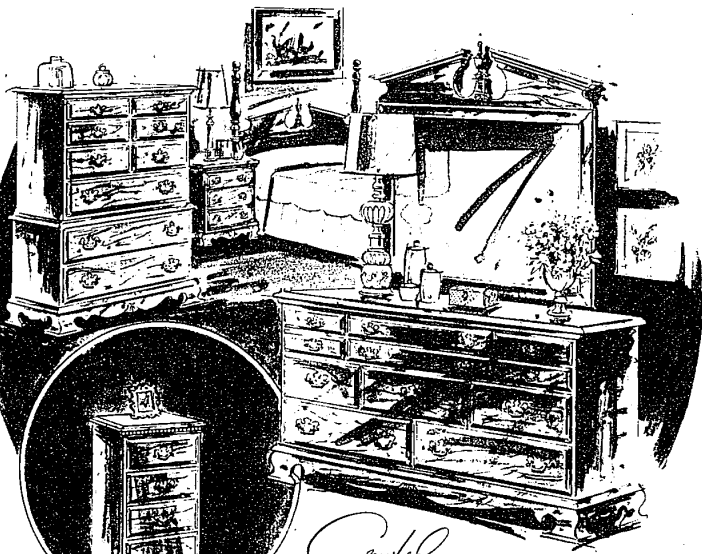
He said the decision was "another battle in the war over M-275." Rosman said the group, which has been fighting the freeway for nearly four years, would only go to court to stop it "as a last resort."

Because of the modified freeway's potential impact on wetlands in northwestern Oakland County and the Dodge Park No. 5 recreation area, Rosman seemed confident his organization could still stop the project.

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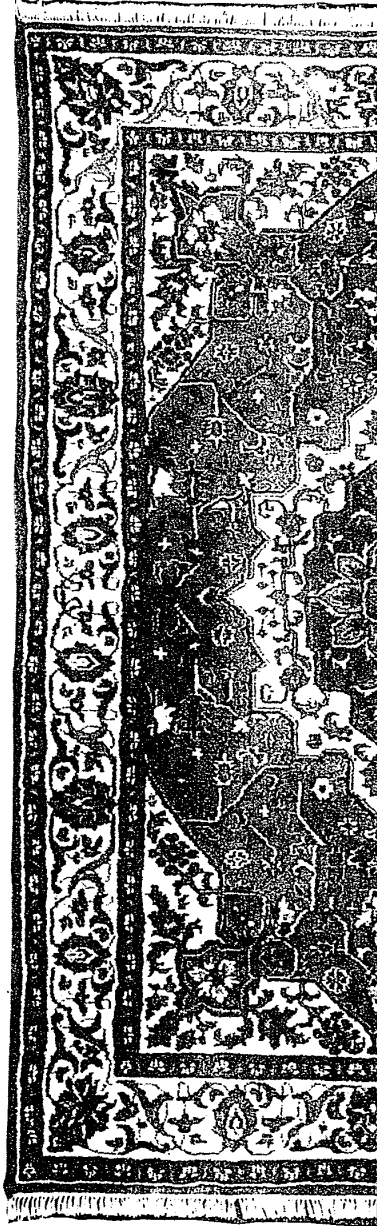
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