

Cites funding crisis

Road board backs gas tax hike

The three-member Oakland County Road Commission is supporting in concept a package of proposed state legislation that seeks to provide relief from the "crisis in road funding."

The "Transportation Package" of four bills is based on recommendations made by a coalition that included leadership of the County Road Association of Michigan (CRAM), the Michigan Transit Association (MTA) and the Michigan Municipal League (MML).

Key features of the package would:

- Index the fuel tax to the whole-sale price.
- Set a single licensing fee for all passenger vehicles.
- Increase truck licensing fees by 30 percent.
- Assign more of the existing state sales tax revenue to public transit.

Since 1979, the state-collected tax on gasoline at the pump has been 11 cents per gallon. Revenues from that tax have been declining because fewer gallons have been sold as the pump price has risen.

The indexing proposal would change the fuel tax to 11 percent of the whole-sale price, while retaining an 11-cent-per-gallon floor (11/11).

As introduced (11/11) in the transportation package, the tax would remain the same as at present when the whole-sale price is \$1 per gallon or less but increases proportionately when the whole-sale price goes above \$1 per gallon. At the time the proposal was introduced, gasoline selling for \$1.35 per gallon had a whole-sale price of \$1.05 — or the equivalent of 11.55 cents tax at the proposed rate.

THE OAKLAND County Road Com-

missioners' supporting resolution, adopted unanimously, called for an amendment to substitute a 15-cent-per-gallon floor (11/15). They noted that an 11-cent-per-gallon floor would not guarantee revenue increases necessary to keep pace with cost increases.

Chairman Fred D. Houghton of Rochester, who is also chairman of the CRAM Policy Committee, said, "We are supporting the package as part of a broad-based coalition of township, city, village and county officials who see the need for immediate relief — for Oakland County roads and for streets, roads and highways statewide."

"Without vastly improved revenues, we will be forced to cut staff by one-fifth in the 1981-84 period, which will surely reduce our ability to meet the public's expectations. Several road commissions in this state have already been forced to drastically curtail services, some by completely shutting down."

"Based on the current price of gasoline and the current consumption, the proposal at 11-11 would mean about \$2 million of additional revenue annually for the Oakland County road system."

"That is far short of the approximately \$7 million annually needed to keep pace with the full impact of inflation on costs. More than \$2 million annually will be required to avoid cutting back road improvements and maintenance."

RICHARD V. VOGT, vice chairman of the board of Oakland County Road Commissioners, said that unless the floor is set at 15 cents per gallon "we may have to go back to the legislature to go over the whole thing again just to

get enough money to do what the people expect the package to do in the first place."

John R. Gnaul Jr., the third road commissioner, said, "We're in favor of more money for roads, period. If our amendment flies, that will be accomplished."

Houghton added, "It is the judgment of many who have been long involved in the legislative process for road funding that Rep. (Mary) Brown's 'Transportation Package' is the best that can be hoped for at this time."

"Public officials, including ourselves, are very conscious of the public's concern about rising taxes and other cost increases in general. It may be too much to expect that such concerns could be separated from the need for adequate funding to have safe and convenient streets, roads and highways," he said.


THE ROAD commissioners' resolution also called for an amendment to the "internal" formula for distribution

of the gas and weight tax revenue. The board asked the legislature to restore to 37 percent the share devoted to county roads statewide. Since 1973, the legislative formula changes have reduced the share for county roads to 34.3 percent.

Under the proposal, passenger vehicle registration fees currently begin at a minimum of \$20 per vehicle, go to \$26 for the typical full-sized car (4,000 pounds), and on up as vehicle weight goes up. The proposal would set a flat rate of \$25 per passenger vehicle.


Truck licensing fees would remain graduated according to truck weight, but would be increased 30 percent.

Public transit's share of current revenue from sales taxes on the automotive group (new and used vehicles, parts, accessories) would be increased in stages. The legislature may appropriate up to 25 percent of automotive group sales tax revenue to transit, but thus far has authorized only about one-fourth that amount.



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EMU summer enrollment drops

Summer term enrollment at Eastern Michigan University totaled 5,612 students, a decrease of 5 percent, or 296 students, from the 1980 summer term enrollment figure of 5,908 students.

The summer term headcount included 573 freshmen and sophomores, 2,180 juniors and seniors, and 643 special students. In addition, 2,216 graduate students are registered for the summer term.

In-person registration and program adjustment for the fall term at EMU currently is in progress at the University Registration Office in Briggs Hall. The Registration Office is open from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1 to 5 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday through Friday, the office is open from 8 a.m. to noon and from 1 to 5 p.m.

Fall semester classes at EMU begin Tuesday Sept. 8.

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