

Grubba on roads: 'We see a collapse'

Continued from Page 7A

increase taxes for transit. Those should be considered on their merits, and not one piggy-backed on the other.

Q. Following up on something you raised earlier, truck weights: Michigan, I hear, has the highest truck weight limits in the country. Should Michigan think in terms of lowering those truck weights so we don't beat the living daylight out of the roads?

A. "There's a technical argument on that that I'm not convinced of. The engineers tell us it's not the (gross) weight of the truck but the axle weight of the truck (gross weight divided by the number of axles). Michigan requires more axles for the weight, and the axle weight on our trucks is not any higher than most other states.

"Frankly, I think that not only do we have large trucks, we have many, many more trucks. With the demise of the railroads, trucks carry practically all the goods through all parts of the state.

"Some figures have shown that the number of trucks on the road since 1960 in the U.S. have increased from nine million to 30 million.

"I do not think that trucks pay their fair share. . . . The truckers always come back with, 'But if you increase our taxes, we merely pass it onto the consumer, and so that's not saving anybody any money.'

"And I think that one of the biggest problems is the safety factor, with the smaller cars and the larger trucks. That traffic mix is very dangerous."

Q. Whatever happened to M-275 freeway, which was supposed to be built through West Bloomfield?

A. "As is usual in these things, it is still being studied. Environmental documents are being prepared. As far as I know, it's still in limbo. We're very anxious to get it moving. But I'm sure with the current financial position of the state highway department, we're not going to see M-275 in the foreseeable future. . . . They don't have the money."

Q. Your budget, for rebuilding and so on, has just been cut to shreds, hasn't it?

A. "We've had a steady decline since 1979 in our revenues. We had \$23 million in gas and weight taxes in '79. It dropped to \$18.9 million in '81, and is estimated at \$13 million in '82."

"That's only part of the story because, without the available state funds, we cannot get federal matching funds. We have townships now that are willing to contribute to construction programs that we cannot match. . . ."

Q. I see a lot of signs on curves. What's that all about?

A. "Our board, in looking at the

shortfalls, said that safety was the No. 1 priority. For many years in Oakland County, 160 people have been killed each year on our roadways. . . ."

"We're very pleased that in the last couple of years, Oakland County has experienced a reduction in fatalities. I won't take all the credit for it, but I'll take a good share. . . ."

"We have some 78 lawsuits pending now (from injured motorists and passengers). In 1973, we paid \$53,000 in insurance premiums. Two years ago, before we went into our current self-insured program, our premiums were over \$1 million. That is a direct result of the multiplicity of lawsuits. . . . We seem to have impressed the juries and judges as having deep pockets. . . ."

"By 1984, if current trends continue, we'll be spending more on insurance premiums and settlements than on construction. . . ."

Q. You've been talking about an "Ohio plan" for funding of roads. What is the Ohio plan?

A. "The Ohio plan is an attempt to adjust the revenues from the gas tax by indexing the tax on gasoline to the federal highway maintenance index and also to a base-year consumption level."

"The theory being that as the consumption of gasoline drops, the tax on the gasoline will increase. . . ."

Q. If my little Horizon weighs half as much as my old station wagon, why should I have to pay more (weight) tax on that little Horizon?

A. "We find that smaller cars require a higher level of service. We have a standard guideline for a size of pothole that will trigger overtime calls to one of our crew. We have recently reduced the size of pothole necessary to trigger overtime. Smaller cars just cannot hit potholes. . . ."

"Another example of the cost associated with smaller costs is that they're lower; they just can't see as far ahead. And so this last year, we went out and resurveyed all of our no-passing zones and remarked the surfaces and resigned some 2,000 miles of county roadways. That's all associated with smaller cars."

"And in winter those smaller cars do not have the traction of larger cars, and we have to provide a higher level of (snowplow) service."

Q. You've had some pretty massive layoffs in your own organization. What's happened to those people? Are they getting other jobs?

A. "We're very encouraged. We brought in a service that taught people how to apply for jobs. We haven't got a full report, but as of the end of January, only 12 of the 40 layoffs had applied for unemployment compensation. So we assume most of the others have found other jobs."

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