

Ford, Reuther top freeway improvement list

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

The I-94 (Ford) freeway in Detroit and the I-696 (Reuther) freeway in southeastern Oakland County should be the region's top candidates for improvement, according to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

SEMCOG's General Assembly, representing some 120 local governments in the seven-county region, last week placed those two corridors at the top of its A.D. 2005 wish list.

Approximately 50 percent of the I-696 road surface will be surface deficient within the next five years," said Ed Hustoles, SEMCOG staff member.

Population in the corridor is projected to grow by 31 percent, the number of households by 53 percent, and employment will double in that 20-year period, Hustoles said.

WITHOUT DISSENT, the SEMCOG General Assembly approved the transportation corridor plan, identifying top regional needs but leaving the details to transportation engineers.

The I-696 corridor in question runs 9.7 miles from the Lodge freeway in Southfield to the I-275 freeway in Novi. It was opened in 1963-64. (The portion to be improved does not include the

"missing link" from the Lodge to Macomb County, which was delayed 20 years by inter-governmental battles.

Major traffic generators include Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills, Tel-Twelve Mall in Southfield, Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi, Lawrence Institute of Technology in Southfield and 17,000 employees of offices and light industrial plants.

Frequent "stop-go" rush hour traffic is predicted at peak hours.

NOT ONLY is the pavement wearing out, Hustoles said, but the route was never meant to be only a four-lane freeway.

"This segment of I-696 was originally conceived in the 1950s to be constructed as a six-lane high speed freeway," he said.

"However, because traffic conditions in the 1950s did not warrant a six-lane facility and I-696 was classified as a 'rural freeway,' the Bureau of Public Roads agreed to finance a four-lane facility, providing extra right-of-way for additional lanes when traffic volumes warranted further improvements.

Hustoles said the number of lanes is likely to be increased, but other steps also could be taken — notably the use of dedicated lanes for buses and multi-passenger vehicles.

THE I-94 (Ford) freeway, the only east-west freeway across southeast Michigan, was opened in stages from 1950 to 1959. The section tapped for improvement extends 15 miles from Wyoming Avenue in Dearborn to Vernier in Detroit.

"Although population and employment surrounding the corridor are projected to decline by 2005," Hustoles said, "the number of daily trips is expected to grow by approximately 20 percent."

I-94 carries trips to and from Metropolitan Airport in Romulus, the Rouge steel complex, Fairlane Town Center, downtown Detroit, Wayne State University, the cultural and medical com-

plexes in Detroit and the new GM "Fiero" plant in Hamtramck.

More than 60 percent of its surface is expected to be deficient within five years, the SEMCOG plan said.

OTHER CORRIDORS marked for improvement in the SEMCOG plan include:

- Southfield Freeway and Southfield Road (M-39) from Allen Park to Birmingham.

- Telegraph Road in two sections — Flat Rock I-696 in Southfield.

- Woodward Avenue from 16 Mile in Bloomfield Hills to Pontiac.

- Orchard Lake Road from Farmington Hills to Pontiac.

- Haggerty Road from Eight Mile to M-59 in Oakland County.

IN OTHER highway business, a Michigan Department of Transportation spokesman told SEMCOG delegates it would be too dangerous to make the Lodge freeway one-way inbound in the morning rush hour and one-way outbound during the evening.

There are too many chances for human error which could result in fatal head-on collisions, said Bob Adams, MDOT's liaison with SEMCOG.

In the \$30 million project, the northbound lanes will be rebuilt in summer of 1985 and the southbound lanes in summer of 1986.

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