

# Read our lips: raise taxes

By Tom Henderson  
staff writer

Members of a state legislative committee got an unusual message when they held a hearing Friday on proposed tax increases. Taxes would not be raised enough under the plan, said a group of representatives from Oakland and Wayne counties.

The three House bills are known by sponsors as the "Safe Roads Packages." They would:

- Increase the state tax on gasoline from 15 cents to 17 cents, raising about \$90 million annually for state transportation needs.
- Add a fee of one cent a gallon to all petroleum products at the refinery level, raising about \$55 million annually.
- Allocate \$14 million of the refinery fees to clean up leaky underground storage tanks.
- Allocate the remaining \$41 million in fees to finance up to \$410 million in bonds for construction and maintenance projects by the Michigan Department of Transportation.

But members of the House Transportation Committee, which met

Friday morning at Metro Airport, were told repeatedly by local officials that the money for roads was inadequate and that their constituents would support larger tax increases earmarked for roads.

The officials expressed fears that not enough money would be spent in southeastern Michigan, and urged that the gasoline sales tax be raised by five or six cents a gallon.

WAYNE COUNTY Executive Edward McNamara was the first speaker before the committee, which was chaired by Rep. Curtis Hertel, D-Detroit. Committee member James Kosteva, D-Canton Township, was present, while member Mat Dunastakis, R-Lake Orion, was not.

McNamara asked for an increase in the gas tax of six cents.

He said that 40 percent of the 1,415 miles of county roads are classified as inadequate and that 61 of 234 county bridges need major repairs or replacement. McNamara quoted a state study in 1984 that predicted a shortfall in the county of \$700 million in available funds just to repair road deficiencies, and said that money would

have to be found for new roads in and around the airport if development there is to increase.

"Without a source of new revenue, these new roads will not be built and in effect, we have managed to dismember economic development for counties like Wayne and Oakland," McNamara said.

"The cost of continuing to postpone an increase in the statewide gasoline tax would be devastating for Wayne County and all the counties in the state," he said.

OTHER SPEAKERS in favor of a larger tax increase than the two cents the House proposes included Southfield Councilwoman Barbara Talley, Troy city manager Frank Gerstenecker, Del Borsadori, Ann Arbor city administrator Wyandotte Mayor Jim DeSana, and Brent Blair, deputy managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission (see related story).

Blair blasted the current proposals, saying that Oakland County alone needs about \$940 million over the next 10 years to build and maintain roads. He recommended:

- The state fuel tax be increased

by two cents a year for each of the next three years.

• Putting half the money into an Economic Development Fund for road improvements in areas they are critically needed, such as Oakland County.

• Increase the percentage of gas tax revenues that go to urban areas. Talley told the committee that Southfield needs \$71 million in the next six years to build and maintain roads and bridges.

"A two-cent or three-cent gasoline tax," she said, "In Southfield's opinion, the five-cent gasoline tax will begin to address the needs and alleviate some of the road (and) transportation problems. Just give us the legislation, and Southfield will work to garner the support for passage."

Gerstenecker told the committee about the near-gridlock in Troy during peak hours. "In our city, you're lucky if you can see the stoplight that's causing the problem."

Other committee hearings on the tax increases will be on April 27 in the Capitol in Lansing and April 28 in Grand Rapids.

## Flying high

### Oakland economy stays among best in the nation

By Dave Varga  
staff writer

Oakland County is flying high.

It continues as "the strongest urban economy in the state" and among the tops in the country, say two University of Michigan researchers.

"Last year, we called Oakland County the strongest urban county in Michigan and nothing has happened to change that assessment," said George Fulton during an economic outlook luncheon last week in Pontiac, hosted by the National Bank of Detroit and the county's Economic Development Division. Both Fulton and Donald Grimes are researchers with U-M's Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations.

In addition to good businesses and diversification, Grimes said, "We believe a major part of that (growth) is education. Education is one of the major advantages this county has over other counties."

Nearly one out of every four Oakland County residents over age 25 has completed four or more years of college, Grimes said. Other counties with highly educated populations generally have higher employment rates, their research found.

OAKLAND COUNTY saw "incredible growth" in jobs from 1985-87, Grimes said.

Since then, and in the near future, county job numbers are growing steadily, sustainably, they said.

"We like to draw analogies. Oakland County has already achieved

cruising altitude," Grimes said.

And, the county will continue flying higher than the rest of Michigan. New jobs will increase by 3 percent during each of the next two years, they projected, compared with much slower statewide job growth of 1.6 percent by 1989 and 0.3 percent by 1990.

In total, the county's number of non-farming jobs grew 32.5 percent from 1979 to 1988, including the 1979-82 period of recession. Jobs in Oakland County grew by 137,400 since the recession period. Nearly all those new jobs — 115,500 — were in nonmanufacturing areas.

IN FACT, the future shows non-manufacturing jobs still growing and manufacturing jobs shrinking, as the automobile producers continue downsizing their production. "The hit is all in the automotive industry," Grimes said.

The forecasters show steady growth in Oakland County, with 46,800 new jobs between 1987-90. Manufacturing jobs in that period will fall slightly by about 1,900, while nonmanufacturing jobs increase nearly 46,000.

In dividing up the job pie, auto-related jobs carved nearly 13 percent of Oakland County's jobs in 1979 but will provide only about 7 percent by 1990. Other manufacturing jobs took a smaller piece of the job share too.

A larger piece of the pie will go to service industries, increasing from 23 percent of the jobs in 1979 to 33 percent by 1990.

## ...Oakland County's one big parking lot

Suburban communities, the Oakland County Road Commission and Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara presented a united front Friday in urging an increase in the state sales tax at a meeting of the House Transportation Committee.

The strongest language during the

two-hour session came from Brent Blair, deputy managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission, who said the proposed plan to raise the state gasoline tax by two cents a gallon was woefully inadequate.

Here are excerpts from Blair's

presentation:

- "To the customer of the road system, the road user, this (\$500 million in bond money and gas-tax revenues) sounds like a lot of money. The problems with the roads should now be all over, right? Wrong! Their (the voters') expectations of relief are high. The ability to deliver, under this plan, is harshly negative."
- "We literally plead with you to help solve this crushing problem in Oakland County. The customers of the Oakland County road system, the users of the roads, have clearly and frequently told everyone willing to

listen that they will no longer tolerate the scattering of their tax dollars throughout the state when their own needs are ignored. . . . They are demanding to be heard — and somebody better listen up — quickly."

- "You simply cannot drive to work in a 900-square-mile parking lot. The Oakland County Road Commission can't continue to hold together with road patch material and coathangers a road system that could stretch from Detroit to San Francisco if the pieces were laid end to end."

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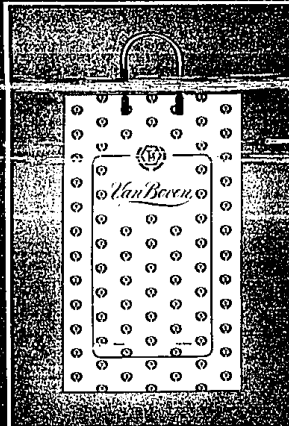
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