



Testifying: Sandra Carroll, on the monitor, speaks to the commission in a packed auditorium in Lansing. Residents talked to commissioners about I-275 noise.

STAFF PHOTO BY BRYAN MITCHELL

1-275 from page A1

by woods carries the roar of a freight train, Giuliano Zuccato said.

"As I approach my jail in the woods," Zuccato said, "I think to myself 'Will this nightmare ever end?'"

Others spoke about sleepless nights, not being able to send their children outside to play or entertain guests, and declining property values due to the noise.

Jennifer Wandzel joined 45 others on a bus caravan to Lansing that left early in the morning from the Livonia Community Center. She had daughter, Lauren, 4, in her arms at the podium.

"This is why I am here today," said Wandzel, who lives in the Quirkertown subdivision.

An MDOT sound study in November 1999 revealed noise levels ranging from 75 to 91 decibels from five to 10 miles down the freeway reconstruction in the summer of 1999.

Anyone exposed to 85 decibels or above needs to protect their ears, federal guidelines say. A running motorcycle generates 95 decibels while an operating garbage disposal produces 80 decibels.

"The unique thing ... is that you can turn these things off," said Fred Hendershot, who lives on Nola Street in Livonia. "You can't turn off I-275."

Residents point to the use of concrete and, more precisely, random trailer skid tining to improve traction. The surface is experimental, previously used on a 500-1,000 foot of Wisconsin highway, a Livonia official said.

Earlier warnings

Ironically, a group of Farmington Hills homeowners made a similar trip to the transportation commission in March 1999 to register their concerns about the tining and use of concrete.

"A mistake has been made," Mayor Jack Kirksey said to the commission. "We should accept it. We should accept it collectively."

One Livonia resident provided a list of possible solutions. Those included sound walls, landscaping, curbing speeds to 55 mph and reducing truck weight limits.

Number one on Mike Nolta's roster of remedies is replacing the surface with asphalt. Black top would reduce noise by 7-9 decibels, he said.

Both concrete and asphalt associations made presentations to homeowners.

"I believe it is safe to say none of us would be here today if ... it were still asphalt," said Nolta, who lives on Marsha Street in Livonia.

Noise sensitive

Many residents refuted the idea they should have expected the problem moving next to a freeway.

When I-275 opened in 1976, 15 subdivisions already existed along the freeway. That's

increased by 14 subs since to include 3,500 homes within a half mile of the freeway.

Hard on pocketbook

Freeway noise is bringing down property values, said a Livonia resident who is a real estate agent. Similar homes appreciate up to 6 percent annually while those near I-275 increase 1 percent, according to Gail DiPonio.

Farmington Hills resident Dennis Beagen had his assessment lowered by the Michigan Tax Tribunal, which cited I-275 noise as lessening the home's value.

His \$295,000 home has only appreciated a half-percent annually since moving in five years ago, he said. "We immediately said to ourselves, 'Oh my God. What has happened to our investment?'"

On the way back to Livonia, Sandra Carroll asked people on the bus if they felt MDOT and the commission would address their problem. More than half raised their hands.

"You didn't ask the other question," a passenger said. "When do you think something will be done."

Commissioners listened intently but made few promises. They did pledge to have MDOT work on the problem.

"Don't expect the department to have a golden answer to every problem in the next month," Commissioner Lowell Jackson said.

Commissioner Betty Jean Avey, who lives in Farmington Hills near I-275, said, "I feel for all of you and what you have been going through. Give us time."

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Taxi wait time rate hike won't affect many

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It will cost an additional \$3 per hour for ABC Cab Company taxis to wait at curbside for customers within the city of Farmington.

But City Manager Frank Lauhoff said the amendment to taxicab rate structures approved in October has little real impact on residents, who hardly ever use taxi-in-waiting.

According to the amendment, approved Monday by the Farmington City Council, ABC Cab Company drivers will be paid an hourly wait time of \$18, up from \$15. Lauhoff said the new rate equates to 50 cents for each one minute and 40 seconds of waiting time — considered the amount of time a driver waits for an existing customer to return to the cab, such as from a grocery shopping excursion.

A shopper keeping a driver waiting outside Farmer Jack for a half hour, for example, would result in a wait time fee of \$9, which is in addition to travel time fares.

"The average customer in

Farmington (doesn't) use a wait time," Lauhoff said after the meeting. "They go to a destination, leave the cab and call a cab to come back when they want to leave. So usually there's no wait time involved. This (wait time rate) is not used that often by the community."

A representative from ABC Cab Company spoke during the council meeting about a communications mix-up in August. That resulted in the Farmington wait time rate not being raised to \$18 in October, which is the current wait time rate in Livonia and Redford.

In October, the city council approved increases for the two companies licensed to serve the city: ABC and Northwest Transport Co. of Livonia. In what was the first increase since 1994, the cost for the first quarter mile or fraction thereof was raised from \$1.50 to \$2.

The cost for each subsequent quarter mile also went up from \$1.50 to \$2. At that time, Lauhoff said it was the cab companies who requested an increase be enacted by the city.

Meanwhile, area senior citizens who participate in the Dial-A-Ride program are eligible to receive discounted cab fares, said Mary DiManno of the Farmington Hills Special Services Senior Adult Division (which serves both Farmington and Farmington Hills.)

DiManno said seniors are charged \$2 for the first four miles of a ride and an additional \$2 for each subsequent mile.

SMART option

Another transportation option for senior citizens are Southeast Michigan Area Regional Transit shuttle vans, DiManno said.

She said the van rides are available for a \$1 donation each way, or \$2 for a round trip. The vans regularly transport riders between their residences and medical appointments, visits to the William Costick Activities Center for various programs, shopping at the Halsted-12 Mile Kroger and other destinations in the area.

For more information on using the SMART shuttles, call DiManno at (248) 473-1864.

Kindergarten round-up slated

Parents of new kindergarten students in Farmington Public Schools will begin the registration process Monday, March 2.

This year, students can be registered at their home school. Parents who wish to send their kindergartener to an all-day kindergarten must indicate a preference for Alameda or Fairview Early Childhood Center. Choice is on a first-come, first-served basis.

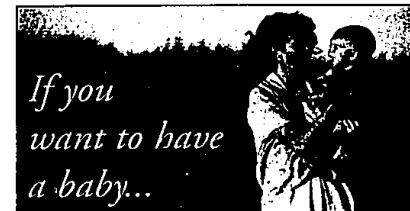
Registration packets are available in the front offices of each elementary school. The child's birth certificate and two proofs of residency are required at the time of registration.

Assignments and parent notification will occur before April 27.

For home school boundary information, please call (248) 489-3329.

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