



Michigan Report

Information Pertinent to Legislative and State Department Activities Since 1906

Volume #47, Report #233--Wednesday, December 3, 2008

LIGHT RAIL PACKAGE GETS SENATE PANEL OK; MAYORS URGE ROAD FUNDING

The Senate Transportation Committee and Senate Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee moved eight bills Wednesday that create a light rail system in Detroit. Separately, the Michigan Municipal League, supported by several mayors, made a pitch for action on a transportation funding package as state officials note the current tax system no longer produces adequate revenues.

The light rail package ([SB 1588](#), [SB 1589](#), [SB 1590](#), [SB 1592](#), [HB 6542](#), [HB 6543](#), [HB 6546](#), and [HB 6625](#)) allows the Department of Transportation to establish a Transit Development Finance Zone for a street railway, and amends the State Transportation Preservation Act to permit MDOT to provide financial assistance to a street railway to perform maintenance. Additionally, criminal procedure guidelines are created for causing the derailment of a light rail system.

Under HB 6542, non-profit corporations would meet certain criteria to become a street railway in an area, but the company would need to pay the road authority for all of that authority's costs incurred in construction of the street railway.

The committee also heard further testimony on the need for increasing funding for MDOT.

Transportation Director Kirk Steudle said if the state cannot produce the money to match federal transportation dollars, the state's road problems would be exacerbated, and all of the progress of getting to high quality standards would be lost.

"We've spent the last ten years getting to 90 percent good (roads)," Mr. Steudle said. "Losing federal aid, (the roads) will start deteriorating rapidly. If we just solve a math problem, we can capture federal aid. We need to sustain good condition."

He also said the fuel tax is no longer generating enough revenue to fund the department. The Michigan Transportation Funding Task Force (TF2) does recommend a revenue increase to ensure federal support. (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, November 10, 2008](#))

The Michigan Municipal League held a press conference urging lame duck legislators to pass transportation funding increases before the end of their terms.

The group gathered mayors from across the state who supported increasing transportation funding as a way to kick start the economy.

Dan Gilmartin, executive director of the MML, said it's important to act soon to maintain the quality of the roads.

"Infrastructure is crumbling," he said. "We need to rebuild and maintain, and the time is now. It would be a real mess if we didn't have federal match dollars. "

Robert Slattery, mayor of Mount Morris, said it would be "embarrassing" to lose the federal match dollars.

Greater, more extensive and more expensive problems with roads would be in the state's future if the roads aren't repaired now, Al McGeehan, Holland mayor, said.