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#### **TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE HEARS CONFLICTING TESTIMONY**

The Senate Transportation Committee heard testimony Tuesday on a series of bills that would allow for the transfer of control of county roads from a road commission to the county commission and establish other changes on performance standards for road projects.

Chair [Sen. Jud Gilbert](#) (R-Algonac) said all of the 12 Transportation Committee bills probably need some changes and that he would soon be meeting with those who testified this and last week for private discussions.

He said he voting could possibly happen next week on several of the bills, but would be contingent on negotiations this week (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, May 20, 2008](#)).

The bills ([SB 269](#), [SB 270](#), [SB 494](#), [SB 1316](#), [SB 1317](#), [SB 1318](#), [SB 1319](#), [SB 1320](#), [SB 1321](#), [SB 1322](#), [SB 1323](#), [SB 1324](#)) brought out supporting and opposing testimony from various advocates.

County Road Association of Michigan's Ed Noyola, who said he didn't think any cost savings would happen, opposed SB 269 and SB 270, a set of bills that would allow counties with less than one million residents to transfer control of roads from a road commission to the county commission.

SB 1317 would require the auditor general to figure out how much the Motor Fuel Tax, the Motor Carrier Act and parts of the Vehicle Code each cost to administer and enforce, with the funding would come from the Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF).

Mr. Noyola said CRAM was opposed to SB 1317 because the language in SB 1321 was preferable as it addressed multiple departments, whereas SB 1317 only addresses Treasury.

SB 1321 would establish a cost-allocation model for collecting various vehicle-related fees.

Mr. Worthams said he supported both versions because either would address deductions from the Michigan Transportation Fund.

Mike Nystrom, vice president of governmental relations for Michigan Transportation and Infrastructure Association, said he was supportive of SB 1321.

Doug Novak, representing the Secretary of State's office, was opposed to SB 1321 and said it would leave the department with a \$20 million hole. The State department operates as a sort of collection agency for the transportation department, he said, and requiring new collection methods may not save any, and even end up costing more, money.

Dave Bertram, legislative liaison for the Michigan Townships Association, said he was open to the concept of SB 1321.

SB 1316 would establish performance and cost efficiency standards.

David Worthams, legislative associate for the Michigan Municipal League, said the league is tentatively opposed to the bill because it focuses on revenues and expenditures instead of the number of riders. The league's policy group will meet on Thursday, so Mr. Worthams gave the committee the recommendations he will give his group.

SB 1318 would establish a road jurisdiction task force to look at whether roads are best kept as state or local roads with a report required within one year of inception.

Mr. Worthams said he supported the concept of SB 1318, but had reservations about how many roads would be kept local and said many local roads were already under the proper jurisdiction.

SB 1319 would lower the threshold for requiring competitive bidding from projects costing \$100,000 to \$50,000.

Both Mr. Noyola and Mr. Worthams said they were opposed to the bill since it would require agencies to bid even small projects that could be done cheaper in-house.

SB 1320 would require certain construction contracts to be routed through MDOT's pre-qualification process.

Mr. Noyola said he is opposed to the bill because many members of his organization who do not wish to go through the grueling audit process would be strong-armed into doing so.

SB 1322 would shift Transportation Fund money from cities and villages to the county road commission if the municipality was to receive \$250,000 or less.

Mr. Bertram urged the committee to pass several of the bills as a way to transfer more authority to the local level, but said he didn't have a position on SB 1322. He did say

townships contribute between \$95 and \$100 million a year to road commissions and that densely populated townships should be able to operate their road jurisdictions.

Mr. Noyola said CRAM is not in representing the different interests municipalities have and would oppose SB 1322. "Our equipment isn't small, it's bulky," he said, adding that county equipment is ill suited for metropolitan construction.

SB 1323 would require the Department of Treasury to audit transportation funds and determine if counties and municipalities were spending the money correctly.

Mr. Nystrom said he supports SB 1323 and said that money has to be spent efficiently.

SB 1324 would require public bidding for transit functions that would include bus/transit systems in Detroit, Grand Rapids and Lansing. Mr. Nystrom said he fully supports the bill.

Several senators asked about the areas where railroads meet roads and who picks up the tab. "It seems more likely to be the traffic rather than the railroad causing the damage," said [Sen. Roger Kahn](#) (R-Saginaw Township).

Railroads are exempt from paying property taxes in exchange for maintaining the tracks, but are not on the hook for the damage done to the road/rail crossings. Mr. Worthams said several ideas for a solution were being examined but he would not tip his hand yet.

SB 494, which would use data from other states to analyze life expectancy for Michigan roads, was not specifically supported or opposed by any of those testifying.

A resolution ([SR 194](#)) urging Congress to financially support Great Lakes infrastructure also was on the agenda but was not addressed.