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Tuesday, December 16, 1997

## MDOT road takeover will add to efficiency

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**JAMES DE SANA**  
*MDOT Director*

There has been a lot of attention on the "rationalization" process being conducted in order to correctly assign jurisdictional responsibility for the state's key roads. MDOT has been working cooperatively with counties, cities and villages so that Michigan will enter the 21st century with a modern, efficient commercial road network. Unfortunately, much of the information being released has been either misleading or downright untruthful.

The state is currently responsible for only 9,600 of the state's 119,000 miles of roads, ranking us 48th in the nation with only 8 percent of roads under state jurisdiction. Governor Engler and I strongly believe that the state should have responsibility for the most heavily traveled roads that make up our commercial backbone network. That's why we support adding up to 9,000 miles to an expanded state road system that would carry 70 percent of all vehicle traffic and 85 percent of the state's commercial traffic. Local governments could then focus on over 100,000 miles of truly local roads providing access to homes.

Decisions about design, construction, improvements and maintenance on these high volume, commercial backbone roads should be made on a programmatic basis, recognizing corridor and route priorities. This will allow MDOT to achieve efficiencies and economies of scale by consolidating construction work along a corridor. Michigan's motorists shouldn't be penalized because neighboring political jurisdictions simply can't agree on how or when to make improvements to a particular road they share.

We should end the horse-and-buggy era system of road responsibilities that guarantees monopolistic control over miles of pavement within the artificial boundaries of city limits and county lines. For the expanded state system, MDOT will competitively bid routine maintenance contracts for large stretches of road that cross political jurisdictions. It is expected that counties, cities and private sector firms will bid for

maintenance work. Competition will bring increased efficiency, greater accountability, adherence to consistent performance standards, and incentives for innovation in the area of road maintenance.

MDOT believes "money should follow the road" so that the amount of money historically spent on a type of road should remain with the road in the future, regardless of who has jurisdictional responsibility. We're adding \$500 million per year in road funding from Governor Engler's "Build Michigan II" plan, and it is an unnecessary scare tactic to suggest property taxes will have to be raised to fix local roads. We're also not suggesting that all federal aid remain with the state. Once we determine responsibility for roads, a new funding distribution formula will nearly take care of itself. While a number of changes to current law will be necessary to make this happen, we know it is mathematically impossible for everyone to get a larger percentage of the new transportation funding pie.

Also, nobody will have to make their way to Lansing to discuss Michigan's high-volume roads with MDOT. Through the reorganization of our department, we'll have 7 regional offices and 25 Transportation Service Centers (TSCs) located throughout the state. It is through this "decentralized" department that many of our services and functions will be delivered, including contract management and maintenance oversight. These TSCs will be staffed to address the questions and concerns of motorists, local government officials, business partners and local media. MDOT will be visible and responsible when it comes to the state road system. We also believe there must continue to be strong local input into decisions about traffic controls, truck routes, speed limits, permits, maintenance standards and other road-related issues.

We have an opportunity to resolve this jurisdictional issue once and for all. The bottom line is when the state and local governments work together and solve problems, the roads will get fixed. Let's get on with it!

James De Sana is director of the Michigan Department of Transportation.

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