

Public Hearing Planned on Mackinac Bridge Commuter Program

A public hearing is planned Thursday, July 9, at 11:45 a.m. at Little Bear East Conference Center in St. Ignace for two proposals regarding the commuter fare program at the Mackinac Bridge.

Commuters will have 24 hours to get across the Mackinac Bridge and back to receive discounted fare under the two proposals to be voted on July 10 by the Mackinac Bridge Authority.

The Authority's Fares, Fees, and Classifications Committee will host the hearing. The committee will also accept written comments through e-mail and

mail until 5 p.m. Wednesday, July 8. E-mail comments can be sent to parsonsb@michigan.gov, and mailed letters to Mackinac Bridge Authority, North 415 I-75, St. Ignace, MI 49781.

There is currently no limit on how long a commuter has to recross the bridge.

One proposal would offer a discounted rate only on return trips made within 24 hours, while the other would be based on a minimum number of trips per year in addition to the 24-hour rule. Both plans would charge a commuter \$1.80 per trip. Regular fare is currently \$3, but is sched-

uled to be increased to \$3.50 in 2010.

The plans allow commuters to keep their current commuter cards and quick cards.

The wording of the two proposals is as follows:

Proposal one: Customers can use their cards to cross the bridge at the regular rate of \$3.50 for passenger vehicles as of January 1, 2010. If a return trip takes place within 24 hours, the return trip will only cost 10¢. The total cost for the commute would be \$3.60, or a discounted rate of \$1.80 per trip.

Proposal two: Customers can use their card to cross the bridge at the regular rate of \$3.50 for passenger vehicles as of January 1, 2010, and must cross a minimum of 12 times in a calendar year, and take a return trip within 24 hours to get the discount. The total cost for the commute would be \$3.60, or a discounted rate of \$1.80 per trip.

The Authority plans to increase tolls 50¢ every two years until 2014, when passenger tolls will reach \$4.50. Commuter tolls climb 10¢ every year to \$2.20.

Mackinaw City Planning Commission Looks at Wind Turbine Regulations

The Mackinaw City Village Planning Commission plans to create regulations for residential and small business wind turbines within the city. The village has regulations for large commercial turbines, which were drafted in 2001, but not for smaller turbines that can be erected at a residence or business.

Village Manager Jeff Lawson said the discussion on creating small turbine regulations came about because several residents and business owners have shown interest in erecting such turbines

to harness wind energy.

"The item needs to be addressed. There's been public places around asking about wind turbines. It's just something that's been on a to-do list," he said. "If there's a local resident who wants do that, we need to have some standards to address it."

Mr. Lawson said he plans to contact other municipalities in the state, including St. Ignace, which published a draft of its wind energy facility ordinance in the Thursday, June 18, edition of *The St. Ignace News*, with small wind

turbine regulations to better guide creating regulations for Mackinaw City.

"It looks like they've done a lot of the homework. We'll have to look at some of their details and what they have," he said about the recently published St. Ignace

ordinance. "We'll look at what they did and talk to our attorney to see what works for us."

The commission will hold a special meeting Thursday, July 9, to review a use permit for a medical office. The meeting will be at the village hall at 7 p.m.

Veterans Officer To Visit Wednesday

Vietnam Veterans of America Service Officer Vic Romback will be available to assist veterans with questions and concerns Wednesday, July 1, from 9 a.m. to noon in Newberry, and from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in room 110 of the Mackinac County Courthouse Annex in St. Ignace. For more information, call (906) 635-6370.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

24-hour Rule Bears No Connection to Defining a Mackinac Bridge Commuter

To the Editor:

I am condensing my public comments filed with the Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) about its alternate proposals for a 24-hour round trip for commuter card use. Only a government bureaucracy could offer discounts to the public, and then when people actually sign up by the government's own rules to save money, publicly (in this newspaper) call it "abuses" by the public. Toll revenue is down mostly because of the toll increases, even more so than the economy.

The MBA blunted organized opposition to those increases by keeping commuter increases minimal for "locals," and now that they have what they want, are coming in the back door to gradually eliminate commuter discounts. If it is going to do that, the MBA must decrease general tolls back to about \$2 one way. Until commuter cards are discontinued, the current minimum deposits sufficiently ensure that only repeat users (commuters) will buy them.

The state continues to spend on Detroit roads the five million dollars a year from the feds for the Bridge portion of I-75, and not a cent on the Bridge, causing the 2007 toll increases. Representative Gary McDowell told me that he agrees with the governor in spending the bridge money "downstate." Who does he represent? They are requiring a ransom from mostly locals from the economically depressed U.P. to subsidize Detroit roads we rarely use. They need to creatively find a way to spend that money on the Bridge, as intended, rather than creatively look for ways to squeeze more money out of local people. We cannot afford these proposals.

A "commuter" by definition is anyone who crosses repeatedly. The MBA has a right to determine the frequency of crossing that qualifies for a discount, and set up the software accordingly. That is the extent of its role.

I have suggested the following alternatives: 1. Set an expiration date per card of one year after those trips purchased (use or lose paid trips within one year); or, 2. establish an annual pass on a calendar or fiscal year basis, like we have for state parks. Allow an option of say \$150 per year, per car or pickup truck (with license number and vehicle description on the card) for unlimited usage, increasing 5% per year (which gives the MBA all money up front); or 3. Revise the 24-hour proposal to a one-week proposal. Why should a person who lives in Petoskey be able to get a discount to go hunting at their camp in the EUP for a day a dozen times a year, when a sales rep living in St. Ignace and working in the Lower Peninsula all week would not qualify because they can't return home at night? And by the 24-hour rule, MBA would be blocking some patients from getting medical care. A shopping trip to Traverse City mall's would qualify higher than someone's livelihood or hospitalization.

Under any proposal, the current "one size fits all" expiration date of December 31, 2009, must be canceled, as most commuters will not be able to magically use up all paid trips that exact date, especially with minimum deposits.

Who came up with the 24-hour proposals? They bear no absolute-ly NO relationship whatsoever to who is or is not a "commuter." Not all commuters are daily commutes. Circumstances often do not permit true commuters to return within 24 hours.

Meanwhile, the MBA resorts to its old tricks of putting forth two horrible and similar proposals, in hopes of looking like heroes when they accept the lesser of the two evils they have created. Most people I have talked to believe the MBA has already decided, and been told how to decide by the pro-Detroit governor. Then they most likely circumvent state public hearing laws by scheduling for them a time when they know most people have to work. This is all designed to keep the public from hearing out loud what their neighbors say, in order to minimize vocal opposition when they have to face the people.

Current commuters, determine how much you currently spend per year on tolls. Then if either of the 24-hour proposals are passed, join me by eliminating and consolidating trips, in order to cross the Bridge less than half as often as you do now, thereby spending less, not more per year. This will result in a toll revenue decrease from commuters for the Bridge as a direct result of their counterproductive actions. Of course, that would just lead to them coming back for another increase later, and another, and another...

Tom North
St. Ignace

The St. Ignace News

and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.

Michigan Politics

By
George Weeks



Land Development: Secretary of State Out of Governor's Race

There was a notable development last week in early jockeying for the 2010 campaign to replace term-limited Governor Jennifer Granholm.

Popular Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land, who got 56% in winning each of her two four-year terms, bowed out of her gubernatorial exploratory effort and made a surprise endorsement of Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard for the Republican nomination.

Said Land: "I believe Michigan needs a leader like Mike Bouchard. I've worked with Mike for many years. I have always been impressed with his ability to make tough decisions. And I also appreciate his resourcefulness and grit: Mike is a real bulldog who won't let challenges go unmet."

The bulldog failed mightily in his 2006 challenge of Senator Debbi Stabenow, getting just 41% of the vote. But, then, Michigan and other states abound with early statewide losers who became later winners.

In the primary, former Kent County Clerk Land's exit is likely to help U.S. Representative Pete Hoekstra of Holland, the only high-profile contender from GOP stronghold West Michigan and one who has been polling well. It could hurt Attorney General Mike Cox of Livonia as he competes with Bouchard in their Metro Detroit turf.

Bill Ballenger, publisher of the *Inside Michigan Politics* newsletter, told the *Detroit Free Press*, "My first thought was that maybe she really wants to stick it to Cox." They're not all that chummy.

My first thought was that a Bouchard-Land ticket could be a good pairing. He's not the only one with whom she'd be a good fit, and an aide to one of them said her potential interest was "hinted" when she met with the candidate.

On Friday, I asked Land, one of the more candid Lansing politicians I have covered, whether she would like to be lieutenant governor. She said, "I want to contribute" in some capacity, and, when I pressed the point, "that would be great" if it is as lieutenant governor.

Cost-cutter Land, whose 1,600 employees are 20% fewer than her department had when she started the job, said she's "frustrated as heck" by what she sees as Granholm's "weakness" leading the executive branch.

Among Republican contenders, media attention has focused of late on Hoekstra (a national TV figure as top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee), Cox (who's been slapping fines and settlements on wrongdoers in assorted criminal fronts), and Bouchard (thanks most recently to Land).

Also in the GOP mix is well-regarded state Senator Tom George of the Kalamazoo area and Ann Arbor businessman and civic leader Rick Snyder.

Keep an eye on Snyder. That won't be hard to do in July, when he plans a mid-month announcement blitz that includes an Upper Peninsula swing spanning from Sault Ste. Marie to Ironwood.

Below the media radar, Snyder has assembled an impressive early-stage gubernatorial campaign organization.

It abounds with state and national figures from John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign. Among them: Chief Strategist John Weaver, helpmate of several leaders who had a decade atop the McCain team before some internal disputes; Senior Political Advisor and Michigan Strategist John Yob, who was McCain's deputy political director (his father, ex-Republican National Committeeman Chuck Yob, touts Snyder); Campaign Manager Dane Waters, who worked on almost every Republican presidential campaign from Reagan/Bush in 1980 to McCain/Palin in 2008; Communications Director Jake Suski, most recently California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's deputy communications director and strategist for McCain's campaign.

Voters care little about operatives behind candidates. But GOP activists should be impressed by the topflight staff that soon-to-be-announced candidate Snyder has assembled.

Public attention on Democratic contenders of late has centered primarily on Lieutenant Governor John Cherry, who has shared the stage with Granholm in several venues, including distribution of federal stimulus funds; has spoken out on Great Lakes and other environmental issues in such forums as the annual meeting of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, and has been assembling endorsements of district and county party leaders.

State Representative Alma Wheeler Smith of South Lyon scheduled an announcement this week as a candidate for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination.

In 2002, then a state senator, she was the running mate of then-Congressman David Bonior of Mt. Clemens in his unsuccessful pursuit of the Democratic gubernatorial nomination after she dropped her own bid for governor.

Other Democrats expressing varying degrees of interest are Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano, House Speaker Andy Dillon, ex-Representative John Freeman, and George Perles, Michigan State University trustee and former football coach and athletic director.

Cheers for Cobo

Northern Michigan has a stake in keeping the annual North American Auto Show at Detroit's Cobo Center. For starters, beyond its important part in the state's culture and history, it is important for all regions of our struggling state that Michigan continue to get the estimated \$600 million in revenue generated by the event.

Furthermore, successful auto operations in the metro Motor City spin out to northern suppliers.

So there is good reason to hail the bipartisan collaboration in the state Senate and House that resulted in Thursday approval of a regional deal to renovate, rehabilitate, and expand the aging facility.

Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Jason Allen (R-Traverse City) called the deal "fair and balanced not just for the city of Detroit, but for the entire state of Michigan."

The deal, worked out with help of new Mayor Dave Bing, came after rejection of an earlier deal by the Detroit City Council that went bonkers under leadership of its then-President Monica Conyers, wife of U.S. Representative John Conyers (D-Detroit). On Friday, she pleaded guilty in a bribery scandal tied to a sludge hauling contract.

Granholm, according to a Saturday report by the Booth Newspaper chain, said that all elected officials should take note of her plea deal and conviction on bribery charges.

"Honor and integrity when you are serving is critical," she said in answering a question at a Friday press conference following announcement of building of a major General Electric facility. She said that a silver lining in the Conyers story is that "I hope it serves as a message to anyone in public office."

Well said.

George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.

No One Injured in I-75 Vehicle Fire

The St. Ignace Fire Department responded to a vehicle fire on northbound I-75 just past M-134 Friday, June 26, at about 3:30 p.m. No one was injured in the single-car fire.

The owner of the 2001 GMC Denali, James Mackie of Brimley, pulled his vehicle over because it wasn't handling properly, Michigan State Police reported. Once he'd pulled over, the front driver's side tire caught fire, quickly spreading to engulf the vehicle. The vehicle was reported as unsalvageable.

St. Ignace News Policies

Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

Obituaries:

The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we do often add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

Weddings:

Weddings with photographs are published without charge within 45 days of the ceremony. After 45 days, a photograph can be included for \$35.00.

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