

Macomb County Commissioner Leon Drolet speaks to his resolution at Thursday's Board of Commissioners meeting. MITCH HOTTS -- THE MACOMB DAILY

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One day after Oakland County's top elected official voiced his opposition to a regional transit tax proposal, Macomb County's leaders echoed his stance.

The Macomb County Board of Commissioners Thursday afternoon voted 8-4 in favor of resolution that calls for the board to work with the Legislature and Gov. Rick Snyder to focus on upgrading existing roads instead of working on a regional transportation system.

Leon Drolet, a Macomb Township Republican and outspoken tax foe who authored the resolution, said Macomb County voters have made their feelings clear: They want the area's crumbling roads fixed as soon as possible.

"The priority Macomb County citizens as well as the board is far too much time, energy, political capital and money has been spent on pushing the Regional Transit Authority plan," he said. "It's far less important to our citizens than it is to some regional players."

Several board members say the majority of the county's residents are well served by the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART).

Drolet said it's time to address roads "first and foremost" and address regional transportation second.

"I can't support this enough," said Commissioner Phil Kraft, a Chesterfield Township Republican.

Board Chairman Bob Smith agreed.

"I don't see this as being anti-RTA," the Clinton Township Democrat said. "I see it as being pro-roads."

But other commissioners -- whose districts are south of Hall Road -- objected. Some called it short-sighted for the board not to think about the future needs of county residents.

"Everyone else is thinking 30 years ahead -- we are thinking only to the next election," said Veronica Klinefelt, an Eastpointe Democrat.

She added it's up to the state Legislature to provide the funding to counties and communities for roads.

In 2016, a Regional Transit Authority ballot proposal was shot down by voters in Oakland and Macomb County but approved in Wayne and Washtenaw counties.

As some regional leaders are trying to get a similar issue on the ballot in November.

Reached after the county board meeting, Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel agreed with the spirit of the resolution. He said a plan is underway to place a 1-mill tax before county voters later this year for road repairs.

“Filling potholes with some patch is not the answer,” he said.

“People trust SMART but some are trying to force us to solve the problems of Detroit and Wayne County. That’s not what people are interested in right now. We have to fix the roads.”

Hackel said it may be up to Macomb residents to pay for their own road repairs. A 1-mill, four-year tax would raise about \$25 million a year, which he admits won’t be enough to fix all the roads, but it would be a good start.

“Every penny would go to roads. We’re not going to solve it all, but it would have an impact. And maybe after four years, we’ll try it again,” he said.

On Wednesday night, Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson said he will not support a regional tax during his State of the County Address in Pontiac.

“They’re asking me to betray my constituents, violate my oath of office, and overnight become a regional taxing icon,” said Patterson. “I will never betray the public that I respect and represent.”

He said a new plan is being floated for the 2018 November ballot that amounts to a 1.56 mill property tax.

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