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## **Path to Somewhere**

In a stunning, bizarre, incredible (emphasis on not credible) revelation, The Commercial Record has learned maintaining area roads might require a future (possible multi-million dollar) millage placed on the backs of taxpayers.

Oh yeah, it already does.

As a bicycle rider, I object to this. How many people die yearly in car, truck and motorcycle crashes? Where's the concern for safety?

Worse yet, big oil, automakers, paid politician/ lobbyists and others who critics (unnamed, naturally) have repeatedly and publically pointed out are "control freaks" make billions, win corporate tax breaks and trash the environment, but can bikers here get a trail built?

What about the cost of sidewalks, parks, fire and police protection and other services not every citizen uses equally? What a scandal!

That's enough. I drive my car many miles. There's a cost and responsibility that goes with it. I expect to pay taxes for infrastructure, licenses, fuel, insurance and maintenance, to have trained first responders available even though I hope I don't need them. I accept there's a risk involved when I take the wheel. No matter how carefully I drive, there is no guarantee someone else may not be texting, drinking, negligent or obnoxious.

Same holds true for bikers. What do we do? Humanproof the world?

Michigan Department of Transportation officials have told Saugatuck Township the state's current Exit 36 bridge over I-196 could accommodate a non-motorized lane as part of the next proposed Trail stretch, which would run from Douglas city limits on the west side of Blue Star Highway 1.5 miles south to the Saugatuck Woods Association entrance.

But MDOT cannot guarantee whether future traffic demands might compel it to reclaim that lane. If so, it would fall on the township to connect its non-motorized trail in some other manner — perhaps as was done a separate non-motorized structure next to the Adams Street bridge for \$1.1 million six years ago. At such time as that should happen — *if* it happens — the agency guarantee state grant funds would be available.

Here's a news flash: stuff costs money. And nobody knows the future. Government standards may add little to value but zeroes to the price tag. Not everyone thinks it's worth it.

These are all fair arguments best addressed in a civil context.

One-sided, shrill and hysterical attacks aimed at Friends of the Blue Star Trail — a 501c3 nonprofit that's worked for eight years to build a non-motorized path from South Haven to Saugatuck, and their supporters — have grown nonsensical. Their proposed trail would link to existing ones running through Laketown Township, Holland and further northward. Others paths connect to South Haven too.

There are thousands of miles of non-motorized trails in Michigan. More are added yearly. They are meant to promote health and fitness for guests and residents, show off their areas' beauties and boost local business. Ask neighbor communities which have long invested in "linear parks" — a term used since the 1960s — if they're a boondoggle.

Before friends who oppose the trail — and whose views I respect — jump all over me, legitimate safety and cost concerns need addressing before Blue Star Trail work continues. Stories elsewhere this week go into them.

Saugatuck city officials are right to perform due diligence probing concerns specific within their boundaries. Other communities, facing similar issues, have not found them insurmountable. I too oppose the trail moving forward until these concerns are met.

Those who say the new U.S. Bicycle Route 35 through downtown — "built" by placing signs at no cost to the city — is enough, aren't bikers. These streets are insanely congested during peak demand times, you can't ride on sidewalks and parking there is a nightmare. By the same standard, why do motorists need Blue Star Highway and I-196 when Butler Street, also running north- south, will do?

Then there's the northbound bike lane on the west side of Blue Star Bridge, where a sign informs users "Bike Lane Ends" as they near Lake Street. Where do they go from there? Whose safety idea was that?

I support local leaders being anal. They have no choice than to take liability and safety concerns in earnest. Someone sues and the money of taxpayers, who they represent, is at stake.

Stonewall the trail entirely? That's an option but not an answer. If Saugatuck city leaders want to tell neighbors near they are building a "Bike Path to Nowhere," "Where does that make Saugatuck?" they'll be asked.

There is a better way to conduct our affairs. We live in a world with others: motorists, bikers, pedestrians, liberals, conservatives, neighbor governments whose priorities may be different. Why not accept and respect this variety that, as a whole, makes us better?

Let the screamers scream. What's a circus without a sideshow? As for how *we* relate, I consider courtesy, reason and give-and-take grown-up qualities.

Marriage has taught me the unbending principle sometimes I have to compromise. Finding a way to "yes" isn't easy.

But it's what moves us down the road.