

Public to be polled

SEMTA rate revisions considered

By TIM RICHARD

The public will be asked its reaction early next year to a lowering and simplifying of bus and commuter rail fares charged by the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority. SEMTA General Manager Larry E. Salci told the governing board there are inconsistencies and complexities in the present system, set up as SEMTA acquired several private suburban bus companies over the last decade.

"A mix of equity and simplicity" is the goal, in the words of SEMTA staff member John Sajovec, who analyzed five different rate structures. Basic assumptions, said Sajovec, are: "For every one per cent decrease in fares, a 0.17 per cent increase in ridership occurs." And on park and ride express lines, "for every one per cent of additional cost... we would accomplish a two per cent increase in ridership."

THE SEMTA STAFF has made no firm recommendation yet, but is pondering these alternatives:

• A zone fare structure with a maximum charge of \$1. Basic fare would be 50 cents, good for two zones, and fares would increase 10 cents for every additional zone. (There would be reduced student, senior citizen and hand-

capped fares.) Commuter rail premium would be 20 cents.

Detroit would be Zone 1; such nearby suburbs as the Grosse Pointes and Dearborn would be Zone 2. Moving north and west on the map, Zone 3 would begin at Eight Mile and the Redford Township eastern border; Zone 4 at Eleven Mile Road and Inkster Road; Zone 5 at Fourteen Mile Road and Farmington Road; Zone 6 at about Wattle Road and Haggerty Road; and Zone 7 at South Boulevard and Canton Center Road.

• Elimination of the 10-cent surcharge at park-and-ride lots. This option was viewed coolly by the staff because: The public is willing to pay the premium for the 15-40 per cent time savings; the runs are costlier; the premium is a good way to recoup the cost of parking facilities; and it is considered unfair to charge general run passengers the same amount as park-and-ride passengers who are getting a better service.

• A flat fare, no matter where in the region one starts and stops. Salci came back from a trip to Atlanta enamored of this idea, but staff members oppose it here: "Flat fares, because of their simplicity, are an attractive fare structure for public transit systems. In the SEMTA service area, however, flat fares are not being recommended by staff due to the size of the area and

the fact that flat fares are inequitable when trips of long distances are involved." A 50-cent fare would cause a revenue loss of more than \$1 million but boost ridership 4.4 to 4.8 per cent. A 75-cent fare would reduce both revenue and ridership, staff estimated.

• A system of two or three zones. The problem here would be persons who take short trips but cross. This would require a system of "overlap" zones that could be a confusing nightmare for drivers and passengers alike.

• A seven-zone fare with a maximum charge of \$1.25 for the longest ride. SAJOVEC'S analysis report of the SEMTA board concluded:

"Staff does not object to the expendi-

ture of additional monies for fare reduction. However, it is our opinion that service expansion has a greater impact on improving ridership than does fare reduction."

It cited the success of expanded park-and-ride services from Birmingham and West Bloomfield to downtown Detroit in the case for expanded service.

"However," the report said, "considering the potential for increasing fares at a future date, it is recommended that public hearings be held on the zone fare alternatives."

"In addition, staff would present the service increases that could occur for the cost of lower fare structure."

Sand, ashes help in snow

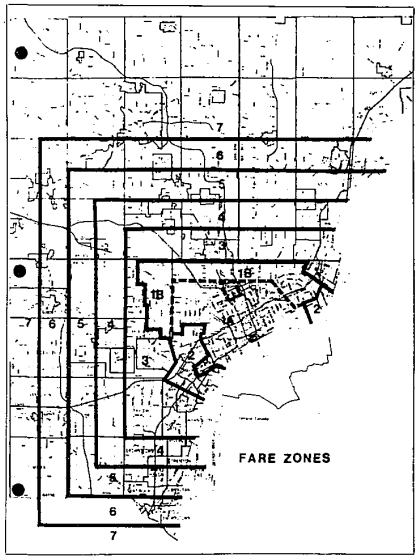
John L. Grubba, Oakland County Road Commission managing director, offers this tip for coping with snow-covered gravel roads:

"Observe caution and carry sand or ashes. The sand and ashes act as weight to give driving wheels better friction with the surface and can be scattered in front of the driving wheels to move over slick surfaces or out of trouble."

In periods of prolonged cold weather, gravel roads will be con-

stantly snow covered. "Salt won't work to remove ice and packed snow from gravel roads and plowing below the snow line would help only temporarily while removing much of the costly gravel," he said.

Salt won't work on gravel roads, he said, because the salt would simply dig into the frozen ground beneath the ice and snow. "On pavement, the salty water spreads along the pavement, melts more ice and snow and traffic forces the mixture off the roadway," Grubba said.



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