

SEMTA still anticipating federal rapid transit funding

By TIM RICHARD

The dream of a rapid transit line emanating out of Detroit got a pat on the back at a board meeting Tuesday of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA).

The pat came from Robert E. Patricelli, head of the federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA). Patricelli said it would be "premature" to conclude the federal government won't hand any more new rail transit starts.

The lack of north-south transit from SEMTA board member Julie Evans of Birmingham. The newest board member expressed shock at hearing estimates of rapid transit construction costs and almost voted against advancing SEMTA's 1979 plan to state and federal officials.

PATRICELLI'S ASSURANCES came in a letter to Joseph P. Bianco Jr. of Bloomfield Hills. SEMTA board chairman who had put through a worried call to the federal official after reading Detroit newspaper accounts that "Detroit's transit

dream is fading."

Said Patricelli: "It is true, as one article stated, that most of the remaining funds for rail projects under our current authorizations will have to be applied to modernization and rehabilitation of existing systems."

"That does not mean, however, that we cannot afford to support any more new rail projects. It would be premature for you to come to that conclusion at this time."

"Moreover, there is every indication that the Congress will be reviewing the National Mass Transportation Act funding levels next year."

"While I cannot suggest what the U.S. Department of Transportation position will be regarding aided authorizations, I believe that UMTA funding levels cannot be accurately predicted at this time."

"I can see no basis for any conclusion that you should suspend your alternatives analysis activities"—a reference to a SEMTA study on the feasibility of different kinds of rapid transit hardware—at this time for want of prospective UMTA capital funding. We expect you to continue that analysis according to the scope of the work we have approved," Patricelli concluded.

THAT NOTE cheered Bianco. "Clearly, they're leaving the door open to us for rail transit funding. He's keeping an open

mind. That's all we can ask for."

Said Thomas Turner, SEMTA board member and president of the Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO, called the Detroit newspaper articles "negative news that tends to polarize the situation."

But Marilyn Thayer, SEMTA board member from Ann Arbor, said the UMTA chief's letter "was no great revelation" of the news stories and warned fellow board members, "Don't get your hopes up."

WHAT BOTHERS SEMTA leaders is that the story broke at a time when Michigan legislators are arguing about how to fund the state and regional share of a \$5 billion rapid transit line.

Meanwhile, federal funds are running out under the existing program, and the legislature adjourned until fall without being able to agree on how to fund the regional share of the project cost.

The transit line is the most startling element in the so-called 1980 plan adopted by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG). It's based on studies up going back to the mid-1960s by the Transportation and Land Use Study (TALUS).

MRS. EVANS almost upset the time schedule for SEMTA's submission of its 1979 capital funding plan to state and federal officials when she threatened to vote against it.

Her single vote could have held up the plan. The nine-member SEMTA board has

one vacancy that Gov. William Milliken has yet to fill after more than a year, and three board members were absent, leaving a bare majority of five to conduct Tuesday's meeting.

The board finally compromised on a unanimous resolution that hunted the rapid transit program would be re-evaluated when the so-called alternatives analysis is completed later this year.

What bothers Mrs. Evans was her calculation, based on a staff report, that by 1980 SEMTA would be spending 71 per cent of local capital funds on the rapid transit line, as projected.

"We'll spend a pile to build a system that goes from the foot of Woodward out to Grand Boulevard. We'll spend 71 per cent of our capital to build only 10.8 miles of transit line by 1980."

"I'm not about to tell that to the people of Detroit, let alone the suburbs," she said.

"JULIE'S NOT ALONE in this," added Mrs. Thayer.

"We know every rail rapid transit system in the country has started off with small figures, and it soared."

But Bianco and Turner urged the women board members to pass a resolution with modified wording indicating the whole notion of rapid transit will face an intensive board study once the alternatives analysis is completed.

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New cars may boost rail service

Commuter rail service from Detroit to Ann Arbor, Pontiac and perhaps Port Huron is about to be enriched by a dozen rail coaches at a bargain price.

The Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) board voted Tuesday to purchase the cars for a total of \$300,000 from the Penn Central Transportation Co.

They were among a group of cars used in Washington New York-Boston runs until they were recently retired.

Joseph R. Wolfe of the SEMTA staff said: "All are of a stainless steel, meaning that no corrosion has occurred, nor will any occur in the future." There will, however, be some major overhauling.

SEMTA General Manager Clarence Genette said the authority had planned to purchase six additional coaches this year for use on an expanded Detroit Ann Arbor service.

In addition, there is the possibility of initiation of new train service to Port Huron or expanded train service to Ann Arbor and Pontiac, Genette said.

State funds will provide the entire purchase price, he added, and there is a possibility of federal funding too.

The coaches were built by Budd Co. in 1949 and were stripped down and rebuilt in 1963 by Budd and the old Pennsylvania Railroad.

Genette said the coaches are basically better than the aluminum ones used on the Detroit Pontiac Grand Trunk line.

OCC opens registration

Registration for the fall semester at Oakland Community College's five campuses and 11 extension centers will be held Sept. 7, 8 and 9 from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. according to an alphabetical schedule.

Evening classes begin Sept. 9 and day classes begin Sept. 10.

Interested individuals should check with the campus for specific dates and times.

Late registration for extension classes will be accepted on campus Sept. 10 from 9:11:30 a.m. and 1:45 p.m. and Sept. 13 from 9:11:30 a.m., 1:45 p.m. and 6:45 p.m.

OCC has campus locations at Auburn Hills Campus, Auburn Heights, 853-1880; Highland Lakes Campus, Union Lake, 363-7191; Orchard Ridge Campus, Farmington Hills, 476-6488; Oak Park Campus, 566-1232; and the Royal Oak Campus, 566-5880.

Extension classes are also conducted at the following high schools: Birmingham, Seaborn, Clinton, Lake Orion, Milford, Pontiac Central, Pontiac Northern, Royal Oak St. Mary, Southfield, Southfield Lathrup, Troy and Waterford Mitt.

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