

# County road commissions spring surprise on SEMTA

By TIM RICHARD

Two motives are behind the Wayne and Oakland County Road Commissions' proposal that a "light rail" transit system be built in the two-county area rather than the more expensive and heavy rapid rail system visualized for Detroit by federal and regional officials.

The road commissions Tuesday unveiled their alternative suggestion to a skeptical, almost hostile board of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA).

The differences between the two road commissions' plan and the SEMTA plan are more than just the kind of hardware, for they reflect fundamentally different views about the future of the two-county area known as metropolitan Detroit.

ONE MOTIVE, in the words of John Grubba, managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission (OCRC), is that the road agencies are worried about the impact of a regional transit system on road funds.

In plain words, the SEMTA plan will cost \$1.2 billion and the road commissions plan \$247 million, or two-thirds as much. The difference would represent a loss of road funds and power to the road commissions. The road agencies don't try to hide their fear of that prospect.

THE OTHER motive is that the road commissions see a continued decline in jobs in downtown Detroit and population in Detroit proper.

Grubba accused SEMTA and its parent agency, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), of "fation" during their desire for a high-level transit system by exaggerating Detroit's future population and the potential identity of a SEMTA rapid transit system.

SEMTA officials say the road commissions are designing a system to serve continued "sprawl" into the suburbs and outlying rural areas. SEMTA's view is that transit patronage is only one purpose of all the federal and state spending; the others are urban revitalization and economic development, particularly in Detroit.

where 80 per cent of SEMTA's new transit dollars would go.

In addition, SEMTA board member Joseph P. Bianco Jr. of Bloomfield Hills saw a political motivation in the road commissions' 11th hour proposal. "They're losing work. The Wayne County Road Commission has many planners and engineers on its payroll with nothing to do."

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Woodward to East Grand Blvd., then following the rail tracks to 12 Mile and Greenbeck Highway in Macomb County, some 13.5 miles in 20 minutes with 10 stops.

THE "LIGHT RAIL" system proposed by the road commissions would consist of single cars rather than trains, although two cars could be coupled as demand developed.

"All three light rail lines tie into a central business district loop in downtown Detroit to distribute and collect passengers at eight conveniently located stops during the 11-minute circuit," said Grubba.

Since this downtown Detroit loop is nearly identical to the route proposed by SEMTA for a "people mover," commuters could enjoy the same convenience without having to transfer from their commuter vehicle.

This light rail loop downtown could be constructed for less than \$4 million, compared to the \$3 million people mover that is a pet project of Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young.

THE ROAD officials said they began their planning work with an origin and destination survey in late September and early October. This is about the same time SEMTA was making its "preliminary proposal" to UMTA for \$600 million in federal funds.

That survey was made by Market Opinion Research, the election polling firm that works for The Detroit News.

The actual transit plan was developed by Transportation Planning Associates, headed by Russell Threlman of Bloomfield Hills.

This prompted SEMTA board member Marilyn Thayer of Ann Arbor to say she was "offended to have this come so late in SEMTA's own alternative analysis of transit routes and hardware."

After the meeting, Mrs. Thayer also snapped: "Have you ever heard of an origin and destination survey conducted in two weeks?"

Bianco said SEMTA's own analysis is considering every kind of hardware proposed by the road commissions.



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