

Transit: SEMTA stalls, Oakland stews

By TIM RICHARD

Like the character in "Snowwhite," the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) is asking: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, which of 13 plans is fairest of all?"

SEMTA staff and board members Friday were unable to decide which three of 13 alternative will provide the best public transportation system for the metropolitan area.

They met all day, trying to make a decision, after 14 months of study, and concluded that they needed two more weeks of work before they could come up with the three best plans.

The three top choices were to have been unveiled this week by SEMTA General Manager Larry Salci at a series of public hearings. Instead, the public will get looks at all 13.

AT THE very hour SEMTA board members were scheduled to wind up their meeting, the Oakland County Road Commission issued a blistering report, saying in effect that the "alternatives analysis" is a sham. The colorfully written road commission report, prepared by Transportation Planning Associates Division of R.F. Thielman Associates Inc., Bloomfield Hills, charged:

"That concept (heavy rail and subway) is already selected and was selected years ago. The plan has never deviated. That concept is heavy rail transit, and the alternatives analysis is simply being used to rationalize a pre-determined decision."

"Local leaders publicly profess they won't know what kind of transit system Detroit will have until the alternatives analysis is completed. But in fact, every planning document of SEMTA specifies the subway plan. SEMTA's five-year capital planning program details the planned capital expenditures for the subway, beginning this year."

The gist of the Oakland road commission's statement is that new tax costs of a subway will be a staggering \$55 a year for a family of four by 1985. It blames subway talk on "the ego need of the local administration to leave a monument."

SALCI REPLIED that the road commission is just plain wrong. SEMTA and its computers are really having a difficult time analyzing which of the 13 plans is best on the bases of five factors—capital costs, operating costs, environmental impact, economic development (jobs created, sales) and social impact.

"None of the 13 alternatives gets more than one or two first-place marks in any of those categories," Salci said. "Heavy rail is extremely expensive. Personally, I lean toward light rail."

Salci, appointed to the job a week ago, said planners will go back to the testing process, using different kinds of population and employment projections.

He hopes the SEMTA board will be able to pick the best three by the Feb. 22 meeting.

After this week's hearings, and

after waiting an additional 10 days for public comments and letters to drift in, the SEMTA board is expected to pick a final plan, go to Washington and ask for the \$600 million in federal aid promised by the Ford administration.

THE DIFFERENT plans utilize four different "modes" or methods of hardware: Heavy (or rapid) rail, light rail (a streetcar-type), express buses and commuter rail. In addition, there is the probability of a people-mover system for downtown Detroit.

The terms "subway" and "heavy rail" are sometimes used interchangeably, as in the Oakland County Road Commission report, but they're different, Salci said. Heavy rail means a railroad-type system using its own right of way. Such a system could be at ground level, a subway or elevated above the ground.

Detroit Mayor Coleman Young is known to favor a subway for at least the downtown segment of a transit system. Generally, a subway costs 10 times as much to construct as a ground-level system, which would generate more construction jobs. On the other hand, a subway is immune to bad weather.

THE 13 ALTERNATIVES still being tested are:

1. A people mover extending from downtown Detroit to the New Center area at Grand Boulevard.
2. High level (rapid rail) service in the Woodward corridor to Eight Mile; intermediate (express bus) along Michigan and Gratiot avenues.
3. Rapid rail along the Woodward and Gratiot corridors to Eight Mile; express bus along Michigan Avenue. (This is roughly the system proposed in the so-called "Preliminary Proposal" SEMTA submitted last October to the Urban Mass Transit Administration, and the basis on which Transportation Secretary James Coleman promised \$600 million.)
4. Commuter rail service in the Michigan Avenue corridor, light rail (streetcar-type) in the Woodward and Gratiot corridors to Sixteen Mile.
5. Rapid rail in the Woodward corridor to Sixteen Mile; commuter rail in the Michigan and Gratiot corridors.
6. Rapid rail in the Gratiot corridor; express bus on Michigan and Woodward.
7. Rapid rail in three corridors—Woodward to Eight Mile, Gratiot to Corner, and Michigan to Telegraph.
8. Express bus in all three major corridors—Woodward, Gratiot and Michigan.
9. All light rail in three corridors—Michigan to Telegraph, Woodward to Sixteen Mile, and Gratiot to Fourteen Mile.
10. All commuter rail in the three major corridors.
11. "Do nothing"—stop development today.
12. "Null"—expand existing programs but add no new features.
13. Light rail on Woodward to Sixteen Mile; express bus on Michigan and Gratiot.

Conservation club lists goals

THE MICHIGAN UNITED Conservation Clubs (MUCC) has listed these goals for 1977.

- 1) Removal of the bounty on coyotes. It is currently \$15 for males and \$20 for females. Thomas Washington, director of MUCC, said, "Michigan is one of the last states to continue to waste thousands of dollars in perpetuating a program that simply doesn't do the job. There is absolutely no justification whatever for paying a bonus to someone who kills one of these animals."
- 2) Environmental education. "This is the key to all of our conservation problems," said Washington. "Had we awakened through education to the necessity for a clean environment many years ago, we wouldn't be facing all these problems today."
- 3) Land use legislation. "The future of our state depends on adopting a sound program for the wise use of our land," said Washington.
- 4) Wetlands. MUCC wants to save the state's wetlands through legislation. "A wetlands bill will assure us that we

will have wetlands left in the state," said Washington.

5) Phosphates. MUCC wants to ban use of phosphates, including those in home laundry detergents.

6) Solid waste disposal. The club said every community in the state should be in a new system of waste disposal.

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