

# Then there were four: SEMTA finally pares transit choices

By RICHARD GOLD

The Southeastern Michigan Transit Authority (SEMTA) took a long stride toward determining the future of public transportation in the Detroit metropolitan area Tuesday, paring a list of 13 mass transit schemes to four.

The impact of the final transit plan will not be felt in the suburbs for one to two years, according to SEMTA General Manager Larry Salci.

"Basically, regardless of the final selection, the suburbs will benefit through new services, while the city will benefit through improvements to existing services," Salci said.

All four choices include bus service on Telegraph, Southfield, Plymouth, I-896, Eight Mile, Big Beaver, Schoolcraft-Davidson and Warren. Other transit alternatives were suggested for Michigan Avenue, Woodward and Gratiot.

The decision, 15 months in the making, followed an all-day meeting of the SEMTA board, and resulted in one extra alternative. The board was expected to edit the list to three.

Three of the final four choices were altered versions of earlier plans and followed "a good deal of testing, refining and modifying existing alternatives," Salci said.

SEMTA determined that Michigan, Woodward and Gratiot are the most used corridors in the metropolitan area. It is in those areas that the four alternatives selected differ.

Four types of transit hardware were considered for use in the corridors: heavy rapid rail or subway; light rail (street cars); express buses; and commuter rail using regular train tracks.

The four alternatives selected were:  
•Commuter rail along the Michigan Avenue corridor on the existing Penn Central right-of-way; and extensive bus service on both Woodward and Gratiot. Buses would stop every two to 12 minutes.

•Commuter rail along the Michigan Avenue corridor, heavy rail on Wood-

ward to Eight Mile and heavy rail on Gratiot to Connor.

•Commuter rail along the Michigan corridor, light rail to Sixteen Mile on Woodward, and light rail to 15 Mile on Gratiot.

•Upgraded bus service, consolidating SEMTA and Detroit lines and an expanded regional system, and a peak-period only commuter rail service to Plymouth and Ann Arbor.

Also included in the fourth alternative is a downtown Detroit "people mover" system, improvement of traffic signal progression on major roadways and reversible lane operation on major thoroughfares.

Many criteria were used to judge the benefits and drawbacks of the 13 alternatives, including capital costs, operating costs, environmental impact, economic development (job creation, growth along the corridors) and social impact.

No one system shined in all categories.

Extended bus service is cheaper in capital cost, but consumes more energy and produces more pollution.

Heavy rail, which often involves above- or below-ground operation, incurs heavy capital and land-acquisition costs.

Light rail involves high capital costs, while offering slower service than heavy rail.

The most significant thrust of the SEMTA board decision, Salci said, was that commuter rail was eliminated as a possibility for high-level service everywhere but along Michigan Avenue.

Selection of a final plan won't be made until after a new SEMTA board takes office April 15.

"I would hope we can have a decision by early May. That's optimistic but within reason," Salci said.

With that final selection in hand, the SEMTA board is expected to go to Washington and ask for the \$600 million in federal aid promised by the Ford administration.

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## Inflation spurs boom in old homes, broker says

Older existing homes may become the prime target for first time home buyers over the next few years, according to the United Northwestern Realty Association (UNRA).

"In the past, most young families had thoughts of buying a brand new home but usually were willing to settle on a newer existing home having most of the desired features at a lower price," states John J. Kelly, UNRA president.

"Now with the total costs of home ownership rising at a faster rate than most incomes, many of these families are looking at older homes that may require a certain amount of work."

A study recently reported by university urban affairs experts predicted that new home costs may increase by 75 per cent over the next four years.

"Prices for newer existing homes generally follow the same trend as new homes but at a lesser rate," Kelly said. "The study showed that only about one in four families today can afford to buy a new home compared to about half in 1970. There also has been a decline in the number that can afford the newer existing homes."

He said more families now are trying to counteract the rise in prices by cutting back on their expectations for their first home and working to establish an equity.

"It has been demonstrated that the increase in housing costs during the past five years has been much less for families selling one home and buying another and for those retaining ownership of a home," he stated.

"Thus, many families want to move into the market as soon as possible and are willing to settle for a lesser home than what may have been envisioned. Those who have shopped

around are beginning to appreciate what older homes have to offer."

"First, they obtain more living space per dollar than in the new housing market. The often unrecognized costs involved with a new house—landscaping, fencing, storms and screens, for example—are for the most part non-existent.

The need for essential repairs, which contribute to the lower price for an older home, can be financed through a short-term note to avoid spreading them through the life of the mortgage.

"Non-essential changes can be made as finances improve or as they are desired. If family members can accomplish all or part of such renovation, the increased equity in the home may surpass their repair investment."

Kelly said that families moving into older established neighborhoods generally are not faced with special assessments for paving, sewers, street-lighting and other costs often encountered in newly-developed areas.

The UNRA president noted a decline this year from 1976 in the number of existing homes being listed in the association's territory, which covers most of western Wayne and Oakland counties.

"With interest rates down and a plentiful supply of mortgage money, sales have climbed," Kelly said. "With the increased number of households being formed, we see the market tightening up with stronger competition among buyers. Gradually, we will begin to encounter shortages of good listings in some areas."

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