

OCART to benefit

Bus-buying moratorium expires

By TIM RICHARD

Transit officials in southeastern Michigan hailed the legislature's passage of a bill which ends a two-year moratorium on new bus purchases.

"I would say it's great news," said Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy, when the legislature passed a bill setting standards for bus equipment.

"There were some inherent problems, but this came as close to being good as anything we're going to have," said state Rep. Jack Kirksey (R-Livonia), who voted for the bill.

The wheelchair lift standards' bill will allow the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority to order 181 large buses for line-haul service and 124 small buses for a dial-a-ride service. A major beneficiary of those orders will be Murphy's OCART, an Oakland County-wide, inter-municipal service.

Oakland County commissioners have

threatened to quit SEMTA unless progress is made by Oct. 1 on implementing the OCART plan.

Larry E. Sali, SEMTA general manager, doubts that any of the 42 bases for OCART will be ready by November or December, although "I'm going to do everything in my power to get them."

THE LEGISLATURE placed a moratorium on new bus purchases in November 1976 when handicapped persons raised a civil rights-type issue, contending all vehicles should be accessible to them.

Two or three legislative attempts to set standards "ailed," Kirksey recalled, including one which fell to Gov. William Milliken's veto.

The bill passed last week requires that:

• All line haul (large) buses be equipped with lifts for wheelchairs. SEMTA officials place the cost of these lifts at \$10,000 apiece. Affected

will be a total of 181 buses for which SEMTA asked federal and state funds in 1976-77.

• Some small buses for dial-a-ride services will be equipped with wheelchair devices, though not all. SEMTA must submit a plan, to be approved by the state director of transportation, showing that equal quality service will be available to handicapped and non-handicapped alike. Cost of equipped small buses will be \$3,000 apiece, a SEMTA source said. Some 124 vehicles are affected.

The bill is to have immediate effect, as soon as it reaches Milliken's desk and he signs it, as expected.

THE SENATE passed the bill April 26 in a 27-8 vote. Supporting it was Sen. Daniel Cooper (D-Oak Park), whose district includes Southfield and Farmington Hills.

Opposed were Sens. Donald E. Bishop (R-Rochester), whose district includes Birmingham, northwest Troy and West Bloomfield, and R. Robert Geake (R-Northville), whose district includes Plymouth, Livonia and Redford.

Absent and not voting were Senate Majority Leader William Faust (D-Westland), whose district includes Garden City and Canton, and Sen. Bill S. Hoffman (D-Madison), whose district includes southeast Troy.

The house passed the bill April 20. 65-50. Supporters included Reps. John Bonner (D-Redford), Tim Bresnan (D-Westland), Kirksey, Robert Law (R-Livonia), Roy Smith (R-Ypsilanti), Wilbur Brotherton, (R-Farmington),

James Desebaugh (R-Birmingham), Richard Fessler (R-Union Lake), Ruth McNamee (R-Birmingham) and Sal Rocca (D-Sterling Heights).

Absent were William Keith (D-Garden City) and Joseph Forbes (D-Oak Park). No Observer & Eccentric area representatives opposed the bill.

EXPLAINING his no vote, Geake said the bill "would add \$10,000 to the cost of every line haul bus purchased, but it wouldn't solve the problem of the handicapped who can't get from their homes to the bus stops."

"I favored putting lift equipment on dial-a-ride buses, which go to handicapped persons' doors."

"It's a bad use of taxpayers' money to require equipment on every line haul bus," said Geake, adding that it "would raise the price of buses about 10 per cent and thus reduce the numbers of buses which could be purchased by about 10 per cent."

MARVIN MELTZER, SEMTA's director of public affairs, said the new law will affect only new purchases financed by grants from fiscal 1976-77. It would not affect existing buses or those ordered before the moratorium took effect.

SEMTA currently has 200 large buses and 111 small ones (including those in Birmingham's and Redford's dial-a-ride programs). About one-third of these small buses "are wheelchair accessible." Only two large ones have lifts—both for a Macomb County program used exclusively by the handicapped.

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