

SEMTA talks with public on 2-way street

By TIM RICHARD

The theory is that people should know what they're talking about before they start talking.

That is why the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) has scheduled both public "meetings" and public "hearings" in the next month on its 1990 transportation plans.

At the meetings, SEMTA talks, outlining the eight bus and rail alternative plans its board will choose from. The public will have a chance to ask questions.

At the hearings, it will be the public's turn to do the talking. SEMTA will do all the listening. The gist of all arguments will be summarized for federal, state and regional officials.

It is all required by federal law. The unspoken assumption is that people and local leaders will judiciously weigh the facts before making up their minds. More likely, what they learn at the meetings will simply reinforce what they already feel. They will be either for or against the "subway."

FIVE MEETINGS are scheduled. The western Wayne County session is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 13 in the new Livonia City Hall, Five Mile west of Farmington Road.

The Oakland meeting is at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 15 in room 202 of the Ferndale Community Center, 400 E. Nine Mile.

Other meetings are Nov. 14 in Sterling Heights, Nov. 19 in Detroit and Nov. 20 in Highland Park.

General Manager Larry E. Salci will conduct the meetings.

EIGHT HEARINGS are scheduled. Western Wayne's is at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 26 in Livonia City Hall.

South Oakland's is at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 3 in the Ferndale Community Center.

North Oakland's is at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 4 in the commissioners auditorium of the Oakland County Service Center, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac.

Detroit's are at noon and 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 5 in the 13th floor auditorium of the City-County Building, 2 Woodward.

Anyone may attend any of the meetings if the one closest to his or her home is at an inconvenient time. It would do no good to make the same speech twice in different locations, SEMTA staff members advise, because it is the arguments — not the number of times they are repeated — which will be compiled.

SEMTA Board Chairman Edward McNamara, or another board member will preside at the public hearings.

THEORETICALLY, there's a do-nothing alternative — simply replace existing buses which wear out.

Practically, all plans are based on the first alternative — "Low Capital 1." The other seven alternatives start with Low Cap 1 and add other modes.

Low Cap 1 involves expanding the bus system to 1,350 large buses (120 route and 195 express buses being added); and 444 more small buses (219 for general service and 225 for the elderly and handicapped).

Low Cap 1 also involves expanding commuter rail service to downtown Detroit. Mt. Clemens would get service — three round trips per day; service to Pontiac and Ann Arbor would be increased.

Finally, Low Cap 1 involves the "downtown people mover" — a demonstration electrical vehicle moving in a loop.

Low Cap 1 would require an investment of \$675 million.

THE OTHER alternatives all start with Low Cap 1. They differ in how they would treat the Woodward corridor. Briefly:

• **LC 2 — Low Capital 2** — would add 80 express buses in the Woodward corridor. They would operate on an exclusive median bus lane on Woodward and the Chrysler freeway. Investment: \$701 million.

• **D2 — Light Rail at Grade** — involves a modern trolley from I-96 in Oakland County to downtown and along the riverfront to the Penn Central Railroad east of Mt. Elliott. It would be at street level. The 13.7 mile line would require 116 vehicles. Investment: \$1.17 billion.

• **F3 — Light Rail, Downtown Subway** — would run from the State Fair

grounds (south of Eight Mile) to downtown and then to the Grand Trunk Western Railroad near St. Aubin. It would be underground only in the downtown area south of the Fisher Freeway. The 11.1 mile line would require 96 vehicles. Investment: \$1.22 billion.

• **D5 — Light Rail, Partial Subway** — is much the same as F3 except for an underground portion near the State Fairgrounds. The 11.1 mile line would require 83 vehicles. Investment: \$1.4 billion.

• **M1 — Light Rail, Part Subway, Part Aerial** — is the one the SEMTA board tentatively selected in April. It would be subway from downtown to Grand Boulevard and aerial from the boulevard to McNichols. The 11.1 mile line would require 70 vehicles. Investment: \$1.4 billion.

• **X1 — Light Rail Subway** — would be underground from downtown to McNichols. The 11.1 mile line would require 70 vehicles. Investment: \$1.44 billion.

AN ENVIRONMENTAL impact statement analyzes how each alternative would affect jobs, economic redevelopment, neighborhoods and air quality.

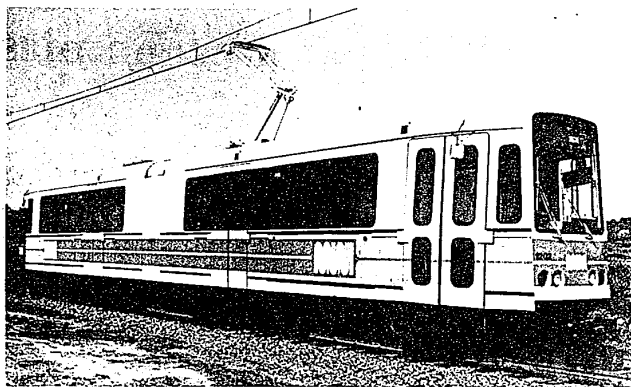
Significantly, the EIS, as it called, has devastating comments on the M1 aerial-subway, which got a weak 10-5 vote in the SEMTA board. It says:

The aerial alignment contemplated for one of the alternatives would similarly exacerbate the psychological barrier effect, rather than representing an absolute physical barrier, again except at stations.

"Visually, the aerial segments also represent a major intrusion on the existing built environment and streetscape. Transition sections — i.e., from subsurface to surface or aerial — will represent a real physical barrier of approximately 1,000 feet in length as well as a visual intrusion in the neighborhoods they traverse."

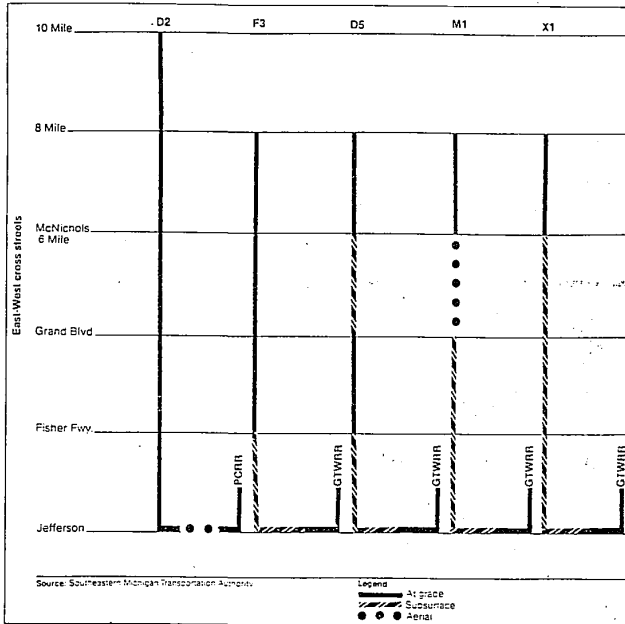
DESPITE THE different sizes of investment, most alternatives would cost the same per year to operate. LC1 would cost \$359 million to operate by 1990. The others would cost from \$370 million to \$380 million a year.

When the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) was making transportation plans a decade ago, it was thinking in terms of five rapid transit lines.



This light rail vehicle, currently being used in Boston and San Francisco, is the kind SEMTA is considering if it adopts such a mode for the Woodward corridor. It uses steel wheels on steel rails, usually on reserved rights of way.

The power source is overhead. It can be run as a single car or in trains of two to three cars. Top speed is 60 mph. Average speed is about 45 mph.



Schematic drawing shows which portions of a light rail transit line in the Woodward corridor would be at ground level, underground and elevated.

ed. The SEMTA board has tentatively picked alternative A1.

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