Give thanks for a change in transit attitudes

We walked into a SEMTA public meeting in Wayne County last Tuesday prepared for some kind

of explosion We walke We walked into a SEMTA public meeting in Oak-land County Thursday still waiting for the explo-

No explosion.

No explosion.

Lots of good — even excellent — questions about the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authorities.

the souncestern mixingan transportation rotation; vs 1990 plan.
Moderately good attendance — 50 to 60 persons.
But no explosion. And that suits us fine. The 'De-troit-suburbs' conflict is a saga we don't relish reporting, although we must report it when it occurs.

"THERE'S A SIGNIFICANT change in atti-tudes," said Marvin Meltzer, SEMTA's intergovern-mental relations man, using almost diplomatic lan-guage.

"Subway" wasn't a dirty word, at least among the persons trying to be informed about the bus, commuter rail and light rail rapid transit plans on which the SEATTA board must make a decision in mid-December.

"The discussion has been at a high level. There were no irrational questions," Meltzer went on. He appeared to be right.

Even in Macomb County, a hotbed of anti-regionalism, the attitudes were reasonable, he reported. "The polities have changed a lot in the last two or three years," added Larry Salci, SEMTA's general manager, Salci used to be businesslike, but he now shows a sense of humor.

But there's a chance Meltzer and Salci could be proven wrong at the public hearings later this month and early in December. That's when the public and local politics will have a chance to speak.

attend an informational meeting before spouting on at a hearing.

Evidence of the change in attitudes, if actual, is that people appear able to discuss various plans for a light rail system in the Woodward corridor on their merits, without blowing up in anger at the

mayor of Detroit.

WE'RE THANKFUL for that. The idea was never really "Mayor Young's subway" or "Detroit's subway," although the mayor, his staff and the Detroit newspapers long tried to convey that impres-

sion. Rapid transit was a regional idea all along. Any light rail line, if built, is unlikely to stop at Eight Mile Road. There will be future phases that will extend into the outer cities of suburbia. Rapid transit and a multi-county bus system are SEMTA ideas, and SEMTA is a regional agency.

If you fly over it, you can't tell where one community leaves off and another begins. Southeast Michigan is an economic and geographic whole. We are all in this region together. Gasoline prices are just as high in one town as another. The onergy crunch is hitting all of us. More and more of us are using bases — route, dial-aride. Park and flide express. — and some the commuter train. Ridership is increasing 20 percent or so a year in the suburbs. We're lucky we have a regional transit agency to fill the need. Ten years ago, private bus companies were going out of business, and there was no local or state money available for public transit. Maybe the "significant change in attitude" is motivated by people waking up to economic and environmental reality or maybe it's spurred by a growth of good will.

growth of good will. Whatever the reason, we're glad to see it.



One holiday left for family

The charming thing about Thanksgiving is that it has remained a non-commercial family holiday. The principal family holiday. Christmas, is preceded by a month of frantic shopping and holiday parties. By the time Christmas day arrives, the children are overjoyed and the parents are exhausted, both spiritually and financially. While Christmas is a religious holiday, religion has become secondary to the month-long onslaught of commercial pitches.

The highlight of the day is not when the family goes to church to worship but how much is stuffed under the Christmas tree.

The other important religious holiday, Easter, is fast becoming dominated by Easter bonnets and finery, chocolate Easter bunnies and multi-colored eggs.

THE NEW YEAR has never been a family holiday, because the adults celebrate New Year's Eve by themselves and many times are in no mood to do much celebrating with anyone New Year's Day. Other holidays in the United States — such as Labor Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Presidents Day — have become more vacation weekends than celebrated holidays.

Non-official holidays, such as St. Valentine's Day and Mothers Day, have gained their importance through the promotion of florists and candy makers rather than because of cultural or traditional practices.

THANKSGIVING, though not a religious holiday as such, has become the most revered day of quiet worship during this year.

The family gathers together for a traditional feast of turkey and all the trimmings which dates back to the early roots of our nation.

The original Thanksgiving celebrated the successful harvesting of crops. Today the family reflects on the wonderful things that have happened to them.

The family is together for no other reason than to enjoy the company of its members. It is a very pos-

enjoy une company of its memoria. It is a very pow-litive day.

The only gifts that need to be given are sharing love and thanks among family members.

Let us keep this holiday on a non-commercial level, and let us strive to keep the spirit of this holiday with us through the entire year.

At long last

Large portions of the northern and western sub-urbs can breathe a ginnt sigh of relief with word that construction on Telegraph between Maple and Long Lake roads has been completed. Traffic congestion will be eased, particularly for persons from Ponitae to Southfield commuting to work. Bumper-to-bumper traffic for a mile-and-a-half at a time should be a thing of the past. Seldom has a project been tied up so long over arguments about its width, its environmental im-pact, construction noise and the like. As the most important road between the M-39 freeway and US-23 at Brighton, Telegraph deserved better treat-ment.

ment.
Its completion — just prior to the first snowfall
— couldn't have been better timed.



Cynics are mainly wrong

Grackerbarrel

Political cynics drive me nuts.

There's one sitting across the office this very minute. He's peering over his desk, glaring in my direction, awaiting an opportunity to attack. This scenario has gone on for more than four

ars. The first clash of the day is about 10:30 a.m. after

The ITSC class of the day is about 10.00 a.m. after everyone has settled down to work. He peeks over the top of his newspaper and with a mischievous sneer, says, "What do you think of this, Barnaby? Didn't I tell you they're all a bunch of crooks?"

Then he vehemently points to an article about the latest indiscretion of some politician.

YOU CAN'T WIN an argument with one of these characters. In their minds, they're always right and the politicians are wrong. Anyone who has the gall to be a politician is instantly tagged a crook in their

minds.

This conduct can be amusing at times. But a deeper analysis demonstrates that far too many persons in this country hold this cynical attitude.

And with the national elections just a year away, the cynics a laready are out like crickets on a summer night. Unfortunately, a lot of journalists feed on the sneers and jeers and join in as they whip out, their wisdom in columns and feature television reports.

CANDIDATES ARE ridiculed for their wrinkles, or lack of them; for how they kiss their wives or somebody else's; the color of their suits and ties. If they're particularly good speechmakers, they

are accused of putting on airs. If they are lousy orators, it's a sign of some mental deficiency. Complaints abound about political television messages. According to critics they are either too short, not telling enough about the candidate or too long, taking up too much time from the great American pastimes — watching situation comedies and football. I witnessed this cynicism firsthand last year. What I found was frightening.
Politics and anyone who participates in the political system are considered unclean.

THE CAMPAIGNERS WERE prohibited from attending public functions. "We don't want no politics here."

We were stopped from passing out political liter-ature. "Take your litter someplace else and dump

it."

In many cities, political signs are prohibited, but garage sale and real estate signs are allowed.

This isn't to say that public officials shouldn't be held up to public scrutiny. They certainly are responsible to those who elected them for their actions.

tions.

But those who do the electing should be just as responsible for their actions. And at present the American electorate is acting irresponsibly.

Americans must open themselves to the political system and be willing to participate in it. They must spend more time reading and studying the issues and candidates so their judgments are more than experience leaves. than emotional reactions.

Otherwise, those stories which the cynic across the room keeps pointing out to me will multiply and then it will become much more than an annoyance.



Tim Richard

'Headlee' flops with houses

"Michigan's tax limitation amendment has proven successful in limiting taxes." So says Richard Headlee, who is excellent at running an insurance company, pretty good at campaigning but inexperienced in local government. Contrary evidence comes from a man who does know local government.

Clair S. Simons, deputy assessor of Ypsilanti Township, wrote an article in last month's edition of Michigan Township News that is getting plenty of circulation in governmental circles. The Headdee amendment, as tax limitation is popularly known, fails to work on residential property, Simons concluded. The reason has something to do with a subject you've read about in this column many times in the last six months — the super-inflation in residential housing prices. housing prices.

The process gets technical, but don't let that scare you off.

"INFLATION IN residential property is ex-

"INFLATION IN residential property is ex-tremely high, being as much as 20 percent per year in some areas of the state," Simons began, "Other classes (of property) do not experience this, and some cannot due to the nature of the sev-eral classes of property as to valuation and to the law. When your neighbor sells his house for twice what he paid for it, your friendly local assessor gets wind of this fact. Everyone's assessment gets adjusted because property is supposed to be assessed at half of true market value.

Now, tax limitation is supposed to provide that, when your assessment rises faster than the consumer price index, your community's tax rate (millage) is to be pared down.

But it doesn't quite work.

Simons showed why, using his township's figures which are fairly typical.

In a period when residential property increased in value by more than 100 percent, commercial property increased 34 percent and commercial 16 percent. Personal property, the assessor's name for factory equipment and business inventories, is assessed at historical cost, so it doesn't increase with inflation: equipment is actually depreciated.

Do you detect what 's happening?'

OVER THE PAST few years, this combination "OVER THE PAST few years, this combination of high inflation and over-emphasis on sales in residential and farm properties has resulted in a 'shift' to these classes of property which would amount to billions of dollars. Simon pointed out.
"Apartments, shopping centers, and other 'income properties' are — property — assessed primarily on the 'income approach', or stated another way, they pay basically what they can afford to pay."
Property assessments are "equalized" between communities by county and state officials. When this is done, however, a community is treated as a whole. The result will blow your mind:

"Rural townships and 'bedroom' communities where values are rising fast, will be greatly bene-fitted, with rollbacks (in millage rates) as much as 20 percent in some cases.

. "Urban areas, with large amounts of industrial

or Orban areas, when large amounts of moustrat and commercial, real and personal property, may get no relief for residential property which may have increased 15 percent or more last year."

"Urban areas" means most suburban cities and townships. We're getting shafted.

SIMONS HAS a solution.
Put simply, instead of equalizing communities as whole, he argues for equalizing by class of prop-

erty.

The foregoing also illustrates a point I've been hammering at all through the tax limitation argument: The real culprit in this property tax situation is not the bogeyman bureaucrats whom Headler reviles; the culprit is the super-inflationary housing industry.

viles: the culprit is the super-inflation in housing is oc-incredibly, the super-inflation in housing is oc-curring when southeastern Michigan's population is almost stagnant. It's hard to blame 'consumer de-mand' for raising prices. It's the people on the sup-ply side who have been jacking up prices, assess-ments, equalized valuations and taxes.

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