

SEMTA: Voters will face transit subsidy question soon

By TIM RICHARD
Look for a tri-county ballot proposal, in about 1982, to pay for the operations of public transportation.

No matter which plan is selected by the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority — all bus, light rail, aerial or subway — an operating subsidy in the \$60-70 million range will be needed.

The funding issue has to be faced by 1982. And we need an elastic system that grows with inflation," said SEMTA General Manager Larry E. Salei.

Salei and other SEMTA staffers spoke Thursday at an Oakland County public meeting in Ferndale to explain the 1980 alternative plans. The top SEMTA administrator was responding to a question about how operating deficits would be paid for.

THE PROSPECT that the Michigan Legislature will find \$66 million for SEMTA from existing revenue is dim. The Headlee tax limitation amendment, added to the state constitution by voters in 1978, virtually guarantees SEMTA's failure to go the voters for an operating tax for Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

Under consideration, according to SEMTA's environmental impact statement, are the personal income tax, the combined sales and use tax, and a property transfer tax.

Most other metropolitan transit systems have gone to the sales tax or property tax for their operating funds, said Salei, citing Denver's 1 percent sales tax.

At present, SEMTA gets part of its funds from a small portion of the state gasoline and weight tax and about \$13 million a year from a surcharge to the annual auto license tax and an auto title transfer tax.

But Salei said those sources fail to keep pace with inflation because auto taxes are getting lighter and burning less fuel.

Road officials make the same complaint. Further, highway interests — including road officials, road builders

and auto people — are politically resentful at seeing motor vehicle taxes used for public transit. Some of that resentment surfaced briefly Thursday.

FOR THE combined SEMTA and D-DOT systems, the farebox produces 30 percent of operating revenues, Salei said. Small bus programs for elderly and handicapped generate only 15 percent of their revenues from the farebox.

Under SEMTA's expansion plans, by 1990 total revenues will be about \$2.8 billion. The farebox will bring in about \$950 million, to be supplemented by federal and state subsidies.

That leaves \$60-70 million still to be raised by a regional tax. The largest subsidy, \$72.7 million, would be required if SEMTA chooses the all-bus alternative for serving Woodward corridor. The five light rail rapid transit alternatives would each require a subsidy of \$66.2 million to \$88.6 million annually, according to SEMTA projections.

If the tri-county population grows slightly to five million, the needed subsidy would be \$13 a person per year.

OTHER ANSWERS to public questions: Are there any plans to extend the rapid transit line north of Eight Mile Road? Yes, SEMTA wanted to plan the line to 16 Mile, but the federal government, which finances 80 percent of construction costs, requires SEMTA to plan in terms of the "minimum usable segment," said Salei. Consideration of a Gratiot line also had to be shelved because the federal government required study of only one corridor at a time.

How far apart will transit line stations be? "About one mile, north of

Grand Boulevard; a half-mile or less in downtown Detroit," said the general manager. Much business revitalization is expected around stations.

Would there be much noise if, as the SEMTA board has voted, the light rail line is elevated between Grand Boulevard and McNichols? While Highland Park is angry at the idea, Salei said, "There do not appear to be environmental problems that could not be mitigated by design," adding that the noise from Chicago and New York elevated lines could be avoided in southeast Michigan.

For the first time, Salei revealed his own design preference: the X1 alternative, which calls for placing the light rail underground from downtown Detroit to McNichols. It is this design that is called "Young's subway" in political circles. But he pointed out that "the politics have changed a lot in the last two or three years," and the subway idea is no longer the anathema it once was among suburbanites.

Why is the downtown Detroit People Mover an aerial line? Why couldn't it be below ground, like the subway? Salei said the idea had been considered but rejected because of the extreme cost — \$200 million or more — of construction. Problems included buildings, pilings and water and sewer lines.

roll call report

House rejects King's birthday as holiday

Here's how area Members of Congress were recorded on major roll call votes Nov. 8 through Nov. 14.

HOUSE

MARTIN LUTHER KING: The House rejected a bill making Martin Luther King's birthday, Jan. 15, a national holiday. The vote was 252 for and 133 against — short of the two-thirds majority required for passage by the short-cut parliamentary procedure under which the bill was brought to the floor.

The bill (HR 5461) may return to the floor under procedures which require only a simple majority for passage. The Senate has not acted on the bill.

Rep. Robert Garcia, D-N.Y., a supporter, said the new holiday would be "an appropriate testimonial to an extraordinary individual who dedicated his life to the cause of human rights."

Rep. Gene Taylor, R-Mo., an opponent, said Americans have respect for King, but that "there is a more appropriate way to honor him than through the costly method of creating another legal public holiday."

Members voting "yes" favored making Martin Luther King's birthday a national holiday.

Reps. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth, David Bonior, D-Mt. Clemens, William Ford, D-Taylor, William Brodhead, D-Detroit, and James Blanchard, D-Pleasant Ridge, voted "yes."

Rep. William Broomfield, R-Birmingham, voted "nay."

REGULATING MORTICIANS: The House voted, 223 for and 147 against, to block proposed Federal Trade Commission (FTC) regulation of the funeral industry. The vote came during debate on an FTC bill (HR 2313) headed for final passage and the Senate. The FTC had wanted to compel funeral homes to provide more complete consumer information, such as a more detailed explanation of prices.

Rep. Marty Russo, D-Ill., a supporter of exempting the funeral industry from FTC regulation, said: "If even there was a classic case of the federal bureaucracy entering an industry truly local in nature, and proceeding on the basis of little evidence of abuse, this is it."

Rep. Norman Dicks, D-Wash., an advocate of regulating morticians said "here is our chance to cut the cost of funerals drastically and allow consumers — your constituents — to buy what they can afford rather than have a funeral director thinks they should afford."

Members voting "yes" wanted to prohibit FTC regulation of the funeral industry.

Broomfield voted "yes." Bonior, Ford, Brodhead and Blanchard voted "nay." Pursell did not vote.

PUBLIC WORKS: The House rejected, 148 for and 320 against, attempting to kill a proposed \$2 billion public works fund to be channeled to local governments in times of high unemployment.

ployment. The standby fund, an addition to existing economic aid programs, would be released if unemployment nationally stays above 6.5 percent for three months. An estimated 10 percent of the country would benefit from the fund. The vote came during debate on an Economic Development Administration bill (HR 2063) later passed and sent to conference with the Senate.

Rep. Robert Bauman, R-Md., who supported killing the special public works fund, said the effect of the program would be "not to cure unemployment but to exacerbate inflation."

Rep. Robert Roe, D-N.J., an opponent, said: "We should not be reacting to catastrophe, we should be prepared ... and ready to go on contingency planning."

Members voting "nay" favored the standby public works program. Broomfield voted "yes."

Pursell, Bonior, Ford, Brodhead, and Blanchard voted "nay."

SENATE

AIR CONDITIONING SUBSIDY: By a vote of 77 for and 68 against, the Senate rejected an amendment to prevent the poor from receiving federal subsidies for air conditioning bills. The assistance would go only to those with a doctor's certification of need for air conditioning. It was offered to a bill (S1724) providing aid to the poor for heating and cooling their homes. The measure was headed for final passage and the House. Sen. Richard Schweiker, R-Pa., who supported the amendment, said taxpayers "will be rightfully outraged by an assistance program which provides air conditioning aid."

Sen. Alan Cranston, D-Cal., an opponent, said the Senate should not help a poor or elderly person survive the winter "but do nothing about a threat to his or her life in summer."

Senators voting "yes" opposed helping the poor pay for air conditioning. Michigan Sens. Donald Riegler, D, and Carl Levin, D, voted "nay."

MX MISSILE: The Senate rejected, 11 for and 77 against, an amendment to delete \$670 million for development of the MX missile system. The money is contained in a defense appropriations bill (HR 5359) later passed and sent to conference with the House. MX missiles are to be land-based. To elude Soviet targeting, they will be continually moved via underground railroads to various launching sites.

Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., a supporter, said the MX system "may" favor development of the MX missile system.

Riegler voted "yes." Levin voted "nay."

Hearings next for SEMTA

After the current round of informational meetings, the board of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority will hold a series of public hearings on its 1980 plan. Two will be held in Oakland County.

The first will be Monday, Dec. 3, in the Ferndale Community Center, 400 E. Nine Mile, a few blocks east of Woodward.

The second will be Tuesday, Dec. 4, in the commissioners auditorium in the Oakland County Service Center, 1200

N. Telegraph (north of Elizabeth Lake Road), Pontiac.

All sessions start at 7:30 p.m. For persons working in downtown Detroit, two hearings are scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 5, in the 12th-floor auditorium of the City-County Building, 2 Woodward. They will be held at noon and at 7:30 p.m.

It is advisable to arrive early and fill out a card in order to avoid a long wait for a microphone. It is also advisable to keep your remarks brief and to submit a letter if you need to go into detail.

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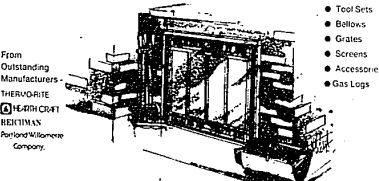
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