

Subway support

Residents boost light rail line

By TOM LONERGAN

Suburbs are generally considered "anti-subway" in the political battle on regional rapid transportation.

But nearly half of the western Wayne County residents who spoke at a Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority public hearing in Livonia this week favored a light rail line in the Woodward corridor as part of SEMTA's 1990 transportation plan.

Part of the light rail line of SEMTA's "preferred plan" is subway between downtown and the New Center area in Detroit.

The hearing, held in Livonia City Hall Monday night, drew only 16 who spoke before a panel that included SEMTA staff and three of the transportation authority's 15-member Board of Directors. Seven speakers endorsed a light rail line, while three favored an all-bus system.

A MAJOR bus supporter was the Automobile Club of Michigan. Spokesman Arthur Gibson said the subway and downtown people mover have not been proven "cost effective."

Virtually all who spoke questioned the cost for expanded mass transportation. The plan initially approved by the SEMTA board in April, which includes a light rail line up Woodward to Eight Mile Road and a people mover in downtown Detroit, is expected to cost \$1.4 billion just to put in place.

The federal government is expected to cover 80 percent of the capital cost, with the state picking up the remaining 20 percent.

"That also comes out of my pocket," said Lowell Peterson, an insurance salesman from Livonia, referring to the state and federal money.

Revenue to cover an expected operating deficit, which could reach \$55 million by 1990, "is going to come out of our pockets again," Peterson said.

He told SEMTA officials:

"You're going to say, 'Hey, we've got this system now. We can't let it go down the drain, so give me more money to run it.'"

An operating tax for SEMTA probably will have to be approved by voters around 1982. Under consideration are the personal income tax, combined sales and use tax and a property transfer tax.

SEMTA General Manager Larry E. Salei said the system would "break even through 1982." An operating tax could cost an area resident \$15 a year in 1990, he added.

A WESTLAND man who travels to work downtown using SEMTA's park and ride system favored the all bus alternative. Rail is not feasible because of the "area's low population density," said Joseph Kogelmann of Westland who works for the U.S. Census Bureau.

Kogelmann also opposed the downtown people mover, an experimental \$110 million monorail system designed to move downtown shoppers and convention visitors as "visually polluting" and "unnecessarily hazardous to traffic."

George Schaefer of Livonia, who said he has studied subways since 1915, encouraged SEMTA to make the system "useable at all times."

"When the system is needed most is when the weather is worst," said a cautious light rail endorsement came from David Tavidan of Livonia.

"It's a giant WPA project. I think I could accept that, because it's worthy," Tavidan said. WPA was a massive public works program started by the Roosevelt administration in the 1930s to reduce unemployment.

But Tavidan questioned the Woodward light rail's "tremendous cost... to provide service for a brief period of time in a total day."

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Official welcome SEMTA reception

For SEMTA General Manager Larry E. Salei, the mild tone of Monday's public hearing in Livonia on a regional rapid transportation plan was a welcome change.

"Two and a half years ago, we almost got stoned out of the suburbs," said Salei, who lives in Troy. "People thought public transportation was a dinosaur."

He says the change in attitude is primarily due to rising gasoline prices.

WHILE MOST attention has been focused on the rapid rail line up Woodward Avenue, the transportation plan includes more large and small buses for suburban communities and increased service.

SEMTA officials may meet stiffer opposition to the proposed subway in Detroit at hearings tonight and early next week in Macomb and Oakland counties. The electrified light rail line represents \$100 million of the \$1.4 billion in capital costs for the system.

The two Oakland meetings will be Monday, Dec. 3, in the Ferndale Community Center, 400 E. Nine Mile Road and Tuesday, Dec. 4, in the Oakland County Board of Commissioners Auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph in Pontiac. Both start at 7:30 p.m.

THE SUBWAY and proposed merger of the City of Detroit Department of Transportation (D-DOT) with SEMTA

are the two major issues to be resolved before the SEMTA Board of Directors reach a decision on a regional mass transportation plan.

Two board members said this week they doubt the decision will be made Dec. 18 as scheduled.

R.J. Alexander, who represents Oakland County, said "we must have a total commitment for merger," before the SEMTA board will make a final decision on the mass transportation plan.

"We can't have a regional system and a two-headed monster," Alexander said.

Merger negotiations are underway between Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, Livonia Mayor (and SEMTA Board Chairman) Edward McNamara and Gov. William Milliken. A legislative committee in Lansing is also studying the issue.

THE MERGER issue could upset a compromise on the Woodward subway reached last April between Detroit and suburban representatives. In SEMTA's "preferred plan," the light rail is only underground from downtown to the New Center area.

Both Alexander and Dewitt Henry, who represents outer Wayne County on the SEMTA board, voted for the subway earlier this year.

Henry said he would vote for an all bus system if no agreement on merger is reached.

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East Lansing	Tue. Nov. 20 Thurs. Nov. 29 7:30 pm	Thurs. Dec. 6 7:30 pm
INGHAM COUNTY		
Farmington Hills	Fri. Nov. 23 Fri. Nov. 30 7:30 pm	Fri. Dec. 7 7:30 pm

LOCATION	FREE SESSIONS (come to either)	SEMINAR STARTS
WAYNE COUNTY		
Troy	Mon. Nov. 18 Wed. Nov. 28 7:30 pm	Wed. Dec. 5 7:30 pm
Ann Arbor	Sat. Nov. 24 Sat. Dec. 1 10:00 am	Sat. Dec. 6 10:00 am
WASHTENAW COUNTY		
Dearborn	Tue. Nov. 20 Thurs. Nov. 29 7:30 pm	Thurs. Dec. 6 7:30 pm

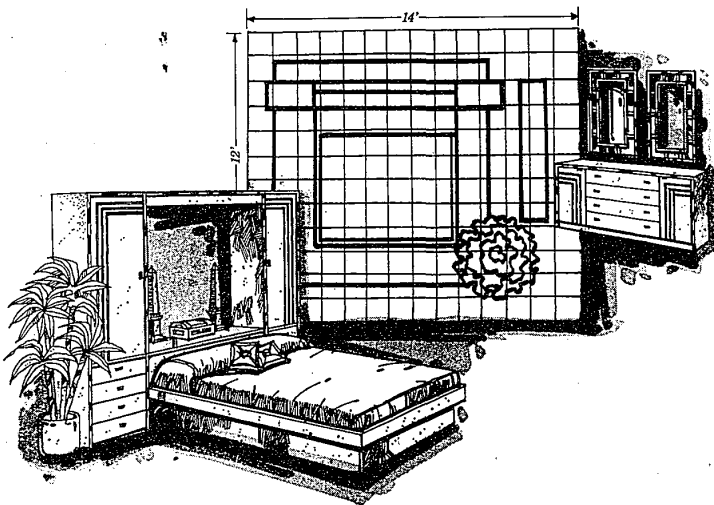


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