

editorial opinion

Holiday is time to think about an issue of life

For most of us, it is the season of "peace, good will to men," of "God and sinners reconciled," of Scrooge-like hearts being softened.

Others, however, feel no such warmth of emotion. They are planning a campaign to reinstitute capital punishment in Michigan, after more than 130 years.

An odd subject to think about two days after the birthdate of the Savior, you say? On the contrary, we think the Christmas season is the perfect time to reflect the proposal to take the lives of certain persons who have run afoul of the law.

The petition drive has been launched. It is guided by persons of considerable political skill. There is a chance it will land on the ballot in 1980 or '82.

THERE IS MUCH popular support in suburbia for the death penalty, and we know it. Polls have been shown as much as 80 percent of the respondents favoring the death penalty.

Nevertheless, the editors firmly oppose the death penalty. We would discourage people from even signing the initiatory petition that would amend the Michigan Constitution to allow executions.

It is one thing to fill out a legislator's poll at the kitchen table and quite another to really inflict death.

It is easy to sign a petition when someone gives you the soft-sell argument that "this is only to give the people a chance to vote" and another to send someone to the grave.

Facing a bedsheet ballot with proposals and candidates, it will be simple to click the "yes" lever on one proposition but a far different matter to hear the sizzle of the electric chair or the snap of a neck on the gallows.

THERE IS A POPULAR feeling that the prisons have failed to rehabilitate, as reformers promised

us they would. We share that feeling.

The frustration is carried to the step of figuring, "Well, wouldn't we be safer if we just wiped criminals off the face of the earth?" It is tempting to agree that a hired gun like Jesse Bishop or a cold-blooded punk like Gary Gilmore deserved death.

The real problem is that for every Bishop, there are several persons who have killed out of marital jealousy or an intra-family argument. How do you write a law, then, which condemns only the Gilmores and Bishops and not the "one-time" slayers who predominate?

How far do you trust the courts? If the term "court" evokes images of a Holmes, think instead of a DelRio. Think of yourself facing such a judge.

Think of the power judges have over your pocket-books, your community's zoning, your company's operations, your union's right to strike. Then ask yourself if you want to give the same courts power over your life.

ASK YOURSELF: Will an execution restore the victim to life — or just place a second graveestone beside the first?

Ethnic groups are concerned that more than half the persons on Death Row are blacks and chicanos, though they make up only one-tenth of the population. Whites are concerned that, despite these statistics, four of the last five persons executed are white males. Clearly, there is room for all races to have qualms about how the system of executions and death penalties operates.

We would prefer to have no part of the death penalty system.

At this holy season, we prefer to hearken to the words of the one who told us to rise above the hoary law of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

How rapid transit plan was hatched 10 years ago

I hit the "end" and "send" buttons on my editing terminal and Tom Loneragan's story on the SEMTA decision was ready for print. It was the end of the day Dec. 18, 1979.

I burned the date in my memory. The board of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) had approved a \$1.4 billion-plus 1999 plan that included a light rail line underground from downtown Detroit to Six Mile, gobs of buses and commuter train improvements.

Sure, there will have to be federal approval. Yes, there will be a lot of posturing in the Michigan Legislature. Of course, there will have to be an operating tax vote in 1982.

But Holy Christmas! I thought to myself. Maybe it's really going to happen.

I TURNED TO my massive file labelled "SEMTA" and pulled out the green, 10-page "News from TALUS" release. The date on it was Aug. 5, 1969. Ten years, four months and two weeks had passed.

Will Hardy, the PR man then for the Transportation and Land Use Study, had phoned it to me that day so we could make deadline.

A \$3 billion build-up of transportation facilities by 1990 . . . was proposed today by TALUS, it began.

Integral in the proposed system is a \$1.1 billion 81-mile rapid transit system coordinated with a swift-moving fleet of 1,000 new buses and a \$2 billion expansion of freeways and highways.

It was unveiled by Irving J. Rubin, TALUS director, to the TALUS administrative committee headed by one R.J. Alexander. If the name sounds familiar, it's because Alexander is a member of the SEMTA board today. He abstained on the Dec. 18 vote — for reasons I won't go into — but it's interesting that in the 1969 release he was quoted as saying the plan is preliminary and will be subject to review and change.

TALUS WAS A 4½-year, \$5 million project of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

Catch the timing: From the day the preliminary plan was unveiled to the SEMTA vote, it was 10 years. From the beginning of the TALUS project, 15 years. By the time the first shovel of dirt was turned for a rapid transit line, it'll be 1983 — 18 years from the start of the study, if we're lucky.

The TALUS report proposed the addition, after 1975, to the freeway network of another 194 miles of freeway, most of it in suburban areas



Tim Richard

and none less than six lanes in width. Estimated cost: \$1.3 billion . . .

Consolidation of existing public transportation systems. SEMTA and D-DOT are on the verge of progress, but it hasn't happened yet.

Upgrading of facilities and service on the Grand Trunk Western commuter line to Pontiac . . . Excellent Progress there, with more to come.

For 1990 TALUS proposed a Priority I rapid transit line . . . to Pontiac (25.5 miles) on a line paralleling Woodward Avenue . . . SEMTA's first phase will go to Ten Mile, about half the proposed distance. Cost will be in the \$900 million ballpark.

Three other high priority rapid transit lines were proposed by TALUS: to Dearborn in the Michigan Avenue corridor, to the Southfield Freeway in the Schoolcraft corridor, to Warren in the Grosse Pointe corridors.

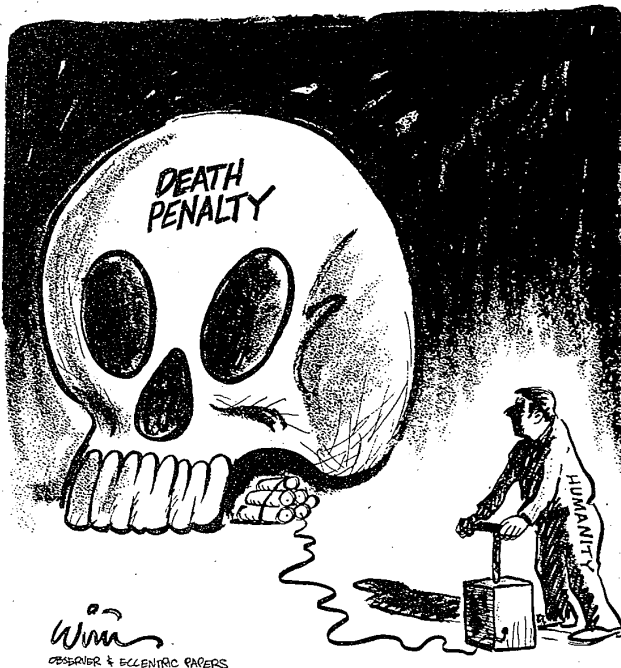
BY 1975, SAID TALUS, work should be complete on the I-96 Jeffries freeway (it took until the end of 1977), I-96 from Roseville to Southfield (part are yet to be started); I-275 from Monroe to Novi (it took until 1976); and M-14 from Livonia to Ann Arbor (we waited until November 1979).

TALUS called for completion of the M-275 freeway from Novi to M-59 by 1975 and the segment to Davisburg thereafter. It took until this month for the State Transportation Commission to reverse itself and decide to build M-275 at all.

Given the mood in Washington, M-275's backers may well be shot down again. They may not have heard of the energy shortage and the population doldrums, but Transportation Secretary Neil Goldschmidt is a little more up to date.

The Northwestern Highway extension from the city of Southfield to M-275 was supposed to be finished by 1975. It's still a question mark.

Ah, planning! Planning, planning, planning.



Catching-up job

Transit funds are spread

The week before Christmas, the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) board voted on a final plan for a regional transportation system. This plan would be the first phase of a system that might take as long as 50 years to finish.

The first phase will be finished in the mid-to-late 1980s if the federal government agrees to fund it and the people vote additional taxes to cover operating deficits when it finally begins operating.

The plan will substantially increase bus service in the area, substantially increase demand-response small-bus service (Dial-a-Ride) in less populated areas, and increase commuter rail service — not only from Pontiac to Detroit but institute new commuter rail service from Ann Arbor to Detroit and from Mt. Clemens to Detroit.

THE CONTROVERSIAL part of the plan is the new 'light-rail service (modern trolley cars) that extends from Renaissance Center in Detroit to 10 Mile Road in Oakland County. The portion that runs from Ren Cen to Six Mile is planned to be subway (subway).

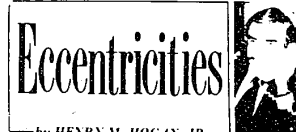
The SEMTA board also tentatively approved a second phase which would bring the light rail line up to 16 Mile Road and out Gratiot Avenue to 15 Mile, but this would not be started until the early 1990s.

Detroit is the only major metropolitan area in the United States that doesn't have some sort of rapid transit program. Most other major metro areas started their programs in the 1920s, so Detroit has a lot of catching up to do.

There is much rhetoric that the SEMTA plan is too expensive and that the suburbs aren't getting their fair share of the dollars to be spent.

Under the original plan espoused by the mayor of Detroit, 77 percent of the construction dollars would have been entirely in the city of Detroit, but the residents of Detroit would have borne only about 25 percent of the operating deficits.

As finally approved, the plan adds \$74 million of



by HENRY M. HOGAN JR.

construction in Oakland County which helps even out the dollars spent.

IT IS OBVIOUS that if the Detroit area is to have a regional transportation plan, most of the first dollars will be spent in Detroit, the hub of the region.

If Detroit is ever to have a good regional plan, now is the time to start because the federal government is dedicating part of the oil windfall profits tax to public transportation. If Detroit doesn't get a share, the taxes will still be collected and other cities will get the dollars.

If southeastern Michigan were to wait until energy shortages forced it into an extended transportation service at some later date, the system would cost much more, and the dollars will be much harder to find.

A well developed transportation plan has saved many metropolitan areas from deterioration and has added new economic growth which Detroit could certainly use. Toronto is a prime example of how a regional transit plan can revitalize a city.

Only the future will tell if the SEMTA board is farsighted or extravagant.

But the final decision still rests with the people because they will be asked to approve the necessary taxes to operate the system.

The writer represents Oakland County on the SEMTA board.

A change for the shorter

I'm taller than my mother, and she is taller than her mother. My husband is taller than both of my in-laws, and they outgrew their parents.

In many families, children are reaching heights their mothers and fathers did not attain. When one goes to a museum and views the anthropological exhibits from early cavemen to 20th century Homo sapiens, these manik-type figures display a noticeable increase in height. It's obvious that a bigger "dummy" is needed to represent modern man.

There are definite advantages to being tall. For instance, you can eat more. The familiar expression, "I'm full up to here," is usually accompanied by a gesture involving pointing to or grabbing one's throat. If indeed that throat is 5 feet above the ground instead of 4, there are an additional 12 inches into which one could swallow sweet sustenance.

WE ALL KNOW that hot air rises. This leads me to conclude that tall people breathe warmer air, which certainly has to be advantageous during the long Michigan winters.

If you are very tall, you might be lucky enough to have your nose above the noxious gases and even get an occasional whiff of oxygen.

Despite the fact that I like being tall and enjoy food, warm pure air and generally being above a lot of other people, my observations have led me to believe that we must reverse this growth trend.

I personally plan to slouch and wear low heels. I will also encourage my daughters to marry men who are shorter than they. I think the entire world would change for the better if we could have some control of the height of future generations.

THIS CONCEPT of shrinking society would help



Sheila Rosen Seitzman

solve many of the problems we face today.

Shorter people would take up and need less space. If houses were built smaller there would be room for more of them. Downsized furnishings would be made from dwindling resources.

We know smaller cars take less metal to build and need less gas to run, and some of them certainly need compact passengers to utilize the back seats.

It would take less food to feed these individuals and a reduction of material to make their clothing.

Our visions and our ideas could still soar; it would just be a simple matter of taking up less space and using less energy. Just think how many molehills we could make out of a mountain.

Sheila Rosen Seitzman, a resident of Orchard Lake, was born and raised in New York City. She is a speech pathologist who has worked in public schools, hospitals and rehabilitation clinics and has had a private practice. She is the mother of three daughters and is married to a patent attorney.

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