

Rail to Oakland County adds \$75 million

Last week's decision by the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) to extend a light rail rapid transit line into south Oakland County will add nearly \$75 million in capital costs to the regionwide transportation plan.

The plan, which includes a subway up Woodward Avenue to McNichols (Six Mile) Road, now carries an estimated \$1.5 billion-plus price tag (in inflated 1990 dollars).

The federal government is expected to cover 80 percent of the capital cost with the state pledging 20 percent.

SUBURBAN and Detroit representatives on the 15-member SEMTA board agreed on the 1990 transportation plan last week.

The plan's future now rests with state and federal authorities, who will likely make critical funding decisions in the next year.

The subway's first funding test will be in the Michigan Legislature, which is due to decide on \$4 million for pre-

liminary engineering studies by Feb. 15.

An additional \$16 million for preliminary engineering will be sought from the U.S. Urban Mass Transportation Authority (UMTA).

SEMTA plans to apply for federal funding within the next month. SEMTA General Manager Larry E. Salci said last week he hopes federal commitments for the entire transportation plan can be obtained by April.

SEMTA has a 1976 federal government commitment that \$600 million will be provided for regional transportation. Detroit Mayor Coleman Young obtained that pledge from former President Gerald Ford's administration.

Recently, however, federal officials have said up to \$300 million may be committed to the area.

A FINAL environmental impact study of the Woodward rail line is required prior to federal approval. The electric light rail system will be trains



SEMTA General Manager Larry E. Salci (left) said last week he hopes federal commitments for the entire transportation plan can be obtained by April.

of three or four trolley-type cars powered by overhead wires.

The route of the system beyond the Michigan State Fairgrounds south of Eight Mile Road has yet to be determined.

Local officials in south Oakland County prefer a route along the Grand Trunk Western Railroad right-of-way. But the system north of Eight Mile

Road may have to be elevated in some areas.

SEMTA officials say the rail line along Woodward would be more accessible for passengers.

"It's (the route) going to cause controversy," SEMTA's Salci said. He expects preliminary engineering studies on the trolley system to take a year.

THE SUBWAY to McNichols may still see a battle at the local and state level. Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy, a Republican, has said he "won't stand" for a subway to Six Mile and Michigan Senate Majority Leader William Faust, D-Westland, hinted last week he may oppose the subway preliminary funding.

What effect the subway opposition has on federal funding remains to be seen. SEMTA officials have maintained the Woodward route was chosen for the subway and rail line to rekindle economic growth along the corridor. Resulting economic growth, they say, is a federal mandate for rapid transit funding.

SEMTA'S TIMETABLE for the rail line is as follows:

- April, 1980 — Final environmental study completed.
- June, 1980 — Public hearings on preliminary engineering plans.
- Sept., 1980 — UMTA approval of \$16

million preliminary engineering grant.

- July, 1982 — UMTA approval of final design/construction grant.
- June, 1983 — Final design completed.
- May, 1983 — Construction begins.

The earliest the trolley-line would be ready for use would be late 1986 or early 1987, according to Salci.

Buses, however, would be purchased at a much faster rate than now possible depending on when federal approval of the plan is obtained. SEMTA plans to expand both large and small bus lines in the suburbs, with better service between the major shopping centers emphasized.

No matter what the federal government approves and what share of the system's capital cost it covers, additional tax revenues will be needed during the mid and late 1980s to cover the transportation system's operating deficit.

SEMTA plans to put a tax proposal before Wayne, Oakland and Macomb County voters on or before 1982.

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