

Oakland snubs subway but stays in SEMTA

By TOM LONERGAN

Strong opposition to a SEMTA subway in Detroit apparently won't lead to an Oakland County withdrawal from the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA).

Recent interviews with 11 county commissioners and two top county officials revealed little support for SEMTA's planned subway along Woodward from downtown Detroit to McNichols (Six Mile) Road and extension of the rail line at ground level to 10 Mile in Royal Oak.

With the exceptions of Commissioner Henry Hoot, R-Bloomfield, and Road Commission Managing Director John Grubba, those polled said they aren't about to suggest Oakland operate its own transportation system.

COUNTY EXECUTIVE Daniel T. Murphy is "absolutely opposed" to the Woodward corridor subway, the main cog of SEMTA's proposed 1990 transportation plan. But he is equally adamant that the county remain in the 12-year old regional transportation authority.

"I have not been in favor of withdrawal," Murphy said last week, "and I've not seen enough to convince me to today that withdrawal would serve a useful purpose."

"We have to be at the negotiating table, and they (SEMTA) have to recognize that we think it (the subway) is a pork barrel."

The county is not studying withdrawal possibilities "right now," Murphy said.

Last April, the Republican county executive vetoed a county board resolution that Oakland leave SEMTA. The board action followed SEMTA's initial decision to build a subway from downtown to Grand Boulevard.

At last week's county board meeting — the first since the SEMTA board's decision Dec. 18 — there were no withdrawal proposals.

SEMTA'S DECISION to extend the subway to McNichols was "a political move, not a move on its merits," Mur-



JOHN PETERSON

phy said. He predicted metropolitan area voters would reject a required operating tax for public transit.

SEMTA officials have said they'll seek voter approval of a transit tax during or before 1982 to help cover expected operating costs. The system's annual deficit could reach \$65 million by 1990.

A larger share of the estimated \$1.5 billion in federal and state funds needed for the transportation system should be spent in the suburbs, Murphy said, "if they (SEMTA) ever expect the people to approve anything by a vote."

More than half (\$805 million) of the system's capital investment is earmarked for the modern light rail trolley line. About \$75 million will be spent to extend the line into southern Oakland County.

THE RAIL extension has been touted as a compromise between Detroit and Oakland County representatives on the SEMTA board. Detroit has five of the 15 SEMTA board seats, while Oakland has three.

But the road commission's John Grubba, long a subway opponent, re-

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ALEX PERINOFF

fers to the compromise as "a cave-in."

"I hope Oakland County will continue with the possibility that if the subway is approved (by state and federal officials), they will withdraw," Grubba said.

"The chances now of federal approval are good," Grubba continued. "The

only way it can be derailed is if the suburban leadership forgets the idea now that they can compromise, because there is no compromise."

WALLACE GABLER, R-Royal Oak, chairman of the Board of Commissioners, proposed the rail line be extended

into Oakland County after county SEMTA representative Henry Hogan assured him there were 10 required SEMTA board votes for the subway, even if the three Oakland representatives opposed it.

It's Gabler's hope that the rail extension will strengthen south Oakland commissioners' support for SEMTA and thus forestall any county board move to push for withdrawal.

Gabler's stance was criticized by six of his Republican colleagues, including Commissioner John Peterson of Rochester, at last week's county Republican caucus meeting.

In a prepared statement, Peterson said Gabler's support of the extension and Hogan's vote for the subway and extension, highlighted the Republican leadership's failure "to effectively speak for the citizens of this county."

"It seems to me we should consider what we will do about our SEMTA board appointee (Hogan)," Peterson said.

"We should decide quickly whether we will stand up to SEMTA . . ."

Peterson referred to Republican differences over leaving SEMTA as "an example of our impotence."

"I for one am no longer a follower," he said.

"The rest of you may wish to consider these remarks carefully before you allow impotence on our combined part to cause a Republican defeat next November."

COUNTY DEMOCRATS aren't jumping for joy about the subway and rail extension, even though they have never supported leaving SEMTA.

"Who's fault is 'no fair share?'" asked Commissioner Alexander Perinoff of Southfield. "It's our own fault."

"We've done nothing. All we do is sit back in the hinterlands and bemoan the fact we'll pay for a subway that benefits Detroit."

"If we withdraw, our money will still be used and we're going to sit out here with nothing," Perinoff said he was "not tremendously happy" with the trolley line extension.

New Democratic Caucus Chairman Hubert Price Jr. of Pontiac said Democrats are developing a plan for SEMTA "which contains Oakland County's needs as opposed to hell no, no subway."

"It certainly does not begin to address needs of the residents of Pontiac," Price said of SEMTA's plan.

"We can't wait till 2010. The energy crisis is now."

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Sluggish tourism benefit: traffic death rate falls

For the fifth time since 1974, Michigan's traffic death toll last year hovered below 2,000.

According to the Michigan State Police, incomplete figures show 1,810 people lost their lives on state roads and highways during 1979.

That's 266 fewer, or about 13 percent lower, than the toll of 2,076 in 1978. The 1979 toll will probably increase slightly when records are finalized.

State Police traffic officers attributed the decreased death toll to the lower speed limit and a slower economy in some sectors, particularly tourism in northern Michigan.

Uncertainty over the availability of gasoline during May and June, as well as bad weather, caused more people in populous southern Michigan to stay closer to home.

DURING DECEMBER, 132 people were killed on state roads, down 26 from 157 in 1978. The state's traffic death toll for the Christmas weekend was 19, or 12 fewer than in 1978. During the four-day New Year's weekend, 22 were killed in highway accidents, 15 more than a year earlier.

The state's all-time high traffic death toll was 2,487 in 1969.

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