

Tuesday forecast: A House yes for SEMTA subway

By TOM LONERGAN

Initial funding for southeast Michigan's proposed light rail system will likely be approved by the Michigan Senate Tuesday.

That's the prediction of several area state senators interviewed late last week.

A resolution freeing \$950,000 for the subway surface rail line which will run from downtown Detroit to Royal Oak was defeated Thursday by an 18-18 tie vote in the Senate. However, the measure was put back on the Senate calendar for a vote Tuesday.

"When they (subway supporters) get that close, it's Doomsday," said Sen. Donald Bishop, R-Rochester, a

subway opponent. Bishop's district includes the Birmingham-Bloomfield area and West Bloomfield.

Bishop voted no, as did Sen. Doug Ross, D-Oak Park. Sens. William Faust, D-Westland, William Huffman, D-Madison Heights, and Robert Geake, R-Northville, voted yes.

"I believe we'll have the votes Tuesday," said Geake, whose district includes Livonia and Redford Township. "I'm hopeful some of the out-state Republicans will decide to give us a vote."

The Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA), which operates a \$1.5 billion regional transportation plan in December, can't apply for initial federal funding until the state legislature first approves the lo-

cal-regional-share of 20 percent. The House of Representatives will tackle the issue after the Senate.

THE \$885 MILLION subway-surface rail line has been the most controversial element of SEMTA's plans for years. The modern trolley car line would run underground to McNichols (Six Mile) Road and on surface to 10 Mile.

"I'm waiting for someone to say this is why we have to have it (the subway) and sell it to me," Bishop said. "The figures don't warrant a subway system as far as I can see."

Regarding the subway's cost, Bishop has an unusual ally in his liberal colleague, Ross.

"No one yet, in hard dollars and cents terms, has been able to persuade me that an additional \$800 million to build a subway makes sense as opposed

to added buses (on Woodward) or all-surface light rail," Ross said.

Ross, whose district includes Southfield and the Farmington area, met with SEMTA General Manager Larry Salci Friday regarding the subway's cost and SEMTA's opinion of its advantages over the alternatives.

ACCORDING TO SEMTA, one major reason the Woodward corridor was chosen for the subway is to promote future economic development.

"That's development that's drawn from other places in the region," Ross said. "That is not new development in the region."

However, Ross appears to be undecided. "How I vote depends on how I feel about what I learn," he said.

Before Friday, Ross said no one — not the mayor (Coleman Young), the governor's office or SEMTA — had

asked him to vote for or against the subway system.

Huffman, whose district includes the Troy area, was confident the initial state funding will be approved Tuesday.

The \$950,000 at stake is only part of \$4 million SEMTA is expecting from the state to conduct preliminary engineering studies on the subway system. SEMTA can't apply for a \$16 million preliminary engineering grant from the federal government until the system clears the state hurdle.

"IT'S YOUR last chance to say 'I'm going to vote for a mass transit system for the metro Detroit area,'" Huffman said.

"I could find you 40 reasons to vote against it," he said, but added, "it's too far down the road. There is no alternative."

"Most of those who vote against it, they want something."

Huffman noted that two key votes "to pay for all of this" also face the Senate this year.

The first is a renewal of a special license plate registration and title transfer fees. It currently provides SEMTA's operating revenue. The tax is due to expire April 15.

And Huffman predicted SEMTA would try and get the state gasoline tax increased 2 cents a gallon to fund future operating deficits, expected to reach an estimated \$65 million by 1990.

The Senate resolution also directs SEMTA to study extending the rail line to Pontiac and building a spur to the Pontiac Silverdome. The extensions, however, probably won't be built during the first phase of the regional transit expansion.

Market mum on bad flour

A suspected shipment of contaminated whole wheat flour has been removed from the shelves of area Farmer Jack supermarkets, according to the mill that manufactured it. Farmer Jack corporate owners, Borman Foods, declined comment through a spokesman. The spokesman also refused to comment on the type of contamination suspected, the quantity of flour involved and whether any of it was sold to consumers before the suspected contamination surfaced.

The flour is sold under the label "Robin Hood Whole Wheat Flour." It is made by Minneapolis-based International Multifoods.

A spokesperson for Multifoods said their sales agreement with Bor-

man allowed the Detroit supermarket to return shipments suspected of contamination. The questionable shipment arrived in Detroit three weeks ago, said the Multifoods spokesperson.

The shipment hasn't returned to Minneapolis yet, according to the Multifoods spokesperson, and the Minneapolis company doesn't know if the flour is actually contaminated, or, if it is contaminated, what with.

A spokesman for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Detroit office said the agency was not aware of the issue. He said foodstuffs can be sent back for causes considered unimportant to the FDA, like poor quality labeling.

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