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Executive Editor

## Can SEMTA rival Washington's Metro?

Anyone know where we can borrow a Magic Carpet which comfortably seats 4.8 million people?

That would be just the right size for a quick trip by the residents of metropolitan Detroit to Washington, D. C.

The object of this junket would be to take a ride on Metrorail, the capitol's new, high-speed combined surface/underground rail system.

In this way residents of the Motor City and its suburbs could learn first-hand how magnificent mass transit can be.

NOW THAT OUR Southeastern Michigan Transit Authority (SEMTA) is getting into the subway business in a mini way, with a line out Woodward Avenue, it might be good for residents to learn about a modern transportation system.

Washington is certainly a great place to start.

My wife and I recently had an opportunity to sample that city's Metrorail. We had flown into National Airport, where the Metro's Blue Line sweeps into view and at that point is elevated.

We were heading for Union Station and learned we could ride a Blue train downtown, hop off at Metro Center Station and board a Red Line train to Union Station.

It took a few minutes to figure out how to purchase a farecard, which at first seems to be a devilish way to go, but like everything else it's a method that a person can eventually accept.

The train ran above ground a couple of miles, then dipped below the surface. It seemed to be racing along about 50 miles an hour.

WHAT REALLY IMPRESSED us was the extreme beauty of the stations and the cars, plus the train's quiet, speed and ease of operation.

There was something else — the complete lack of graffiti, the bane of ancient systems like New York's.

We had obtained a map of the system, and when we exited the Blue Line and strolled onto the spacious Metro Station platform, I paused to study the map.

Hardly had I unfolded it when a fellow in civilian clothes was asking, "Sir, I'm from the Metro Transit security police. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

When I said we were transferring to the Red Line and heading for Union Station, he quickly gave directions, even suggesting we go to the first car in

the train so as to be closer to the Union Station escalator we would be using.

AS WE SETTLED down in the Red Line car, a man stepped inside and the doors closed. He casually glanced fore and aft as the train took off in its smooth start.

"Hey," I whispered to Marilyn, "There's another one, a Metro cop. They must be on every train."

As it turned out, the guess was quite correct. The Metro system is security personified. That best explains things like no graffiti or trouble in stations and on trains.

It's a concept that certainly pays dividends in passenger safety and comfort.

We agreed Washington has a tremendous mass transit system and wouldn't it be wonderful if SEMTA can end up with something like this?

ONCE BACK HOME I dispatched a request to the Metro folks in Washington, asking for data on their system.

All sorts of fascinating stuff arrived.

Metro is a combined bus/rail hookup. Right now there are 30.76 miles of rails serving 34 stations. This will continue to grow until 1985, when it hits 101 miles with 88 stations.

Estimated cost: \$5.6 billion.

Of course, SEMTA is talking about eight miles of rail in its present plan, 2.5 miles underground and the rest surface and overhead to the State Fairgrounds at Eight Mile Road.

Like Washington's Metro system, SEMTA's buses will feed into the rail. Can there be more rail lines for the Metro Detroit area? Who knows? But we can hope.

METRO TRANSIT AUTHORITY officials report that during 1978 about 139.9 million passengers rode buses or trains to reach jobs, stores or recreational facilities.

When rail lines were extended in 1978 to Silver Springs and New Carrollton, 200 Metrobus routes were adjusted to save costs and eliminate duplicate services.

But most fascinating was the addition of 4,000 parking spaces near the rail terminals to serve customers. From its opening day, New Carrollton's 1,700-space lot was filled before 8:30 a.m.

One in four Metro riders had previously used autos to get to work, a survey by the Washington Post showed.



Metrorail stations feature attractive and functional barrel vaulting which helps deaden sounds. Compared to subways in New York and Chicago, Washington's system is cathedral quiet. Floors, stairs,

benches and walls are spotless. Its cars sparkle, thanks to constant upkeep. (Photo courtesy Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.)

WASHINGTON'S ECONOMY has been given a happy jolt, thanks to the transit system. Stores near Metro entrances now report Christmas-like crowds almost all year, the authority said.

Office-retail developments at Farragut North and Rosslyn total \$35 million. A \$200 million Metro Center downtown renewal project, and a \$6 million renovation of the downtown Woodward & Lothrop store are under way.

The city's Board of Trade has presented its first "Golden Link" award to the transit group.

It reads: "Metro has made the most significant contribution to the community, especially its economic health and well being, and helped link the area more closely together."

Does all this seem like things we'd like to hear said about SEMTA?

IN A WASHINGTON POST story on the economic impact of Metro, a fellow named Leonard Abel, who is building apartments along the Blue Line in Pentagon City and the Red Line near Nicholson Lane, Md., is quoted:

"People who think they have to be a two-car family will find they only need one. They can walk to Metro and let the wife keep the car at home."

Abel goes on to explain that with gasoline prices going up and Metro getting more convenient, people will change habits. "Downtown Washington will be so economically viable, it won't even be funny," he said.

The Post talked to Raymond Kass, of a large real estate management firm, who said downtown office space is now hard to find, despite continued construction.

Retail rentals, said Kass, have jumped from \$13 per square foot to \$25 and \$30 for space near Metro stops.

FOR TOO MANY YEARS, I'm afraid, the subway concept in Detroit has been written off. Costs were always given as a factor. And the soil — it wasn't right. Besides, there were plenty of inexpensive cars available and gas was 24 cents a gallon. Who needs rails, especially if they're underground?

Well, times change, and apparently our understanding of the soil wasn't what it should have been.

Larry E. Saici, general manager of SEMTA, has said that the land beneath Detroit and the inner suburbs is clay, formed when this area was covered by a lake.

Contractors installing a subway would drill through it, not excavate and blast out bedrock, as had to be done in New York, for example.

Costs are still going to be astronomical. But to turn our backs on this sort of mass transit approach might be even more expensive.

FROM ALL THE CLIPS and magazine articles sent from Washington, one quote really seemed to hit the target dead center.

Appearing in the Luther Place Newsletter, it said: "The miracle of the decade in Washington is Metro. It is a living example of good judgment, stewardship of resources, community cooperation and sensitivity to creation. It is a step away from pollution, individualism on highways and senseless enslavement to the car."

That really says it all.

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