

County revolt threat prompts SEMTA warning

By TOM LONERGAN

McNamara, of Livonia.

The letter particularly takes issue with Fessler's, and the road commission's, statements that the county would be immediately eligible for federal and state transportation funds.

Because it is the designated recipient of federal funds for the region, SEMTA says the county would have to go through the regional agency to obtain any federal money.

Gov. William Milliken concurs that SEMTA be the designated recipient, the letter adds. At the state level, an Oakland system "would have to compete with SEMTA for already difficult-to-secure transit funds," the letter said, because the Michigan Legislature would have to decide the county's eligibility.

"There is no dependable source of funds for transit within the county, and such a tax is not within the county's authority according to present laws," the SEMTA letter said.

THE ROAD commission argues that SEMTA's regional plan — particularly the combined subway, elevated and surface rail system along Woodward Avenue — favors Detroit at the expense of better service for Oakland County.

It said "heavy new taxes will cer-

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— SEMTA letter

tainly be required" once the system is in operation and that Oakland County, "because of its relative affluence, will pay a disproportionate share of this expense . . . and receive only negligible benefits."

SEMTA's initial estimate to put the regional plan in operation is \$1.4 billion, including \$750 million for the Woodward corridor rail.

The regional authority said a study earlier this year showed both the bus and rail alternatives would cost "less than \$20 per resident" to operate depending on the form of taxation and income level of the region in the 1980s.

Such a tax would have to be approved by voters in a regional referendum, SEMTA added.

EVEN BEFORE that bridge is crossed, SEMTA fears Oakland's leaving the regional agency could jeopard-

ize the \$600 million promised by the federal government to get the system off the ground.

SEMTA faces a major hurdle later this year in the state legislature, which must approve preliminary engineering funds for the rail system.

The road commission is banking on getting 15 percent of that \$600 million. It says the Urban Mass Transportation Agency (UMTA) would be forced to review the \$600 million commitment if the county leaves SEMTA, and the county could urge it get a proportional share of the money.

SEMTA says its plan "contains considerably more" than the 4.8-mile subway, which has received most public and political attention.

SEMTA listed expansion of large buses by 125 on regular routes and 195 on express routes and 330 small buses for curb-to-curb service. It also pro-

poses to improve commuter rail service between Pontiac and Detroit.

The transportation agency noted its ridership on 18 bus routes in Oakland County increased almost 12 percent in the past year and 21.6 percent since April 1977.

The four round trip trains from Pontiac carry 55 percent more riders than in April 1977, including a 19 percent jump in the past year.

CITING AN almost three-year-old survey, the road commission says only 10 percent of all Oakland County transportation trips are made to Wayne County, including downtown Detroit. The survey was taken before the March 1977 opening of Renaissance Center.

But SEMTA says its ridership study of a light rail system along Woodward shows the highest proportion of transit riders would be from Oakland County who would get on the rail at Eight Mile after driving or taking the bus or commuter rail to the State Fairgrounds.

"The commuting patterns now and in the future will be those that necessitate large numbers of people entering and leaving the county," according to SEMTA. "Forcing people to transfer between an Oakland bus and a regional bus will not encourage ridership."

SEMTA noted that the majority of the 13,000 who use Oakland route buses each weekday travel over county boundaries.

Besides the large buses and commuter rail, SEMTA operates three small bus Dial-A Ride programs in county cities and has a five-month-old Oakland County Advanced Reservation Transit (OCART) system for elderly and handicapped.

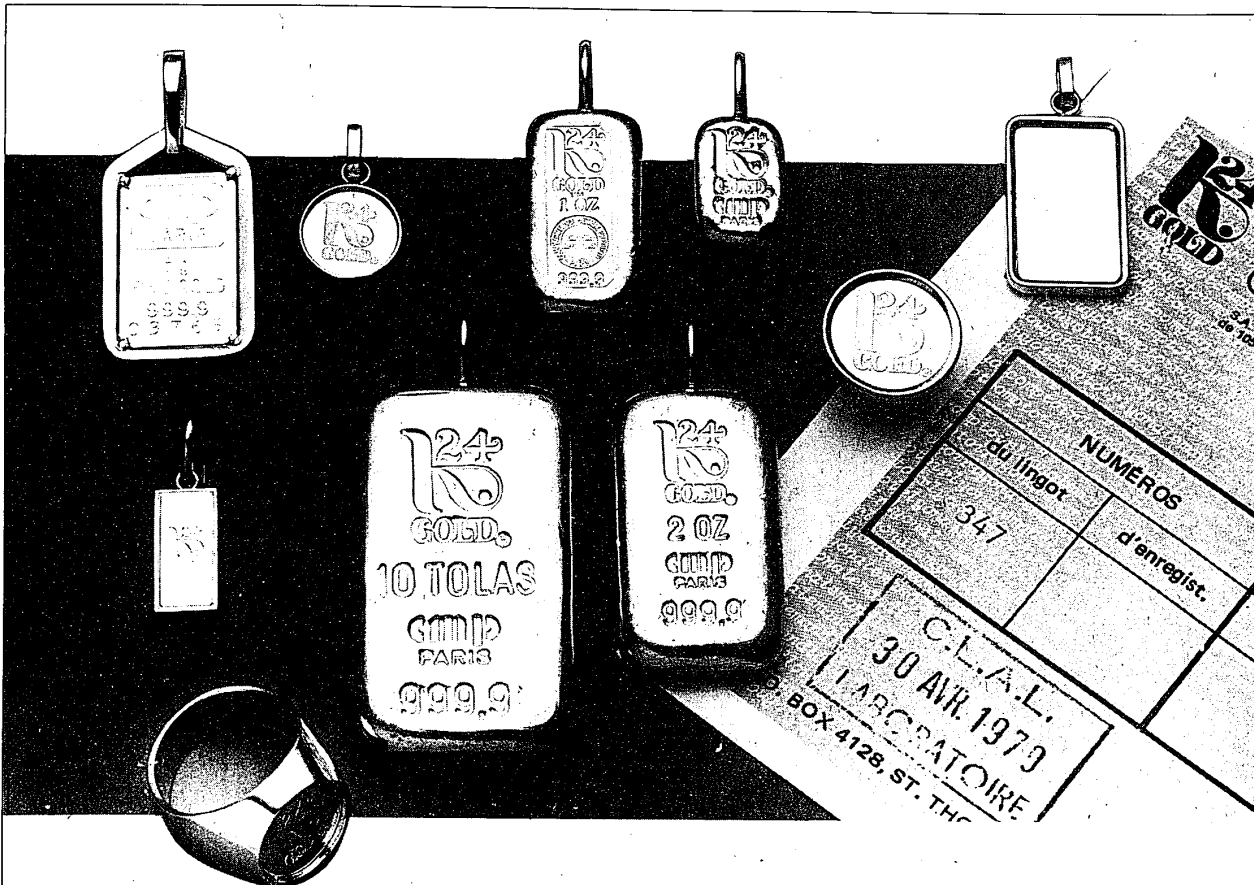
In April, OCART carried 6,000 passengers on 19 small vehicles. SEMTA will increase the number of vehicles to 47 by next June 30.

THE ROAD commission proposes a county transportation agency contract with SEMTA to continue large bus routes across county lines and the commuter rail from Pontiac.

SEMTA has told commissioners that a county withdrawal would "jeopardize" the fixed route buses and the commuter trains.

While there is some county board support for a withdrawal from SEMTA, County Executive Murphy's report, due next month, won't make a recommendation.

Last year, Murphy vetoed a board decision to leave SEMTA. His veto was later upheld by commissioners.



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