

Secession try fails; SEMTA keeps county

By TOM LONERGAN

Oakland County will remain in the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA), but the relationship may well continue to be a stormy one.

Before county commissioners voted not to leave the seven-county regional authority last week, they installed a pro-withdrawal commissioner, Paul Kasper, R-Bloomfield Hills, as their SEMTA Board of Directors representative.

A PROPOSAL to leave SEMTA, sponsored by Commissioner Richard Wilcox, R-Orionville, failed on a 12-12 vote. (See vote below.) The measure required a two-thirds majority (18 votes) to pass.

The county has threatened to leave SEMTA for the past two years, primarily because a majority of the Board of Commissioners are opposed to the proposed Woodward Ave. subway.

With all county elected officials facing re-election this year, the SEMTA issue will likely remain a hotly debated topic.

"We've had 10 to 15 years to decide how we feel about SEMTA, subways and public transportation in Oakland County," said Wilcox.

"It's time for you to stand up and be counted so your constituents know whether you're standing with them or against them."

Wilcox is representative of several northern county commissioners who believe that section of the county would get better public transportation through a county operated system than what SEMTA now provides.

DEMOCRATS FROM the more densely populated southeastern corner of the county have long opposed leaving SEMTA, fearing a cut-off of service.

"I haven't had one lousy call to vote against the transportation system as proposed by SEMTA or to withdraw," said Alexander Perinoff, D-Southfield. "I don't care for the subway either. But we've got a strong Detroit mayor who feels he got something for his community."

Perinoff left last week's county board meeting before the final vote was taken on withdrawal.

SEMTA's proposed 1990 transportation plan now includes a subway from downtown Detroit to the W. Grand Boulevard area. The SEMTA board, however, still has the option to recommend a longer subway should a preliminary engineering study show an elevated or surface light rail line through Highland Park isn't feasible. The light rail line is now proposed to run to Eleven Mile Road in Royal Oak.

The overall \$1.5 billion transportation plan includes more large and small buses for the suburbs and more commuter rail service between Pontiac and Detroit.

ONE REPUBLICAN who favored leaving SEMTA said the issue had become "very parochial."

"When you live north of Fourteen or Fifteen Mile Road, our transportation is non-existent," said Anne Hobart, R-Waterford Township/Pontiac.

"We have a handful of OCART (small advanced reservation) buses that don't run on time, that leave people stranded. It's a laugh. The only thing we have left to do is withdraw."

Leaving SEMTA was supported by one Republican commissioner who isn't seeking re-election.

Robert Gorsline, R-Milford, said "services" was the issue. "Let's deal with those issues and not November," he said.

An amendment proposed by Commissioner John Peterson, R-Rochester, that the county not leave SEMTA until Dec. 31, 1981, pending completion of a county-run transit system plan, passed 13-10, but was eventually dropped. County Board Chairman Wallace

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Gabler, R-Royal Oak, ruled that the board could not bind a new county board seated next January to a SEMTA withdrawal.

Terms of the present 27 commissioners expire at the end of the year.

IN OTHER ACTION, the commissioners appointed Commissioner Kasper to the SEMTA board, replacing Henry Hogan, of Bloomfield Hills.

Hogan, a Republican, lost his re-appointment bid, 14-10. Board Republicans voted as a block for Kasper, while Hogan was supported by 10 board Democrats.

The Republicans decided against reappointing Hogan at a caucus meeting in late March. Last Wednesday, the Republican caucus refused to reconsider their position after Hogan told them their action was "a great disappointment to me." Hogan's three-year term on the board expired this month.

Hogan's support in December of the subway/surface rail line to southern Oakland County angered a number of county board Republicans.

Hogan said because he negotiated for the light rail line extension into Oakland County, he had to vote for the Detroit subway.

"Obviously I can't put \$75 million in the project (estimated cost of the line to Ten Mile Road to be primarily federally funded) and not vote for the project."

"The end result was the subway was going in. Was Oakland County going to get anything for it?"

When the Michigan Legislature approved initial engineering money for the subway recently, the line was extended to 11 Mile Road.

ALTHOUGH KASPER won a seat on the SEMTA board, he may have gained an opponent — Hogan — for his county commissioner seat.

Hogan said Thursday he's "seriously considering" running for the Bloomfield Hills/Bloomfield Township seat. He said he had not considered running before losing the SEMTA appointment.

"If you have to be a commissioner to represent the county on the SEMTA board, then I ought to be a commissioner," said Hogan.

Kasper said Hogan called him Wednesday and told him he would run against the incumbent commissioner for the county board if he lost the SEMTA appointment.

"I will not be intimidated to back out," Kasper told the Republican caucus Wednesday.

FOLLOWING THE board's vote on the SEMTA resolution, Kasper admitted that his vote favoring withdrawal was somewhat inconsistent after being elected to the 15-member board.

"I'm going down there with the vote behind me that I'm not satisfied nor in any way affirming their (SEMTA's) actions," Kasper said.

"I'm looking for cooperation. We don't feel we've received cooperation. Right now, we can't live with what they've done."

Kasper said, "fiscal responsibility, that's the issue. The subway is not fiscally responsible."

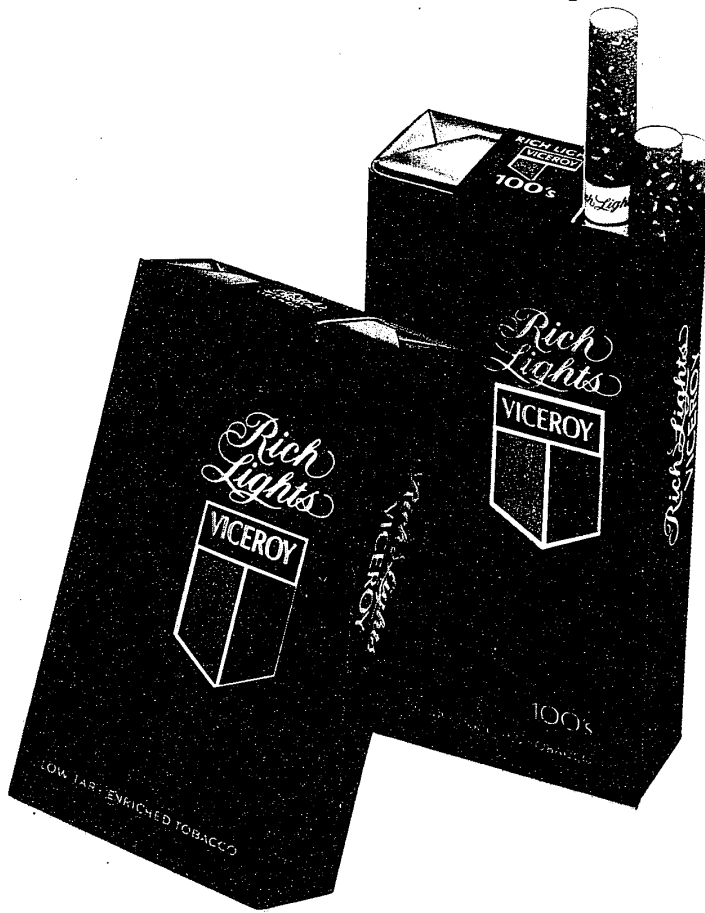
Oakland County's two other SEMTA board representatives, Homer Case and R.J. Alexander, both of Bloomfield Township, were appointed through the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG). Alexander's term expires in June.

ABSENT: Ralph Moxley, R-Birmingham.

NOT VOTING: Robert Page, R-Birmingham; Alexander Perinoff, D-Southfield.

The proposal needed a two-thirds majority of the board (18 votes) to pass.

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GOP vote splits withdrawal vote

Here's the Oakland County Board of Commissioners' vote on withdrawing from the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA).

REPUBLICANS FOR: (11) G. William Caddell, Walled Lake; Matthew Dunaskis, Lake Orion; Wallace Gabler Jr., Royal Oak; Robert Gorsline, Milford; Anne Hobart, Pontiac/Waterford Township; Henry Hoot, Troy; Paul Kasper, Bloomfield Hills; John McDonald, Farmington; Joseph Montante, West Bloomfield; William Patterson, Clawson; John Peterson, Rochester.

DEMOCRATS FOR: (1) Betty Fortino, Pontiac/Waterford Township.

REPUBLICANS OPPOSED: (8) Lillian Moffitt, Birmingham; Dennis Murphy, Novi; Richard Wilcox, Orionville.

(Wilcox, who sponsored the resolution to withdraw, initially voted yes, but changed his vote so he could propose future reconsideration of the issue.)

DEMOCRATS OPPOSED: (8) Dennis Aaron, Oak Park; John DiGiovanni, Hazel Park; James Doyon, Madison Heights; Patricia Kelly, Ferndale; Thomas Lewand, Royal Oak; Walter Moore, Pontiac; Lawrence Pernick, Southfield; Hubert Price, Jr., Pontiac; Kenneth Roth, Berkley.

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