

SEMTA's Salci: high marks for his leadership

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Larry E. Salci announced his resignation as general manager of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority Tuesday on a high note and a low note.

"It's one step forward, two steps back," Salci summed it up. The high note was that in Washington, Senate-House conferees Tuesday agreed to appropriate \$3 million for final engineering on SEMTA's downtown Detroit people mover system, which

for political reasons will be renamed a "central automated rail line." The same day, SEMTA's own board approved a contract with the Urban Transportation Development Corp. (UTDC) of Ontario to build the three-mile system, supply the electric vehicles and operate it on a "turnkey" basis.

The low note was that chances for a light rail rapid transit system in the Woodward corridor — referred to in political shorthand as the "Detroit subway" — were dimming fast in the midst of regional disagreements about

the underground portion.

SALCI, 34, of Troy, will wind up five years as SEMTA general manager Oct. 2, when he will join the accounting and management consulting firm of Plante & Moran in Southfield.

"I'll be in the line section in public sector consulting," said Salci. "I'll still be active in metro Detroit economic and social activities — but not so visible." He called his decision to leave SEMTA based on "career, family and lifestyle," adding in an interview that the SEMTA job was keeping him from

home and family an average of two or three nights a week, "and sometimes all five."

Salci was the University of Detroit's 16th highest all-time basketball point-maker, earned a master of business administration degree there, and worked for Chrysler Corp. in budget analysis and accounting.

He joined SEMTA in 1975 as board secretary, becoming acting general manager when Clarence Genette was fired the next year.

Although admired by SEMTA board members and respected by reporters, Salci lived in the political shadow of Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, to whose name the "subway" was often attached.

"A BUSINESS with social responsibility" was how Salci sees SEMTA. While SEMTA board members and

Michigan politicians noisily debated the subway portion of the 1980 plan, Salci's administration proceeded to purchase 500 new buses, rehabilitate 100 older buses, build a western Wayne terminal in Inkster, and work on additions to facilities in Oakland and Macomb counties.

The small bus program grew in the same time from 30 to 275 vehicles equipped with two-way radios, Salci said.

The commuter rail program grew to 23 cars, and the Park & Ride express bus program from the suburbs became a virtual growth industry through SEMTA's clever marketing.

THE TWO backward steps grew out of a closed door political conference in Lansing last week between Gov. William G. Milliken, several aides, Salci, SEMTA Chairman R.J. Alexander,

Young and Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy.

They were advised by U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth, guiding SEMTA money bills through Congress, to show a "united front" and minimize disagreements. There was broad agreement except that Murphy was unable to support the underground rapid transit line.

Gubernatorial aide James Kellogg told a Detroit News reporter, incorrectly, there was "unanimous agreement." The News hit the streets, and the phone calls hit Murphy's switchboard.

Murphy publicly fired off a telegram to President Reagan saying, "I am adamantly opposed to the inclusion of a subway in any regional transportation plan." Murphy also threatened to pull Oakland out of transit planning unless the subway idea is dropped.

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