

But delivery a year away

SEMTA gets \$5 million for buses

By Mike Scanlon
staff writer

In the snail's pace world of southeast Michigan public transit development, things have been recently moving at a positively breath-taking rate.

Thursday, the seven-county Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) won a \$5 million federal grant to purchase 41 diesel buses, and a transit authority spokesperson says the purchase may include some huge, "bendable" models.

But if you're a suburban commuter looking forward to less park-and-ride lots, don't hold your breath. The bus grant took a year to win approval, and delivery of the buses themselves is probably another year away, added the spokesperson.

FASTER ACTION is expected on the

long-stalled downtown people mover. Groundbreaking is scheduled for next month and construction on the 2.92-mile elevated route is expected to begin before winter. Completion, however, isn't likely before 1984.

The people mover is proceeding on the strength of \$8 million in federal funds released to SEMTA 10 days ago. The money was part of a \$125 million congressional appropriation which had been impounded by the federal Urban Mass Transit Administration.

The remaining \$4 million is still stalled, although its delivery under the long-awaited federal contribution to the region's public transit system is still expected, said an aide to U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth.

Pursell, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, was instrumental in convincing administration figures to release the funds.

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MOST FEDERAL money comes with strings, and the \$8 million is no exception. In this case, the string is that the downtown people mover is dead.

In its place has come something called a "downtown, light rail component of an integrated system."

"Some of the people down here (in Washington) are down on the people mover," explained Pursell's aide. "They had plans to put these people movers all over the country and (SEMTA's) was a demonstration program."

"The Reagan administration came along and said no, we're not going to do that. We're only going to fund areas where a system is under way, and the people mover is part of the system."

When we put it in the bill, we phrased it as a "downtown, light rail component of an integrated system."

"IT'S NOT that the technology of the so-called people mover changed, but that the program it's part of is different."

It may possibly be considerably different.

The SEMTA spokesperson explained that some of the \$8 million will go to the Kingsport, Ontario-based Urban Transportation Development Corp. for further study on the people mover. The company is to study the feasibility of linking the downtown rail system to the controversial Woodward corridor light rail line (the subway).

The two systems are markedly different, however. People movers are automated cars, while the subway trains will be staffed by a brakeman.

And the people mover, designed to run downtown on an elevated roadbed, does not appear suitable for use in ground-level or sub-ground roadbeds, the SEMTA spokesperson explained.

WHEN BUILT, the people mover will be the fastest thing in SEMTA's fleet.

Average speed is expected to reach 30 mph, compared to 18 mph for SEMTA line haul buses on the road now. The Detroit bus system, which has to contend with more city streets and less freeways, averages only 11 mph.

Roads to Silverdome done months early

Ribbon-cutting ceremonies were held last week for an extensive system of road and traffic control improvements designed to aid access to the Silverdome stadium in Pontiac.

The project, which cost \$2.6 million in addition to engineering and administration, was completed 4½ months ahead of schedule, said Fred Houghten, chairman of the Oakland County Road Commission. It was prompted by the Silverdome's selection as site of the 1982 Superbowl game for the national professional football championship.

Costs were shared by the county road

commission, the city of Pontiac and the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Interstate 75 and M-59 freeway lanes and exit ramps in the area have been expanded. A new exit ramp has been built from M-59 to the stadium's auxiliary parking lot south of that freeway. Lanes have been added to Opdyke Road and University Drive.

Surface streets have been widened. Signals to ease Silverdome-bound traffic flow have been installed. And sidewalks and an overpass on M-59 were installed to limit pedestrian mingling with vehicles.

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Monday, August 17, 1981

(B.T.S.F. ROSS)

GI Bill requires some care

If you're a veteran planning to enroll in or return to school this fall under the GI Bill, the Veterans Administration offers this checklist to help keep VA education benefits coming regularly:

- Double check your choice of courses to be certain they will count toward your educational objective.
- Register early. VA and your school need time to process your registration so that GI Bill checks can be started your way promptly.
- Avoid dropping classes.
- File for your GI Bill benefits as early as possible.
- If you change addresses, notify VA promptly.
- Submit transcripts to the college admissions and records office immediately after application is made. This will speed up the school's certification to the VA.
- If you have any questions about the GI Bill or eligibility for it, contact the nearest VA regional office.

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