

# New federalism, lawsuit cut mass transit funds

By Suzie Rollins Singer  
Staff writer

Public transportation will shift into low gear once the Reagan Administration's new federalism becomes a working reality.

So says Gary Krause, acting general manager of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA), adding that Michigan residents must decide how much they're willing to pay for public transportation.

Presently, SEMTA receives 30 percent of its revenue for operations from the federal government. Last year its budget was \$145 million, of which \$50 million was passed on to the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT).

"THE CURRENT administration

**'From 1981 to 1982 the federal government reduced its aid to us from \$40 million to \$31.7 million. . . . Individual metropolitan areas will have to make a decision about whether or not to fund public transportation.'**

plans on phasing out over the next few years its aid to public transportation," Krause said.

"From 1981 to 1982 the federal government reduced its aid to us from \$40 million to \$31.7 million."

While the state will offer some assistance to purchase new buses and other capital expenditures, Krause said, it has no intention of supplement-

ing operating budgets.

"Individual metropolitan areas will have to make a decision about whether or not to fund public transportation," Krause added, saying that the state legislature has authority to impose a special transportation tax.

SEMTA'S FINANCIAL problems extend further than new federalism, he

went on.

A recent Michigan Court of Appeals decision calls for SEMTA to refund to the state more than \$9 million the Secretary of State's office collected in vehicle registration and title fees, once earmarked for SEMTA.

The judges in Michigan's second highest court said the taxes should be refunded because SEMTA and D-DOT failed to merge prior to April 16, 1981, a date set in the law authorizing the license taxes. The case was brought by the state attorney general's office and the Oakland County Road Commission.

The 2-1 appeals court decision was made in the second district court in Ingham County last week. SEMTA will appeal to the State Supreme Court, Krause said.

THE TRANSIT authority argues it is entitled to all registration and title fees collected from April 1981 to November

1981 because of an extension of time granted by the legislature.

"It was an ambiguous and poorly written piece of legislation," Krause added.

"This is really a setback. We are taking significant steps towards a merger. We've come a long way, but we still have some funding issues to work out."

"Once that is done, then the (Detroit) voters must pass a referendum which is required by city charter for disposal of real property," Krause added.

KRAUSE SAID the merger and tax collection methods are "highly emotional issues."

"We have \$16-\$18 million in an escrow fund that's been accumulating since April 1980. But we're not able to utilize those funds and are living off of our savings," he added.

Last month SEMTA cut \$735,000 from its operating budget by eliminating unfilled staff positions. By mid-February, it expects to cut \$2.3 million, by eliminating many bus runs and one commuter train run.

The seven-county authority, set up by a 1967 state law, was designed to absorb all private and public bus systems in the region. It has absorbed all but D-DOT.

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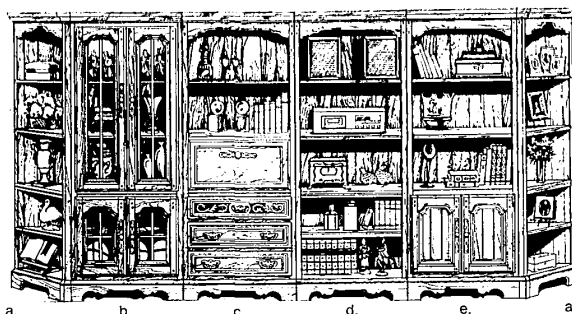
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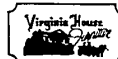


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