

# Road board asked to back off SEMTA case

By Suzie Rollins Singer  
staff writer

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners is urging the county Road Commission to drop its role in impending lawsuit over SEMTA funds.

In a 19-5 vote, the county board adopted a resolution calling for the release of \$21 million in tri-county vehicle license surcharges and title transfer taxes. The money is being held in a special escrow fund pending outcome of litigation involving the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority and the Road Commission.

If SEMTA prevails in the state Court of Appeals, the Road Commission plans to appeal the decision.

Opposing the resolution were Republican Commissioners Anne Hobart of Pontiac, Paul Kasper of Bloomfield Hills, James Lanni of Royal Oak, Joseph Montano of Orchard Lake and Richard Wilcox of Orionville.

ABOUT 30 persons, mostly handicapped, spoke to the board opposing the SEMTA bus cuts.

They said they depended on the service to get to medical appointments

and sheltered workshops.

Commissioner Lawrence Pernick, D-Southfield, told the audience that because the commissioners appoint Road Commission board members, they could use their influence to stop the road commission's appeal.

"We will be appointing a new (road) commissioner next year, and this action (the appeal) is something we should not support," Pernick said.

The money held in was collected from special vehicle taxes charged to Wayne, Oakland and Macomb county residents. The Oakland road board objected to the collections, and Attorney General Frank Kelley ruled that the collections were unconstitutional.

John Grubbs, managing director of the road commission, said he intervened because he thought "SEMTA was asking for too much."

WITHOUT the escrowed funds, SEMTA will be forced to cut its services by 60 percent Jan. 1. Most cuts will involve SEMTA's connectors and train programs, which serve many handicapped and elderly persons.

Several commissioners opposed the resolution because they favor de-

veloping a transportation service operating in Oakland County.

"SEMTA is continuing to deteriorate," said James duck commissioner Kasper, one of three Oakland members on the SEMTA board.

"We can do it alone. We're going to get less and less, and it's going to cost you more and more. SEMTA is in a crisis situation, and it hasn't changed," he added.

COUNTY EXECUTIVE Daniel T. Murphy supported the board's resolution but also favored having state legislation to pay for the transportation system, rather than relying on tri-county vehicle license surcharges and title transfer taxes.

"This board and I are behind the bus system. We don't want it cut," he told the audience of nearly 500.

"We had to fight with the SEMTA board to get small buses operating in this county. We don't have a tax to pay for this system."

"The \$21 million will keep part of the system going this year, but what about next year? We have to get the Legislature to come up with a tax pro-

posal to pay for the system," he explained.

THE BOARD also adopted a resolu-

tion opposing substitute House Bills 6148, 6149 and 6151, which are part of the public transit funding legislation.

## SEMTA tax halts

Beginning Jan. 1, the \$2.50 Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) tax for renewing vehicle registrations no longer will be collected in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

The change is reflected in prepared vehicle renewal applications now being

send 45 days in advance to motorists in three counties. The \$2.50 SEMTA tax along with a \$6 tax on titles have been collected in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties since 1977.

According to Secretary of State Richard Austin, the law establishing both special taxes is scheduled to expire Dec. 31.

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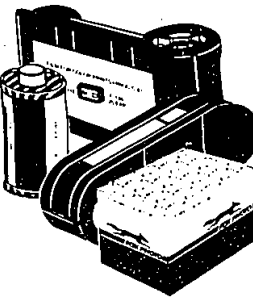
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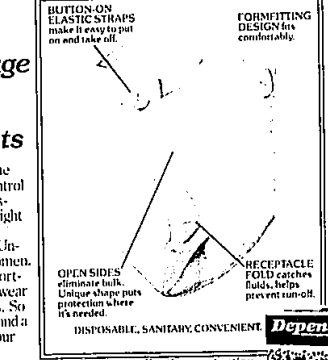
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