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Commissioners' SEMTA motion: more service or lose our support

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A divided Oakland County Board of Commissioners is warning the Southeastern Michigan Transit Authority (SEMTA) to agree to Oakland's service demands or face the prospect that the county will back away from supporting a regional public transit package.

And Oakland commissioners are insisting county votes be counted separately in any tax-hike election so that any county in the six-county transit area could veto a regional tax hike.

"We're not shaking our fist, we're protecting that little old lady from having her taxes raised without her vote,' said commissioner Lillian Moffitt, R-Bloomfield Township.

THE VOTE to give SEMTA until July 12 to accept Oakland's modifications was 19-7, with two Democrats *joining all 17 Republicans.*

It was denounced by Commissioner Dennis Aaron, D-Oak Park, as "a nail in the coffin of public transportation.

'They (Republicans) talk about service to the elderly . . . then do everything possible to see they don't get it (public transportation).'
—Dennis Aaron
Oak Park Democrat

"Once again the Oakland County Board of Commissioners has shown it is no friend of public transportation. . . . They (Republicans) talk about service to the elderly, the sick, those who can't afford cars . . . then do everything possible to see they don't get it.

"This board is saying that you want it your way or you'll pick up your ball and bat and go home."

COMMISSIONER Larry Pernick, D-Southfield, recalled the Oakland board's earlier demand that any tax supporting SEMTA operations be approved by a vote of the people but noted that "we mandated a vote, though SEMTA doesn't have authority to call a vote — only the Legislature does."

Pernick said the board was, in effect, "sitting back and shaking its fist. It does no great harm, but it doesn't serve any positive purpose."

"We just shot our foot off again," said Commissioner James Doyon, D-Madison Heights.

"We're saying to the federal government, 'We don't want your money, we don't want the jobs.' "

SEMTA HAS been told by the U.S. Department of Transportation to resolve regional bickering — largely between the city of Detroit, which favors light rail rapid transit and, Oakland and Macomb counties, which don't — or no federal capital funds will be forthcoming.

SEMTA chairman Dewitt Henry of western Wayne County had been seeking to patch together an agreement between the factions, but the Oakland board attached its own set of conditions March 31 and is demanding SEMTA accept them.

Its resolution last week said the agreement would be "of no force and effect" if SEMTA fails to act on the Oakland demands by July 12.

"SEMTA will be out of money in November," said County Executive Daniel T. Murphy. "We have to do something soon. The feds require you to have a tax in place to cover operating deficits."

The resolution was unveiled and pushed through the board in a single evening meeting without going through the committee process. Its authors — Republicans Roy Rewold and Ralph Nelson of Rochester and George B. Jackson of Birmingham — wanted to give the SEMTA board two meetings in which to act.

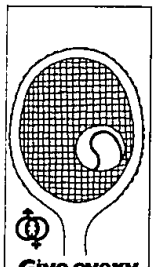
'We're not shaking our fist, we're protecting that little old lady from having her taxes raised without her vote.'
—Lillian Moffitt
Bloomfield Republican

"Oakland County can proceed on its own" if the federal government fails to give SEMTA capital funds for the $1 billion-plus project, said Rewold. "The monies are going to come to Oakland County one way or the other.

And later Rewold added, "It's not Oakland County not agreeing. It's the city of Detroit."

IN OTHER business, the Board of Commissioners last week:

- Unanimously supported abolishing the state' presidential primary, citing the $5-plus cost per vote in 1980 and the 13 percent voter turnout.
- Gave 22-1 support to a resolution asking the Michigan Legisature to give a two-thirds vote to rescinding the 7.2 percent pay increase awarded it by the State Officers Compensation Commission.
- Agreed to pay up to $123,000 to board Oakland's excess jail prisoners for three months in jails of Washtenaw and Allegan counties.



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- June 24 — A communication for couples workshop will be 7:30-10:30 p.m. at the Mercy Conference Center in Farmington. The program is designed for couples who want to enhance an already good relationship. Participants will learn techniques for listening, responding and disagreeing in a caring way. The fee is $20 per couple.

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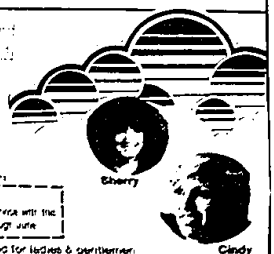

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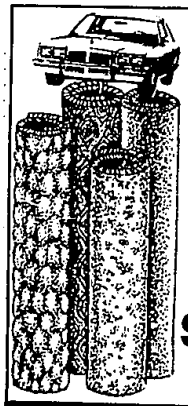

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