

When public speaks, SEMTA revises plan

THERE'S AN old principle of politics that should give comfort to suburban voters: If you squawk at a public hearing, true, nothing may happen this year — but wait until the next time around.

The principle is proving true as SEMTA (Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority) prepares for a new round of public hearings next week.

After getting squawks in 1979 that too much emphasis was being placed on Woodward corridor light-rail traffic and too little on "crosstown" suburban movements, the SEMTA board revised its 1990 plan.

The version prepared this year will contain something the 1979 version lacked: a designation of a number of suburban locations — traditional downtowns, major shopping malls and employment centers — as "transit centers." They will be not only bus destinations but major transfer points for the different modes of SEMTA service.

It was what the public was saying, and it represents a major change in SEMTA thinking. No longer are the radial patterns emanating from downtown Detroit the only game in town. Outlying communities are important centers in their own right.

And it lends new emphasis to our notion that the term "suburb" may be obsolete.

THE WOODWARD corridor undergoes some

major changes in the revised SEMTA plan.

The northern terminus of the light rail has been extended from Royal Oak to Pontiac, and a spur is added to the Pontiac Silverdome. Both changes are realistic and merit applause.

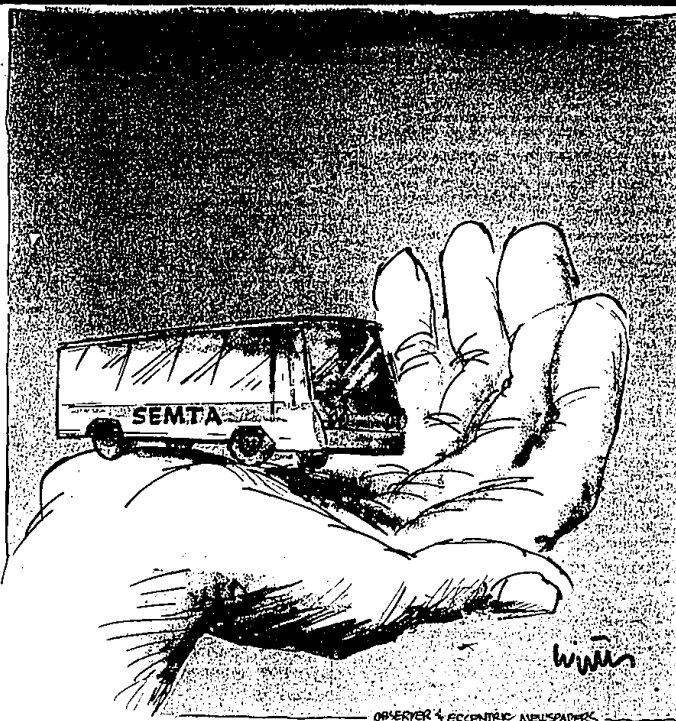
The amount of the Woodward corridor which will go underground has been reduced drastically. Politically, that is a good move because many transit-hating suburbanites had equated "subway" with the name of Detroit Mayor Coleman Young. So be it.

We still believe, however, that the idea of building much of it underground — away from traffic, away from rain and snow, using stations that would have been models for human safety — was the better choice. But we won't whine over the loss of the subway portion if the entire package turns out to be more realistic and more politically acceptable.

AT THE HEARINGS, listed elsewhere in today's edition, you'll have a chance to walk through exhibits that will explain details of how the plan will affect your area.

That will be followed by a brief (underline that word) explanation from SEMTA officials. They learned from earlier hearings that folks don't care for long-winded explanations and slide shows.

Then the public will have its chance to comment. And our experience with SEMTA shows clearly that the public gets heard.



OPINION BY ECCENTRIC NEWSPAPERS

Suburbia is core of effort to recall Blanchard

A GRIZZLED old man stood at the corner of Woodward Avenue and 10 Mile Road on Sunday afternoon and begged motorists to stop and sign a petition for the recall of Gov. James Blanchard.

Nothing unusual about this scene except only a few feet away a sign proclaimed, "Welcome to Pleasant Ridge, the home of Gov. James Blanchard." The recall movement had come to the governor's tiny hometown.

Petitioners were out in force over the long Fourth of July holiday weekend. They could be seen at suburban shopping centers and parks. Many were downtown or at the fireworks display on Friday evening.

"We're going to meet the deadline and force a recall election," Shannon Roessler of Livonia said Tuesday. "I think we had a good chance." Roessler is co-chairman of the state campaign to recall Blanchard.

Her committee needs to obtain 750,000 validated signatures by Thursday, July 28. As of last week, Roessler said, about 400,000 signatures had been ob-



Nick Sharkey

tained, but "the mail has been pouring in the last few days."

ONLY THE MOST optimistic recall organizers believe they have a reasonable chance of making the July 28 deadline. But that doesn't mean the campaign is not having its effect.

The strongest sentiment in the state for Blanchard's recall is in Wayne and Oakland counties, according to a survey released over the weekend by the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan.

Many of your suburban friends and neighbors are

grousing about the governor. According to the U-M study, only 25 percent of the Oakland and Wayne respondents approve of how Blanchard is handling his job, and 67 percent disapprove. (In contrast, approximately 52 percent outstate and 50 percent in Detroit disapprove of Blanchard.)

Roessler said she recognizes a strong anti-Blanchard feeling when she gets signatures on weekends at places like Livonia Mall.

"I've been working on this campaign since April 30, and I've only met one person who has refused to sign a petition," she said.

Roessler maintains — and the U-M survey agrees — that the major source of dissatisfaction with Blanchard comes from the increase in the state income tax. The state income tax rate was raised from 4.6 to 6.35 percent this year.

"When the man (Blanchard) campaigned, he said jobs first and taxes last," Roessler said. "When you raise taxes in such a depressed area, it makes the people mad."

WHATEVER YOUR personal reaction may be to

the recall Blanchard movement, to a certain extent it doesn't matter. I personally think it is dumb and was doomed to failure from the start.

It is having a dramatic effect on state politics. The euphoria the Democrats experienced on Jan. 1 in electing their first governor in 20 years is over.

As Rep. Jack Kirksey, R-Livonia, told the Observer & Eccentric last week, "The threat of recall has had a sobering effect on the Democratic Legislature and the governor. He is no longer bragging about saving the state from financial ruin. He is now on the defensive."

What this means is that Democrats are not going to run roughshod in Lansing merely because we have a Democratic governor and Legislature. That means more compromise and a stronger Republican influence.

The old man getting signatures on a recall petition in Blanchard's hometown will not be successful in removing the governor. But he, and others like him, will be responsible for significant changes in how this state is governed.

Strategic fund: enterprise or paperwork?

FIRST, THE bad news: Associate Financial Services Co., Credit Thrift of America, Transamerica Financial Corp., Commercial Credit Plan, Inc., Dial Finance Co., Liberty Loan Corp., Avco Financial Services Co., Aetna Finance Co., and now Beneficial Finance Co. have all pulled out of this state. They said no to Michigan.

Now the good news: Gov. James J. Blanchard is asking the Michigan Legislature to set up a "Michigan Strategic Fund" to stimulate formation of venture capital. The description is fuzzy, but it seems the governor wants to use \$54 million in state funds to "leverage" private banking capital and diversify the state's moribund, auto-oriented economy.

REASON FOR the bad news is that Michigan has usury laws with the good intention of keeping the mean old capitalist from putting the screws to the humble husbandman and consumer.

We've read about such laws in the Bible. Shakespeare fans remember the character of the loan shark Shylock in "Merchant of Venice." It's not Christian for lenders to sock borrowers big high interest rates to borrow, and the Michigan Legislature, unions and consumer groups agree.

Only trouble is that it doesn't work. If a borrower can't make what he/she/it considers an adequate return on capital, the borrower looks elsewhere, which is one reason Michigan is so short of capital. Our interest rates are nice and low, but there's no money to borrow.

Now, finance companies don't provide venture capital to future Apple Computer companies, but they are part of the total supply side of credit. If the



Tim Richard

finance companies skedaddle because of our interest rate regulations, then borrowers must go to banks, savings and loans and credit unions.

And that means the other institutions have less money to loan to entrepreneurs.

CLEARLY, BLANCHARD needs to clean up Michigan's interest rate act if we are to capitalize new businesses which will hire us good working folks.

The governor hasn't committed himself to do that yet. He has political troubles on his left. The United Auto Workers and consumers groups, which believe in low interest rates the way a dog believes in bones, are making the governor pause.

At his news conference last week, Blanchard left us the clear impression he would like to move away from the unrealistic 12 percent rates. He is "negotiating" with all sorts of pressure groups on his economic program.

I'm inclined to have faith. This governor, despite his political support, is not a flaming liberal to whom "corporation" is a dirty word.

HIS STRATEGIC Investment Fund is the new name for his 1982 campaign promise — a "strategic investment bank."

I hope it works and want it to work, but there is a nice question of a state bureaucracy financing fledgling businesses.

Look at it this way: Entrepreneurs operate on a handshake and trust in one's character. They talk and work with their hands. They're not writers and lock-step planners.

Well, the Blanchard fund is supposed to work through a nine-member board which will study and evaluate project proposals. To me that sounds like the kind of writing and paperwork that entrepreneurs don't do. Can you imagine Henry Ford or Andrew Carnegie filling out a project proposal form projecting five-year business activity levels?

Yet if Blanchard can send a message to the financial community that economic adventurers are welcome in Michigan — well, bless him.

Justice system must focus on alcohol abuse

The 19-year-old Westland resident who pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter in the death of a man killed by a bowling ball thrown out a car window was sentenced last week.

There was some speculation beforehand that the 19-year-old, Charles Borg Jr., a Washnaw Community College student, would receive a probationary sentence with no provision for jail time.

But Wayne Circuit Judge Richard Kaufman, who was warned that such a sentence would likely spark a new controversy about sentencing, was not that lenient.

In ordinary times, a long-term probation might have been ordered. But the times have not been ordinary since Kaufman's father, Circuit Judge Charles Kaufman handed down a probation sentence to two men who admitted killing Chinese American Vincent Chin with a baseball bat in a Highland Park street.

THAT CONTROVERSY still isn't over and Kaufman and every judge in the state is well aware of the extreme public disapproval that sentence inspired.

The younger Kaufman's seven-part sentence calls for Borg to spend six months in jail now and another six months at the end of his four-year probation. It also requires Borg to spend five hours a week for two years working at a Westland-based organization that provides recreation for physically and mentally handicapped and another 100 hours working for another public service organization.

He is forbidden to drink alcohol during the five years of his sentence, must report monthly to a probation counselor and must pay \$480 a year court costs.

It is not well-known but it is a frequent practice for judges to order a certain amount of jail time to be served at the end of a probation period. It is generally understood that the person sentenced will



Bob Wisler

not have to serve the jail time at the end of probation if he has behaved himself.

WHAT IS interesting is that Kaufman forbade Borg to drink alcohol at all, indicating that the judge thought drinking played a significant part in Borg's bizarre behavior the night he decided to throw a bowling ball out the window of the car he was riding in.

The fact is that alcohol abuse and dependency have not received much consideration from judges in determining sentences, although the evidence is becoming clearer that they play a role in the majority of crimes, homicides and motor vehicle deaths.

There are some educated opinions to the effect that more than 50 percent of all prisoners in the Michigan penal system committed the crimes they were sent to prison for while they were under the influence of alcohol or while they were alcohol abusers.

The law is slowly beginning to realize that the problems caused by alcohol abuse are closely intertwined with many of the problems which concern our criminal justice system.

Kaufman's sentence is perhaps an indication that the system is beginning to deal with alcohol problems.

ANOTHER BETTER indication is the work being done in Oakland County to deal with drunk driving. The Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning has renewed a grant for \$345,000 and the Oakland County Commissioners have allocated \$140,000 more to continue the model county program aimed at drunk driving.

During the first two years of the program, officers from the sheriff's department assisted by other departments made 11,000 arrests. Bruce Madden of the Oakland County Traffic Improvement Association said the program results correlated to 2,453 less accidents and an economic savings of \$14.2 million.

We need more progress in this area.