

# SEMTA's big news: crosstown bus patterns

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

SEMTA's new public transportation plan, due to be unveiled at local hearings next week, emphasizes the crosstown patterns that riders want.

"Since 1979, we've heard nothing but noise on our part from the communities," confessed Gary Krause, general manager of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority.

"We looked at the current service maps and the 1980 plan we adopted in 1979, and the only difference was that 1980 was more of the same."

"That's bad. What the people were saying was that the region is a bit more complex than that. It's a multitude of centers, like Los Angeles, not like New York."

Hearings are scheduled for 1 p.m. Monday in the Oakland County Board of Commissioners auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac, and 7:30 p.m. Wednesday in the Southfield Parks and Recreation Building, 26000 Evergreen.

SOUTHEASTERN Michigan has strong "radial" traffic patterns — the Gratiot, Woodward, Grand River and Michigan Avenue corridors and their corresponding freeways, all built over old Indian trails.

"But overlaid on that are the east-west movements," said Krause, citing the I-696 freeway and other developing east-west roads in Oakland County. And the revised SEMTA plan takes them into consideration.

"If I live in Mount Clemens and work in Detroit, I'm OK (as a transit rider). But if I live in Mount Clemens and work in Troy, I can't get there," he said of the 1979 plan.

So SEMTA planners adopted a system of "transit centers" — focal points for bus service, where passengers can transfer between buses or park their cars and board a bus.

Krause identified several kinds of transit centers: historic downtowns, major suburban shopping centers, employment centers. "They are more than casual places to catch a bus. They are focal points for services. You work to tie them together with the rest of the region."

OAKLAND COUNTY's transit centers, in the new plan, will include

- Southfield — the Northland, Civic Center, 11 Mile-Lahser area.
- Farmington Hills — Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College at Orchard Lake Road south of 12 Mile.
- Birmingham, an historic downtown.
- West Bloomfield — Pine Lake Mall.
- Troy — Somerset, Civic Center, Oakland Mall.
- Avon Township — Great Oaks Mall.
- Royal Oak — 10 and 11 Mile light rail stations.
- Novi — Twelve Oaks Mall.
- Pontiac — central business district.

These centers will receive high-speed Park and Ride express buses, conventional bus service, neighborhood circulator service and dial-a-ride service.

KRAUSE DE-EMPHASIZES talk of the light rail rapid transit component of the revised 1990 plan, contending "the big news is the redesign of the bus system." But there are changes in the light rail plan, too, particularly in the Woodward corridor.

Much of the underground "subway" that has been scrapped, as has the commuter train that goes only downtown in the morning and back to Pontiac at night.

Instead, he said, most of the line will run at-grade and some above ground, and will go out to Pontiac.

From downtown Detroit to Royal Oak, it will follow the Woodward corridor, traveling west of the Woodward stores through Highland Park. North of that, it will follow the Grand Trunk Railroad tracks.

THE SEMTA general manager is emphatic that the line makes sense. "Every day we don't make a rail investment in the Woodward corridor is a day we're wasting resources," he said of the heavily traveled route.

The Woodward corridor contains virtually every "one-of-a-kind" service in the seven-county region except Metropolitan Airport, Krause said.

These include the Renaissance Center, Cobo Hall, the Louis Arena, the Medical Center, the cultural center (Art Institute, Historical Museum, Main Library, Science Center, Wayne State University), the New Center area, the Michigan State Fairgrounds, the Zoo and Silverdome stadium.

"And there are many churches, a number of de facto communities and the populated 12 south Oakland County communities," he said.

"One of the most accessible points in the region will be I-696 and Woodward. It will be a new focal point for the region," Krause added.

AFTER PUBLIC hearings, the revised 1990 plan will go back to the SEMTA board for approval, then to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments for inspection.

The federal government will put up most of the capital cost — buses, rail lines and cars. "The federal government position is very clear: It will make major investments in public transit. Of the new federal five-cents-a-gallon gasoline tax, one cent has been set aside for transit. It will produce \$1 billion a year," said Krause.

Gross capital cost of SEMTA's plan is in the \$2 billion ballpark, although some capital costs such as buses and terminals are already in place.

"The good news is better service," he said.

"THE BAD news is that when you rely on buses, you have a system that is expensive to operate."

Under President Reagan, the federal government has moved out of providing operating money (salaries, fuel) to transportation agencies. SEMTA is asking the Michigan Legislature to place an operating tax question on the ballot.

A one-cent sales tax is most popular with SEMTA officials because it would yield \$200 million a year. Less popular are a one-mill property tax (\$49 million) and a 1 percent income tax (\$183 million).

Combined operating budgets of SEMTA and Detroit's Department of Transportation are about \$150 million, Krause said.



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— Gary Krause

## Dome to protect salt stockpile

Rock salt used by the Oakland County Road Commission for road de-icing soon will be under a domed roof in its Waterford Township yard. Multi-colored temporary covers will be unnecessary.

The road commission awarded a \$268,400 contract for construction to Horrell Harrington Co. of Pittsburgh. The dome will store 10,000 tons of salt.

The road commission had been storing the salt under cover since the winter of 1979-80, when it enlarged its stockpile to two-thirds of the annual need. Stockpiling has eliminated the salt shortages during crises, according to OCCR chairman John Gnaus Jr.

Other salt storage areas will also be improved, Gnaus said.

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