

# SEMTA battens down hatches in north Oakland

By Kathy Parrell  
staff writer

Every day, 123 commuters park their cars in a Rochester mall and leave the driving to Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA).

Next month, though, those bus riders probably will be behind the wheel in bumper-to-bumper traffic on I-75.

For most of the area's 42,000 bus and train commuters, proposed SEMTA cuts would mean longer waits to transit, fewer choices of buses and a more crowded ride to work.

BUT THERE won't be buses at all for north Oakland County residents to squeeze onto. With the exception of a popular Oxford-Lake Orion connector bus, all service north of Pontiac and Troy would disappear.

"In southern Oakland, all the service would remain, but it would diminish," said SEMTA staffer Lori Lysett following a meeting Monday with Oakland County officials.

"But we won't be able to serve the rural areas."

Trying to offset a \$16-million deficit, SEMTA officials have drawn up a plan which would eliminate the commuter train from Pontiac to Detroit, cut the number of large buses from 267 to 188, and reduce small buses from 148 to 98.

SEMTA, a seven-county operating authority, had sought approval of the Michigan Legislature to place a tax proposal on the ballot. Legislators, fearing voters' wrath at any tax proposals, so far haven't acted.

SEMTA WILL hold a public hearing on the proposed cuts at 10:30 a.m. Monday in the Veterans Memorial Building, Jefferson east of Woodward in Detroit. The 15 SEMTA board members will vote on the issue at 1 p.m. Tuesday in the authority offices in downtown Detroit.

Concern over reduced service prompted SEMTA staffers to hold special county meetings with local officials to detail route changes.

During a meeting Monday with a dozen Oakland officials in Southfield Parks and Recreation Building, Lysett said goals are to provide seven-days-a-week service and maintain a balanced regional system.

But SEMTA also is trying to retain the greatest amount of revenue while maintaining the most service possible. So low-revenue routes like Rochester must go.

"NO ROUTE brings us back 100 percent. The question is how big the subsidy," explained Lysett, SEMTA's manager of schedules, service evaluation and communications.

She said cost per mile and cost per passenger were out considerations. "Rochester is one of the most expensive routes because of the total number of miles the buses travel and number of passengers carried."

Presently three Rochester buses carry 123 passengers daily — the second lowest number riding any Oakland County route. Riders meet the bus at Great Oaks Mall, Meadowbrook Village Mall and Winchester Malls in Avon Township.

Lysett said Rochester buses attracted twice as many riders last year. But previous cuts caused many people to switch over to van pools run by Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG).

"Van pools are very popular there, and people reacted very strongly to service reductions a year ago," Lysett said.

ALSO ELIMINATED would be several other routes which SEMTA officials say are accessible through other buses.

Stated for elimination in Oakland County are: Route 425 Northland-Oakland Mall; Route 400 Campbell Road, Royal Oak; Route 499 Rochester Road between Universal Mall and Oakland Mall; Route 840 Park & Ride Ryan-Dequindre; Route 842 Park & Ride Rochester; Route 850 Park & Ride which runs from Maple and Lahser roads in Birmingham to Northland, the New Center to downtown Detroit.

Running reduced service would be: Route 410 Southfield; Route 440 Maple-Telegraph; Route 450 Pontiac; Route 460 Somerset; Routes 445, 455 and 465 Woodward Limited; Route 470 Berkley; Route 480 Northland-Orchard Mall; Route 485 Middlebelt-Detroit; Route 494 Hazel Park Race Track; Route 495 John R; Route 750 Pontiac Arrow; and Route 851 Park & Ride.

SEMTA PUBLIC affairs manager Marvin Melcher told Oakland officials the bell-lightening measures would maintain a balanced budget both this fiscal year and next.

"It seems more reasonable to make the necessary cuts now rather than come back in another six months and make more," he said.

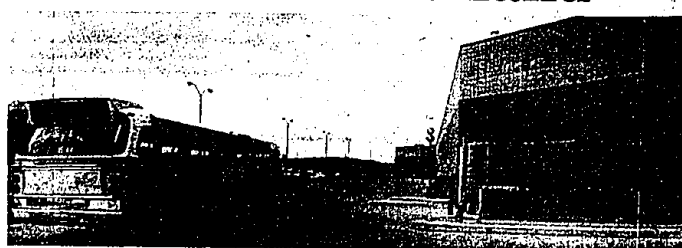
While the cuts are the third in less than three years for the authority, Melcher asked them not to despair.

"I'm not here to tell you we're closing shop or turning out the lights on public transit in Michigan. We're here to stay and are going to be back bigger and better than ever."

Melcher said SEMTA still is working hard to get the Legislature to approve a tax proposal benefitting transportation. The authority hopes to get the issue before voters by April.

"Meanwhile, we're making cuts to handle whatever comes up before we're able to go to the voters. We're battening down the hatches."

COUNTY COMMISSIONER Lawrence R. Ferrel, D-Southfield, said there must be more cooperation between SEMTA and the Detroit Department of Transportation (D-DOT).



The sound of coins dropping into the farebox at Winchester Mall in Avon Township will be a thing of the past if proposed SEMTA cuts are made. Being eliminated are three morning and three afternoon Park & Ride bus routes which also include Great Oaks Mall and Meadowbrook Village Mall.

Staff photo by DAVID FRANK

"People keep trying to resolve this, but we see the system falling apart because of provincialism. We're not going to be able to fight for tax increases until people realize there's got to be more

efficiency built into the system," Ferrell said.

"And we've also got to do the job in Washington. We just don't have the resources and are sending too much money

to Washington that just disappears." "I just don't see us coming up with the resources whether it's on the ballot or not. We're going to need federal help."



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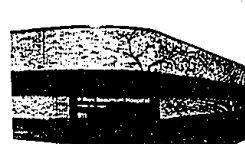
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