

Private buses, van pools help ease SEMTA pinch

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By Kathy Perish
staff writer

It's standing room only on some buses for commuters displaced by public transit cutbacks.

But Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) hopes to reduce crowding soon through private buses and van pools.

"It's something we're very pleased with — a cooperative venture between the private and public transit to benefit the riders," said Lori Lysett, SEMTA's manager of schedules.

IN COOPERATION with Michigan Trailways and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) Ride Share Program, SEMTA is working out private bus and van transportation for some riders if no longer serves. To offset a \$18 million deficit, SEMTA Oct. 17 eliminated its commuter rail and reduced buses and routes.

Former rail commuters will be offered luxury coach service from the train stations by Michigan Trailways, which will run two buses each way

from Pontiac to Detroit.

SEMCOG has added six or seven Michiganders to its former 65 and expects to form another 10 to 15 in the next month. Most of the new riders ride Park and Ride buses from parking lots in the suburbs.

SEMCOG plans schedule "refinement" Nov. 14 to ease the crunch, which resulted in usually full buses carrying 15-20 standees. In rare cases, buses have 30 more people. SEMTA buses average 44 passengers, but they can legally carry 70.

"We expect to make another schedule adjustment to even out the loads," Lysett said.

"We can't change routes or add buses, but we can make some adjustments."

AFFECTED MOST by the extensive cutbacks are buses carrying passengers to and from work at peak hours — 7:30-8:30 a.m. and 4-6 p.m.

Almost all commuter runs have been affected, but the most crowded are main routes like Ford in western Wayne, Van Dyke and Woodward,

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which is commuters' alternative to the train.

Also packed are reduced-run Park and Ride: \$10 (Plymouth) and \$20 (Farmington), which picked up passengers stranded by the eliminated 515 Park and Ride.

Shortway Lines is exploring offering service in the communities of Farmington and Plymouth.

PEOPLE WHO depend on small bus service are now finding that they have to call farther ahead for reservations. If they wait until the day before — as

they used to — the vehicle may already be full.

Walls legally buses can carry many more passengers than did before, Lysett admitted some rides are now "very cozy."

"There are a lot of people standing. We know that," explained the manager of schedules for SEMTA, which now gets 1,600 phone calls a day instead of its previous 1,200.

"But people have been extremely cooperative. They realize, with our monetary restraints, we just didn't have much choice."

Drivers, though, now have the unfa-

miliar task of getting passengers to stand behind the white line near the front door.

"Passengers like to hover near the front. So we need their cooperation," Lysett said.

TRAIN RIDERS who have switched to Woodward bus or private transportation will be offered private bus transportation Nov. 7.

Michigan Trailways, a Clio-based company offering two Pontiac-Detroit trips daily, will expand to offer a "premium" service from the train stations to Pontiac, Bloomfield, Charing Cross and Birmingham.

The big red buses with the motto "Go Big Red" will stop at the New Center, three times in the downtown central business district and Renaissance Center.

Cost of the service will be \$3 each way from Pontiac and Bloomfield and \$2.50 from Charing Cross and Birmingham. There are 10-trip and monthly rates.

Riders are asked to call if reserva-

tions (734-5566 in Detroit or 634-8222 in Pontiac) the first couple of weeks.

"We're excited about it," said Dan Fischer, assistant to the president of Michigan Trailways.

"We think it will be a premium service for commuters."

CONTRIBUTORS ALSO are being helped to form van pools, which carry 15 riders and usually offer door-to-door service.

The driver gets use of a new vehicle and rides free, while passengers pay about \$40 monthly to travel 40 miles round trip a day.

Sandra Wigert, SEMCOG's Ride Share Program manager, has been deluged with inquiries in the past two weeks. About 50 percent of the hotline (363-RIDE) calls — up to 160 a day — are from former Park and Ride commuters.

"We're delighted. We're willing to help whatever way we can," said Wigert, who encourages SEMTA riders where it's available because of the greater flexibility of public transportation.

OCC board backs Mastin in recall

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Trustees of Oakland Community College have given state Sen. Philip O. Mastin, target of a Nov. 22 recall election, their "full and unreserved support" — by a 5-3 vote.

Trustees Edward Pappas of Farmington Hills and David Preston of Birmingham argued in vain that a college board should not take a stand on a political issue, though they were sympathetic to the Pontiac Democrat. They opposed the resolution.

Bids taken on highways

Michigan Department of Transportation has taken bids on two projects which will affect Oakland County drivers.

Still to be announced is the winner of the bid on reconstruction of the interchange at I-75 and Big Beaver, which will have four directional loop ramps to accommodate increased traffic generated by commercial development in the Troy area. The project is expected to be completed in June 1985.

Thompson-McCully Co. of Belleville was low bidder at \$4,559,163 on a project to reconstruct 3.3 miles of M-59

in Livingston County.

The M-59 project calls for widening the two-lane highway to a four-lane boulevard from just west of US-23, east to newly reconstructed M-59 near Tippecanoe Lake Road in Hartland Township. It includes construction of a paved bicycle path on each side of the highway.

When completed, the entire stretch of M-59 from US-23 to Pontiac will have been widened to either four or five lanes. The improvement will enable traffic to move more easily and safely than it did on the former two-lane highway, which has been a traffic bottleneck for years.

The resolution supporting Mastin was introduced near the end of a three-hour meeting Thursday by Trustee Earl Anderson of Madison Heights.

Describing himself as a "staunch Democrat," Anderson said, "If we take it on ourselves to start recalls on elected officers because they vote one way or another on a bill, then we might as well not have elected officers. To me it's a shame we can recall."

Anderson said he would feel the same way if a Republican legislator were involved. He recollected that OCC and all other public colleges had to cut budgets repeatedly during the recession and that the income tax increase produced the first increase in educational funding in several years.

Besides Anderson and Ritter, the pro-Mastin resolution received the votes of chairwoman Suzanne Reynolds of West Bloomfield and trustees David Hackett of Rochester and Margaret MacTavish of Birmingham.

"THIS BOARD should take positions

on policies. It should not take positions on candidates," said Preston, a Bloomfield Hills attorney attending his first OCC meeting since being appointed Sept. 29 to fill a vacancy.

"I hope Mr. Mastin is not recalled," Preston added.

Pappas, also an attorney, said it was "not the appropriate business of this college to get into politics," pointing out the recall movement complied with state law to get the Mastin question on the ballot.

Pappas, too, expressed personal sympathy for Mastin.

The resolution opposes the recall "attitude" of punishing a legislator for a single vote, but it also warmly endorsed Mastin's overall legislative record.

It credited Mastin with casting "a vote favorable to schools on 25 of the 25 critical school issues."

Mastin was elected to a four-year term in the Senate last year after serving three terms in the House of Representatives in the early 1970s.

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