

Tuned in SEMTA drivers alerted to weather, driving conditions

"It's like having another pair of eyes and ears for our drivers."

That's how Ron Stewart, the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) superintendent of transportation at the Oakland Division, describes SEMTA's computerized communications link with Michigan Emergency Patrol (MEP).

Linking up with the volunteer traffic-advisory organization has helped keep bus drivers and dispatchers informed about unusual traffic conditions and adverse weather that could delay runs.

During recent bad weather, SEMTA received a report on the MEP computer network about accidents at five locations.

"With this information in hand, we were able to immediately notify drivers of all SEMTA divisions about these congested areas so they could select alternate routes and keep buses running on schedule," Stewart said.

SEMTA drivers, in turn, help MEP by reporting road conditions and accidents to the dispatcher at the Oakland Division by radio or telephone. The SEMTA dispatcher immediately types this information into the computer, and it is received instantaneously by MEP at its headquarters in the Fisher Building.

In addition, the dispatcher relays the

information to other drivers operating in the vicinity, on the same route or from other terminals.

LAST YEAR MEP conducted an orientation program for more than 70 drivers and supervisors at SEMTA terminals. Besides SEMTA, the MEP traffic-information-gathering network includes motorists with citizen-band radios, MEP volunteers who have radio-equipped cars, fire departments, county road departments, specially equipped aircraft and several construction companies.

Via a network of receiving antennas scattered throughout the metropolitan area, MEP monitors citizen-band radio Channel 9, which is reserved by the Federal Communications Commission for emergency and motorist assistance.

When MEP receives a call about a traffic accident or other condition requiring action by police or other public safety agencies, the special computer and telephone links are used to speed the information to the appropriate agency for action.

MEP also delivers regular traffic advisories to 12 local radio stations and several cable-television stations throughout the computer network. These stations then relay information to motorists and notify MEP about traffic accidents reported to them by

the public.

"Our vital communications link with SEMTA's Oakland Terminal has enhanced MEP's ability to provide up-to-the-minute traffic reports," said MEP volunteer Jack Lees.

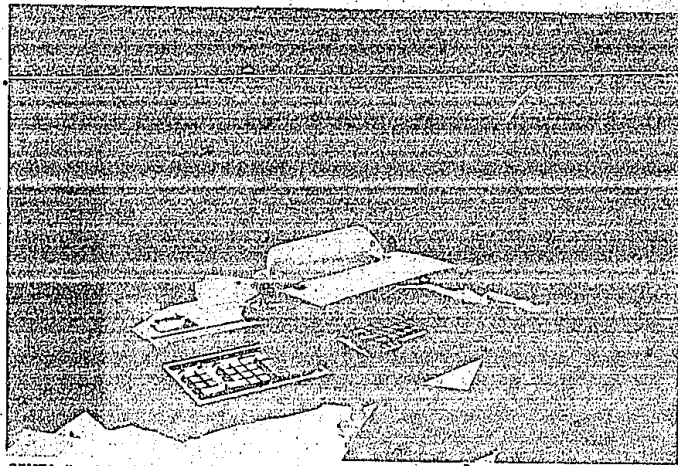
"The SEMTA drivers who watch and report accidents and traffic conditions each day provide useful information that benefits all citizens in the area. Since we are staffed entirely by volunteers, we depend on other agencies, groups and individuals to make our program work."

MEP VOLUNTEER operators handle more than 100,000 calls each year, and keep the service on the air an average of 21 hours a day — and often 24 hours a day — throughout the year.

"Thousands of area motorists have equipped their vehicles with CB radios and use Channel 9 to call MEP when they need help, want directions, wish to report traffic hazards, or want to know about traffic conditions along their route of travel," Lees explained.

"Many of the people MEP has helped like the service so much they have volunteered as operators."

Citizens without CB radios can get full use of all MEP services by dialing T-R-A-F-P-I-C on the telephone or calling 875-0105.



SEMTA dispatcher Richard Barnett transmits an accident report on a computer to the Michigan Emergency (MEP) headquarters in the Fisher Building in Detroit. When a SEMTA driver observes adverse road conditions or an accident,

the driver notifies a dispatcher at the SEMTA Oakland Division who reports the condition to MEP. In return, MEP provides SEMTA with a traffic advisory report which is relayed by the dispatcher to SEMTA drivers.

Legal aid workshops scheduled

Oakland Livingston Legal Aid presents information on some common legal problems at a series of informal workshops.

Upcoming workshops include: attorney

Lennie Peace on "How to Get Your Security Deposit Back," Thursday, April 5; and attorney James DiMeglio on "What's Going to Happen to Your Stuff When You Die?" Thursday, April

12. There will be questions at the end of each 2-4 p.m. session in Oakland Livingston Legal Aid, 10 W. Huron, Suite 307, Pontiac. To attend, call 332-9175.

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