

Some balk at paying more for People Mover

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

After months of shaking their heads over rising costs of the Downtown People Mover, Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) board members finally said "What? Well, almost."

Four of the 11 SEMTA board members on hand for Tuesday's meeting voted against increasing the project's cost by \$85,512. A two-thirds vote was needed to spend the money, which is slated for revisions to the structural system of DPM's Maintenance Control Facility.

While the board later approved the expense, some members voiced frustration over spiraling costs of the troubled rapid transit system. Originally expected to run about \$138 million, it is now estimated at \$192 million.

"I AM VERY distressed about how we're managing the project, controlling the costs," said second vice chairman JoAnn Soronen.

"I find myself with little alternative except voting 'No.' It's almost unbearable the situation I find myself in as a board member. I don't know how to put a cap on the costs," added the Farmington Hills city council member.

"Voting 'Yes' in a sense says I'm agreeing with all the things I'm unhappy with."

While voting to spend the money, Nanci Rowe asked SEMTA general manager Albert Martin to have his staff "stop writing agenda items and talk to us."

"We're told if we vote 'No' the project is going to cost more and yet if we vote 'Yes' we're afraid we'll be liable for something forever," said the Detroit attorney.

"If we're gonna rubber stamp something, it should be something we believe in."

VOTING AGAINST the \$85,512 expense were board members Tom Fegan, Walter Franchuk, Diana Kolakowski, and Soronen.

Favoring it were Phillip Dondero, Ted Frantz, Chester Jurewicz, Richard Manning, Malcolm Dade, Rowe, and chairman Tom Turner.

But after reconsidering the issue, the board voted to spend the money. The motion was approved in a voice vote without a roll call.

Turned urged the action, blaming poor preliminary engineering for the rising costs. He also assured board members that SEMTA staff is working "day and night" to keep the project on track.

"This project will come in under the projected \$200 million we talked about, but we need help from this board — and from the naysayers out there who think this is a white elephant," said the Detroit representative firmly.

"I feel very confident that we are beginning to put round pegs in round holes for the first time."

"YOUR STAFF is just as frustrated as each and every one of you must be," added general manager Martin, adding that the money isn't going into new changes.

"We're cleaning up a project that's been in trouble a long time because of very poor preliminary engineering. There is a cap out there we are working toward."

Traffic death count is up slightly in '84

The Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County (TIA) reported 125 traffic deaths reported in 1984 and 117 in 1983.

The last year in which fewer traffic deaths were recorded was in 1982, when the traffic toll in Oakland County stood at 115.

The 1984 fatalities represent at 6.8 percent increase over the preceding year. Traffic fatalities statewide in 1984 were 13.2 percent higher than the preceding year — 1,508 as compared to 1,331.

BRUCE MADSEN, TIA managing director, said traffic authorities of Oakland County were concerned early this year about a substantial increase in traffic fatalities which occurred during the first few months of 1984.

"During the first quarter there was a slight increase in the number of fatal accidents, but several of these resulted in multiple fatalities which pushed the traffic toll 75 percent above the same period in 1983," Madsen said.

The unusual fatal accident experience resulted in stepped up prevention efforts on the part of local authorities.

The work of special alcohol enforcement teams comprised of sheriff's department personnel and local police officers has played a significant role in this reduction, according to TIA.

THIS OBSERVATION is based, in part, on the fact that alcohol-related fatalities in designated target areas were down 60 percent last year compared to the two year period prior to 1980, when the countywide alcohol enforcement and education project was launched.

TIA reported that approximately \$700,000 was spent on this project from mid-1980 to mid-1983, during which time there was an estimated \$15.5 million reduction in the cost of alcohol-related accidents.

TIA reported that other factors which helped keep fatalities down include improvements in traffic engineering, law enforcement, emergency medical services and vehicle safety engineering.

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