

SEMTA faces '86 shutdown

Reagan would end U.S. transit subsidies

President Reagan's proposed budget cuts in public transportation would force the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) to close its doors by fall of 1986, said Albert A. Martin, acting general manager of SEMTA.

"Federal operating assistance would be cut from \$9 million in fiscal 1985 to zero in fiscal 1986, and Section 3 capital assistance would also fall to zero," Martin told the SEMTA board of directors.

Reduction of federal funds without

replacement would mean the end of public transit in the region, Martin said, adding, "SEMTA will operate until we no longer have money and have to close our doors."

THE SEVEN-COUNTY bus authori-

ty's annual operating budget is \$40-45 million.

It gets \$9 million from the farebox, \$9 million from the federal government and the rest from the state.

Martin saw no chance the state could pick up the federal share.

Nor could farebox revenues make up the difference, he said. Without federal subsidies, bus rides would cost \$3 per passenger for linehaul (big buses) and \$5 or \$6 for small buses.

"We couldn't do (charge) that without antagonizing riders because of the poor level of service," he said.

MARTIN SAID cuts would have four impacts on SEMTA:

1) A 66-percent reduction in the number of SEMTA linehaul buses available for peak-hour service (from 188 buses to 63).

2) A 65-percent reduction in small buses available to the elderly, the handicapped and others in need of this service (from 85 buses to 34).

3) The layoff of 67 percent of SEMTA's work force (from 913 employees to 300).

4) No implementation of the regional consensus plan for long-range capital improvements, including the light rail rapid transit line.

"THE RIPPLE effect of these actions on the Michigan economy is still imprecise," Martin said, "but we know it would be enormous. . . . Taxpayers would be faced with substantial increases in welfare and unemployment costs, and retail centers, such as Northland, would lose customers."

SEMTA receives \$25 million in federal operating funds — \$9 million for itself and \$16 million which it passes on to the Detroit Department of Transportation.

SEMTA Chairman Tom Turner said congressmen "need to hear your voices raised in protest."

Protests convince SEMTA

not to discuss Mover in secret

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

Reporters who compete vigorously while covering Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority united Tuesday to protest a planned SEMTA closed session.

As a result of the protest, SEMTA's board of directors eliminated discussion of Downtown People Mover negotiations from the secret session.

Instead, they limited discussion to a job application from a candidate for the authority's general manager position. The applicant had requested confidentiality.

ARRIVING at the 1:30 p.m. meeting in SEMTA's Detroit headquarters, reporters expected to cover the controversy over which three directors would represent Wayne County on the board.

It was possible that two rival slates would show up — a three-member group selected by suburban Wayne County commissioners and a trio appointed last week by County Executive William Lucas.

But the Lucas appointees never showed. Instead, media representatives

created a stir by objecting to the proposed "executive session" to discuss the Detroit's rapid transit system and a job application.

MICHIGAN'S OPEN Meetings Act requires public bodies to transact most business in open sessions.

Public bodies may review in private contents of an employment application when a candidate requests it remain confidential.

While opposed to the "executive session" itself, reporters expressed particular concern about plans to talk secretly about the troubled Downtown People Mover.

Objecting were representatives of the Detroit Free Press, Detroit News, Oakland Press, the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, WJR and WXYZ.

Detroit Free Press reporter David Kushner said his paper's attorney advised him "the matters you (SEMTA) plan to discuss are not covered by the Open Meetings Act."

"I ask you to place them on the public agenda or postpone them until this can be resolved."

AFTER BEING advised that the re-

porters would either sue or file complaints with the Wayne County Prosecutor, the board considered closing the session to discuss the possibility of a lawsuit.

"We just got threatened litigation," said director Nanci Rowe, a Detroit attorney. "I suggest we go into executive session to discuss that."

WJR reporter Bill Black objected again, saying the issue wasn't a lawsuit but a violation of the law.

"We want to make sure this board does not break state law."

BUT SEMTA attorney Walter Clements said the Open Meetings Act does not allow for a closed session to discuss such litigation. "It would not be appropriate at this time, no," he said.

Director Malcolm Dado suggested the executive session be eliminated from the agenda. The closed meeting had been added by Director Thomas Fegan.

Instead, the board decided to discuss in private only the job application. Clements ruled that would be proper since the applicant requested confidentiality.

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