

New Lodge plan: shorter shutdown

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Suburban drivers taking the Lodge Freeway to downtown Detroit will see it shut down for reconstruction only half as long under a new plan unveiled this week by state Transportation Director James P. Pitz.

"The contractor's time will be greater, and the closure time will be less," said Pitz, who cancelled an earlier plan to rebuild the 25-year-old freeway when bids came in 30 percent above estimates.

The work will be done over two years:

- 1986 — non-paving work, requiring no shutdown of the freeway during rush hours. "Only one lane will be closed for construction at other times," Pitz said. Many contractors will be hired to do \$14 million of work to enlarge drains, widen shoulders to 12 feet (from the present eight) and build a new safety wall. Work will run from April 15 to late September.
- 1987 — repaving, requiring the

northbound lanes to be closed for three months from April 15 to about July 27. For two weeks both lanes will be open for equipment moving and traffic signal setting. Then southbound lanes will be closed from early August until about Nov. 9. A single contractor will be in charge of the estimated \$25 million job.

During the 1987 closing, suburban commuters will be detoured to the I-96 (Jeffries) and the M-39 (Southfield) freeways. (See map for alternates to the detours.)

The Michigan Department of Transportation will work with the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority and Southeast Michigan Council of Governments to set up special express bus and ride-sharing programs during the 1987 closure.

"The total time of closure for both directions now will be about six months instead of 10," Pitz said. "This will consolidate all the traffic disruption into one construction season instead of two seasons, as was originally planned."

"The current estimate of the cost is

\$39 million," compared to \$43 million for the first plan.

What went wrong with the first plan to make bids come in so high? "The original plan required the contractor to do too much work in too little space in too little time," Pitz replied. The new plan is "greatly simplified."

William A. Cilluffo, director of marketing for the Automobile Club of Michigan and former administrative assistant to Detroit Mayor Coleman

Young, called the new plan "reasonable and sensible. Our people can think of no better alternatives."

The Lodge carries 140,000 trips a day — 70,000 in each direction.

MDOT also consulted with downtown and New Center area businesses to minimize disruptions for restaurants, hospitals and businesses. Some employers will institute "flex-hours" for workers, the MDOT chief said.

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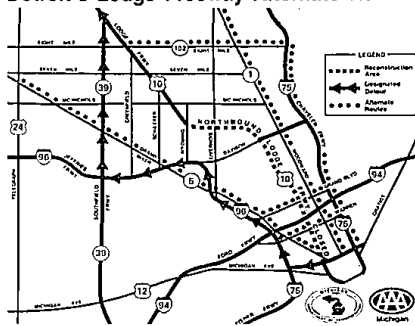
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SEMTA will delay hiring agency head

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

Four area leaders have urged Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) to postpone hiring a permanent general manager.

Calling the move "clearly premature" in light of a meeting May 31 on Macomb Island to discuss transportation, the "Big Four" asked the SEMTA board to delay the hiring. Signing the hand-delivered letter were Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy, Walter Franchuk, chairman of Macomb County Board of Commissioners, and Wayne County Executive William Lucas.

"We urge you to devote your energies to completion of the People Mover and day-to-day operations until this matter can be worked out," the May 21 letter read.

"Be assured that we are giving full attention to this matter and will continue to work with you."

SEMTA'S BOARD is divided on whether to hire acting General Manager Albert Martin or Boston resident William Stead, director of operations for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

Stead and Florida engineer George Billman were the two finalists in a \$40,000 candidate search conducted by Plante and Moran, Southfield.

Martin decided at the end of the search process that he would like to stay on. Some SEMTA board members objected to him being added to the list.

At a meeting last week, Stead received seven of the eight votes needed to win the job. Six of those votes came from suburban representatives. Of four votes cast for Martin, three came from Detroit representatives. Billman was not considered. Tuesday, an effort to table the vote on a general manager failed. The board then tied 5 to 5 on whether to offer the job to Stead.

LUCAS APPOINTEE Robert K. Archer asked that the vote on a general manager be tabled until plans are made to fund the troubled transit system. He suggested the search then be reopened.

"Certainly if I was running a private business and had the problems we face I wouldn't be hiring a new general manager," said Dearborn's chief financial officer.

But Farmington Hills representative Jo Ann Soronen moved to hire Stead.

"I think it's unfair to the two out-of-town candidates and Mr. Martin," explained Soronen, who voted with Oakland County representative Philip Dondero and Washtenaw representative Thomas Fagan against the tabling.

"And I rather resent the request from the authorities who sent it to us. I'm not in favor of tabling the issue. I'd like to see it resolved."

MICHAEL J. BRICE, the Plante and Moran consultant who recruited both of the two finalists, said he would have like to see the issue resolved. While saying his firm would like to be involved in conducting another search, Brice admitted candidates might hesitate to get involved in it.

"Once they reach the public interviews, candidates can jeopardize their current employment."

Stead said he was not surprised at the delays in the selection process. "I was told some of these things might happen," explained the civil engineer, who had not yet decided whether to stay in the running.

"In this business, it's public sector. The ball's in someone else's court, not mine."

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