

SEMTA's dilemma

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In awe of Big Four, transit board can't act

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

In Michigan's law books, there is no such thing as the "Big Four."

In politics, the Big Four are a potent force, and the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority board stands in awe of them.

"We're in a dilemma," said SEMTA board member Gerald E. Jackson of Macomb County as the deeply-split SEMTA board failed Tuesday for the third time to appoint a permanent general manager.

The reason is that the Big Four want to replace the SEMTA board with themselves, and don't want SEMTA to hire a permanent general manager.

THE BIG FOUR are Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, Wayne County Executive William Lucas, Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and Macomb County board Chairman Walter Franchuk.

A bill by state Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, to replace SEMTA and its 15-member board with a tri-county Regional Transit Authority led by the Big Four has advanced through the Senate and stands a good chance of House passage.

The Big Four, who meet informally behind closed doors about once a month, want that general kind of reorg-

anization, and most SEMTA members think the Big Four have the political clout to get it. Directly or indirectly, members of the Big Four already control a majority of the current SEMTA board.

Meanwhile, despite their political power, the Big Four have no operating authority. The result — the "dilemma," as Jackson put it — is that the SEMTA board can't/won't hire a permanent general manager.

Instead, the SEMTA board Tuesday authorized Chairman Tom Turner of Detroit to meet with the Big Four, explain the dilemma and get some kind of direction.

ALBERT A. MARTIN, previously the personnel manager, has been acting general manager of SEMTA since Gary Krause was forced out 13 months ago as the embarrassing details of the People Mover construction controversy were bared.

Martin, 43, was one of three finalists for the permanent job and was the apparent favorite among at least Detroit's four SEMTA board members.

As many as seven SEMTA board members favor William G. Stead, 38, who recently quit as director of operations for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. Despite the tie-up, Stead last week still wanted the SEMTA job.

But it takes eight of the 15 SEMTA

members to make the appointment. Twice Philip Dondro of Oakland County has dominated Stead, and twice he was short of a majority. Dondro planned to nominate Stead again Tuesday but didn't when only nine SEMTA board members showed up for the meeting.

DONDRO, Oakland's planning director, suggested the SEMTA board offer to arrange for its three general manager finalists to be interviewed by the Big Four and advise SEMTA. "What do you think of the idea?" he asked.

R. J. Alexander, retired Oakland County public works chief, thought little of it. "The Big Four's not involved at this point," said Alexander. "They should not tell us who we should hire and why."

Robert Keith Archer, board member from suburban Wayne County, agreed with Alexander, adding, "If the Big Four indicated an interest (in making the appointment), that (consulting them) would be appropriate."

"Unless we do something," said Turner, "we're going to find ourselves in this situation board meeting after board meeting." Turner worried aloud about the morale of SEMTA employees at having no permanent boss after more than a year.

AFTER THE meeting, Alexander, shaking his head, said the job should be

given to acting GM Martin.

Any (outside) who would take it has got to have holes in his head. We should remove the 'acting' from Al Martin's title," Alexander said.

The nine-year SEMTA veteran was critical of the Michigan Legislature for spending so much time on SEMTA reorganization and virtually none on getting the transit authority its own source of tax revenue. SEMTA meets farebox shortages and capital needs with federal and state grants — and the federal government is phasing out operating subsidies to local transit authorities.

If Fessler's bills are approved by the Legislature, SEMTA would be reorganized for the second time in less than a decade.

In 1988 SEMTA was born as a seven-county agency with a nine-member board — six appointed by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments and three by the governor.

A 1975 reorganization gave SEMTA its current 15-member board — four Detroiters appointed by the mayor, four Wayne County suburbanites now appointed by the county executive, three Oakland County members appointed by various methods, two Macomb County members appointed by the board of commissioners and two representatives for the four small counties appointed by the governor.



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West Bloomfield man heads panel

A West Bloomfield resident, who is widely known in business circles for sponsoring self-help Dale Carnegie courses, was elected chairman of the Henry Ford Community College Foundation Board of Directors.

Ralph Nichols, whose corporation by the same name is the world's largest licensee of the self-improvement courses, replaces appliance store owner Michael Adray on the college's fund-raising board.

Members to the non-profit organization are appointed by college trustees and serve as volunteers. Nichols' other fund-raising activities include working as a volunteer on the annual Easter Seal telethon. He has been involved with Dale Carnegie and Associates in southern Michigan and southwest Ohio since 1988.

Other local residents appointed to the board include:

- Stuart Goldstein, a Bloomfield Hills resident, has been an attorney for 17 years and is the principal partner with the Southfield-based Goldstein, Serlin, Esrow and Steinway, P.C. He currently is president of the Jewish Vocational Service and Community Workshop of Detroit.
- Randy Sher is president of A Better Way Inc. of West Bloomfield.

Christian education group sets meeting

A group called Christians United to Reclaim Education is hosting a seminar 7 p.m. Tuesday, July 30, in the Royal Oak Public Library to discuss home schooling.

The meeting will include information on "how to attain private Christian education" for children, said a meeting organizer.

The library is at 222 E. 11 Mile Road.

For more information, call 751-4497 or 585-6092.



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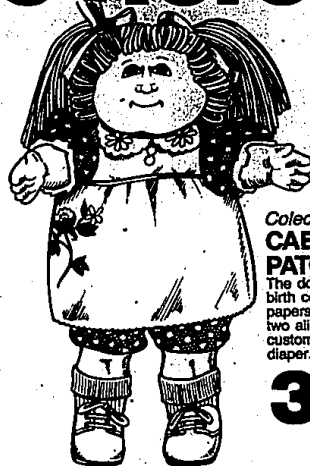
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