

MDOT official describes public transit's fate

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nancing this year, with at least 25 percent the following year. Proposed fed-

eral cuts next year will certainly mean the death of AMTRAK rail services, Norris said.

The Reagan administration in every

year has asked for nothing (to be allocated to public transit), Norris said. Because the state can no longer fill the funding gap, one of two things will

happen. Either state officials will make cuts in other programs to continue funding public transit — buses, trains, special services and commuter airlines — or cuts will take place in transportation, Norris said.

"The public will have to decide," she added.

ization of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA), called for in state Senate Bill 363. Bill 363, which has passed the Senate and is in committee in the House, would actually eliminate the existing 15-member SEMTA board — a group that sets policy and operates bus systems throughout a seven-county area.

The bill calls for creating a regional transit coordinating authority that would consist of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties, as well as the city of Detroit. The authority would have the power to contract for transportation services with other public or private providers. It could also create corporations that would provide and operate a public transportation system with the authority's service area.

Norris told the audience that she likes the idea of the bill's attempt to separate public transit policy from operations. "It serves a counter-check system," she added.

Often when the two functions are intermingled, such as with the current

SEMTA, "lines blur" and members forget what are their functions and duties. "I like the idea of smaller board," Norris said.

THE THREE-COUNTY authority makes sense because the transit needs of the counties — Macomb, Oakland and Wayne — are similar. The needs of the out-county SEMTA members are different than the three urban counties. "For the SEMTA organization to try to serve all these different compelling needs, seems to me, to be impossible."

Yet, compared to other states, Michigan's public transit system "is the best in the nation." Backing up her contention, Norris said the state has 60 transit systems — "we run the gamut" — ranging from the large urban areas all the way up to the rural areas in the Upper Peninsula.

In 1984-85, SEMTA and the Detroit Department of Transportation served 75.5 million passengers. Of the total, 18 million were elderly and handicapped passengers.

Hills car dealer faces charges

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very trying situation" for Mechigan in light of the charges facing him, according to his attorney.

"That's the fear that's been in this case from the beginning," attorney David DuMouchel of Detroit said. "The other dealers were allowed to plead to counts not jeopardizing their franchises."

An offer of a lesser plea was not offered to his client, DuMouchel said.

DuMouchel refers to energy-related charges brought against Pogo Toyota of Southfield, whose owner testified at the beginning of Mechigan's preliminary examination. The Pogo dealer paid Jones \$1,500 to alter three electric meters, was charged with energy fraud, and was allowed to plead guilty

to a lesser charge, Meekins said.

FORMER FARMINGTON HILLS dealer Roger Peck testified that he refused offers for Jones' services, sources said.

Another dealer testifying, the owner of Tamaroff Buick of Southfield, said he also paid Jones to alter his meters. During the investigation, the Tamaroff owner filed for amnesty under a newly-passed state utility statute, and he was not charged, Meekins said.

"There were quite a few auto dealers being investigated," Meekins said, adding that many filed under the amnesty provision, which allowed dealers to pay back utility money owed without being charged with an energy fraud felony.

Mechigan also filed for amnesty and paid back money owed to utilities from

his business, but was charged with the two energy fraud counts despite statute provisions, DuMouchel said.

"You only receive immunity" for what you divulge," Assistant Attorney General Robert Ianni said, noting the defendant did not mention his alleged involvement with other dealers when he filed for amnesty. Mechigan applied for amnesty only with regard to his business, Ianni added.

PRELIMINARY examination testimony began Nov. 19, was continued Dec. 2 and concluded last week for Mechigan. The auto dealer witnesses were subpoenaed by the prosecution, Meekins said.

Mechigan also faces a late April trial in Wayne County, his attorney said, also on energy-related charges.

DuMouchel said he will file a petition for dismissal on behalf of his client in Oakland County Circuit Court.

The charges against Mechigan stem from Michigan State Police investigations of a reported 60 commercial and residential gas and electric meter tamperings beginning in January 1982. Approximately \$130,000 was involved in the fraud, discovered in May of the same year by Detroit Edison.

Mechigan opened his Oldsmobile dealership at its present location on Grand River in 1973. He previously worked as a Chevrolet sales representative, taking over an ailing Grosse Pointe dealership before coming to Farmington Hills.

ASKED HER opinion of what should happen, Norris responded, "The citizens of this country and this state need and want public transit."

Public transit and transportation in Michigan is financed through the state's gas and weight tax. Transportation — highways and roads — takes 90 percent of the total revenue from gas and weight taxes. Public transit is left with 10 percent, 65 percent of which goes specifically for bus service, Norris said.

In addition, one cent of the federal gas tax is put in a restricted fund, which cannot be used for anything other than public transportation. But of the \$45 million Michigan contributes in federal gas tax (based on the one cent restricted fund), it receives back less than \$1 million, Norris said.

In 33 Michigan communities, residents have voted themselves a tax specifically for public transit. Although Oakland County contributes financially to roads, it does not to public transit.

Responding to questions about taking public transit away from the government and putting it totally in the hands of private companies, Norris said it would not be "a 100 percent answer, especially not in an urban area, such as Oakland County." Private companies, however, are used on the state level to provide certain services.

TURNING THE discussion to a more regional direction, audience members asked Norris about the potential reorg-

Snow days discussed

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sion by 5 a.m., Cartsonis said. OCC's policy is to close all campuses. "It's as dangerous to get to one place (in Oakland County) as another," he added.

Younger students anticipating free school snow days will pay the price soon. "The whole attitude is going to change statewide," Shilber predicted.

Because of a recent state law, students are guaranteed 180 days of classes. This year in Clarencville

— and next year in Farmington — any snow day cutting into that 180-day guarantee will be made up at the end of the year.

CLARENCVILLE IS scheduled for 181 days of school this year, and Farmington 182, giving each district a one-to-two-day cushion.

The legislation was prompted by an Upper Peninsula student, who complained about losing school time because of excessive snow days, Schulman said.

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