

SEMCOG transit plan has light rail lines

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A compromise plan endorsing two rapid transit lines won a 5-1 margin of approval from the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. "It is not a wish list. It recognizes the needs of people who have no personal auto," Milton Mack, a Wayne County commissioner from Wayne, told the SEMCOG General Assembly meeting Thursday in Novi. Mack chaired a panel which proposed the bus-light rail plan. SEMCOG's plan calls for expanded bus service — particularly for east-west routes between suburban Oakland and Macomb counties and along Ford Road and Michigan Avenue in western Wayne County. And it proposed a rapid transit plan from the '70s — light rail in the Woodward corridor from downtown Detroit to Eleven Mile and in the Grosse Pointe corridor from downtown to Roseville. The final plan was a blend of four earlier "alternatives" discussed last summer at public hearings.

TWO AMENDMENTS were shot down by SEMCOG delegates. • Pontiac's — to extend the Woodward light rail line there. It failed with 19 in favor and 41 against. • Macomb County's — to endorse an all-bus system. It was talked about but never came to a vote. SEMCOG is composed of 135 local governments in seven counties. It does long-range regional planning required by federal law to qualify the region for highway and other grants. PONTIAC MAYOR Walter Moore got much Oakland support when he proposed that a light rail line pinpoint his county seat city immediately. The adopted plan advocates building only to Royal Oak, then "assessing" whether the line should be extended to Southfield, Troy or the Auburn Hills-Rochester area. "If we shortchange on plans, we shortchange on votes," said Moore, arguing that taxes to support the public transit would be easier to approve if Pontiac were designed as a

terminus now. "We need people from the south to come north, and northern communities to come south," said Pleasant Ridge Mayor Jeff Sherbow. "If we present a total plan, we'd have something to present (to voters)," said Oak Park Mayor Charlotte Holstein. "At least it's on paper where we're going." MACK REPLIED that his panel "looked at extensions to Pontiac and Troy. Pontiac was No. 3 on the list." SEMCOG staff members said that around the nation, transit systems are being built a leg at a time, not all at once. The SEMCOG plan calls for boosting public transit ridership 88 percent — from the current 72.5 million passengers a year to 136.3 million by 2005. It didn't identify a source of funding, designate what kind of transit agency should do the building or pinpoint specific lines. And it didn't specify whether the light rail should be built on the surface or underground — "subway," a word that



Milton Mack
transit chairman

'It is not a wish list. It recognizes the needs of people who have no personal auto and calls for cross-suburb service.'

— Milton Mack
panel chairman

causes flights in the metro region. The plan put operating cost per passenger at 58 cents for light rail, \$2.42 for large buses on fixed routes and \$6.36 for small buses serving the elderly and handicapped. It proposes expanding the region's existing large bus fleet from 822 to 1,326, particularly on cross-town routes between suburbs. It asks that the small bus fleet for elderly and disabled be expanded

from 196 to 432 vehicles. And it proposed rejuvenating commuter rail service between Ann Arbor and Detroit. MACOMB COUNTY, which stayed away from SEMCOG for about 15 years and frequently is at odds with Detroit, voted against the plan because of the light rail component. "It (light rail) is infeasible and not easily amended," said county commissioner Sam Pettito. "Its construction cost (\$1.7 billion) would consume capital that could be used elsewhere." George Killen, a Macomb commissioner and board chairman of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA), said public transit generally has too much of a Detroit orientation. "SEMTA operates 10 routes in Macomb, and eight are entirely oriented toward Detroit," said Killen. "There's a tremendous growth in employment in Oakland and Macomb counties in recent years. We should increase the east-west service equal to the service to Detroit." "Not correct," Mack replied. The plan clearly calls for Oakland-Macomb service but doesn't address specific routes because that is SEMTA's function, he said. Troy Councilman Randy Husk said, "The plan is very very short-sighted because it doesn't mention east-west routes at all north of Twelve Mile Road. There's no way for anyone in the region to get (to offices and malls) on Crooks and Long Lake."

CP extends security plan deadline

Consumers Power Co. will extend to Nov. 15 the enrollment period of its residential natural gas customers to sign up for its heating security plan. The heating security plan, announced in September, is designed to cover the potential cost of repairs and replacement parts on a customer's home heating system and/or hot water system for one year. Coverage

can include the main burner, thermostat, motor and fan control. Annual cost ranges from \$49 to \$74, depending on the homeowner's coverage choices. The deadline has been extended to provide the metro region's 618,000 residential natural gas customers the opportunity to take advantage of the protection plan," said Edgar L. Doss, metro region general mana-

ger. Coverage of a water heating system includes such items as the thermostat, burner, pilot, temperature and pressure relief valve, but not the water heater tank. Consumers Power offices will handle customer inquiries.



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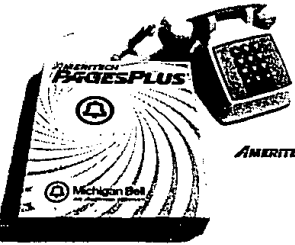
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