

SMART will listen to suburbs — Nowak

By Tim Richard
staff writer

At first, suburban bus riders will notice little change.

But now that SEMTA has become SMART, its chairman says the public transit service will be under suburban control — no Detroit politicians on the board, a sensitivity to riders and taxpayers.

"Our mission will be to focus on the needs of the riders and taxpayers as opposed to the organization, staff and employees," said Patrick Nowak, first chairman of the new board.

"We're not Nowak going to change the routes to downtown Detroit. Our riders have jobs there."

"But if the next route that's needed is cross-town (between suburbs),

that's where it's going to go," said Nowak, 50, a deputy Oakland County executive. "Detroit no longer has any votes in how a suburban authority works."

THE STATE Legislature last year reorganized the 20-year-old SEMTA (Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority), abolishing its 15-member board representing Detroit, suburban Wayne County, Macomb County and four outlying counties.

In its place is a thin superstructure called the Regional Transit Coordinating Council, composed of the political Big Four. Underneath RTCC are Detroit's Department of Transportation and the suburban operating unit called SMART chaired by Nowak.

SMART stands for Suburban Mobility Authority — Regional Transportation. Its logo says "Ride SMART."

SMART's board has seven members:

- Wayne County Executive Ed-

ward H. McNamara and his deputy, Mike Duggan. Alternate is Wyandotte Mayor James DeSana.

- Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and his deputy, Nowak. Alternate is attorney Keith Murphy of West Bloomfield Township.

- Macomb Board Chairman Mark Steenbergh and commissioner Harold Grove. Alternate is commissioner George Killeen, a past chairman of the SEMTA board.

- One person still to be named by the four outlying counties of Washtenaw, Livingston, St. Clair and Monroe. "We don't know if they're going to flip a coin or what to decide," said Nowak. "They will rotate the post every two years."

SEMTA's general manager, Albert Martin, will stay on board. The agency already has a reputation for efficiently operating its 320 buses and \$94 million budget.

But Nowak said things can be improved.

In a news conference after Tuesday's organizational meeting, the Big Three politicians announced the name change, a hiring freeze and a ban on out-of-state travel for board members and employees.

"We are determined to run a lean machine," said Nowak. "It means more service."

The presence of Keith Murphy (no kin of Dan Murphy) on the board is significant, Nowak said. Keith has been Dan's expert on privatization — the use of private contractors to

perform public services. Murphy has been Michigan's most vocal official in advocating privatization, to the chagrin of public employees' unions.

THE THRUST of SMART's technical work is being done not by the top executives but by the deputies and technical people.

Nowak said they already had held meetings to learn operations and have brought in their experts in purchasing and personnel.

Nowak, now of Bloomfield Township, was a life insurance agent and

county commissioner from Farmington Hills until 1976. In 1974 he was one of the finalists considered by then-Gov. William Milliken to be lieutenant governor.

Murphy in 1977 appointed him deputy in charge of long-range planning and legislative projects, such as transit. Newspapers know Nowak as Murphy's political stand-in.

Each year county board Democrats try to amend the budget to eliminate Nowak's salary, a motion always rejected on a party-line vote.

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