

SMART officials ponder a road to privatization

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Directors of Metropolitan Detroit's suburban bus system this week will again try to resolve a problem that has divided them for three months and undermined \$40 million in grants to update and expand the mass transportation system.

At issue is about \$12 million in federal money allocated to buy 20 new buses and add 12 routes to SMART (the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation).

The expansion is the first phase of a plan to eventually add more than 60 new buses and replace others in SMART's aging fleet.

SMART's board of directors is scheduled to review the matter at its regular meeting Tuesday. But each of the last two monthly meetings — when directors were also scheduled to address the matter — was adjourned for the lack of a quorum.

SMART annually handles about 8 million riders in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, Livingston and St. Clair counties. About one-third of those riders begin or end their trips in Oakland County.

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To qualify for the \$12 million, SMART must award a contract to one of five companies submitting competitive bids to operate the 20 new buses and 12 new routes.

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The split is personified in the deputy county executives from Oakland and Wayne counties, Patrick Nowak and Michael Duggan, respectively.

Nowak, who is also chairman of SMART, wants to award the contract to ATE, saying the company would save SMART about \$300,000 in phase one, and more than \$1.6 million over the complete expansion.

Awarding the contract to ATE would help privatize SMART, Nowak

said, something the federal government is encouraging to save money and improve service.

Duggan wants to award the contract to SMART, insisting its bid is actually lower and would save money over the years.

Duggan said federal bid procedures are designed to provide an advantage to private companies, like ATE, by the way administrative costs are computed.

Giving a sense of urgency to the situation is Nowak's contention that the federal Urban Mass Transit Administration will take back its grant if SMART doesn't award the contract soon.

"Other communities are ready to put that money to use if we're not," said Nowak. "I'm afraid we'll lose it."

OU enrollment

Half of students come from county

Oakland County continues to provide just over half of Oakland University's students, fall enrollment records show.

A total of 6,314 of OU's 12,400 students at the Rochester campus come from Oakland. Macomb County is second with 3,643 students. Wayne County is third with 922.

Information from the Office of Institutional Research shows totals in

three areas fell slightly from 1989 figures: Oakland County down only four students, Macomb down 24 and Wayne down 17.

Combined student totals for Genesee, Lapeer and St. Clair counties were 623 for fall 1989 and 660 for fall 1990.

Of OU's students, 12,204 came from Michigan, up 20 over last fall. Foreign enrollment was 129 com-

pared with 125 last fall. Other U.S. enrollment fell from 76 students in 1989 to 67 this year.

Women continue to outnumber men in the OU student body by a count of 7,920 to 4,480. Female enrollment was up 20 students over last year and male enrollment up by one student.

The 12,400 full- and part-time student count is up 15 over 1989.

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