

# You're getting more chances to take the bus

**By Pat Murphy**  
staff writer

SMART is getting larger — and more privatized. And, starting today, suburban residents are getting more public transportation.

SMART (the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation) is introducing eight new bus

routes today as part of a new expansion financed with \$12 million in federal funds and \$1.3 million in state money.

Area communities that will be getting this added bus service include Farmington Hills, Farmington, Southfield, West Bloomfield, Troy, Rochester and Rochester Hills.

The new routes will be managed by ATE Management & Service Co.

This represents the largest step toward privatization in the 24-year history of the metro Detroit area's major mass transportation system.

Until recently, most of the system's 244 buses operating in metro Detroit have been operated by SMART itself. SMART has subcontracted some bus routes. But they were small, the exception rather than the rule.

"This (awarding the contract to ATE) is certainly the biggest step toward privatization in SMART history," said Patrick M. Nowak, the former Oakland County deputy executive and is now director of the Michigan Department of Transportation.

**NOWAK WAS CHAIRMAN** of SMART last year when the system

advertised for bids on the contract to operate the new routes. He is among the executives scheduled to attend a press conference — called to announce the initiation of the new routes — today at the regional SMART office in Royal Oak.

SMART was obligated to put the contract out for bids to qualify for the \$12 million from the Urban Mass Transit Administration the agency that oversees federal transportation grants.

"If we hadn't advertised the bids and then done what we said we were going to do," Nowak said. "We would not get the money."

Consistent with policies initiated by Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, UMPATA wanted quasi-governmental units, like SMART, to explore privatization as a means of promoting efficiency.

The Cincinnati-based ATE was the successful bidder, edging out four other competitors, including a subsidiary of SMART.

"It certainly puts competitive forces in place," said Nowak. "But it wasn't easy."

The new routes represent a significant step in another way, said Matthew M. Wirgau, one of two Oakland SMART representatives. "It's not a massive expansion. But it is a

step toward providing more suburban routes that can act as feeders to the main traffic arteries."

"The routes introduced today add about 120 route miles to SMART, whose buses travel more than 10 million route miles annually.

**THE NEW ROUTES ARE:**

Route 300, in Farmington, Farmington-Hills, Redford Township and Novi.

Route 400, in Southfield, Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield, Keego Harbor, Orchard Lake and Pontiac.

Route 492, in Troy, Rochester, Rochester Hills and Auburn Hills.

Route 494, in Ferndale, Hazel Park, Madison Heights, Warren, Sterling Heights and Troy.

Route 115, in Woodhaven, Trenton, Riverview, Weyandotte, Southgate and Taylor.

Route 265, in Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Garden City and Westland.

Route 320, in Warren, Sterling Heights, Utica and Shelby Township.

Route 730, in Harper Woods, East Detroit, Roseville, Center Line, Warren, Madison Heights and Royal Oak.

These routes are considered the first phase of a long-range project that calls for a total of \$41 million in federal and state money to go to regional transportation.

## Prosecutor praises court decision

Oakland County prosecutor Richard Thompson is loudly praising the U.S. Supreme Court for upholding Michigan's toughest-in-the-nation law requiring a mandatory life sentence for people convicted of possessing 650 grams or more of cocaine.

This decision gives police and prosecutors the tools to permanently remove major drug dealers from our community," Thompson said Thursday during a press conference.

"The current law is working," said Thompson, whose office over the last 20 months has obtained more than 60 drug-related indictments from three Oakland County citizens grand juries. "It has produced dramatic results."

Thompson has consistently claimed Michigan's law deters drug dealers and helps police agencies get to major suppliers through low-level street dealers who cooperate rather than face life in prison.

But other officials, including Macomb County prosecutor Carl Marfaglia and Oakland Circuit Judge David F. Breck disagree.

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Farms, who claims the existing law does not help police get to major dealers, who frequently circumvent Michigan's law by having their cases switched to federal jurisdiction, where penalties are considerably less severe.

The decision Thompson lauded was handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court Thursday involving Ronald Harmelin, now 46, who was caught in a routine traffic stop by Oak Park police in May, 1988.

Police found 672 grams — or about 1.5 pounds — of cocaine in the car. Harmelin was subsequently found guilty of possessing cocaine and, under the tough 1976 law, was sentenced to life in prison with no chance for parole.

In its 5-4 decision, the high court ruled that a life sentence for possession of that much cocaine was not disproportionate to the offense and thus did not constitute the cruel and unusual punishment prohibited by the U.S. Constitution.

THEY ARE AMONG the officials who have testified before the Judiciary Committee of the Michigan House of Representatives on behalf of Bill 4024 that would change the tough drug law, giving judges more discretion in dealing with drug offenders.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. William R. Bryant Jr., R-Grosse Pointe

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Justice Byron White, writing the minority view, said the mere possession of a large amount of cocaine — even as much as carried by Harmelin — is not always serious enough to warrant life in prison.

The high court's decision does not necessarily mark the end of the controversy over Michigan's tough drug possession law.

The Michigan Supreme Court could overturn it this fall when they are expected to rule on a similar case.

ment without parole is . . . not disproportionate to Harmelin's crime," wrote Justice Anthony Kennedy, who wrote the majority. "His suggestion that the crime was nonviolent and victimless is false to the point of absurdity."

"The amount of cocaine Harmelin possessed has a potential yield of between 32,500 and 65,000 doses, and the amount is momentous enough to warrant the deterrence and retribution of a life sentence without parole," Kennedy wrote.

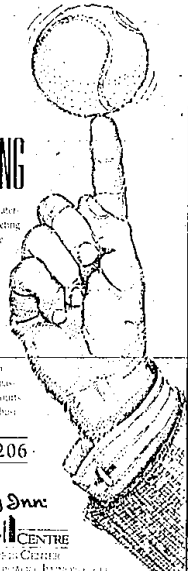
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