

Duggan, unions pledge to keep buses rolling

Michael Duggan, deputy Wayne County executive and SMART's new interim general manager, has pledged that in two weeks, union and management will present a plan to the SMART board that reduces costs and averts the March 27 service reduction date.

SMART is the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation.

At a special meeting of the SMART board Feb. 27, union leaders pledged support for the appointment of Duggan, the cost-cutting of transit operations and merger of the D-DOT and SMART systems.

Each union leader spoke before the board and committed to working with the board to solve the short-term and long-term problems of SMART.

"Today is a very good day for public transit in southeastern Michigan. For the first time in recent history,

we have labor and management working together. In addition, we have the Michigan Legislature, the mayor of the City of Detroit, the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce, the news media, government and civic leaders all agreeing to work on a long-term transit plan that works," said Matt Wirgau, chairman of the board of directors and a Troy resident.

Duggan stated that he and the board will continue to work together with the SMART staff, union officials and Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young to provide an efficient and effective regional transit system to the residents in the tri-county area.

Duggan resigned Thursday as the vice chairman of the SMART board. He had served on the SMART board since 1989 when the authority was reorganized.

The SMART board of directors are chairman Wirgau, Oakland County;

vice chairman Patrick Johnson, Macomb County Board of Commissioners; Edward McNamara, Wayne County Executive; Daniel Murphy, Oakland County Executive; John Funk, Monroe County Board of Commissioners; Mark Steenbergh, Macomb County Board of Commissioners; Wyandotte Mayor James DeSena (alternate); Wayne County Executive; and Jean Wiloughby (alternate), Oakland County.

Duggan takes over management of the SMART operations following the surprise resignation last week of acting general manager James Aho. Wirgau, chairman of the board of SMART, said he was surprised by Aho's resignation but he disputed charges that area leaders are using transit riders as pawns in a political battle.

Wirgau said the SMART board is "looking at every option to maintain service and avert a shutdown on March 27." But he added that the board is reluctant to accept another Band-Aid solution.

"It's time to put partisan biases aside and work together to form a regional transportation agency under regional control properly funded by some sort of dedicated revenue," said Wirgau.

"SMART and before it SEMTA has been a political football for the last 20 years it's time to put in place a long-term solution that works," he said.

Wirgau said the SMART board is working toward a long-term solution. The board's actions include talking to the state about funding, vehicle liability and worker compensation, cutting labor costs and creating a new autonomous agency by a board represented by the three counties and the city of Detroit funded in an equitable manner.

The financially-plagued Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation which seeks a merger with the Detroit Department of Transportation.

Coleman Young in a letter issued last week said: "The city of Detroit is ready, and has always been ready, to develop a regional transportation system for Southeast Michigan."

All that we have asked is that other units of government in the region No. 1 - demonstrate a willingness to come up with a transportation subsidy in the same way the City of Detroit subsidizes the Detroit Department of Transportation, No. 2 - provide for a more equitable distribution of federal and state money between D-DOT and the rest of the region, based on the amount of services provided, and No. 3 - provide for a system of equitable representation, again, based on the amount of services provided with the system."

The Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce board of directors has asked the Michigan Legislature to intervene to prevent the shutdown of SMART's suburban transportation services.

"To provide the resources necessary for the temporary continuation of suburban transportation services we ask that legislative action be taken authorizing the use of an estimated \$10 million overpayment in SMART Pension Funds and a change in SMART's current fiscal year which would add another \$4 million."

"Finally, we urge legislative authority to allow southeast Michigan to levy a local, dedicated source of revenue to support a regional public transportation system," the chamber letter stated.

Recent audits indicate the SMART employee pension fund is overfunded by some \$10 million - a sign, some say, of just how badly managed regional transportation has been.

SMART's financial problems are caused by declining state and federal revenue - including state gas tax money - and dwindling ridership, Wirgau said.

Though it would take approval from the state Legislature, tapping the pension fund would more than cancel SMART's announced \$6.7 million deficit.

"SMART's problems aren't new. A decade ago, the Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority - SMART's predecessor - began cutting services in the face of a projected \$4.2 million deficit. Total sub-

urban transportation services have been cut by an estimated 40 percent, with commuter rail service abandoned entirely.

Ridership, once more than 12 million under SEMTA, has dwindled to 25,000 while the SMART operating budget has risen to \$52 million.

SMART has no taxing authority of its own.

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Re-entering the singles world

Divorced people often hold back on re-entry into the social arena, and a workshop from the Oakland University Continuum Center will explore why. "How to be Single After a Divorce" will be presented on Tuesdays, March 3, 10, 17 and 24, 7-10 p.m., at the Birmingham Unitarian Church.

Communications Specialist Barbara Halpern, MA, will lead this candid four-session exploration of the sensitive issues that surround being single again. The program will focus on the importance of maintaining a love relationship with self before building one with another.

Participants will look at ways to

avoid previous patterns. They will examine ways to keep self-esteem intact to move on with life, whatever the decisions.

Other workshop topics include how to deal with family, including kids, parents and ex-spouse, when a new relationship begins. It specifically explores conflict that can develop with children.

The fee is \$75. MasterCard/VISA accepted. Call 370-3033 before March 2 to register.

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