

## POINTS OF VIEW

# Transportation becomes a voting rights issue

Just lost the right to vote on public transportation.

That's because Monday night my township board voted 4-1 against joining the just-formed Oakland County Transportation Authority.

So West Bloomfield residents won't participate in the June 6 election on whether to improve public transportation to, from and within our suburb.

It means that if the question passes, West Bloomfield residents won't pay the .33 mill property tax increase being sought — about \$33 on a \$200,000 home.

It also means West Bloomfield residents won't reap any transportation benefits from that increase.

Similar votes — whether to join the new authority and participate in the election — will be taken throughout our suburbs within the next couple of weeks. Southfield, for instance, will address it Monday.

So far, Troy has elected to be part of the new transportation authority and the June 6 election.

Meanwhile, back in West Bloomfield, four trustees (Michael Schwartz, Marc Schulman, Roy Holland and Dennis Vatsis) cast my voting rights away. Only township Supervisor Joddy Hood was in favor, with two other board members absent.

Schwartz and Schulman, formerly in favor of the vote, said that with the formation of the authority, it is no longer a countywide question.

They added that since only communities which rely on public transportation will be voting — already Highland, Lyon, White Lake, Independence, Rose and Holly have withdrawn — the deck is stacked against West Bloomfield voters.

Of course, that's provided my fellow residents are against the tax increase. It is Schwartz's assessment that West Bloomfield would vote down more money for public transit since "Most of our citizens do not use it."

Pleas of audience members, who turned out with very little notice for the special meeting, were listened to



JUDITH DONER BERNE

but not heard.

Helen Singer said she was very upset that the board thought it had to protect her from this vote.

"I'm thinking I'm old enough to look out for myself."

She found the board short-sighted in thinking that just because few residents ride buses, public transit isn't important to the West Bloomfield area.

Many (West Bloomfield) businesses rely on employees who use public transportation — restaurants, markets,

domestic help. Not everyone has the money to call a taxi."

Narinder Kuthuria said: "It has always been a concern that Detroit has a poor transportation system. I feel good that we at least have some form of transportation." Now, even that is in jeopardy, he said.

Pauline Sabaroff, a grandmother, was concerned for the young people. "It is terribly unfair that in one of the richest counties (Oakland) in the world," young people can't get around unless they have access to a car.

Her husband, Arnold, 71, recalls even in the 1920s there was an interurban line "all the way out to Cass Lake." He talked of "a real public transportation system" as the road to less pollution, fewer road repairs and the key to a thriving metropolitan Detroit.

Public transportation has always been a tricky issue here in car-driven metropolitan Detroit. And it is fair to say that the SMART system could be run smarter.

Critics point to too many empty or near-empty large buses on trunk line routes. At the same time, they say there are not enough smaller, off-shoot buses and vans for the actual needs of riders in Oakland County.

Still, Detroit is probably the only major metropolitan area with no viable public transportation.

But talk is cheap. And Singer, Kuthuria, the two Sabaroffs and I won't get a chance to have our say where it counts — at the ballot box. Will you?

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of The Eccentric Newspapers.

# Reduce drunken driving by changing our lifestyles

The most devastating thing that can happen to a parent, as I've watched life, is the death of a teenager — a kid on the brink of manhood or womanhood snuffed out in a traffic accident, especially by a drunken driver.

A reporter's toughest job, in my experience, is to knock on the door of grieving parents and ask for a picture of the dead teen, often a yearbook portrait.

So it wasn't exactly fun last Sunday to do a "Spotlight" program on Channel 7 with Ed and Peggy Babinski, parents of the late 18-year-old Christine, and Warren Councilman Jim Fouts. But it was an issue that had to be discussed.

All three support a proposed city ordinance to confiscate the cars of second-offense drunken drivers who have previously had their licenses suspended. Fouts said, "Judges and law enforcement officers are not enforcing the law on the books." Their theme:

"Anything" that gets habitual drunk drivers out of their vehicles. Mrs. Babinski would keep them from behind the wheel for seven years.

I've heard this debated for a decade: More punishment, tough new laws, more punishment. In the mid-1980s, the Legislature provided for jail and prison terms for second- and third-offense drunken drivers.

Before those laws were passed, the odds that any drunken driver would be arrested were one in 3,000. After they took effect, the odds were one in 3,000. If we pass harsher local ordinances, harsher state laws or even federal laws with more creative punishments, the odds of arresting any individual drunken driver are one in 3,000.

Michigan has tripled its prison population in a dozen years without denting the overall crime rate. In my view, tough new laws and more punishment aren't working.

Here are some ideas that are more likely to work:



TIM RICHARD

■ Earlier closing — The last time I was in Great Britain, the English bars closed at 11 p.m. and the Scots' at 10 p.m., though I hear they've now moved up to midnight. The British don't appear to have the same drunken driving problems we do, despite their two-lane, twisting roads. Michigan's bars close at 2:30 a.m. Read the Associated Press Monday stories about weekend traffic deaths, and you'll find the bulk occur after 1:30 a.m. We should close 'em at midnight.

■ Tea time — The Brits' close their bars for three hours in the afternoon — either 2-5 or 3-6 p.m. The Babinskis' daughter was killed about 8 p.m. by a man who was alleged to have spent all afternoon in a bar. She might have been spared if we had tea-time closing.

■ Neighborhood bars — In the Detroit neighborhood where I spent my earliest years, there were corner taverns that folks could walk to. There was no need to drive, at least not very far. Suburban governments, however, use liquor licenses as a tool of economic development. You need a \$2 million development with hotel to get a license because city and township officials are primarily concerned with property tax revenue, not teens' lives.

■ Public transportation — A worker who has lost his or her license and vehicle needs to get to work to support the family. Channel 7 host Chuck Stokes asked Councilman Fouts his

position on the SMART bus tax proposal. Fouts hadn't decided. I hope Fouts will re-think his position and support public transportation vigorously.

The foregoing are extremely radical ideas. The many lawmakers who worship the golden god of Economic Development lack the testicular fortitude to vote on them. The convention industry will object. Many licensees will object, though I suspect a few will welcome the shorter hours and reduced chance of being held up. Many auto fanatics will see public transit as unmanly and unAmerican.

We need tough new laws to avoid drunken driving, but I have my doubts about harsher punishments for drunken drivers after the accident.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

# Catering to every minority's whims diminishes majority's experiences

The parish newsletter that arrived last week announced that incense would not be used at Easter services this year and urged churchgoers to avoid perfume "and other scented products so that those with allergies and respiratory problems may participate."

I responded by letter: "I am both faintly amused and deeply offended at this latest example of political correctness run rampant in our church."

"I am not aware of previous instances in which those with allergies and respiratory problems had been deterred from participating in church services because other parishioners have been so thoughtless as to wear perfume and other scented products. Indeed, I had thought that decent dress and good personal hygiene at church services indicated a respect for our worship of the Lord. I suppose we could create a designated 'no scented products or perfume section.'"

The letter continued: "My concerns move beyond amusement in the matter of incense."

"The use of incense in celebration of special days in the liturgical calendar is both an ancient and distinguished part of our ritual. To suddenly ban its use in response to what appears to be the demands of a tiny minority is very sad."

"Our liturgy and ritual have evolved over many centuries, and their components come together as one complete package. To arbitrarily rip one piece out of the totality of our service is deeply offensive to those who treasure continuity in our religious practice."

"Possibly the next step would be to eliminate the choir singing hymns on grounds that an occasional mistake in intonation would offend those in the congregation who have perfect pitch."

"Then the main point of my letter, running far beyond personal grumpiness with church practice to a fundamental axis of debate in our nation's public life:

"How sad it is that in our society we ceaselessly work to find ways to resolve the problems of tiny and passionate minorities, nearly always at the cost of offending the quietly tolerant majority whose experiences are thereby diminished."

"Our American habit is to go to extreme lengths to avoid offending anybody in any way."



PHILIP POWER

This certainly diminishes the pungency of our social discourse (heard any good ethnic jokes lately?), but the damage runs far deeper and costs much more.

My son, for example, is now a seventh-grader. He has learned a lot in school about Kwanzaa, the African-American year-end celebration, and about Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights. That's great; he's learning something he wouldn't necessarily have learned at home.

But his school experience has been devoid of discussions on the meaning of Christmas or singing the Christmas carols that are so much a part of the majority American culture.

Countless numbers of parents have recounted their dismay on this point. And whether eliminating Christmas — or religious prayers, or even patriotic observances — from the schools has come in response to overzealous concerns for the U.S. Supreme Court's interpretation of the First Amendment or fear of suit by the American Civil Liberties Union, the fact is that the experiences of many, many majority school children thereby have been diminished.

Thus the real reason why so much political rhetoric these days is so emotionally focused on "taking back our country." Majorities whose experiences have been diminished mechanistically in order not to offend minorities, passionate or otherwise, necessarily will feel deprived of their own legitimacy.

And loss of legitimacy, as my own feelings about Easter services can attest, is a powerful emotion.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1880.

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