

SMART wins praise, has 'continuation' budget

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

SMART, the suburban bus service, won praise for plans to shift to smaller buses from members of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments executive committee.

Otherwise, there was little "review and comment" as SEMCOG, a seven-county regional planning agency, casually scanned the \$59.3 million budget of an agency that was dying just six months

ago.

"It's really a continuation budget," SMART staffer Jim O'Shea told SEMCOG delegates July 23, but with one big difference: Past budgets had used red ink; this one anticipates a \$5 million surplus.

Voters in most suburban Wayne, Oakland and Macomb County communities during May and June approved a one-third-mill property tax hike to pump \$16.4 million into the ailing

SMART system.

The SMART budget for fiscal 1996, which began July 1, will be \$8 million greater than the prior year, however, because some federal and state funds are drying up.

"We're responding to criticisms we heard during the campaign," O'Shea said. "We're purchasing a lot of smaller buses, and we're making many east-west route changes. The changes will come by fall or January.

"Probably in two months, the SMART board will approve a revised budget," he said.

Barbara Moorhouse, a delegate-at-large representing the League of Women Voters, asked whether any communities that had opted out of the SMART millage vote had changed their minds and wanted to opt in.

"Yes," said O'Shea. "Bloomfield Hills, which had been (on) our line-haul routes, plans to hold an election in November to ap-

prove the millage."

SMART's \$59 million in revenue will come from: federal aid, \$4.4 million; state aid, \$24.6 million; property taxes, \$16.4 million; line-haul operating revenue, \$7.4 million; paratransit operating revenue, \$2.1 million; and restricted revenue, \$3.9 million.

Its \$53.8 million spending will go chiefly to:

- Line-haul operations, \$31.3 million.

- Paratransit, \$9.4 million.
- General administration, \$7.1 million.
- Bus purchase for coordinated service, \$68,000.

SMART stands for Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation. Its board members are appointed by tri-county officials. Its operating area excludes the city of Detroit, which has a separate bus system.

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