

Transit plan provokes opposition

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY—Gauging public sentiment toward the Proposed Regional 1990 Transportation Plan may be as difficult and cumbersome a task for the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) as understanding SEMCOG's multi-billion dollar plan has been for the public.

After describing the details of the transportation proposal through a variety of press conferences and speaking engagements over the past several months, SEMCOG took its plan directly to the public this week.

Hosting a public hearing Thursday at the Oakland County Courthouse, SEMCOG lined the walls with multi-colored charts, offered two slide pre-

sentations and assembled a panel of eight spokesmen in an attempt to explain and un-complicate the plan.

IN TURN, SEMCOG received input from local residents on possible revisions of the plan.

What resulted was more than three hours of discussion and a vast exchange of information. While residents wrestled with the complexity of the transportation plan, SEMCOG representatives struggled to assimilate a wide variety of questions and concerns.

No one expected a clear mandate from the people to be arrived at, and none was. Supporters and opponents, ordinary citizens and elected officials, those concerned about a specific street and those worried about overall

cost, joined in the dialog.

THE CURRENT transportation plan, the product of nearly ten years work, calls for sweeping improvement of most conventional means of transportation: upgrading roads, creating new freeways, greatly expanding bus and commuter, railroad lines.

Perhaps the focal point of the plan concerns some 70 miles of a rapid transit system in the most heavily traveled areas in the metropolitan Detroit area.

As yet, no price tag has been placed on the total plan. However, the bus, railroad and rapid transit proposals alone could cost in excess of \$5 billion, according to separate estimates by the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA).

There were few communities in the county unrepresented at Thursday's hearing. Cost and need were the most challenged aspects of the plan.

SEMCOG SPOKESMEN explained that state and federal funding would be necessary to pay for much of the project. Additional tax revenue from projected growth in the county should eliminate the need for increased taxes, one spokesman said.

John King, of Bloomfield Hills, was one of the first to challenge the necessity of such a sweeping proposal. The metropolitan Detroit area, he argued, is too accustomed to driving automobiles to switch to buses, trains or rapid transit.

"They won't give up their cars until the last drop of gasoline is gone," he said.

Others repeated those sentiments. "People are too spoiled by having their own cars," "Nobody wants to walk half a mile to catch a bus."

SUPPORTERS, like one mother in the audience, said alternate transportation systems are necessary, especially for youths. State Rep. Charlie

Harrison (D-62) sent a statement saying that improved transportation was essential to creating a high standard of living for people throughout the area.

Two persons asked SEMCOG to consider the handicapped in their plans, such as providing ramps for those confined to wheel chairs or bus signs in Braille.

Joseph Williams, of Birmingham, drew applause when he criticized SEMCOG for not taking bicycles and other non-motorized forms of transportation into their planning.

MOST OF the questions, however, dealt specifically with a particular community's problem.

A spokesman from Troy urged defeat of the plan because it didn't adequately consider anticipated traffic on Troy's Big Beaver Road corridor, where city planners have concentrated high-rise and high density zoning.

Dorothy Conrad, Birmingham city commissioner, complained that SEMCOG's plan for expansion at the Grand Trunk station on Elton would increase an already bad traffic and parking situation.

SEMCOG CONTINUED the meeting until all questions were answered. The meeting ended after midnight, although large numbers drifted away as the discussion entered its third hour.

SEMCOG spokesmen assured the crowd that the Oakland County reaction, along with the reactions from the six other member counties, will be considered before the SEMCOG board formally adopts a transportation plan sometime next year.

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Oakland Prep names director

James W. McGinnis, a 34-year-old Detroit educator-psychologist, has been named director of the Oakland Prep School.

The alternative education program for teenagers is operated under Oakland University's Urban Affairs Center. McGinnis begins his new duties immediately. Wilma H. Bledsoe, center director, said.

McGinnis directs a school that is designed to enable high school dropouts to complete secondary education and

enter a college or university. Oakland Prep is in its third year, is supported by a grant from the Wayne County Juvenile Facility Network and Neighborhood Education Authority. There are 125 students currently enrolled at 7801 Burlingame in Detroit.

The prep school director comes to OU after work as an educational development coordinator in a manpower training center.

McGinnis has had extensive experience in teaching, in clinical psychology, educational testing and research.

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