

# SEMTA plan criticized

By TIM RICHARD

Most suburban officials reacted negatively to Detroit Mayor Coleman Young's demand that he be allowed to appoint four of the nine board members of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA).

The idea was aired, at Gov. Milliken's request, before the executive committee of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, SEMCOG, a six-county planning agency, appoints six of the SEMTA board members; the governor names three.

SEMOG delegates who spoke on the matter Friday also favored a weight (auto license) tax or an income tax as the preferred methods for financing the region's 10 per cent share of constructing a rail rapid transit system. The federal government would pick up 80 per cent of the tab, and Milliken has pledged his support of the state's picking up the remaining 10 per cent.

LARRY PERNICK (D-Southfield), an Oakland County commissioner, summed up what appeared to be a majority view (there was no vote) when he predicted SEMTA "will become a political football" if individual cities begin appointing board members, as Young proposed.

Pernick said Detroit's interests could be adequately protected by appointing Detroiters through the SEMCOG and gubernatorial process. Pernick called public transportation "a regional problem—not a Detroit or Oakland County problem. It's time to put politics aside and think of service to the people."

JERRY RAYMOND, Livonia city councilman, had a different view of the Young proposal.

Raymond said only Detroit has any great amount of capital poured into public transportation; only Detroit and Ann Arbor levy any great amount of taxes to finance public transportation; and only Detroit has a charter requirement that a vote of the people be taken before the city's Department of Transportation (DOT) can be merged into SEMTA.

Therefore, said Raymond, Detroit has a good case for asking for a bigger role on the SEMTA board.

FRED HOUGHTEN (R-Rochester), chairman of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, looked with some unhappiness at past transportation tax plans.

"Oakland County got short-changed for 25 or 30 years for its road work from state gasoline and weight tax funds. Oakland doesn't want to be a majority taxpayer and get short-changed on benefits again."

Houghten said a combination of two or three tax ideas rather than reliance on a single tax could be used to raise the region's \$22 million a year estimated share of construction.

He added that SEMTA board members should be elected officials from local government, perhaps getting their appointments through their county boards of commissioners.

JOHN BARR (D-Deerborn Heights), vice chairman of the Wayne County Board of Commissioners, voiced strong objection to "Detroit's weighty influence. It violates the regional planning concept."

Allowing the mayor of Detroit to appoint four board members beholden to him would "give away the regional viewpoint" on rapid transit, he said.

Sid Alexander, Oakland County public works official, said there should be "no restructuring of the SEMTA board until after the merger of SEMTA and Detroit's DOT." Detroit would be on both sides of the bargaining table, if Young's demand were met—said Alexander.

JAMES KELLOGG, head of the state Department of Highways and Transportation's rapid transit section, was personally tapped Milliken to sound out the regional viewpoint to Young's suggestion. Kellogg and State Sen. Carl Purcell (R-Plymouth) held meetings with local officials to sound them out.

Young has insisted Milliken back him in presenting a "Detroit Plan" to President Ford.

Young has talked of a Detroit-only rapid transit program if SEMTA cannot stir up enough interest or money to carry it out.

Milliken, however, is strongly committed to regional (seven-county) planning for and solutions to broad-scale problems, according to aides.

FOUR QUESTIONS were put by the governor:

1. Should there be an agreement to

merge SEMTA and D-DOT? Overwhelmingly, SEMCOG officials felt there should.

2. Should SEMTA's board structure be reorganized on Young's proposed 4-4-1 basis, with Young naming four, SEMCOG four and the governor one. The heavy majority felt there should be no formal reorganization but that

Detroit's interest could be protected by SEMCOG and the governor naming enough Detroiters to the board.

3. Should SEMTA's district size be reduced from seven counties to three (Wayne, Oakland and Macomb) inasmuch as it will be decades before any transit lines reach out to Westland, Livingston, Monroe or St. Clair

counties? Majority reaction was that planning should be done on a seven-county basis, but taxing and operations should be confined to the three metropolitan counties for the immediate future.

4. What kind of tax should be levied to finance the region's 10 per cent share of building a rapid transit line?

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## Belasco wins speech contest

John Belasco has won the annual speech contest held by the Birmingham Toastmasters Club. The title of his speech was "I Demand My Rights."

Dennis Royston, speaking on "Recycling the Human Experience," was runner-up.

The Birmingham Toastmasters Club meets every second and fourth Tuesday at a dinner meeting in The Community House.