

Suburbs want more say

SEMTA control fight looms

By MARTHA MAHAN

If enough need is scattered, a garden should grow.

That's one way you could look at an area-wide public transportation system developing in Wayne and Oakland counties.

From Redford's new dial-a-ride to Southfield's sophisticated survey of a city-operated bus system, most suburban communities are moving to meet residents' transportation needs.

GENERALLY, a program is started to aid senior citizens and the handicapped and branches out from there.

Somewhere along the way, like a genie, up pops SEMTA (Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority), the regional planning agency.

SEMTA eventually will harvest the individual transit sprouts into a single, full-scale regional transportation system, state-funded and SEMTA-directed.

But, as SEMTA pops up, so do hassles over its control.

Detroit Mayor Coleman Young and other Detroit city officials are pushing for domination of the regional transit authority. Suburban spokesmen insist that no major SEMTA project proceed unless the suburbs are guaranteed no less than equal representation on its governing board.

Despite political conflicts, local communities are moving ahead with their individual programs.

SOON TO GO into operation under subcontract with SEMTA is the Nankin Transit Commission (NTC) which will include Garden City, Westland and Wayne.

Westland will administer the program which is targeted for senior citizens and the handicapped. Initially, NTC will concentrate on transporting groups of senior citizens to hot lunch programs and social functions.

Eventually, service will be expanded to all segments of the community and will hook up to main SEMTA bus lines as a feeder service.

NTC will operate with state funds for 11 months as a pilot program. After that, the individual cities must decide whether the service is worth supporting.

ANOTHER SEMTA-sponsored project is expected to begin this month in the Rochester-Avon Township area. Limited transportation service to residents 60 years and older is now provided by the Rochester-Avon Recreation Authority (RARA).

A call one day in advance will reserve a RARA ride within city or township limits from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sunday.

The new service, operated by Oakland-Livingston Human Service

Agency (OLHSA), will run small buses in six northeastern Oakland County communities on a one-year experimental basis.

Sharon C. Koenig, OLHSA representative, is organizing service planning committees in each community. Composed of charitable organizations, agencies which need or provide transportation and interested individuals, the committees will establish guidelines for community service.

Routes will hook up with Oakland University and Pontiac where connections are available to Birmingham and Detroit.

Other buses will provide door-to-door service on an on-call basis. Presently, weekday service only is planned, although Saturday travel is a possibility.

One vehicle will be specially equipped to handle wheelchair. If the OLHSA service is successful, a separate transportation authority will be organized.

LIVONIA for some time has had a SEMTA line operating along Middle Belt and Inlander roads.

The buses run from Michigan Avenue in Wayne to the Livonia Mall at Seven Mile and Middle Belt in addition to a short run from the Mall to Grand River for those going to downtown Detroit.

The Detroit Department of Transportation (D-DOT) operates buses in Livonia going as far west as Middle Belt along Six and Seven mile roads and to Farmington Road along Five Mile.

It also has runs to Westland Center along Joy and to Middle Belt along Plymouth Road.

SOUTHFIELD is halfway through a public transportation study and is ready for some solutions.

"Phase two" will include compilation and review of a recent survey by consultants and a citizens advisory committee, according to Roger Smith, Southfield traffic engineer. They will make decisions based on cost and other factors, Smith said.

Dial-a-rides and transportation for the handicapped will be considered, he added.

SEMTA already provides Southfield with 87 buses on 37 routes a day through the city. D-DOT runs 230 buses a day on four primary routes touching Southfield.

One major problem is that we have no definite schedules or pickup spots available to potential riders," Smith said. "That's something else we're working on."

REDFORD'S dial-a-ride, which began July 10, appears to be an outstanding success.

"The best thing since Social Secu-

city," said one of its first riders, a senior citizen.

Senior citizens were the focus of nearly two years of negotiations leading to the transit program.

But the first three weeks of operation disclosed the main riders as shoppers, taking the special runs to the Livonia Mall and Wonderland Center outside Redford.

Ridership is increasing steadily, according to Ron Caryl, Redford's transportation coordinator. He is hopeful of more senior citizen participation as awareness of the service spreads.

Senior citizen fare is 30 cents, half that for regular adult riders. Students ride for 20 cents, also, and youngsters under five years ride free.

Residents call to be picked up at their doors and are driven anywhere within the township between 6:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The usual wait is between 20 and 30 minutes.

Special shopping runs are Monday through Thursday with a 25 cent premium added to fares.

Caryl says the system's flexibility is its prime asset. He promises operation times will be expanded if interest warrants.

WHILE A longtime proponent of regional joint governmental action, State Sen. Carl Pursell (R-Plymouth) is digging in his heels for at least equal suburban representation on the SEMTA governing board.

A proposal now before the legislature assures that either Detroit or the suburbs would dominate, leaving the decision to the governor.

Under Senate Bill 801, the present nine-member SEMTA board would be expanded to 13. Detroit's mayor would appoint five members and another five, who could not be Detroit residents, would be designated by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG).

The governor would appoint the remaining three members with advice and consent of the Senate.

Makeup of the new board is considered critical as it will make lasting decisions on transportation systems throughout the region.

"All (Detroit) Mayor Young wants is four acres to begin with and then he'll take his chances on the deal of the remaining cards," said Pursell, whose 14th District includes Redford, Livonia and Plymouth.

"He wants full control of the SEMTA board and its decisions. In return, he's willing to let the suburban areas pay for his city transportation system."

"Equal representation actually involves us doing Detroit a favor, not the other way around."

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The Collection Practices Act (1974 PA 361), which became effective July 1, is a comprehensive act requiring licensing of both a collection agency and its agents.

It prohibits a number of debt collection practices, including:

• Communicating with a debtor in a misleading, deceptive, harassing, oppressing, abusive or profane manner.

• Relating information regarding a debtor's indebtedness to an employer or his agent unless specifically authorized in writing by the debtor.

• Identifying collection agent other than by his legal name or the assumed name registered by the individual with the director, or identifying the agency other than by the name appearing on the license.

• Causing expenses to the debtor for long distance phone calls, telegrams or other charges.

• Using or threatening to use physical violence in connection with a collection of a claim.

The act also establishes a collection

practices advisory board within the state Department of Licensing and Regulation and stipulates that it shall meet at least twice a year.

The attorney general and the Department of Licensing and Regulation are authorized to enforce the act.

The act provides for both civil and criminal penalties. The department or the attorney general may recover, on behalf of the State, a penalty not exceeding \$500 per violation.

Deliberate failure to obtain a license by either a collection agency or the manager of a collection agency is punishable by a fine of not more than \$5,000 for the first offense. Second or subsequent offenses are punishable by a fine of not more than \$10,000 and/or imprisonment for not more than one year.

The court may also award a petitioner actual damages, or \$50, whichever is greater. In the event that the practice was a willful violation of the act, the court may give a penalty of three times the actual damages, or \$150, whichever is greater and shall award attorney's fees and court costs to the petitioner.



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