

# Transit aid to benefit city, not suburbs

By TIM RICHARD

Detroit and its suburbs started out to build a regional rapid transit system. Now they find instead they're in the economic development business—and nearly all the money is going to be spent inside Detroit's city limits.

Under the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) \$1.125 billion plan, at least 91.5 per cent of the rapid transit line and bus route mileage lies in the Detroit's city limits.

SEMTA officials say the reason is a political malfunction on the part of Detroit voters, but the economic policies of the Ford Administration in Washington. This is not being built to serve people

said Julie Evans, a dissenting SEMTA board member from Birmingham, referring to the rapid transit portion of the public transportation program. "It's being built to serve economic development."

SEMTA HAS been in business since 1968, integrating bus systems in the seven-county region, underpinning rail, commuter lines and planning a "high-level" rapid transit program.

Larry Saks, SEMTA's acting general manager, is hesitant about appearing critical of the federal government, but he nodded yes when asked if he agreed with this statement. "It would be fair to say that the federal government changed the rules to a 91.5 per cent of the way through the same."

This isn't just mass transit. It's urban revitalization," said Saks. "Do you remember what President Ford said during the campaign? Ford said there are existing laws and incentives to use rather than just pouring money into the cities."

That's the federal government's 20 per cent funding and its requirement that SEMTA invest in put up equal amounts of development dollars are viewed by Washington as an effort to rebuild Detroit's economy.

THE BIGGEST CHUNK of the total program—41 per cent—would, under SEMTA's Preliminary Proposal, go into rapid transit.

Instead of building one complete line

from downtown Detroit to the outer suburbs, however, SEMTA proposes two lines from downtown Detroit to the city limits at Eight Mile Road—one in the Woodward corridor and one in the Grosse Pointe corridor.

Said Mrs. Evans, "I still think we need a high-level system, but one that goes somewhere I will not vote for two lines."

Her view is a minority one. The nine SEMTA board members live in four counties, but seven of the nine have downtown Detroit business telephone numbers.

There is a bus rapid transit element in the proposal which gives 22 miles of routes to Detroit and eight to the suburbs. A border route, such as along Eight Mile, was credited half to Detroit and half to the suburbs in these calculations.

Saks said the bus element is highly tentative because buses simply aren't available. General Motors Corp. is proposing a new kind of bus technology which competing manufacturers oppose, and the result is that federal money for buses is tied up.

THE DETROIT Central Business District "people mover" amounts to 4.6 per cent of the total. This subsidy was highly controversial when the Michigan legislature downgraded federal funding.

Mrs. Evans has a low opinion of the "people mover" plan. "A people mover is not going to get one more person to a job who can't get there now. It's not going to get one more person to a doctor who can't

get there now."

Price tag on the people mover is \$51.36 million for 2.3 miles all in Detroit. Three commuter rail lines—from downtown Detroit to Ann Arbor, Pontiac and Port Huron—would be upgraded. Of 122 miles of track, 21 are in Detroit and 97 in the suburbs. Price tag on the commuter rail element is under \$42 million or 37 per cent of the total package.

The element called "regional bus" is general service and dial a ride improvements. There is no breakdown between what goes into Detroit and what into the suburbs.

NOT ALL OF this will be built initially. SEMTA asked the federal Urban Mass Transit Administration (UMTA) for \$60 million and got a qualified pledge of \$60 million. Clearly, the preliminary proposal will have to be scaled down.

Meanwhile, SEMTA is completing what planners called an "alternatives analysis" that will go into routes and ridership. Gary Krause, planner for the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, the regional planning agency, emphasizes that the actual SEMTA proposal is preliminary, and the alternatives analysis could change things.

Saks added, "UMTA is saving to us. Your best alternative may not be your best transit alternative. It's a formal, incremental way of saving what Mrs. Evans said. This is not being built to serve people. It's being built to spur economic development."

Saks allows in the case of the rapid transit lines that one line complete may be the answer.

BUT FAR MORE money is at stake than UMTA's grant. Saks said the economic development investment could total \$1.8 billion. He gave this breakdown:

\$600 million from UMTA, of which more than 90 per cent will go into Detroit.

\$500 million in private investment required by UMTA as a condition of the grant. This investment would mean jobs in business, jobs in construction and in property tax base. UMTA intends that if all is as in Detroit.

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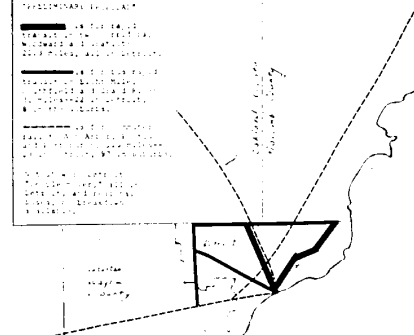
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## Where transit money will go

By this newspaper's calculations, SEMTA's \$1.125 billion preliminary proposal would pump \$1.03 billion (91.5 per cent) into Detroit and \$40.02 million (4.7 per cent) into the suburbs. Here is the breakdown:

Rapid transit: \$945.03 million, all in Detroit.

Bus rapid transit: \$34.3 million—\$21.15 million in Detroit and \$9.15 million in the suburbs. This allotment is based on the number of route miles in each community, with the Eight Mile route being split 50-50.

Detroit "people mover": \$51.36 million, all in Detroit.

Commuter rail: \$41.91 million—\$3.94 million in Detroit, \$33.97 million in suburbs.

Again, this allotment is based on the number of route miles in each area.

Regional bus: \$52.4 million—no breakdown of route miles available from SEMTA.

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