

# SEMTA makes choice

## Oakland cool to compromise

By TIM RICHARD

Board members from Oakland and suburban Wayne counties split 4-2 as the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority picked a part-subway, part-elevated light rail plan for the Woodward Avenue corridor.

"It was a compromise. Nobody in the room really wanted it," said SEMTA Chairman Edward H. McNamara, mayor of Livonia. "But the federal money that is now released will provide suburban (bus) transportation. Unless we made a decision today, the real sufferers would be the suburban communities."

The board of the seven-county transit authority gave the required two-thirds support (by a 10-5 vote) to the so-called "M-1" alternative.

It provides for a light rail (trolley) that would be underground from downtown Detroit to Grand Boulevard, elevated from the Boulevard to McNichols (Six Mile) and at grade (ground level) from there to Eight Mile.

THREE OTHER alternatives were defeated Tuesday as the SEMTA board made its crucial choice for its 1990 plan.

As all-bus plan lost 11-4. A rail plan at grade was rejected 10-5. And the so-called X-1 plan for a subway from downtown to McNichols - favored by the City of Detroit - lost 8-7.

The M-1 plan, whose aerial feature was discussed only in the final week of deliberations, would cost \$711 million, about 7 percent less than the X-1 subway alternative.

Supporting the M-1 were McNamara, R.L. Alexander, retired Oakland County public works director from Bloomfield Township; Dewitt Henry, Wyandotte civic leader and economic development corporation head;

all five Detroit members; and George Lahodny, a gubernatorial appointee representing the smaller counties.

Opposed were Joseph Bianco Jr., J.L. Hudson executive from Bloomfield Hills; Henry M. Hogan Jr., Birmingham businessman and director of Suburban Communications Corp., parent corporation of Observer and Executive Newspapers; both Macomb County representatives, who steadfastly opposed any light rail program; and Marilyn Thayer of Washtenaw County.

BIANCO, A member of the SEMTA board since it was created in 1967, said, "I was basically looking for an alternative that had less aerial and less subway." He supported plans that would call for light rail lines at grade.

Hogan said the M-1 plan "cut only \$42 million" from the all-subway plan. He added that M-1 "introduces a technology we have done no investigating into. An elevated line will bring noise pollution. It will bring visual pollution. Politically, it doesn't bother me."

Hogan's criticism of the elevated line was the same as that of Highland Park Mayor Jesse Miller, through whose city most of the elevated line would run.

Alexander had offered his own idea - a surface rail line from Eight Mile to Grand Circus Park, with an expanded downtown people mover instead of a downtown subway. When his own plan was defeated 10-5, Alexander supported the M-1 compromise.

"It appeared this was the only one that would get this show on the road," Alexander said. "This will give the public and elected officials a target to shot at."

"The aerial line idea doesn't intrigue

me. We have not the slightest idea what it would cost. Those figures (\$714 million) were picked out of the air."

THE PUBLIC will have a chance to "shoot at" M-1 in a series of public hearings. SEMTA General Manager Larry Salei, of Troy, said they would be scheduled over a 60-day period beginning in September.

Federal funding for \$600 million or more of the 1990 transit package was assured by the Ford administration in 1976. But Michigan will have to come up with local money for both construction and operating subsidies.

James Kellogg, Gov. William Milliken's public transportation man, said the governor would commit the state to construction funds for whatever plan SEMTA chose. Thus, the politically volatile issue of a subway will be argued in the Michigan Legislature, not by the metropolitan electorate.

Operating money, on the other hand, will have to come from the electorate of either the seven-county region or three-county metropolitan area. By 1990, SEMTA estimates, operating sub-

sidies will reach about \$77 million to \$80 million - no matter whether the Woodward corridor has buses, surface rail, subway, elevated rail or some combination.

THE SEMTA board instructed staff to make refined computer tests of the elevated rail line plan.

George Swede, SEMTA's director of engineering, said, "I personally don't know of any light rail elevated lines in the United States. There are quite a few in Europe - in Berne, Switzerland, and Frankfurt, Germany, I think."

No matter what alternative the SEMTA board had chosen for Woodward, the remainder of the 1990 transportation plan was intact: some 1,100 large buses on 120 routes; 200 express buses on 35 routes; 219 small buses for 27 systems; 225 small buses for elderly and handicapped "essential transportation systems"; expanded commuter rail service on the Pontiac-Detroit route; 22 round trip trains daily between Ann Arbor and Detroit; and three round trip trains daily between Mt. Clemens and Detroit.



Joseph P. Bianco Jr., SEMTA board member from Oakland County, argued against high cost subway and elevated rail lines and in favor of surface rail. (Staff photo)

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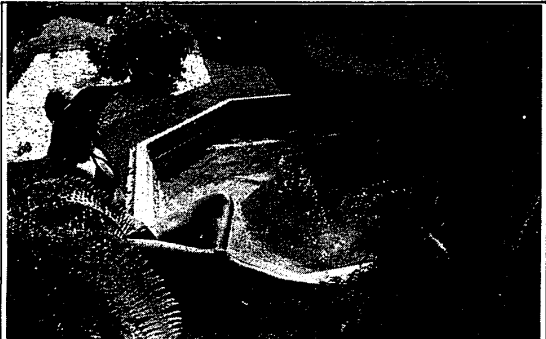
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