

Doubts on subway package resurface in SEMCOG vote

What effect a Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) review committee's recent refusal to endorse further study of the proposed Woodward Avenue subway will have at the federal level isn't known by three suburban opponents of the controversial project.

The three — Farmington Hills Mayor Jo Ann Soronen, Bloomfield Township Treasurer Fred Korzon and Plymouth Township Trustee Lee Fidge — were among the five members of SEMCOG's regional clearinghouse review committee which Thursday opposed recommending federal approval of a \$13.8 million preliminary engineering grant for the Woodward light rail rapid transit line.

The proposed subway would run between downtown Detroit and McNichols (Six Mile) Road. The surface portion of the rail line would extend to 11 Mile Road in Royal Oak.

DAVID SHEPARD, Oak Park Mayor who supported the subway study grant, doesn't see the SEMCOG vote damaging the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority's (SEMTA) plans. SEMTA has \$6.3 million in state and federal funds to proceed with the rail line study this year.

"This was simply a procedural question," said Shepherd. "I don't see any way preliminary engineering will be stopped."

Shepherd noted that the four members supporting the subway included the mayor of Saline in Washtenaw County and the Macomb County Intermediate Schools superintendent.

The SEMCOG committee, which reviews all local requests for federal capital grants, recommended the first phase of preliminary engineering in July by an 8-2 vote. The federal Department of Transportation awarded SEMTA a \$5 million study grant last fall.

Two committee members — Korzon and St. Clair County Commissioner William Smiley — voted for the engineering study last summer, but opposed the second phase grant last week. Ann Arbor Township Supervisor Nancy Davis' yes vote of last summer was replaced by alternate committee member Fidge's no vote and Wayne County Community College Trustee James McCartney of Westland, who voted yes last summer, was absent from last week's meeting.

KORZON SAID Tuesday he changed his vote because he's no longer assured that metropolitan area residents will be given a vote on financing SEMTA's projected operating deficits.

"I'm beginning to have some concern and doubts," he said. Oakland County officials have insisted there be a region-wide vote on any new taxes proposed to pay for SEMTA deficits which are expected to increase greatly between now and 1990.

Generally, Korzon said, the regional review committee's refusal to recommend a grant for federal approval is detrimental to a project. But, he added, "SEMTA is not an ordinary project."

SEMTA and Detroit officials, particularly Mayor Coleman Young, have been lobbying for federal mass transit

support since the mid-1970s. Subway opponents hope the new Reagan administration will refuse federal funding for the project.

SORONEN, FIDGE and Korzon took issue with Young's reported comments last week that suburban subway opponents are motivated by racism and bigotry.

"Young used those statements politically," Korzon said. "My position is not as narrow and parochial as he suggests. . . . Historically, I can go back and demonstrate otherwise."

Korzon said he's "more convinced

than before that the subway is not a viable approach."

"In a sense," he said, "it's one man's monument."

Soronen, who voted against the subway study last summer, said: "I'm sorry, I do not see a connection between racial bigotry and subways."

"I don't feel it (the subway) is even adequately serving the city."

Soronen said the review committee did not recommend against the second subway study grant.

"None of the five of us thought quickly enough to make a motion to give a negative recommendation, had we

wanted to," she said.

Fidge, who is an alternate committee member, said, "I have no problem with my vote."

"My basis for voting on that was not a black and white issue."

"I have difficulty rationalizing the benefit (of the subway line) for the whole region," she said.

"I'm living one mile from the (Wayne-Washtenaw) county line," she continued. "There is little, if anything, proposed out here for even a small mass transit into Detroit."

A SEMTA spokeswoman said Tues-

day that the seven-county transit authority expects federal approval of the second preliminary engineering grant. The total study will cost \$29 million, including \$4 million from the state.

SEMTA's proposed \$1.5 billion regional transportation plan would expand large and small bus service and commuter rail service in the suburbs.

The subway and downtown people mover, however, are considered vital to Detroit's economic revitalization plans.

The subway/surface rail line carries an estimated \$907 million price tag; the people mover, \$118 million.

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