

People-mover

Congress set to consider controversial transit plan

By Mike Scanlon
staff writer

Critical decisions are expected next week in Congress on the proposed \$127-million downtown-Detroit people mover, a key link in rapid-transit plans for southeast Michigan.

A joint U.S. Senate-House conference committee will meet on June 1 or 2 to decide on freeing up some \$8 million in final engineering funds.

The \$8 million is part of a \$12.5-million federal grant already on hand at the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA), said an aide to U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth.

That \$12.5 million was frozen in March by the Reagan Administration's Urban Mass Transit Authority (UMTA).

FREEING the funds during this fiscal year, which ends on Sept. 30, has already been approved by the U.S. House but not by the Senate. The conference committee will seek to iron out differences between the two appropriations bills.

A SEMTA spokesman credited Pursell with saving the people-mover engineering money in the House Appropriations Committee. But because Pursell is a junior member of that unit, he does not expect to be on the joint conference committee.

If the \$8 million is not freed, then the people mover will probably be eliminated at least for the near term — which might last as long as the current administration. That's what's happened to Los Angeles' people mover, said Dale Heydlauff, Pursell's legislative aide.

On the other hand, Heydlauff said that if the \$8 million is approved, chances are good for approval of some \$52 million in next year's budget. That money would be used for more engineering studies and preliminary construction of the people mover.

And Heydlauff said chances of approval are good.

"WE'VE REALLY got this thing wired," he said.

The people mover would be a single-rail, one-car conveyance, which would travel a three-mile loop around the downtown on an elevated monorail. If everything went perfectly politically, it could be in operation by 1984.

SEMTA spokesman Marvin Meltzer said SEMTA is making "common cause" lobbying effort with Miami, Fla. officials, who want money for a people mover there. The snowbelt-sunbelt coalition expects to make a stronger case than either could individually.

Preliminary engineering money for a Detroit-Royal Oak rapid-transit line is dead for this year, Meltzer said. The light-rail plan, called a "subway" because part of it would be underground, is hotly opposed by Oakland County politicians.

"There is no controversy over the small-bus, large-bus and commuter-rail portions of the package.

The only controversies have been over the people mover and the light rail," Meltzer said.

Heydlauff said that if Congress frees the engineering funds, chances are good that Congress will continue making annual appropriations until it meets the federal government's committed 80-percent contribution toward the \$127-million cost. The state of Michigan is committed to providing the remaining 20 percent.

He said the people-mover will "generate approximately \$500 million in private investment in the downtown area" including construction of apartments, hotels and convention space.

About \$2 million has already been spent on people-mover engineering.

Wayne board rejects commission probe

By Mike Scanlon
staff writer

The Wayne County Board of Commissioners decided Thursday not to believe what it reads in newspapers.

Following a number of impassioned speeches, the board voted against investigating a recent newspaper series charging improprieties, misappropriations and nepotism by the Wayne County Road Commission.

At issue was a proposal to request Michael Berry, chairman of the Road Commission, to respond to a four-part Detroit News series alleging mismanagement and misappropriations.

The three-member Road Commission, which oversees construction and maintenance of all county roads and also controls Metropolitan Airport, is appointed by the county Board of Commissioners but is largely autonomous.

A resolution by Commissioner R. William Joyner, D-Plymouth, to seek the response was approved in an 8-3 vote Thursday morning by two board subcommittees meeting jointly. The resolution appeared as a supplement to the full board's Thursday afternoon agenda.

CRITICISM of the resolution was largely based on some board members' stated beliefs that literally nothing printed in newspapers is true.

However, Commissioner George F. Killen, D-Detroit, said he opposed the resolution because it was too vague.

"This is much like saying to an individual, 'I want you to write the questions down for an exam and then take the exam,'" said Killen, who favored a personal appearance by Berry before the board.

Seeking written responses "takes away the integrity of the legislative body," Killen said.

"They thumb their nose at us every chance they get," Killen said. "Let's look at it from the realistic standpoint of the taxpayer who hangs his tire on the freeway because it hasn't been fixed."

"THE BOTTOM line of the issue before us (is) whether we've got the guts to make people we appoint accountable to us," said Joyner.

Joyner urged commissioners to "bring in outside counsel and start an investigation of our own."

"If you take what a newspaper says about somebody as fact, you're barking up the wrong tree," said Commissioner Arthur Blackwell, D-Highland Park. Blackwell is the son of Highland Park Mayor Robert Blackwell.

"I come from a political family, and down through the years the (Detroit) News and (Detroit) Free Press have written a lot about us, and not one word was true."

"The newspaper article just touches the top of the iceberg," said Commissioner Rose Mary Robinson, D-Detroit. "And most if it's scurrilous, sensational news."

Commissioner Ervin Steiner, R-Grosse Pointe, sponsored an amendment to the resolution to allow any commissioner to address specific questions to Berry. That failed 9-13 with three abstentions.

The board then rejected 10-14 with one abstention a move to address the questions to the full road commission instead of Berry personally.

THE BOARD then rejected asking any questions at all in a 16-8 vote.

Commissioners Joyner, Mary Dumas, R-Livonia; Thomas Presnell, D-Westland and Richard Manning, D-Redford Township, favored questioning the road commission.

EDC chief hits veto of housing \$

Gov. William Milliken didn't understand what he was doing recently when he vetoed funding to help convert the now-vacant Wayne County Child Development Center in Northville Township into 1,300 units for senior citizen housing.

So says Robert Fitzpatrick, director of the Wayne County Economic Development Corporation (EDC), which would have used the vetoed \$150,000 to help make the conversion.

The site is at Sheldon and Five Mile roads in Northville Township. It was used as a training school until the county closed it down in the early 1970s.

Since then, it has been a costly white elephant to Wayne County.

FITZPATRICK said the conversion to senior citizen housing would provide 1,000 construction jobs and 650 to 700 permanent jobs.

"It's really discouraging," said Fitzpatrick, adding that the EDC will try to get other money to pay for a bid proposal and liability insurance.

"I haven't spent 2 1/2 years to let the department of the budget — which didn't even bother to find out what it was about — strike the project out," added Fitzpatrick.

A spokesman for the governor said his veto message was clear, "and if there's any misunderstanding, it isn't on this side."

Part of the vetoed money would have been used to hire personnel to prepare plans for a proposal, Fitzpatrick said. The EDC has only about \$40,000 on hand but may try to prepare bid proposals with existing staff members, he said.

CHOOSE THE NEWS THE EMMYS CHOSE NEWS 4 DETROIT

Last Saturday, the Detroit Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences recognized our 5:30 P.M. and 6:00 P.M. news programs as the best early evening newscasts in Detroit by awarding each of them an Emmy (we also won 13 other Emmys).

sports, weather and special reports from Mort Crim, Ben Frazier, Rich Mayk, Jennifer

Moore, Al Ackerman, Don Shane, Mal Sillars and Doug Hill. You'll see for yourself why those who choose, choose News 4.

Don't make your TV news station a habit. Make it a choice.



It was welcome recognition for the talented, dedicated Channel 4 news staff.

We hope that you've noticed we've been inviting Detroiters to shop around, look at all of the news programs and then decide. We think that if you do you'll choose us.

Spend a week with us. Get your news,

