

Traffic nightmare: Clogged arteries could be the norm by the year 2000

By Tim Richard
staff writer

By the year 2000, southeast Michigan will have 15 congested traffic corridors as the seven-county area experiences 24 percent more regional travel. "That will mean 'the sort of traffic slowdowns we have seen this summer because of construction work, particularly on the Chrysler Freeway," said JoAnn Soronen, who chairs the Council on Regional Development of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG).

"Those sorts of slowdowns would be the normal freeway rush-hour conditions in the year 2000 if we don't make some modifications," said Soronen, a Farmington Hills council member.

SEMCOG last week selected five corridors for major road widening and public transit improvements. The new plan, considerably toned down from the 1990 plan adopted seven years ago, includes three light-rail rapid transit lines but no new freeways. The earlier plan had six rapid transit corridors.

Without debate, SEMCOG's General Assembly approved the new plan unanimously by voice vote. The general assembly represents all 140-plus member governments.

Commonly, politicians' discussions of rapid transit erupt into hot debates

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over "subway," a dirty word to many suburbanites. Not so at the SEMCOG meeting, where any mention of ground level vs. underground modes was avoided.

"A plan is simply the best analysis of what would solve a problem mechanically or technologically," Soronen said soothingly. "A plan is not a direction to sink shovels into the ground and begin construction. A plan, such as we consider tonight, must pass through and over various political and financial hurdles before any part of it is actually built."

"FOR PRACTICAL purposes," Soronen said in her introduction, "we already have in place the freeway system as we will know it for this century. "Thus, our options for improving

traffic flow did not include any significant new freeway construction. Rather, we were limited to a pair of basic options: various mass transit possibilities and modifications of the freeways themselves.

"These modification options include such things as reworking the freeways by narrowing shoulders and restriping to add an additional lane, thereby increasing capacity by 20-25 percent."

A second group of possibilities, she said, is high occupancy lanes — "reserved lanes for buses and car or van-pool vehicles traveling with traffic during rush hour (as in Miami) or reserving lanes on the opposite side of the freeway, using special dividers and enforcement (as in Houston)."

A third possible modification is reserved lanes on surface streets. Here are the corridors and SEMCOG's proposed treatment of them by 2000:

CENTRAL/CROSSTOWN corridors:
• Ford Freeway (I-94): high-occupancy vehicle reserved lanes serving peak direction travel between I-275 in southwest Wayne County and I-696 in Macomb County.

• Chrysler Freeway (I-75, I-75): high-occupancy vehicle lanes serving peak direction travel between I-696 in eastern Oakland County and downtown Detroit.

• Lodge Freeway (US-10): high-occu-

pancy vehicle lanes serving peak direction travel between I-696 in Oakland County and downtown Detroit.

• Woodward public transit: extension of light rail line to Sixteen Mile Road (Quinton/Big Beaver).

• Cross-town public transit: a new light rail transit line beginning at Gratiot and Fifteen Mile, proceeding to downtown Detroit and following the Michigan Avenue corridor to Telegraph Road.

• Gratiot and Michigan Avenues: peak direction bus lanes between I-94 and downtown Detroit with reversible lanes during peak periods.

MOUND/VAN DYKE corridors:
• Van Dyke public transit: a new light rail transit line beginning at Van Dyke and Fourteen Mile, connecting to the cross-town (Gratiot) line.

• Arterial improvements: an additional through lane in each direction on Mound Road between Sixteen Mile and Eight Mile roads; on Hoover between Ulta and Eight Mile; on Schoenherr Road between Ulta and Eight Mile; and on Dequindre Road between M-59 and I-4 Mile roads.

For the Fisher Freeway corridor, SEMCOG proposed only short-range transportation systems management actions to improve traffic flow, to provide additional transit service and to promote ride-sharing.

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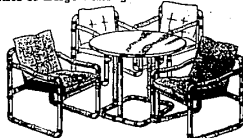


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