

3 clouds hang over SEMTA's rail, bus service

By Tim Richard
staff writer

In the "L'il Abner" comic strip, Joe Blatz was a lithe character who always had a raincloud over his head.

Gary Krause has three clouds over his head. The general manager of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) says the agency's bus and commuter train programs will have to be cut by three-quarters — virtually dismantled — if one or more of the clouds isn't removed by Jan. 1.

"The only thing I can do is to cut the budget to stay with what I have in hand," Krause said in an interview this week.

The cuts SEMTA faces would come on top of last January's central staff cut of 50 jobs and last March's 20 percent service cut which eliminated 150 jobs in the field — drivers and mechanics.

THE "WORST case" Krause can visualize would occur if:

• The Reagan Administration is successful in paring federal operating subsidies to SEMTA from last year's \$27 million to \$17 million. Two years ago, federal support totaled \$41 million.

lion. The Reagan philosophy is to support "big-ticket capital items" but get the federal government out of subsidizing operations.

• The state Court of Appeals fails to act or acts unfavorably from SEMTA's point of view — in a case brought by the Oakland County Road Commission. Some \$21 million in tri-county vehicle license surcharge and title transfer taxes are tied up in an escrow account until the suit is settled.

• The Michigan Legislature fails for the second straight year to fulfill a 1977 promise to adopt a comprehensive transportation package. Lawmakers dodged the issue this year because raising taxes has been such an unpopular issue.

Krause and the SEMTA board feel they must assume none of those three conditions will be corrected in time to avoid cutting the six-months budget from the current \$28.5 million to less than \$13 million. And if there are corrections — well, the cuts will be less drastic.

PUBLIC HEARINGS on the service cuts and a fare increase are scheduled for 1 and 7:30 p.m. Nov. 15 in the Southfield Parks and Recreation Building.

For commuters who ride the SEMTA train from Bloomfield Hills, Birmingham and Royal Oak to downtown Detroit, the cuts would mean elimination of all weekday service and all weekend special service. Large bus routes in Oakland County would also be affected.

lower level at 26000 Evergreen.

A second Oakland County hearing is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Nov. 18 in the Ferndale City Hall council chambers, 300 E. Nine Mile.

"We're going to be where Idaho was 15 years ago when they couldn't cough up 10 cents on \$1 of federal aid," said Krause, 40, a transportation planner by background.

He recalls those years vividly. He was working for the old Michigan Highway Department, "soaking up every bit of federal aid other states couldn't afford to take" because they couldn't put up matching funds.

THE PUBLIC hearing is aimed at educating the public and getting reaction to a proposal to raise the base fare from \$1.30 to \$1.50 with even stiffer hikes for weekend passes. Senior citizens would continue to pay half of the base fare.

The fare box, however, covers only 20 to 35 cents of every \$1 of expenses, Krause said. Major cuts would have to be made in services.

Detroit's Department of Transportation (D-DOT) faces a similar revenue shortage, he said, but Detroit officials have made a basic decision to dip into

the city's general fund to subsidize the operation. SEMTA, a single-purpose regional authority operating in the

suburbs, has no property-tax supported general fund to dip into.

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LARGE BUS routes in Oakland County would also be affected.

Eliminated, among others, would be these routes: 435 Clawson-Detroit, 445 Woodward Limited (Maple-Telegraph), 450 Woodward Local (Somerset), 465 Woodward Limited (Adams Road), 485 Farmington Hills-Detroit, 490 Rochester

ter Road, 842 Rochester-Detroit park & ride, 850 Birmingham-Southfield Detroit park & ride, 940, 941 and 942 Birmingham train feeders.

Many Oakland connector small bus routes would also be dropped entirely.

Reductions would be scheduled for these Oakland routes, among others: 425 Northland-Oakland Mall (Greenfield), 430 Clawson-Detroit, 440 Woodward Local (Maple-Telegraph), 450 Woodward Local (Oak Street), 460 Farmington Hills-Northland, 495 John R, 820 Farmington-Livonia-Redford park & ride, 851 West Bloomfield-Farmington Hills-Detroit park & ride.

Computers for novices

Easy Introduction to Computers, a non-credit course designed for those who know little or nothing about computers, will be conducted in four sessions beginning Dec. 9 at Oakland University, Rochester, by the Division of Continuing Education.

The course provides an overview and

actual experience on three systems: the Apple II personal microcomputer, a major commercial computer and the Wang word processor.

There is a waiting list for the class. However, details about the courses may be obtained by calling the Continuing Education office, 377-3120, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays.

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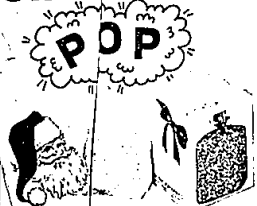
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