

Challenger's bid for SEMTA seat falls short

By Tim Richard
staff writer

SEMTA's establishment survived a stiff challenge as Oakland County member R.J. Alexander of Bloomfield Township was re-elected to the board of the seven-county public transportation authority.

"R.J. is an institution," said Troy Councilman Randy Husk after his successful but surprisingly strong effort to win one of three Oakland seats on the 15-member board.

The general assembly of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) gave Alexander a 38-30 victory for a new three-year term on the SEMTA board.

"A few people are getting together to make agreements the rest don't want," Husk said of the SEMTA board's effort to reach a consensus agreement with top Detroit and tri-county leaders over transit plans and taxes.

"I would vote the positions the way the people want them voted," Husk said.

ALEXANDER is an institution, not only in Oakland County, where he headed the Public Works Department for 17 years before his retirement in 1975, but in the region.

He chaired the pre-1968 Regional Planning Commission, the Transportation and Land Use Study of the late 1960s and the advisory committee

which set up SEMCOG. He has been a delegate at-large to SEMCOG and served on its top planning councils, including the Council on Environmental Strategy and the Solid Waste Study Committee. And he is a trustee of the Metropolitan Affairs Corp., a research agency funded by top industries and labor unions.

Husk, 40, is a relative unknown outside Troy, where he has been on the council four years. He has been a SEMCOG delegate in that period.

Alexander declined to make even a one-minute speech on his own behalf. Husk sent a mailing to every SEMCOG delegate and alternate, following up with telephone calls to many. Five community leaders who promised sup-

port, however, didn't attend Thursday's dinner-meeting in the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dearborn.

SEMTA, WHICH basically operates suburban buses and a pair of commuter trains, is emerging as a 1983-4 political issue.

It has revised its rapid transit plan to include less subway but extending study corridors along the Woodward corridor to Pontiac and the Silverdome, and the Gratiot corridor to Mt. Clemens. The idea of fixed rail transit, however, is unpopular with many suburbanites, including many Husk supporters. Indeed, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners frequently has threatened to pull out of SEMTA unless

more consideration is given to its views.

On top of that, SEMTA is seeking authority from the Michigan Legislature to put an operating tax proposal on the ballot — probably calling for raising the sales tax from four cents to five.

BUT SEMTA General Manager Gary Krause cautioned against interpreting Husk's strong showing as anti-transit feeling.

"We are going to public hearings, and the plan may be modified after public input," said Krause.

SEMTA will hold nine public hearings, including:

- Northern Oakland County — 1 p.m. Monday, July 11, in the board of commissioners auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac.
- Southern Oakland County — 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 13, Southfield Parks and Recreation Building, 26000 Evergreen.



Randy Husk
stiff challenge

SEMCOG defends curb on cable

Local governments in southeast Michigan are joining the battle against a congressional bill that will limit state and local regulations of cable television systems.

"A wholesale preemption of local regulatory authority over cable... is an unwarranted intrusion on municipal powers," said the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) General Assembly last week.

"This is the most important piece of legislation for the American consumer that I have been associated with for a long time," said Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., whose subcommittee reported it out.

And the Senate Commerce Committee supported the bill because it "believes in free and open competition in the marketplace and in the elimination of... artificial barriers to entry."

SENATE BILL 66 passed the Senate on an 87-9 vote last month and is headed for the House of Representatives, where local officials from across the nation want to head it off.

Among SB 66's provisions:

- Cable TV systems would be allowed to increase their rates for basic cable service.

- Fees charged by local authorities would be limited.

- No state or local government could prohibit ownership of a cable system by any person because of that person's ownership of another media interest, although the Federal Communications Commission could still bar commercial broadcasters from owning cable systems.

SEMCOG's resolution, adopted unanimously by about 80 local representatives at last week's annual meeting, was based on resolutions adopted by Detroit and Huntington Woods' councils.

Many southeast Michigan communities have either adopted, or are in the process of negotiating, cable TV franchises. This has occurred because most cables must be strung from studios to homes along rights of way owned by cities, villages and townships.

Local units see contracts as a revenue-maker, a way to get government's point of view directly to viewers, an aid to elementary democracy through "public access" channels and a method of controlling showing of "adult" films.

The bill would nullify many local objectives concerning cable communications and many terms of contracts that were or will be voluntarily negotiated by municipalities and cable companies," the SEMCOG resolution said.

panies," the SEMCOG resolution said.

SEMCOG MADE these arguments against SB 66:

"The bill provides that 'if circumstances significantly change,' cable companies can unilaterally drop services and, following negotiation and binding arbitration, drop facilities and equipment that the companies voluntarily agreed to provide.

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