

# SEMTA delays bus, train service cuts 2 weeks

By Kathy Parrish  
staff writer

Commuters bracing themselves for Oct. 1 bus and train service cuts will have two more weeks to find new transportation.

But the short reprieve could mean even more hardship for Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) patrons.

"Two more weeks is going to cost us," said SEMTA General Manager Gary Krause, who told his board of directors waiting will mean deeper cuts. He estimated the two-week extension will cost \$120,000.

"We'll see the same financial package, altered somewhat. But dollars are dollars," he said.

**FACING A \$16 million operating deficit,** SEMTA's board of directors Tuesday voted 10 to 3 to go ahead with a plan to eliminate the commuter train, reduce buses and routes and raise the youth fare 25 cents.

Opposed were Walter Franchuk and Diana Kola-kowski, both of Macomb County, and Ted Frantz, of St. Clair County. Absent were John Peterson of Oakland County and Dennis Green of Detroit.

SEMTA attributed the deficit to the federal government's decision to phase out operating subsidies for public transportation and to the Michigan Legislature's reluctance to let SEMTA ask local voters for a tax.

Criticism by patrons — especially train riders — caused the board to delay the action until Oct. 17 in order to try to save some services.

**PLANNED ARE talks with Grand Trunk & Western Railroad officials** about possible contract concessions with their employees who work on SEMTA trains and discussions with local city officials about helping maintain railroad facilities.

SEMTA directors also intend to put pressure on the Legislature, which created the seven-county authority in 1987, to "plan, operate, construct, acquire, extend and improve transit services in

southeastern Michigan." SEMTA has no taxing authority of its own.

"If we wind up passing this today, I don't think we have the bargaining edge," said director Nanci Rowe, of Detroit.

"We're taking all the best ourselves. The legislators are elected and should have to listen to it too."

**MORE THAN 60 people** crammed into Tuesday's special SEMTA board meeting, set up to act on cuts proposed Sept. 6.

Directors were updated at a public hearing held Monday. At the meeting, 140 patrons opposed the cuts.

SEMTA's cutbacks would lay off 60 administrative personnel and 100-150 bus drivers, eliminate 15 routes and reduce stops on many other routes.

Only three of SEMTA's 15 directors — Walter Franchuk and Diana Kola-kowski, both of Macomb County, and Tom Turner, of Detroit — attended the daylong hearing in Veterans Memorial Building.

Krause said the hearing and meetings with local officials prompted his staff to restore the 710 Nine Mile and 185 Westland-Scorse runs and reduce runs on the 530 Schoenherr route.

John R 495 would be lengthened to pick up some passengers who travel the 842 Park & Ride Rochester, which is being eliminated.

**KRAUSE STOOD firm on doing away with the train,** which carries 450 people each way from Detroit to Pontiac daily at a cost of \$2 million a year.

"To further delay that decision would negatively impact on the extent to which we can continue to provide bus service in this region," said Krause. He added that commuter rail gets a 17 percent return from the fare box, while bus service returns 35-38 percent of costs.

"There is no desire by the SEMTA staff to eliminate the train. There's more to be gained if we put our dollars into buses," he added.

Director Tom Turner of Detroit expressed concern that many patrons weren't able to attend the public hearing because of short notice, its time and

downtown Detroit location.

He also questioned the next-day action by the board, asking it to delay the cutbacks 30 days. In those 30 days, he said, a subcommittee could work with SEMTA administration and elected local and state officials "to see if we can come up with a realistic proposal we can live with."

Director Michael Einbeuser of Detroit offered what he called a "friendly amendment." The amendment would adopt the plan Oct. 17, but leave open the option of revisiting it at some future date.

"I think we have to be honest with ourselves and everyone else — 30 days is 30 days," said Einbeuser. "We may have a new idea and we may not."

**FOR SOME directors,** such as JoAnn Soronen of Farmington Hills, the delay meant "prolonging the agony."

"It's an unpleasant task; you want to go to the ladies' room or something rather than have someone point the finger at you," she said. "But we're all here to face the music."

Vincent Fordell, a suburban Wayne County director, agreed.

"I think all the efforts leading up to the inevitable point have been made. We've been fiscally re-

sponsible. We've run out of time," said the Garden City mayor. "I'm only sorry we didn't have this room full of people two months ago."

**OAKLAND COUNTY routes proposed for elimination are:**

- Pontiac to Detroit commuter rail.
- 425 Northland-Oakland Mall.
- 490 Campbell Rd.
- 750 Pontiac Arrow.
- 840 Park and Ride Ryan-Dequindre.
- 842 Park and Ride Rochester.
- 850 Park and Ride.
- 740 Twelve Mile.
- 860 Park and Ride Clinton Township.
- 875 Park and Ride Van Dyke.

*'We're taking all the heat ourselves. The legislators are elected and should have to listen to it too.'*

—Nanci Rowe  
SEMTA board member



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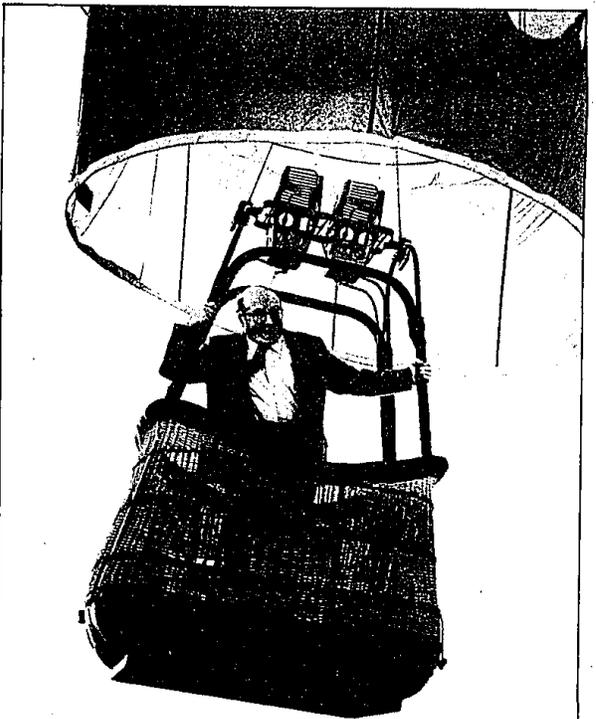
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