

OBSERVATION POINT

Railroads Are Far From Answer To Need For Mass Transit System

There has been a lot of talk out here in the suburbs about the need for a metropolitan area mass transit system. You know busses or trains or something that busses or trains or something that would transport the public from the suburbs into Detroit and back again without the daily thrash on the clogged ditches. Such a system is desperately

needed; the need will grow enor mously in the coming years as our suburban communities grow in population.

in population.

The general theory in Detroit is that mass transit has been blocked by the big auto companies (General Motors is most prominently mentioned), on grounds that people who ride on mass transit won't be buying as many cars as they would if there were not not be the proper of the statement of the proper of the statement of the proper of th

many cars as they would if there were no such system.

This theory remains unproven. (In fact, I suspect that the reduced demand for cars that a mass transit system in this area would produce is less than a drop in the bucket of the total demand for cars in this country. But the very existence of the theory points up the curious fact that the Detroit area is one of the very few metropolitan areas in this country without a mass transit system. transit system.

ONE OF THE possible ways such a system might work is through the railroads. Using existing rail beds, they would establish stations in the suburbs, servcommuter traffic to and from

Having just spent a few days in New York, where the railroads run the main mass transit system to the suburbs, let me say that if

to the suburbs, let me say that it we let the railroads get hold of our mass transit system the result would be catastrophe!

I traveled from Grand Central Station to Stamford, Conn., on the New Haven Railroad, which is the transit of the New Haven Railroad.

on the New Haven railroad, which in turn is controlled by the Penn Central Railroad. The ticket was expensive fover \$5 for two of us, traveling some 40 miles.) The station was simulated the orac mars indegrimy, and the cars were inde-scribable. Paint was falling off; scribable. Paint was failing oir, broken windows had not been fixed; seats would not work; air conditioning was either non-exis-tent or non-operative: rust showed everywhere. The con-ductor was surly (they must have a surliness training school somewhere for all new conduc-

The ride was long and rough.
In short, I'd prefer to face
the ditches rather than go through
that horror show every day.

ALL THIS WAS so, despite the fact that rail is still the cheapest land transportation per-ton-mile.

The railroads (including the Penn Central) are screaming to be allowed to cut further commuter services, on the ground that they lose money.

What the railroads don't explain (including particularly the

Penn Central, now undergoing bankruptcy proceedings) is what they did with all the money they made off their freight and passen made off their freight and passen-ger operations in the past. The strong suspicion exists that they funneled their profits out of the rail business and into other areas (real estate, tourism, land development) where they sensed a greater profit potential.

Failing to plough back profits into new cars or better passenger service, the railroads then discovered that they were losing customers to airplanes and bus-

Now they turn around and try to get the federal government (i.e. us, the taxpayers) to get them off the hook by guarantee-ing loans and eliminating the last

ing loans and eliminating the last vestiges of commuter service. It seems to me that the recent history of such railroads is one of irresponsible management, compounded with equal parts of inefficiency and gall. Given the amazing store of ill-will the railroads have managed to accumulate over the past years. I wouldn't be surprised if Penn Central were allowed to slide into the drink with few tears shed anywhere.

A NUMBER OF other local railroads, although not in the same trouble as the Penn Central,

have not been entirely public spirited about the way they conduct their business. The C & O tracks running

through Livonia and, especially, Plymouth, have been a source of

local cussing for years.

The railroad's management has made sympathetic noises about the traffic tie-ups that their trains cause; some scheduling changes have been made to reduce traffic during daytime

However on the key point of railroad crossing underpasses, the railroad has refused to pay. Both Plymouth and Livonia lack the money. So the motorist waits.

money. So the motorist waits.
So, too, do the commuters
who are now almost entirely
forced to get to Detroit by car,
since the C & O cut back its
commuter service from Plymouth some time ago.
On the plus side, the Grand
Trunk and Western Railroad has

Trunk and Western Railroad has operated a commuter service through Birmingham into Detroit for some time. They promoted and put some money into im-proved service and rolling stock. I understand they are doing fairly well with I. well with it.

Which all goes to show: In business, as in anything else, if you treat the other guy with scorn and don't keep trying to do a better job - you get what you



Tim Richard writes

Finances For SEMTA Poses Big Problem

Item: Earlier this year, the privately-owned Northville Coach privately-owned Northville Coach Line went under financially. After a period of hardship, nota-bly for some state hospital em-ployes, a Toledo firm was able to restore service, although it re-mains to be seen how it will work

out.

Item: Detroit voters repealed a city charter provision that the DSR bus system must be financed entirely by the farebox. This opens the door to a sub-

box. This opens me door to a sub-sidy from taxes.

Item: The DSR on July 25-canceled its Middle Belt Road run from Metropolitan Airport to the Livonia Mall, blaming a \$465-daily loss, and suburban officials are scratching their heads in an effort to figure out a way to sub-

effort to figure out a way to sussidize or replace it.

Item: A year or so ago, Ann
Arbor's privately-owned bus company called it quits. A city subsidy now helps support a limited service with small van-type

Item: Pontiac is subsidizing its bus service to prevent its col-

AND YET ironically, the need for public transit is growing.

Several times each year, Observer Newspaper readers learn of new industrial plants and businesses going up in these sub-urbs. Sometimes they're entirely new companies, but oftener it seems they moved out of Detroit

Several times each year.

seems they moved out of Detroit because they needed more space and newer facilities. The move has been tough on workers. In a significant finding, TALUS recently reported that Detroiters now have longer drives to work than suburbanites.

drives to work than suburbanites, although we tend to think of suburbanites as the commuters.

Detroiters tend to have lower rates of automobile ownership, and there are potentially productive workers there who simply early are up to jobs.

tive workers there who simply can't get out to jobs.

And they can't move here because of (a) racial bigotry of a very quiet but tangible sort in the real estate market and (b) our "snob" zoning in which we build four-bedroom colonials for the executives but little for the clerical of the processor of the proce

executives but little for the cieri-cal and blue-collar folks.

We hear of local matrons organizing car pools to pick up their domestic help at the end of the DSR busline. And although those of us with a "booster" menthose of us with a "boose" inter-tality hate to admit it, there are a lot of suburban housewives, students, old folks and, yes, low-income folks who would be aw-fully happy if they could get de-

fully happy if they could get de-cent bus service.

¹ Each year our roads get more congested.

And each year we're getting closer and closer to the kind of thing that's going on in New York and Tokyo-air pollution so seri-ous that much auto travel has to be certained or hanned be curtailed or banned.

THE SOUTHEASTERN THE SOUTHEASTERN
Michigan Transportation Authority is a little more than a year
old, but already it's feeling itself
in a crisis position.
The six-county authority,

The six-county authority, and the six-county authority and the to accept federal study grants, small amounts of state aid, some meager local contributions and private foundation grants. As Chairman Wilbur R. Thompson put it in the recent

grants. As Chairman Wilbur R.
Thompson put it in the recent
annual report:
"We are very close, in short,
to the point at which there must
come an end to vague 'ought-to'
reports of the kind which fill dozens of dusty file cabinets, and a

start on the hard planning and engineering design of an operat-ing public-transportation sys-

The facts of life in public transportation today, here as in, every other metropolitan area, tell us that the potential operating revenue... will not be chough... to fully support their daily, operations, much less the cost of activities are the support their daily. quiring and improving them...

"There can be no substitute for a strong state-local source of financial support if SEMTA is to do its job."

Clearly, it's up to the Legis-

lature and an enlightened electo-rate to make some hard decisions rate to make some hard decisions not just to study grants but on how to give SEMTA a reliable source of income.

That will mean some tax money. There is no alternative.

Dennii L. Pajot writes

Raps Action Of SC Board

Six members of the School-craft Community Collège Board of Trustees. a panel not distin-guished for its courtesy, have committed a grave insult — one which probably will coly the col-lege relations for a long, long

Unfortunately, the color is likely to be a discredit, rather than a credit to Schooldraft. In their zeal to exercise a rightful power, the board members have jeopardized their own influence as a stabilizing and guiding panel for the public institution.

tution.
And, in the process, they managed to place two persons whom they probably hoped to honor in a position to be unfairly

trammeled.

IF IT WOULD DO any good, this writer would urge the six trustees to retract their action of Thursday, July 30, adding three of their own choices to the four presidential candidates recompanying the colleger property. mended by a college community search committee.

mended by a college community search committee.

It wouldn't do any food.

Instead, let it aperely be pointed out that the loadrd could have waited an appropriate time before adding its admes. Even after such a wait, additions would still reflect upon the formmittee—but not in the harsh, heavy handed manner of a stern parch disciplining a knaye.

With such a wait, the trustees could have saved the college community from a potentially explosive controversy and at

least have shielded two persons whose professional reputations stand to be tainted by the force of the impact.

AS IT IS, with their abrupt insult of the committee, the six trustees have invited a defensive reaction; that is sure to sweep together the already rampant insults of thords represented the sure of issue of "board repression of campus voices" and attacks upon

personalities.

With a wait, if there were to be critical reactions, the two controversies could have been at least separated and less damag-

ing. Trustees Jane K. Moelfle,
Trustees Jane K. Moelfle,
Paul Mutnick, Clarke Oldenburg,
Dr. Robert Geake, Dr. George
Martin and John LaRue, should
jointly take the blame for their
unanimous action of Thursday,

The pity is, because any penalty that might come would touch them latest and least, they will not.

· Community college relations the college image, the trust of the administration, faculty, students, foundation, alumni and their own constituents have all been damaged. Damaged trust always has far-reaching and unpredictable

If the controversy takes the If the controversy taxes the turn at least one source indicates it will, the very men the board apparently sought to honor will be the center of challenge and therefore exposed to undue tarnish.

All for the lack of a little

courtesy

View points expressed in DISSENT do not necessarily reflect those of Observer Newspapers Inc., but are presented in the belief that publica-tion of all segments of thought on a public issue is a prerequisite to understanding and progress.

By SHERRY KAHAN

We Americans are so dishonest on the question of violence that it sometimes makes me ill. We are a very violent country and we ought to admit it quickly and then get down to work to

and then get down to work to change it.

We have resorted to violence all through our history. The Boston Massacre, so important in our steps toward nationhood, was a confrontation much like the one at Kent State. And we have always condemned the British who liked the other that killed the profired the shots that killed the pro

The Boston Tea Party was a deliberately anti-social act designed to protest against the British and stir up trouble. Good old Sam Adams, one of our revered patriots, was one of the biggest trouble-stirrers-up that ever came down the pike.

LATER ON WE SAW the violence of the Civil war which settled by force the social issue-of slavery. We are a nation that has always been quick bn the-draw. Look at our well-planned, kindly settling of the Indian question. And how considerately those western cowmen requested the western cowmen requested the nesters to leave their grazing

There has always been vigi-Inere has always been vigi-lante-ism in this nation. Blacks were frequently shot and hanged without a word of protest from without a word of protest from those who are now so piously talking for non-violence. Martin Luther King was a non-violent man. Did this win him praise from those proclaiming non-violence today?

When the police kill a Black Panther, thousands of Americans

Panther, thousands of Americans applaud. If the Panthers kill a policemen, thousands of other Americans applaud.
We are not against violence in this country. It all depends on whose ox is gored. We are only against it if our side is the victim.

It seems to me that the

It seems to me that the whole question of violence is tied up with an unspoken contract. I will not commit violence. But you on your part must at least listen to me and perhaps take a mea-sure or two to relieve my prob-

lem. It is simply not fair for our leaders to say, "We must not get violent, children, we must not get

Let us look at the Vietnam Let us look at the Vietnam war. In 1968, the people who will be running the government in 15 or 20 years were very frustrated with democratic principles. They had demonstrated long and hard had demonstrated rong and mand and were rewarded with more troops being sent to Vietnam by President Johnson. But they de-cided to continue using the demo-cratic way. They went into the New Hampshire primary for Eugene McCarthy. And they won.

THEY WON to the point of emocratically toppling a govern-ment. Lyndon Johnson went home to Texas. The country apparently backed them on their war weari-ness because Richard Nixon felt

ness because Richard Nixon felt compelled to promise time after time that he would end the war. But to the young people, has been like Lyndon Johnson. He spoke with forked tongue. Despite all the apparent changes, nothing changed. In fact, there is now a bigger war, with the young people expected to fight it.

So if you want to bring about change in this country, what should you do?

Back we come to the ques-

Back we come to the ques-tion of violence. In black mo-ments I sometimes feel that violence is the only way to get our leaders to listen. Little gets done without the threat of it.

The non-violent marches of Dr. King won the hearts and minds of many well-meaning Americans, but it wasn't until the blacks started burning down cities that city fathers decided they ought to get busy and do

something.

The country that can only move upon the threat of violence is going to get violence.

