

The Riders' Voice

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weekend, and most of DDOT's routes would be changed or eliminated. At the first hearing on January 20, well over 100 individuals were present to testify. Rather than providing the detailed service reduction plan, DDOT discussed only eliminating overnight service and a small number of low-ridership routes. Copies of a 118-page plan sat in a corner, only to be provided to TRU upon specific request after the hearing. The plan was later made public during a lightly attended second hearing held on the day of a major snowstorm.

The plan proposes cuts on nearly 90% of DDOT's routes. Besides eliminating overnight bus service and abandoning eight routes, DDOT proposes to reduce service on 42 routes – many seemingly without regard to route popularity or usefulness. For instance, Route #53 (Woodward) is frequently overcrowded at its current frequency of seven minutes between buses during peak hours. This overcrowding causes buses to become late and provide inconsistent service. DDOT has proposed in its plan to slash

the frequency to 15 minutes between buses. This will exacerbate the overcrowding problem. Such poorly targeted service cuts will decrease DDOT's efficiency, further diminish its farebox revenue as riders "jump ship" to SMART or give up on transit altogether, making the city less productive. The across-the-board elimination of overnight service on all routes is, by far, the most devastating part of the plan for the many Detroiters who count on the bus for their evening and morning jobs. Currently, overnight service is provided on 14 key routes. DDOT's customers have over the years planned their employment commute around the availability of this service. If DDOT has its way, on March 5 this lifeline service and many riders' jobs will be history. Hopefully, by the time of publication of this newsletter, the plan will be rescinded or reconsidered. If not, please continue to contact DDOT, City Council, and Mayor Kilpatrick's office.

TRU has increasingly argued against service cuts such as these without DDOT first making good on its often-promised internal management and operational

changes to increase efficiency and streamline its operation. Whether the current proposed changes go forward or not, the fact that they were publicly proposed before making any meaningful internal improvements shows once again that DDOT management has lost the will or the power to run an efficient and effective transit system. In the absence of some sort of immediate DARTA action, TRU believes that the City must explore the hiring of a professional transit management team with 21st-century expertise to manage and direct DDOT's operation for Detroit and Detroiters. Other cities utilize this arrangement, and several nationally recognized firms provide this service. The goal would be to better utilize DDOT's transit assets, including its experienced labor force, to provide better quality service at a lower general fund support level. This could immediately benefit the city, its taxpayers, and its transit customers, while strengthening DDOT's position as a leading player under a future DARTA-led regional plan. Without immediate self-improvement, DDOT's future under DARTA appears grim.

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Together, we can move our region forward!

TRU Moving Forward

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DO WE WANT A CITY? – Overview of the Vision Charrette to develop Detroit 2030: An Agenda for a Sustainable Metropolis

By Larry Hands

Transportation Riders United's president, Bob Prud'homme, asked me the question, "Do we want a City?" Unfortunately, the answer to this question is not obvious. For the past 50 years, "no" has been Greater Detroit's response. As Frank Owen stated in an article in Playboy Magazine in August 2004, "No other US metropolis has suffered a decline as steep as Detroit's...What madness could possess a civilization to construct such a grand and magnificent place and then, within half a century, to obliterate so thoroughly what was created?" Looking forward to the next 25 years, we need to ask the question "Do we want a City?" TRU's response is a resounding "YES!!" A vibrant Detroit is our overarching urban imperative. Now, the primary focus must be to ask ourselves "How do we get there?" As part of our Annual Meeting on January 25, TRU, along with Detroit Synergy Group, the Mackinac chapter of the Sierra Club and Preservation Wayne, sponsored a vision charrette – a workshop designed to stimulate ideas and involve the public in the community planning and design process. The charrette was an exciting first step in the development of "Detroit 2030: An Agenda for a Sustainable Metropolis." This



Yes, this really is a subway station on Fort Steet. Unfortunately, it's a movie prop that was used for filming scenes for "The Island" – a story about what Los Angeles would be like after the apocalypse. Even after the end of the world, L.A. has better transit than Detroit does today.

was a great opportunity for groups to come together to develop our common urban imperatives for Greater Detroit. Close to 90 people attended, including mayoral candidates Freman Hendrix and Sharon McPhail and City Council candidate Palencia Mobley. Matt Clayson of Detroit Synergy Group facilitated the

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TRU Transportation Riders United (TRU) is a

501 (c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to improve transportation access and mobility in Southeastern Michigan

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The Riders' Voice

By Patricia Fedewa

TRU's hard-fought victories in the battle to improve local bus service may soon come to naught if the City of Detroit Administration gets its way. On January 12 Mayor Kilpatrick announced that effective March 5 overnight bus service will be eliminated and other route changes will occur. During his speech, the mayor promised that no changes would be made without public input, and that the chronic late bus problem would finally be

fixed. Providing a mere three-day legal notice, which is less than the five days required by the federally mandated public

Mayor Kilpatrick announced that effective March 5 overnight bus service will be eliminated

participation plan, DDOT announced that the public hearings would begin January 20. The Notice pronounced that service would be

eliminated from 12:00 AM until 5:00 AM during the week, and other times during the

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President's Message

It is very easy to become caught up in all of the media attention surrounding the recent International Auto Show, but this year there was a new twist to the age-old story: Detroit's First Annual Winter Blast was, from all accounts, a real success. My hope is that this is just one sign of a city beginning to turn the corner, and starting to accept the "invitation out of exile" that many have been extending for so long. There are many issues still facing us, but this winter's festivities were, I think, a sign of the optimism building in the region for Detroit once again. While there is much to be hopeful for, there are many concerns looming in the upcoming year. I would like to take this time to encourage all of us working on transit-related issues to hold our heads high and to look forward to what the possibilities are. As the current administration is preparing to once again balance the city's budget on the backs of transit riders, I expect that my thoughts of encouragement and optimism are as much for myself as for anyone. It is starting to become evident that the current administration does not grasp the importance of transit as the catalyst for economic and community development that other parts of the nation seem to have discovered, and I wonder if the City of Detroit can withstand another blow to an already inept and crippled transit system. I am reminded of a statement by Anne Frank many decades ago, however, during a particularly dark period in her life: "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." Let us use these words to guide our spirits into 2005 and beyond. Let's each of us begin this day.

Bob Prud'homme

What Makes It Apples and Oranges?

By Virginia Lingham, TRU Research Assistant

Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) and the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) are not typically compared side by side. It is said that doing so is like comparing apples and oranges, but what does that mean?

DDOT's proposal to cut service on 90% of its routes got us thinking: How do DDOT's individual route ridership figures compare with SMART's? The idea was to get a better idea of any similarities and differences, and identify trends. TRU was unable to obtain current route ridership data from DDOT for this article, despite several requests. This forced us to utilize data from a report prepared for DDOT by a consulting firm a few years ago. The SMART information was provided by SMART, and covers the month of April, 2004.

The statistic being compared is the number of riders per weekday for each route. It should be recognized that all route services are not identical: Routes operate for different time periods during the day; some routes are 24-hour service; some routes are peak period only. Also, DDOT is a significantly larger transit system than SMART, with nearly twice the number of coaches and approximately five times the overall number of weekday passengers.

This graph shows ridership for each regularly-scheduled route operated by the two agencies. Each data point represents a separate route. The routes have been arranged in order of increasing ridership, with least productive on the left and most productive on the right of the chart.

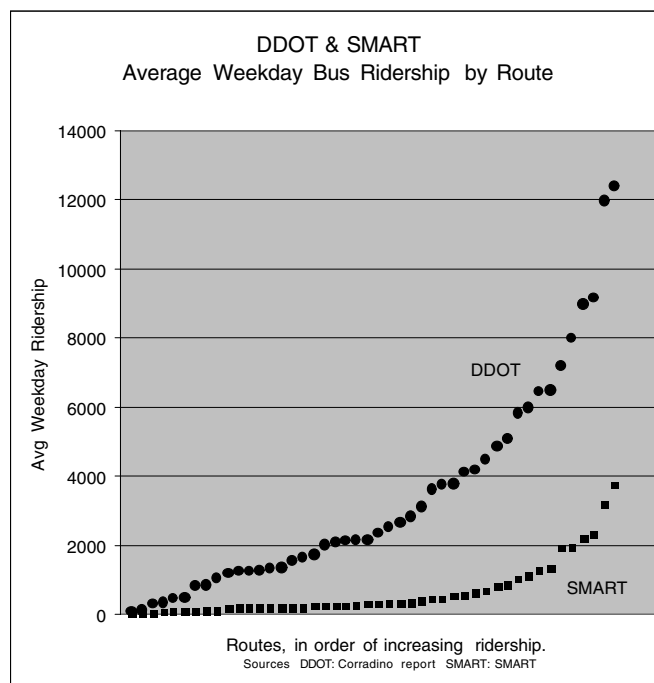
The chart clearly shows that DDOT carries more people than SMART each weekday.

The low ridership routes on the left of the chart reflect the fact that some routes may be relatively ineffective and unpopular while other routes have limited running times and would naturally not carry as many people. There is always a need to have medium-ridership feeder routes that connect with the main routes. These feeder routes are generally located at the center of the chart. On the right of the chart, the number of high-ridership routes for both systems represent a relatively small percentage of the total number of routes operated.

According to our information, the top four routes for DDOT are Woodward (#53), Grand River (#21), 7 mile (#45), and Gratiot (#34) and for SMART are Gratiot (#560), Woodward (#'s 440-450-460), Michigan (#200), and Van Dyke (#510). The routes with the least ridership for DDOT are Woodrow Wilson (#52) and the Red Loop (#2) and for SMART is Auburn Hills – Eastland (#559) and Livonia – Industrial Drive (#297).

It will take our regional transportation authority to perform an in-depth analysis and look beyond individual constraints of each system – funding mechanisms, for example – to design a coordinated route system and service level that both serves the region in the most efficient manner and promotes transit usage.

Apples and oranges? Perhaps, but they are all in the same bag.



Transit Funding: Don't Let it Become an Easy Target in Bad Economic Times

By Michael Whims and Steve Gutterman

Current budget shortfalls and the politics surrounding them at every level of government are creating mass uncertainties for the future of transit funding. There's going to be a fight for transportation dollars during the coming budgeting processes, and the support of grass-roots transit advocates is going to be necessary to make sure that transit gets its fair slice of the pie.

Reauthorization of the federal transportation spending bill has been delayed in Washington for over a year now and the process is starting anew in the 109th Congress now in session. In Lansing, attempts to reduce transit's share of the state transportation budget were only partially successful during the 2004 legislative session, but indications are that transit will be targeted for further cuts this year as the state wrestles with its deficit. Locally, the City of Detroit desperately wants to rid itself of its costly transit burden to help reduce its budget deficit. Meanwhile, the Detroit Area Regional Transportation Authority (DARTA) has yet to hire a chief executive and begin the process of developing a badly needed coordinated transit services plan.

The federal government's funding role in transit is to provide capital funds for such things as new buses, facilities and projects. How supportive Congress is to transit in reauthorization of the federal transportation spending bill this year will have an impact on the level of funds available to meet routine needs, not to mention new transit projects, for the next six years. Decisions on federal spending at the local level are made in coordination with the local metropolitan planning organization, which in Greater Detroit is SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. Its long-range 2030 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) contains all the approved transit capital projects—mostly routine replacements of equipment—for the next 25 years utilizing an assumed level of federal support. The RTP contains no provision for a rail transit project, such as a regional DARTA rail initiative, the downtown circulator project being studied by the City of Detroit, or the Woodward corridor transit project being studied by the Detroit Transportation

Detroiters need to let City Council and the administration know how critical transit is to their personal livelihoods and the overall health of the city.

How to be Heard

- Attend transit agency meetings and contact agency officials. See the meeting calendar in this newsletter for dates of DARTA, DDOT and SMART meetings and contact information.
- Detroit City Council meetings are generally held each business day at the Council chambers located on the 13th floor of the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center, Two Woodward Avenue, Detroit. Call the Detroit City Clerk's office for more information at (313) 224-3260, or go to the Clerk's webpage at <http://www.ci.detroit.mi.us/legislative/CityClerk> and click on the City Council Daily and Advanced Calendars link.
- Find your Michigan State Senator and contact information at: <http://senate.michigan.gov>
- Find your Michigan State Representative and contact information at: <http://house.michigan.gov>
- Find your U.S. Representative and contact information at: <http://www.house.gov/writerep>
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Corporation. It is clear that any major transit proposal is going to need political push from outside SEMCOG in order to get amended to the RTP and become eligible for federal funding.

According to Michigan Department of Transportation Director Gloria Jeff, Congress will likely not have a transportation bill out of the House until this spring, with Senate action not likely until summer. There is still time to let our Washington representatives know about our support of regional transit. It is critical that sufficient federal transit funds be made available during the 109th Congress to accommodate future transit expansion in Greater Detroit. It is also critical that DARTA take its rightful lead role in the planning effort so this region can finally obtain a fair share of federal funds for new projects.

Transit operating funds for day-to-day management and provision of transit service come principally from the State of Michigan as well as local sources. Even though Lansing increased the overall state transportation budget by nearly \$60 million for this fiscal year, transit operating funds were held flat with the prior year – a victory of sorts considering that anti-transit state legislators waged a strong effort to gut transit funding much further. The oppositional effort is expected to continue during the next budget session, which has just begun, where statewide cost-cutting is at the top of the agenda in order to reduce deficit spending.

It is time to let our Michigan representatives know how critical transit is to Greater Detroit. Newly elected representatives, particularly, need to hear from us before they are swayed by anti-transit Lansing dogma.

In Detroit, Mayor Kilpatrick is trying to close the city's general fund to transit

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Mark Your Calendar!

All meeting locations are in Detroit unless otherwise indicated.

TRU Board

Normally 2nd Tuesday of even-numbered months, 7:00 pm
Guardian Building, 6th Floor
*TRU meeting information (313) 963-8872

TRU Riders' Voice Committee

Normally 3rd Monday each month, 6:00 pm
Guardian Building, 6th Floor

DARTA Board (new schedule)

Normally 2nd Friday each month, 1:00 pm
Chamber of Commerce,
1 Woodward Ave., 19th Floor
*DARTA meeting information (313) 596-0440

DDOT Advisory Commission

Normally 3rd Wednesday each month, 10:00 am
DDOT HQ, 1301 E. Warren Ave.
*DDOT meeting information (313) 933-1300

DDOT Customer Information

Normally 3rd Thursday each month, 5:00 pm
DDOT HQ, 1301 E. Warren Ave.

DDOT Local Advisory Council

Normally 3rd Tuesday of odd-numbered months, 10:00 am
DDOT HQ, 1301 E. Warren Ave.

SEMCOG Transportation Advisory Council

Normally 4th Wednesday each month, 9:30 am
Buhl Building, 3rd Floor
*SEMCOG meeting information (313) 961-4266

SMART Board

Normally 4th Thursday each month, 2:00 pm
SMART HQ, 660 Woodward, 9th Floor
*SMART meeting information (866) 962-5515

SMART Advisory Council

Variable time and place

***Note:** Call ahead to confirm agency meetings!

Annual Meeting Sets Records for TRU

The 2005 Annual Meeting held January 25th saw a record attendance and full recovery of meeting expenses for the first time. There are several people and organizations to thank for the success of the meeting.

To start with, TRU received great press coverage for the meeting in two articles written by local news columnist Jack Lessenberry. We wish to thank him for his interest in transit and TRU. The vision charrette session that followed the business meeting helped boost public interest and TRU wishes to thank co-sponsors Detroit Synergy Group, the Sierra Club and Preservation Wayne and the many other groups who sent representatives to be part of this historic collaborative event. (See this issue's lead story for coverage of the vision charrette).

Those who attended the meeting praised the luxurious surroundings of the old Guardian Club room at the top of Detroit's newly-renovated architectural jewel. The meeting space and all setup services were donated to the event by the building management, and TRU wishes to thank Karen Smith and the Sterling Group for their gracious help and support. Catering for the event was provided by metro Detroit-based Rio Wraps as well as Andy's Convenience stores who both came through as promised.

Finally, and most importantly, it is the dedicated TRU membership who, as always, makes any meeting a success. Sitting through renditions of the 2004 Annual Report and Treasury Report isn't exactly exciting, but it is important and necessary to inform the membership of the organization's activities and financial condition. These reports are posted at the TRU website. Thanks again to the members who attended, and to the many new members who joined that evening.

Transit Funding

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operations in order to fix the current deficit and balance the next budget. A city Auditor General's report determined that DDOT's per mile service costs were well above the average of major city bus systems. Yet DDOT has given no indication that it plans to take any internal restructuring measures that could lower the agency's operating costs. The mayor has instead directed DDOT to make severe cuts in service to meet the new budget constraints. Complicating matters, the Detroit Transportation Corporation (DTC), operator of the Detroit People Mover, has for the first time applied for a share of state transit operating dollars, which could potentially cut into operating funds available for DDOT and SMART service.

Detroiters need to become involved in the budget process now underway to let City Council and the administration know how critical transit is to their personal livelihoods and the overall health of the city.

Even though DARTA is woefully behind schedule in becoming a functioning regional authority, transit supporters must continue to pressure the board on issues that it will be addressing under full operation. Attend the board meetings held the second Friday of each month and provide public comment. The board has recently instituted a series of internal training sessions to identify the complexities of transit planning and funding. TRU is attending these sessions. As with regional transportation authorities in other major urban areas, DARTA can be a unifying factor for improving the transit picture for Greater Detroit. However, citizen involvement at the grass roots level is key to making it happen.

TRU members can be involved in the budget-making process by letting your federal, state and local elected leaders and agency officials know that you support transit. Political leaders need to hear from their constituents. They need to know that the voters care about transit. The best way to accomplish this is by phone calls and email messages that identify your name, your residency in the official's district, and your personal support of better transit funding. Be positive and cordial. Your involvement CAN make a difference.

DO WE WANT A CITY?

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workshop. TRU Operations Director Mike Whims set the stage by reviewing the 142-year transit history of Greater Detroit. As a group, we first developed a list of the barriers to transit. We then developed a list of "Why We Need Transit." This list included: curbing sprawl, revitalizing our core, rebuilding working class neighborhoods, breaking down social barriers, reducing stress, reducing crime, betterment for children, and saving taxpayer money. At that point, we broke up into three groups to discuss the following topic areas: Environment, Economy and Community.

Specifically, each group was asked: 1) Who would benefit from better transit? and 2) How would it help? I participated in the environment group, and I noticed that the group had a difficult time not talking about economy and community. The environment group's answer to the question, "who would benefit?" included: asthma sufferers, fishermen, people who deal with stress, local businesspeople, police, tourists, artists, and brownfield developers, not a traditional environmental perspective. Each group had the same difficulty with staying focused on their specific topic. We recognized that there was a strong interconnection between the three topics of environment, economy and community. We came back together as a single group to discuss the next steps. These are now being documented and further refined through a follow-up survey questionnaire. Watch for what happens as we start developing our urban imperatives, because, YES, we want a strong, vibrant City. To accomplish this, we will need to reverse the processes that have brought us through the most recent 50 years and take a new path to recreate a grand and magnificent place called the City of Detroit.

TRU Board Notes

TRU's Board of Directors wants to keep TRU members advised of its activities. The following actions were taken at the December, 2004 and February, 2005 board meetings:

DECEMBER

- Approval to co-sponsor the annual MOSES Martin Luther King banquet with an advertisement in the banquet program and \$300 contribution.
- Approval to apply for an ECCO/Belden small grant for 2005.
- Resolution to support an ACCESS/ECCO initiative for an executive directive from the Governor supporting environmental justice that includes public transportation as an issue.
- Approval to collaborate with Detroit Synergy Group and Sierra Club on a regional agenda for transit improvement.

FEBRUARY

- Re-elected the current officers and approved extending the Operations Director's contract for 2005.
- Reviewed and approved an operating budget for 2005.
- Established goals for the TRU Leadership Retreat planned for March 18-19, 2005.
- Agreed to collaborate with Community Living Services and Wayne State University on planned transit-related activities.

The TRU Board generally meets every even-numbered month and meetings are open to the public. If you have a business item that you wish to be placed on the agenda, please call Mike Whims at the TRU office - (313) 963-8872.

TRU needs your involvement – become a member today!

TRU is committed to continuing the hard work necessary to build an on-time, efficient and affordable transportation system in Greater Detroit. As a non-profit organization, we rely on membership and community support. Much of our work is done by dedicated volunteers who get paid with a slice of pizza. TRU needs you – if you are not a member, please join now! If you are a member, encourage your friends, family and colleagues to join. *Together, we can move our region forward!*

Yes! I want to become a TRU member:

\$20 Standard
 \$30 Family
 \$5 Student/Low Income
 \$ _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

DAYTIME PHONE () _____ EVENING PHONE () _____

FAX () _____ EMAIL _____

AFFILIATION (COMPANY/ORGANIZATION) _____

Yes, I would like to volunteer my time. Please contact me.
 Special skill(s) you can contribute _____

Please make your check payable to **TRU** and mail to **500 Griswold, Suite 1650, Detroit, MI 48226**

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