

The draining away of transit options



*Stephen
Hands
of Grosse
Pointe Park*

As numerous developments spring up around downtown Detroit, we must ask ourselves: "How is everybody going to get there?" Our downtown is already overflowing with parking lots and parking structures. We cannot afford any more cars filling our streets and draining away interest in city blocks. Shouldn't we look at other options for the future?

We must look at how best to transport our residents and employees to downtown. The city talks about not having enough room for parking, but what is wrong is that we have too much land wasted on parking and not enough for businesses and shops.

Now the casinos and the city are trying to take away our only escape to transport freedom. The City Council vote on Jan. 29 to convert the rail line along St. Aubin to a freeway was a great leap backward from our transportation needs.

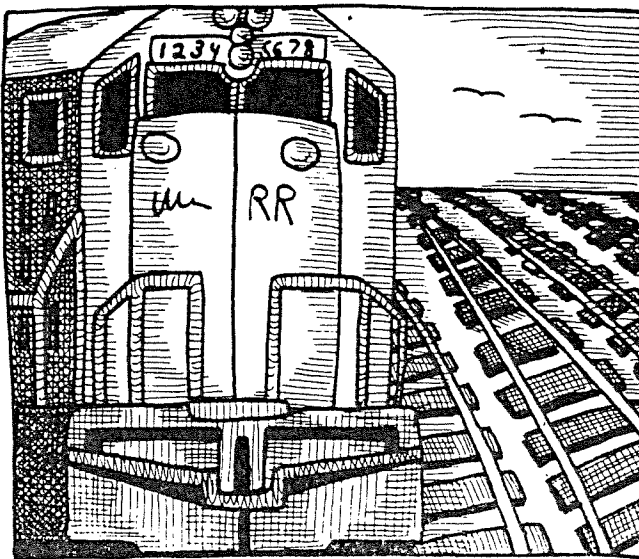
This road will be four-tenths of a mile away from the parallel I-375. This pavement will be placed on an existing rail line, which is the only rail line that travels close to downtown and is the key link for the different commuter rail proposals to serve downtown. The City Council had to vote for this without knowing what will be wasted and what the road will do as it cuts through the center of Lafayette Park.

Do we really want to create more freeways, the things that contributed to sprawl and drained the vitality out of the city of Detroit?

The casinos will pay for the road, but they are the only ones who will be served by it. Instead of building a new road, the casinos should pay for a good rail system in Detroit. With the money it would cost for two miles of freeway, we could start a commuter rail system from downtown to Pontiac, Mt. Clemens and Ann Arbor. This commuter rail system will not be possible once we take away this precious rail line.

Detroit lags behind every city its size for transportation options. It offers only the car and sometimes the bus. This is our last chance. We need this rail line to connect to our new airport terminal, the proposed new Amtrak station and the nearby communities and cities.

Great cities thrive on people, not cars. We want people to walk in downtown, not drive through it. Look at great cities like Chicago, New York or Paris. These cities



MARGARET SCOTT / Special to the Free Press

have spectacular public transit systems and make it hard for people to drive.

The casinos claim they will leave room for a single rail track for future (otherwise known as never-will-happen) plans. We need two tracks leading to our city's heart, not one. This car-only option will not benefit the nearly 40 percent of Detroit households that do not have a single car and that need better, more frequent bus (and train) service.

What about the population under 16 who cannot go anywhere unless it is a weekday, during rush hour, when a bus goes near their house? Retail and restaurants will tell you they don't profit from cars driving in front of their shops, while they do make money from light rail and pedestrians.

Good luck for people trying to drive or walk down Gratiot after this freeway is built. To those who enjoy walking in the many parks of Lafayette Park and Elmwood, get used to hearing the sound of roaring cars traveling past you. You will not be able to cross the freeway, either, because the city plans to replace the three existing pedestrian bridges with only one.

I hope that until the city has finalized its plans to build the road, you will join me in writing letters and protesting to the City Council. And when they have finalized the plans, I hope you will join me standing in the way of the bulldozers and shovels on the rail line, until the city realizes the waste of money and lost opportunities they will create.

Stephen Hands, 14, will lead a May workshop on transportation at the National Town Meeting on Sustainable Development in Detroit.

BE HEARD

If you're under 25 and have a view on a subject of current interest, and can make your case in about 500 words, or if you're teaching a class of opinionated students who might like to put their views in a public arena, mail them to:

Young Voices
c/o Katharine Bagdon

Detroit Free Press, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit, Mich. 48226

You can also E-mail them to editpg@freepress.com or fax them to 1-313-222-6774.

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