

A better downtown requires bus power

By KAREN KENDRICK-HANDS



IT IS EXCITING to see plans for redevelopment in Detroit that will bring a critical mass of new employees into downtown to revive it. One key factor is missing, though. The Campus Martius development has not been designed to accommodate and strengthen public transportation.

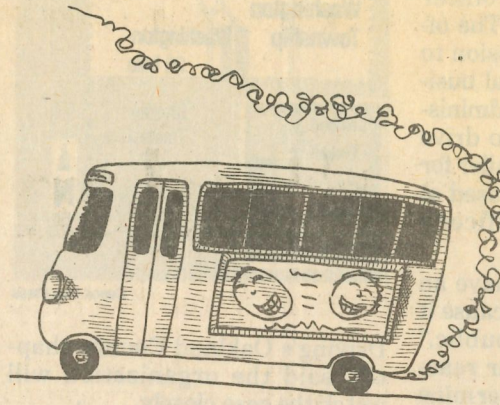
In order to make room for the Campus Martius project, the city is poised to evict the Cadillac Square bus transfer plaza from downtown, with no immediate good alternative to replace it.

Easy transfer between buses, cars and other forms of transportation has been the key to revitalizing downtowns in many cities. It involves little cost or effort if it is done early enough in the planning, which is now. User-friendly transit can be a better investment than creating parking spaces at \$25,000 to \$35,000 a pop.

The current Cadillac Square bus plaza has few fans. Ugly and barren, it embodies the low esteem in which the city seems to hold its own transit system. Buses arrive and depart in a dark, unlovely canyon, with not a posted route map or timetable in sight. Yet riders say that at least it's lighted, safe and more convenient than widely scattered stops would be.

The function Cadillac Square serves is all-important. It allows buses access to the core of downtown so that riders can transfer among various SMART and Detroit bus routes with no more than a two-block walk. After 6 p.m. nearly all downtown routes stop there. Without a central hub, more travel time will be required of every rider who must transfer.

The Detroit Department of



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Cadillac Square allows buses access to the core of downtown so that riders can transfer among various bus routes with no more than a two-block walk.

Transportation is apparently considering some sort of shuttle to connect passengers between routes. But adding 20 minutes of waiting or travel time to the one-to-two-hour commutes many riders already endure is unconscionable. It will make it even harder for DDOT and SMART, the regional bus line, to coordinate their schedules.

The cumulative time wasted translates into thousands of hours and, even at minimum wage, thousands of dollars a day. Employers will suffer still more tardy, exhausted employees.

Those who can choose to drive will, thereby adding to congestion. The city will subsidize their parking with below-market rates, while the transit captives will pay in extended travel time.

DDOT projects that 45,000 of its daily riders pass through downtown. A 20-minute-longer commute for each of them adds up to an extra 15,000 person-hours per day spent waiting for the bus instead of being productive at work, in the community, at home with family. And one can't begin to measure the non-monetary costs paid by those who wait.

Instead of a shuttle, while construction disrupts the Cadillac Square area, DDOT and SMART could develop a circulating downtown route that would enable passengers to board and exit at several strategic locations.

A permanent transfer center could be built on the ground floor of the parking structure proposed for the Crowley block.

The right vision and design concept could attract federal transit investment funds to help defray the cost of the parking structure. It's been too long since this region's transit needs have attracted significant federal investment.

Public transportation is the key — not the barrier — to making Detroit the world-class city people yearn for it to be.

The city is concerned enough about public transit that it is willing to oppose the planned investment by the Michigan Department of Transportation in I-375 until the state includes transit and solutions to the congestion at the Windsor tunnel. That's wonderful. Similarly, plans for Campus Martius must include transit infrastructure and functions, not displace them.

The silent, humble and virtually invisible function of Cadillac Square is an important one. It should not be displaced until both permanent and interim solutions are part of the overall development plan.

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