



*Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus*  
**Historical Perspectives on Modern Mass Transit in Detroit**

**A thesis submitted to the  
Honors Program at the University of Detroit Mercy  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Graduation with Honors**

**by**

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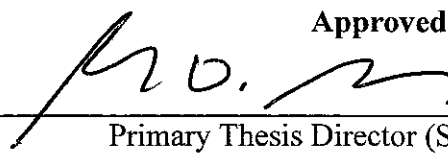
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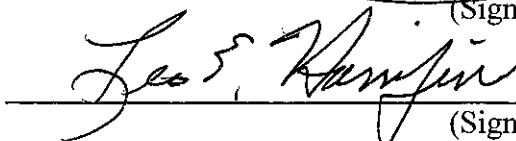
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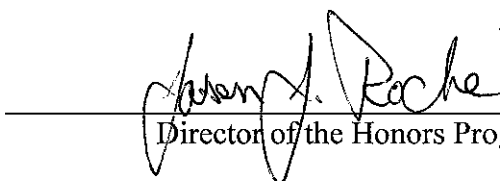
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## Preface

When I first began to conceptualize what directions I might take with this work, the topics were as varied as my own interests. Frankly I had no idea where to start, but knew at the very least I wanted to write something relevant to my future course of study. At the time that happened to be medieval Europe, so I began to probe around for something interesting that fit into that overarching category. Eventually this led me to longsword fencing and to the fight manuals, or *fechtbücher* in German, of the great continental masters such as Hans Talhoffer. As I'm sure you can judge by the title I have given this thesis that was not the topic I ended up with—far from it, in fact.

In essence what prompted such a radical change in subject material was an equally radical change in my own academic pursuits. Not interests, mind you, as I still to this day am deeply fascinated with European politics and warfare from the eleventh through fifteenth centuries. But I came to realize that to become a Medievalist came with the distinct possibility of working at a drive thru window for the rest of my life, so decided to shift focus to American history which, at the very least, might land me a job in fast food middle management.

All jokes at the expense of historians aside, it was this initial shift that led to a search through the various fields of historical study that would lead to my first experience with the history of mass transit. I took a class called the “History of American Technology,” and from there was introduced to the historic streetcars in Detroit. Mass transit was never something I had considered in any great detail. I have lived in the suburbs my entire life and always have had a car to get where I needed to be. While I knew at least passingly that Detroit's bus system was somewhat of a mess, it was both surprising and intriguing to learn that the city once had such a vibrant and extensive transit network.

This interest prompted me to declare a provisional topic, which would look into the historic streetcars of Detroit as a solely historical project. But in conducting my initial research, as is often the case with such things, I stumbled upon what I thought to be a far more interesting story. I learned of the failed attempt at creating a regional transit government, the story of SEMTA, and wanted to investigate the topic in more detail. Why exactly did Detroit's mass transit fail so dramatically, why was SEMTA unable to succeed? And furthermore, asking a question I believe all historians should ask, what does this have to say about where we stand as a society today? It was with this line of questioning that I came to finally decide upon a topic—trying to place the present state of mass transit in Detroit within the context of its storied past.

## **Acknowledgments**

The following few lines will indeed be cliché, as the acknowledgments section of most works are, yet I still find it important to make note of those who have helped me reach the point of completing this thesis.

First and foremost I would like to thank my parents, Larry George and Janice Ann Kostin, who have worked and sacrificed tirelessly to provide me with a quality education that has allowed me to be able to write such an ambitious thesis as this. Their constant support has been invaluable in pushing me forward at the times I was not sure I had what it takes to finish this work.

I would also like to extend the deepest of gratitude to my primary thesis director, Gregory Sumner, and my committee members Leo Hanifin and Dan Pitera. Without their insight and copious knowledge of mass transit and profound editing wisdom I would not have been able to produce such a thorough and polished manuscript. Also noteworthy was the input of former SEMTA CEO Larry Salci, who was most gracious with his time and more than willing to share his experiences working with transit in Detroit.

Finally, I would like to thank the University of Detroit Mercy as a whole, and specifically the Honors Program, for providing me with an environment conducive to academic excellence and the opportunity to write this thesis in the first place. I probably would never have had such an experience had I not attended this university or been accepted into the Honors Program.

## Introduction

*Speramus meloria; resurget cineribus—*  
We hope for better things; it shall rise from the ashes  
-Motto of Detroit-

You might think Fr. Gabriel Richard could see into the future to have coined such a motto for the City of Detroit. A fire broke out in 1805 that burned the city to the ground, but the priest knew the spirit of the city and her people, and from those ashes an even grander vision for the future would emerge. And in many respects it did; the city grew exponentially from the 1840s through the end of the 1950s—over a century of population increase to a peak of roughly 1.8 million.<sup>1</sup> The city teemed with life and culture, from championship winning sports teams to a world class art institute and numerous buildings gorgeously adorned in the Art-Deco, Neo Classical, and French Renaissance Revival styles, to name but a few. At the heart of this growth was transportation, but while one might naturally think of the automobile (and you would certainly be right, at least in part), the real driving force was mass transit.

Detroit's long-standing love affair with mass transit has its roots roughly at the beginning of its century long population boom. Following the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 and Michigan's admission into the Union as a state in 1837, the population of Detroit would nearly double in every decade from the 1840s onward. By the eve of the American Civil War, Detroit's streets were so congested with pedestrians and horse drawn omnibuses that linked railroad stations with local hotels, and were in such deplorable condition, that the Common Council passed an ordinance on November 24, 1862 “establishing the guidelines for obtaining a thirty-year [street railway] franchise, with exclusive rights to build and operate streetcar lines within the city.”<sup>2</sup> From that point forward it was off to the races and Detroit never looked back. Over the next 80 years mass transit, mirroring the city's population, would grow to a peak ridership of 492 million annually in 1945 between regularly scheduled bus, streetcar, and commuter rail service.<sup>3</sup>

But as the Detroiter of today knows all too well, the era of unprecedented growth was to be followed by one of equally unprecedented decline, and from the height of 1945 the precipice was just a few years away. At the time, however, and even in the following few decades after the peak had been reached, the state of the city and its transit network seemed to be at the very least stable and at times even showed signs of growth. Partially fueling the decline was increasing racial tensions both within the city and between

Detroit and her suburbs, which influenced the decreasing number of white riders on city buses.

While race had always been a central issue in the United States, Detroit being no exception, the growing Civil Rights movement placed whites and blacks in close proximity than ever, not only metaphorically but also literally as one could see by riding a crowded bus home during rush hour. The result was a “middle-class exodus from transit” so extreme that “By 1956, one Detroiter could write that among whites, public transit had been 'almost entirely abandoned to the private car...definitely to avoid integration'.”<sup>4</sup>

The powder keg of racial tension exploded on one of the hottest days in the summer of '67. While countless other authors have pointed to the 1967 Detroit Riots as a turning point for the city, and to make this point may be considered on one hand highly cliché and on the other an oversimplification of a multiplicity of complex factors that led to the Detroit of today, I would be remiss not to at least make mention of the fact. Yet even at the city's darkest hour, that very year the future of mass transit in Detroit seemed to take a fortuitous turn with the formation of the Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA), created to ameliorate bus service of the financially strapped suburban transit providers.<sup>5</sup>

At least for the time being things were looking up for regional transit, as SEMTA began a process of consolidation and renovation to the suburban bus and commuter rail services in the region. And nearly a decade later, Detroit received perhaps the greatest potential boon to mass transit in its history both before or since—a \$600 million federal grant from then President Gerald R. Ford, intended to allow city transportation planners to create a modernized regional transit system.<sup>6</sup>

But the damage that culminated in bloodshed in 1967 had left a rift between the City, now with an overwhelmingly majority black population, and her white dominated suburban neighbors. Debates began to rage about the racial implications of a regional transit system—would it provide easy access for inner city blacks to reach the suburbs, would it lead to the integration of schools, or perhaps most importantly would it be the suburbs that would eventually foot the long term bill for a transit system many argued would be used predominantly by black Detroiters.<sup>7</sup> Further exacerbating tensions was Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, the city's first black mayor, whose vehement rhetoric and push for an elevated rail system (something viewed as unsustainable by transit exports due to high costs and Detroit's relatively low population density) all but entirely alienated any remaining suburban support for regional cooperation on matters of transit.<sup>8</sup>

SEMTA found itself in the middle of these feuds for well over a decade, desperately attempting to mediate between Detroit and her suburbs. Yet it was to no avail,

as both parties, largely fueled by racial and economic tensions, could not reach a suitable agreement. Further complicating the issue was the defeat of President Jimmy Carter in the 1980 Presidential Election by Ronald Reagan, who had no particular ties to Michigan.<sup>i</sup> With little progress to show toward a unified transit system other than the People Mover, which had went over its initial budget<sup>9</sup>, President Reagan decided to cut short the \$600 million grant, leaving SEMTA and the region with few remaining options. Finally, “In 1987-88 the Michigan Legislature, out of frustration with poor regional cooperation, dissolved SEMTA and created SMART”<sup>10</sup>, or the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation.

While SEMTA had met its end that did not mean the end of mass transit in the region, as the remnants of the transit authority continued to operate as SMART in the suburbs, while the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) maintained the City's bus operations along with running the People Mover. Both of these entities operate to this day. Various proposals for regional transit have been fielded since the failure of SEMTA, including a 2001 proposal to create the Detroit Area Regional Transit Authority (DARTA), which was vetoed by Michigan Governor John Engler on his last day in office. “DARTA was partially reenacted in 2003, but existed with little authority until it was dissolved by the Michigan Supreme Court in 2006.”<sup>11</sup> Ultimately such initiatives came to little more than unfruitful discussion, let alone significant gains in regional mass transit, falling short of their predecessors in both implementation and scope.

It has only been recently that plans for regional transit in Southeast Michigan have begun to show significant progress and direction once more. The M-1 Light Rail Project, which will create a “3.3-mile circulating streetcar along Woodward Avenue between Larned Street and West Grand Boulevard”<sup>12</sup>, has been approved for \$25 million in federal funding that will be combined with funds from private and corporate backers.<sup>13</sup> Other initiatives such as the Detroit Future City Project, which attempts to tackle the issue of revitalizing Detroit and views regional transit as one of the many necessary and interdependent pieces to the city's future, looks to “Reshape transportation to establish Detroit within a regional, multimodal network that better serves commercial and personal transportation needs, especially in terms of connecting neighborhoods and employment districts.”<sup>14</sup> But perhaps the most encouraging sign is the creation of a new regional transit authority, known as the Regional Transit Coordinating Council (RTCC).<sup>15</sup> All of these proposals seek to draw on the rich history of transit in Detroit while looking to the future sustainability, growth, and interconnectivity required for their success.

When it comes to the past I have always advocated for modes of thinking that look to the successes and failures of those who have come before us in order to pave the

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<sup>i</sup> While Carter was not himself from the state, Mayor Young was an early backer of his presidential campaign (Dutta, “Chapter 4”, 22).

way for a brighter future in our own time. Such a model is entirely applicable to the history of mass transit in Detroit, and as such this thesis serves a twofold purpose. First, it provides a chronicle of Detroit's history of mass transit from its infancy to high point (Chapter One), moving on to pay specific attention to the promising yet ultimately fruitless SEMTA years (Chapter Two), before finally looking to the future and what it may hold (Chapter Three). And second, it seeks to explain the mass transit initiatives of the present in a historical context, providing a focal point for illustrating how successes can be capitalized upon and failures ameliorated (Chapter Four).

I most sincerely hope that the contextualization of Detroit's transit history within the lens of modern transit proposals will in some small way build upon the foundation of established research that has proved so invaluable in the completion of my own work. Certainly those who have come before me understood how essential a city's history is to its future. Yet a city is not defined by its past any more than you or I. Looking to history for guidance in the present is only useful when one realizes that any analogues or comparisons drawn between then and now are accurate only in part; the circumstances of the past, including demographics, cultural attitudes, the hopes and fears of a generation, are *unique to the past*, and ultimately our own present has an entirely different set of circumstances to operate under.

As such, I seek to approach the subject at hand with this precept in mind. While explaining the history of transit in Detroit may certainly provide insight into current and future goals, it does not hold all the answers. Thus at this the beginning of my work, I implore you the reader to bear with my attempts to find the relevant analogues between past and present while maintaining focus on the realities of our own time.

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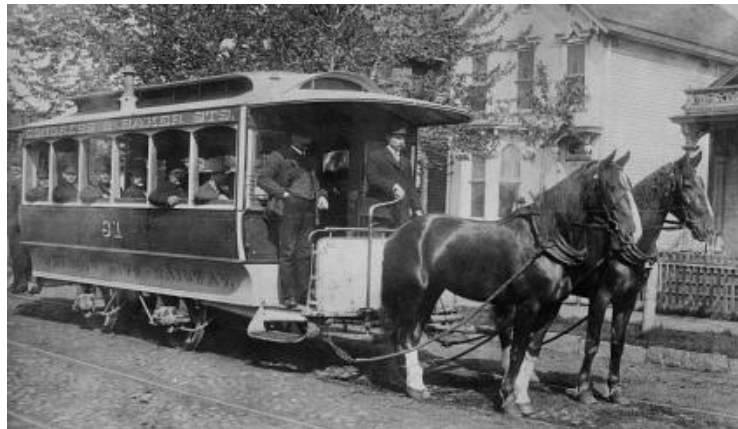
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## Chapter One

For anyone who knows the Detroit of today it's hard to think of the city as a frontier town. Yet following the American Civil War, over a century and a half from the city's founding by Antoine Laumet in 1701, its population barely reached over ten thousand. With the opening of the Erie Canal and the push of westward migration, however, the city's population would nearly double every following decade until after the Second World War. And it is with this westward expansion that the story of mass transit in Detroit begins, or more correctly, with the muddy and rut-filled roads in the city.

Whether traveling by foot or horse-drawn cart, the Detroiter of the 1860s found the roads in deplorable condition. "Detroit's streets became congested with slow moving traffic which caused business men to note that other large urban centers were moving people around town on what was termed mass transit".<sup>1</sup> And with the steadily growing population a solution was desperately needed. Thus on November 24, 1862, responding to the poor condition of local roads, the Detroit Common Council passed an ordinance "establishing the guidelines for obtaining a thirty-year [street railway] franchise, with exclusive rights to build and operate streetcar liens within the city."<sup>2</sup>

Fig. 1-1, Photograph of Horse-Drawn Streetcar<sup>3</sup>



While the offer was initially met with little interest, on January 5, 1863 a group of investors from Syracuse, NY (Cornelius S. Bushnell, et al.) paid the \$5,000 franchise deposit and on May 9 of that same year were awarded the franchise. The newly formed company was officially incorporated three days later under the name Detroit City Railway Company, and line construction began shortly thereafter. "The first line to be constructed was along Jefferson Avenue, from the Michigan Central Train Depot at Third

Street<sup>i</sup> eastward to the city limits at Mt. Elliot Avenue.”<sup>4</sup> Regular service was extended to lines running along three of Detroit’s four remaining radial avenues, those being Woodward (August 27), Gratiot (September 12), and Michigan (November 25).<sup>ii</sup>

For unspecified reasons, the Detroit City Railway decided to forfeit its franchise rights to lay track along other roadways, paving the way for new and competing street railway companies to be formed. The first of these new companies was the Fort Street and Elmwood Railway Company,<sup>iii</sup> which began its operations on September 6, 1865. Within a short period of time from the late 1860s into the mid 1870s, a number of other new companies were formed, including the Grand River Street Railway (Grand River, 1868), Central Market, Cass Avenue and Third Street Railway (Cass and Third, 1873), Detroit and Grand Trunk Junction Street Railway (Congress and Baker, 1873), and the Russell Street, St. Aubin and Detroit Milwaukee Junction Street Railway (Russell, 1874).<sup>5</sup>

However, this period of growth also brought to the forefront some of the various problems inherent in horse-drawn streetcar service, and many in the industry began to realize the inefficiency of the system as it stood, citing that “the horses life expectancy was very short in street railway service, the horse was susceptible to disease, the horse dropping polluted the streets, and most importantly, the horse travelled very slow.”<sup>6</sup> Further aggravating these concerns was the 1872 outbreak of the horse epidemic known as epizootic that resulted in the temporary citywide shutdown of streetcar service. All the while ridership was increasing, and “In 1875, the Detroit City Railway Company alone carried 2,900,000 passengers on the four lines it operated within the city.”<sup>7</sup> What resulted from these various factors was the push towards implementing new technology, namely the electric streetcar, to solve the issues plaguing the street railways.

While the use of electric streetcars seemed to be the obvious solution to such problems, and had even seen success in other major cities around the country such as Chicago, New York, and Cleveland, initial attempts to electrify Detroit’s street railways met opposition. The Detroit Electric Railway Company was formed on September 1, 1886 and set up the city’s first electric streetcar lines running along Dix Avenue. However, “Public fear, coupled with complaints over the objectionable rumbling noises and electric arcing in the systems...produced from its overhead connection, prompted the common council—citing irregular service concerns—to order the electric cars withdrawn in 1899”<sup>8</sup> resulting in the city’s first electric streetcar line being reverted to a horse-drawn line.

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<sup>i</sup> The current location of the Joe Louis Arena.

<sup>ii</sup> Service to the last remaining radial avenue, Grand River, would not be provided until 1868 under the Grand River Street Railway.

<sup>iii</sup> Later renamed the Fort Wayne and Elmwood Railway Company, or the Fort and Elmwood for short.

Yet the technology initially pioneered by Charles J. Van Depoele would improve, and “On August 22, 1892, the electric streetcars would finally begin on the city-based liens, with electric service beginning on Jefferson Avenue. Conversion to electric power on other lines would eventually follow, and the last of the horse-drawn liens would be removed in 1895.”<sup>9</sup>

Fig. 1-2, Citizen’s Electric Streetcar<sup>10</sup>



During this time of improvement to street railway infrastructure across the city, another issue was just beginning to emerge, one that would lead to a thirty-year struggle between the privately owned street railway companies and the City of Detroit, eventually culminating in the wholesale municipal takeover of all streetcar service. Trouble had been lurking in the background for many years, its origins traceable to the 1879 early reissue of the Detroit City Railway’s thirty-year franchise. The initial franchise agreement, which had been awarded in 1863, and was set to expire in 1893, was reissued by the Common Council fourteen years early for unspecified reasons, setting the new expiration date at 1909.<sup>11</sup>

Detroit City Railway owner George Hendrie, partially in order to wrest control of the company away from its shareholders and partially in order to justify the large initial investments of electrifying horse-drawn lines, formed a new company in 1890 called the Detroit Street Railway Company. Yet for his twofold strategy to be successful Hendrie needed to produce a new thirty-year franchise agreement<sup>iv</sup>, so in 1891 he petitioned the City for a new one. However, Detroit, “unlike other cities, included no financial benefit to the City [in their franchise agreements]...other than the usual 1½-per cent tax on

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<sup>iv</sup> The logic behind Hendrie’s seeking a new franchise agreement before electrifying his street railway system was to ensure the Detroit Street Railway Company would have thirty years of operation in which to hopefully recover the initial investment costs, as opposed to footing the bill within a shorter period. Furthermore, this move would assuage the minds of investors who may have been wary about purchasing stock in a company that, without having brokered a new franchise agreement, would have less of a guarantee of breaking even.

receipts,” and the new franchise’s approval by the Common Council “immediately infuriated citizens, many of whom signed petitions demanding that action be taken to overturn the new council ordinance.”<sup>12</sup>

Echoing the citizen’s protest was Detroit Mayor Hazen S. Pingree, a social reformist and vehement critic of monopolies and the private ownership of utilities and street railways, who “vetoed the council’s decision, asserting that to grant a 30-year franchise to this new corporation without allowing the City the opportunity to sell the franchise rights to the highest bidder was unacceptable. The mayor took the position that it was either profit to the city from the franchise or municipal ownership.”<sup>13</sup> Mayor Pingree believed not only that to award the Detroit Street Railway a new franchise would be detrimental to the city, but furthermore that the Common Council’s 1879 decision to reissue the franchise early was invalid.

If Mayor Pingree’s opinion were indeed the case, the time Hendrie’s Detroit City Railway would have to renegotiate a franchise agreement with the city would be drastically shortened, placing the lion’s share of bargaining power in the hands of the city. At this point,

realizing it was becoming a futile effort to secure a new franchise extension under the Mayor Pingree administration, George Hendrie—citing failing health—decided to sell his street railway company to a group of wealthy investors based out of New York State. On September 16, 1891, the Detroit Street Railway Company was purchased by the newly incorporated Detroit Citizen’s Street Railway Company for \$3 million. Shortly thereafter, [on] October 1, 1891, the new company also purchased (for \$1 million) the smaller independent Grand River Railway Company...[leaving] only two [other] streetcar companies<sup>v</sup> operating within the city.<sup>14</sup>

Yet the change in ownership did not dissuade Mayor Pingree from continuing to pursue municipal ownership over Detroit’s largest street railway company, nor did it change the Detroit Citizen’s Street Railway Company’s (Citizen’s) need to negotiate a franchise renewal. While Citizen’s attempted to reach such an agreement with the city, Mayor Pingree took the issue of the 1879 franchise to the courts, and while the U.S. District Court initially ruled in favor of the city, it would be nearly three years before the final verdict was reached.

In the meantime, the proposed franchise renewal negotiations broke down, and with Citizen’s unable to secure an agreement, stockholders in the company began to sell their shares, “and on September 1, 1894, ownership of the...[company] passed into the hands of...wealthy Wall Street bankers from New York City.”<sup>15</sup> Almost immediately following the transfer of ownership, “the U.S. Court of Appeals rendered its

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<sup>v</sup> These being the Detroit Electric Railway and the Fort Wayne and Belle Isle Railway.

decision...[revising] the lower court and [ruling] against the city...[finding that] the city had a right to grant use of its streets to a corporation for an allotted time of its choosing, but it was the City that had agreed to extend the franchise; so the 1879 franchise stands.”<sup>16</sup>

Mayor Pingree attempted to resist the court’s decision to no avail, as the Michigan Supreme Court refused to hear the case. The mayor continued to battle with Citizen’s over other issues, mainly fair prices, but when Citizen’s outright refused the mayor’s request that they lower fares to three-cents and provide universal transfers, Pingree decided to create his own street railway, which was officially incorporated as the Detroit Railway Company on December 10, 1894.<sup>17</sup>

In order to accommodate the three-cent fares and universal transfers Pingree held so dear, the City of Detroit agreed to pay for road maintenance in-between the Detroit Railway’s tracks, something altogether unheard of at the time. However, shortly after the new company’s incorporation, rumors began to spread that Citizen’s was planning a takeover. “These rumors seemed to gain more credibility [when] on July 29, 1896, the Detroit Railway Co. was sold to the Detroit Electric Railway Company, only one year after beginning operations. What was disturbing to many was the fact that many of the stockholders in [the Detroit Electric Railway Company] were also owners and investors in the Citizen’s Company.”<sup>18</sup> All the while, and unbeknownst to the public, the owner of Citizen’s, Thomas L. Johnson, was secretly planning to acquire the remaining independent streetcar companies.

On January 4, 1897, the controlling interests in both the Detroit Electric Railway and the Fort Wayne and Belle Isle Railway<sup>vi</sup> were purchased by the Citizen’s Company. The management of Citizen’s now had full control over both systems, with both franchises expiring in 1924. In 1897, all of the companies were placed under a holding company, known as the Citizen’s Traction Company. Tom L. Johnson had cleverly moved himself into the position to control all three of the street railway companies in Detroit.<sup>19</sup>

But the 1800s would see one final, albeit unsuccessful, strike against the private ownership of street railway companies in the city, spearheaded by now Michigan Governor Pingree and, ironically enough, Thomas L. Johnson. For on reason or another, Johnson had been converted to the same progressive ideology espoused by Pingree, and the two sought to work together towards the goal of once and for all consolidating Detroit’s street railways into a municipally owned system.

After negotiating with the State of Michigan to pass the McLeod Bill, “which would authorize the City of Detroit to construct, acquire, maintain and operate a street railway system,” followed by a negotiation between a newly created Street Railway

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<sup>vi</sup> Formerly the Fort Wayne and Elmwood Railway Company.

Commission and Citizen's, "it appeared that municipal ownership had become a done deal, with a sale price of \$16,800,000 in bonds being agreed upon...[the] new city-owned system was to be known as the Detroit Municipal Railway."<sup>20</sup>

However, at the last minute the Michigan Supreme Court stepped in and "declared the law unconstitutional on six counts, one of which centered on the legality of the Commission to be empowered with its authority."<sup>21</sup> With that the municipal consolidation of Detroit's streetcar lines came to a grinding halt, however, this did not prevent such a consolidation in the private sector, and on December 31, 1900 the remaining independently owned street railway companies were sold and amalgamated into what would be known as the Detroit United Railway (DUR), and "for the first time since 1865 all of the city's streetcar lines...[would be] owned by one company."<sup>22</sup> Although the DUR survived legal battles and municipal takeover attempts, there was still one pressing issue facing the company—the ever-looming issue of franchise renewal.

Right from its incorporation the DUR faced numerous issues, and for "most of [its]...twenty-two years of operation would be plagued by constant battles with city hall, pot shots from politicians and the press, and growing negative public opinion."<sup>23</sup> While no longer directly exerting influence over the state of Detroit's street railways, Governor Pingree left a lasting impression on the minds of Detroiters, and while the municipal consolidation of the street railways would not occur in his lifetime, the once mayor could be said to have near single-handedly changed public sentiment in the direction of preferring municipal ownership of utilities and transit.

All the while the DUR would struggle, continuously facing pressure to lower fares and increase ridership without the ability to keep service in line with an ever-growing demand. Quality of service became so bad that the Detroit News, by far the largest detractor of the street railway, began running article and other pieces intended to erode support for the company. At one point the newspaper assigned a reporter

to study just what it was like going home on the Baker Street streetcar line. [He]...boarded a westbound 6:15P.M. car at Michigan Avenue and Griswold...[and would note] that on every corner along the rout were groups of citizens anxious to get home. When the car would stop passengers piled on, fighting and twisting among each other just to get a foothold<sup>24</sup>

But beyond the deteriorating service quality, by far the largest issue facing the DUR was the looming issue of franchise renewal, not only for the original Citizen's Company but also for the other companies acquired in the merger.

Fig. 1-3, Two Examples of the DUR's Inability to Meet Service Demands<sup>25</sup>



Harper Line



Baker Line

The city placed constant pressure on the DUR, and eventually refused to renew franchise agreements with the company. Instead, they began to levy “a \$300.00 daily rental fee for the DUR to operate...[and] the company basically found itself having to lease its own rails from the city in order to continue operating.”<sup>26</sup> Even though the Michigan Supreme Court would later find these fees to be illegal, the city was afforded the privilege to force the DUR to vacate streets that were formerly covered under the expired franchise agreements.

Further increasing the city's pressure on the DUR was an alteration to the Michigan State Constitution in 1908, which “removed restrictions against municipal ownership of public utilities...[and] After attempts by the DUR in the courts delayed the process, the voters of Detroit were finally able to amend their city charter to make municipal ownership of lines legal [as well].”<sup>27</sup> These laws essentially spelled the final days for the DUR, though the writing had been on the wall for many years.

The final nail in the DUR's coffin came with the election of James ‘Big Jim’ J. Couzens as the Mayor of Detroit. A former executive of the Ford Motor Company and one of the original appointees to the Detroit Street Railways Commission, upon being elected Mayor Couzens “wasted no time in getting an offer on the ballot for the city to purchase the DUR for \$31.5 million.”<sup>28</sup> However, the large amount of capital investment required to complete the deal resulted in this first ballot proposal being defeated at the polls in 1919.

Prior to Couzens' election, the Detroit Street Railways Commission conducted a study that concluded an outright purchase of the DUR by the city to be fiscally infeasible. A more affordable option was presented, wherein the city would form its own competing company to “finance and build the system, and regulate fares, while the privately-owned DUR Company would operate it. The money generated by the system would be equally divided between the city and DUR, with the city's share being used to pay off the debt. Eventually, the city could use its share to later acquire the DUR.”<sup>29</sup>

The Detroit Street Railways Commission approved the study's findings and sought to negotiate the terms of such an agreement with the DUR. However, "Mayor Couzens, who had campaigned on a platform calling for the [wholesale] elimination of the DUR, vetoed it. The Council attempted to override the Mayor's veto, but failed by one vote." After the failed proposal, the mayor proposed a complete takeover of the DUR through means of creating an independently competing city-owned system, and "On April 5, 1920, Detroit voters approved Mayor Couzen's \$15,000,000 bond issue proposal to build and operate a separate municipally-owned street railway system...[and] on February 1, 1921, with only two lines totaling 13 miles, and a fleet of sixteen cars in service, the City of Detroit began operating a small competing street railway operation."<sup>30</sup>

Although these initial city operations were vastly underwhelming, Detroit rapidly expanded their municipal service, and by year's end "the operation had built 52.6 miles of new trackage...[yet] the city system would soon realize that without access into the downtown area its operations could not compete against the DUR."<sup>31</sup> Continual pressure from the city, takeovers of DUR trackage, and forced joint operations on certain high-traffic areas ensued, continuing to cripple the already weakened DUR's ability to compete with the city. Finally, "On March 13, 1922, a price of \$19,850,000 was agreed upon...[and] Detroit voters approved the \$4 million bond issue to cover the purchase—the 'Thirty Years War' for municipal ownership of the street railways was over."<sup>32</sup>

Yet the jubilation over new municipal operation would be short lived, as the issues of service quality and insufficient coverage for ever-growing ridership numbers continued to plague the newly formed Department of Street Railways (DSR). The city "quickly found itself in possession of a seriously deteriorated electric railway...[and the] reality of insufficient serviceable cars, rapidly deteriorating track and overhead, and increasing power costs"<sup>33</sup> began to set in.

What resulted from the financial crisis the DSR found itself in was the move to slash costs, which ultimately targeted streetcars as the city moved towards an all-bus service. Yet like much of the history of mass transit in Detroit, this too would prove to be no easy task. "The earliest attempt at bus operation by the D.S.R. began November 19, 1922, on the Lynch Road Line...[which] served the Dodge Export plant...[and had been] previously served by a new D.U.R. rail line."<sup>34</sup> After the end of the First World War, the plant, which had been converted to an ordinance plant during wartime, now saw a decrease in output, resulting in the removal of the line entirely. Yet a request by the Milwaukee Junction Manufacturers' Association led to the line being reinstated, not as a streetcar line but instead being serviced by "three small single deck busses."<sup>35</sup> This service, however, proved to be unprofitable, and was eventually turned over to a privately owned motorbus company for a short period of time before being re-converted to a streetcar line in 1924.

The remainder of the 1920s would see no real improvement to the issues facing the DSR. Mayor Couzens, and later his "successors in the Mayor's office, John W. Smith

and...John Lodge...[would face] complaints of the public and charges of financial mismanagement of the transit system.”<sup>36</sup> It would not be until the New Deal stimulus packages of the Great Depression era, and later the end of the Second World War, that Detroit would truly see the height (and unfortunately subsequent rapid decline) of its transit systems.

Ironically enough, during this time the growing successes of motorbuses in the wake of municipal takeover of the street railways would come in the form of privately owned bus lines, though not within the city limits. Detroit Motorbus, which had operated the aforementioned Lynch Road line, had plied its buses in the city since 1920. Of course the city was not eager to see another privately owned source of competition, and as such sought to acquire the motorbus company as quickly as possible. “While D.S.R. took over Detroit Motorbus routes within city limits, the suburban lines were reorganized into two new private companies. Lakeshore Coach lines provided service to the exclusive Grosse Point area, while Dearborn Coach served western communities. Like D.S.R., these two bus companies survived for many years, until their absorption into the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) in the late 1970s.”<sup>37</sup>

During the Great Depression era, the financially strapped DSR received a much-needed boon in the form of Public Works Administration (PWA) and Civil Works Administration (CWA) funding from the Federal government. “Under these Federal programs, D.S.R. was able to undertake the renovation of its rail fleet...[and] In 1934 alone, CWA funds permitted the overhauling and painting of 500 cars, the installation of rear exit doors on 37 cars, the replacement of cane seats with leather cushions on 87 cars, and overhauling of trucks and motors on 624 cars.” Even so, “the pre-World War II D.S.R. rail system steadily declined. No new cars were purchased...[while] The bus fleet...continued to grow.”<sup>38</sup>

Fig. 1-4, The Growing Bus Fleet in Detroit, 1941<sup>39</sup>



The years of the Second World War saw one final resurgence in streetcar service, as orders from Washington for the rationing of fuel and rubber led to the expedient of cutting back on bus service in favor of the steel wheeled and electric powered streetcars. This, however, would be the 'last hurrah' for streetcars in Detroit, for while "D.S.R.'s streetcars performed an excellent job during the high ridership war years...After the war...auto producers resumed and former transit patrons flocked to dealers' showrooms. Engineers laid out mile after mile of expressway to server the auto boom. Buses, too, could use the expressways, and streetcars became regarded as antiques, both by traffic planners and riders."<sup>40</sup>

Resulting from this move away from streetcars was the wholesale re-imagining of the function and implementation of mass transit in Metro Detroit. These plans can be roughly summarized as coming in two forms. The first of these resulted from a commission formed by Mayor Edward Jeffries with the purpose of resolving the transit problems that had been plaguing Detroit since the 1920s. "Completed in February, 1945, the board's report advocated a network of radial expressways, as well as crosstown lines, which would be operated with multiple-unit streetcars in trains...Streetcars and trolley coaches alike would enter a subway at the edge of the central business district and run to a new underground terminal at Cadillac Square."<sup>41</sup>

The second such plan resulted from a study conducted by the DSR in opposition to that of the mayor's office. It called for mass transit by mode of "modern motor buses operating over the expressway highway network."<sup>42</sup> Buses would operate on the new expressways with dedicated entrance and exit ramps, and a new underground bus terminal would be constructed downtown.

Both of these plans, however, amounted to little more than talk. As for the mayor's plan, "Many miles of expressway were built, but none with rail lines. The downtown subway and Cadillac Square terminal never left the drawing board. Detroit still proudly called itself the 'Automobile Capital.' In its love affair with the automobile Detroit declared that expressways were designed to move cars...not people."<sup>43</sup> The DSR's plan met much the same fate, as "The downtown bus terminals project was canceled...late in 1948...[and] Though several bus interchange stations were built on the expressway system, all were eventually abandoned. D.S.R. soon found that buses were becoming trapped in expressway traffic, and were in fact slower than most local schedules."<sup>44</sup>

For roughly the next twenty years, this trend of proposed grandiose plans that would eventually come to nothing would be the norm. Further fazing out of streetcar lines would continue through the 1950s, with conversion to all-bus service in 1956. Racial tensions, which grew stronger with the Civil Rights movement and the rapid flight of whites to the suburbs, left Detroit a highly polarized environment in this post-war era.

As car ownership surged after the Second World War, transit drifted off the political agenda. Modern expressways would solve the city's transportation problems, its leaders believed, in addition to clearing the black ghetto from the edge of downtown...[the main street of the Black Bottom community being] replaced by the Chrysler Expressway, which conveyed commuters from the all-white Oakland and Macomb suburbs burgeoning north of the city limit at eight Mile road.<sup>45</sup>

It was in this highly contentious environment that Detroit transit planners, and subsequently SEMTA, found themselves in what would prove to be the most promising, yet ultimately disappointing, years of transit planning Detroit had seen to date.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack E. Schramm and William H. Henning, *Detroit's Street Railways Volume I: City Lines 1863-1922* (Chicago: Central Electric Railfans' Association, 1978), 9.

<sup>2</sup> H.B. Craig, II, *The Early History of Detroit's Public Transit (1862-1890)* (Detroit Transit History, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> H.B. Craig, II, *The Streetcar Companies vs. Mayor Pingree (1890-1900)* (Detroit Transit History, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Craig, II, *The Early History*.

<sup>12</sup> Craig, II, *Companies vs. Mayor Pingree*.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> H.B. Craig, II, *The Detroit United Railway Years (1900-1922)* (Detroit Transit History, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> H.B. Craig, II, *The Municipal Take-Over of the City Lines (1921-1922)* (Detroit Transit History, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Jack E. Schramm and William H. Henning, *Detroit's Street Railways Volume II: City Lines 1922-1956* (Chicago: Central Electric Railfans' Association, 1980), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 29.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>39</sup> H.B. Craig, II, *D.S.R. Equipment Photos—1940's* (Detroit Transit History, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Scramm and Henning, *Volume II*, 77.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>45</sup> Utpal Dutta, “Detroit Transit History Chapter 4- Transit Politics and Leadership In Detroit (1862-2007)” (University of Detroit Mercy Transit Research Team, 2013), 18.

## Chapter Two

In the years preceding the Second World War, Americans would begin to move towards the automobile over the streetcar or bus as the predominant mode of transportation, largely fueled by the construction of the Interstate Highway System. “With a decline in ridership and revenues, many transit companies were forced to abandon their streetcars (with their high capital costs) for less expensive diesel coaches.”<sup>1</sup> Detroit was no exception to this trend, and the last streetcar travelled up Woodward Avenue on April 8, 1956. “By the 1960s, public transit had ceased to be a profit-making enterprise. An industry that once paid taxes to municipal governments now had to depend on local tax dollars to survive. Since the federal government had already been financing the building of new roads since 1916, many desperate cities now began turning to the federal government and asking for similar funding to support public transit.”<sup>2</sup>

Responding to this pressure for federal funding, Congress would pass the Urban Mass Transportation act in 1964, providing “375 million for large-scale urban public or private rail projects in the form of matching funds to cities and states...However, all federal funds had to be channeled through approved public agencies.”<sup>3</sup> It was with this requirement that the Southeast Michigan Regional Transportation Authority (SEMTA) found its roots. In the same year, the first proposal for a truly regional transit authority was put forward by Detroit Street Railway (DSR) general manager Lucas S. Miel and backed by Detroit Mayor Jerome P. Cavanaugh, calling for a three-county agency. “While the city charter mandated that the DSR must operate from fare box revenues alone, a newly-created transit authority would be able to receive tax subsidies” from the federal government.<sup>4</sup>

Yet even in its earliest iterations the proposed regional transit authority was plagued with conflict between the competing interests of the City of Detroit and her suburbs. “Mayor Cavanaugh, along with his special assistant, Robert E. Toohey (who Cavanaugh later appointed DSR general manager in 1968), worked feverishly in pushing towards forming a regional authority that favored control by the City and the DSR, rather than the city system being absorbed by a regional system. However, most out-state lawmakers were reluctant to go along with the Detroit plan.”<sup>5</sup>

Three years later, the Michigan State Legislature passed into law a bill that would create a transit authority. SEMTA “would include six counties: Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, St. Clair, and Washtenaw...[and] was authorized to acquire all private bus operations<sup>i</sup> in the...region and the public mass transit assets such as the City of Detroit’s Department of Street Railways<sup>ii</sup>.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Prior to SEMTA, “public transportation within the Metropolitan Detroit area...consisted of the Detroit owned Department of Street Railways (DSR), and a number of privately-owned suburban bus companies,

Fig. 2-1, Examples of Pre-SEMTA Suburban Bus Lines<sup>7</sup>



Great Lakes Transit



Lake Shore Coach Lines



Metropolitan (Metro) Transit

While SEMTA's purpose was clearly outlined in the law that chartered its creation, the economic means of achieving said goal were nowhere near as solidified in the transit agency's early days. The legislation from the State capital "did not grant SEMTA with any powers to levy taxes or with any continuing source of funding," and as such the agency "had to rely primarily upon state grants and private sources for its

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including DeLuxe Motor Stages, Great Lakes Transit Corp., Lake Shore Coach Lines, Martin Lines, Metropolitan Transit Inc., and Northville Coach Line (Craig, II, *SEMTA History Part I*).

<sup>ii</sup> The Department of Street Railways was reorganized in 1974, resulting in its name being changed to the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) (Dutta, "Chapter 4", 19).

operational costs.”<sup>8</sup> Complicating the matter further, “the fledgling system had to depend upon the financial assistance provided by the local communities and transit properties within its territory to acquire further federal funds. The assistance provided by these agencies would help to provide the matching one-third local share money needed to qualify for federal grants.”<sup>9</sup>

It was within this operating structure that SEMTA began the acquisition of suburban bus lines, starting with the failing Lake Shore Coach Line in 1971. Initially Lake Shore Coach had

announced it would cease operations at midnight February 28,” however “SEMTA was able to persuade the six communities serviced by the company to provide...the required \$78,000 local share money needed to acquire the \$156,000 federal...[Urban Mass Transportation Act (UMTA)] grant to purchase the company. In addition, the six communities had also agreed to collectively pay up to \$5,000 per month for any operational losses sustained by SEMTA in running through December 31, 1972.”<sup>10</sup>

With the acquisition of Lake Shore Coach, SEMTA would officially have buses owned and operated by the agency itself.

SEMTA would continue operating in this manner, relying upon the generosity of local communities and the failure of local bus lines to sustain their operating budget. But in 1973 the Michigan State Legislature passed ACT 372 of the Public Acts of 1972, which established a Statewide General Transportation Fund. This measure provided a “2-cent per gallon gasoline tax, with one quarter of that money (½-cent per gallon) slated for mass transit operations mass transit operations and capital improvement usage. Though far short of what would be needed to provide a fully-funded regional system, this funding allowed SEMTA to begin making substantial progress toward achieving its goals.”<sup>11</sup>

Overcoming initial adversity, the following years would be filled with much promise and explosive growth for SEMTA. “By 1975 SEMTA had completed the acquisition of 7 private bus companies...[including] Lake Shore Coach Lines and the Port Huron Transit Corporation...[consolidating] them into a suburban/regional system.”<sup>12</sup> These were the first few steps towards the creation of a truly regional mass transit system, as opposed to merely a collection of disparate transportation agencies operating simultaneously but nonetheless independent of each other and without multilateral coordination.

Yet it was during this time of growth and promise that tension between the City of Detroit and SEMTA began to manifest, echoing earlier tension between Mayor Cavanaugh and the Federal government over who would control the regional transit authority. One issue was that of funding, as “the city had general fund tax revenue..., (DDOT’s) fare box revenue and its share of the regional federal and state operating

assistance to support its operations,” yet nonetheless still “needed to go through SEMTA for federal and state funds.”<sup>13</sup>

Further exacerbating tensions was the question of the eventual acquisition of the DSR by SEMTA from a legalistic standpoint. “According to a new proposition included in the revised 1974 Detroit Home Rule Charter (Sec. 7-1404), the city was prohibited from selling or disposing of any city-owned property needed to furnish transportation services, unless approved by a majority of city voters. However, SEMTA officials believed they had state authorization and were not legally bound by city law.”<sup>14</sup>

Besides the looming economic and legalistic concerns regarding the new transit authority was the ever-present issue of race relations. With the rise of the automobile came the exponential growth of suburban populations and the so-called ‘white flight’ from urban (and largely African American) centers of population within the city. Furthermore, the demographics of mass transit had begun to shift toward less white ridership. As such the majority of support for further regional mass transit development came from the City of Detroit as opposed to her suburbs, leading to further divide that would ultimately spell disaster for regional mass transit.

Many whites feared that rapid transit would endanger the suburbs by providing access to poor black Detroiters. Whites turned out in the hundreds to Southeast Michigan Transit Authority (SEMTA) planning meetings, according to the Detroit News, protesting ‘undesirables, transit crime and low-income housing’ that they believed new transit links would bring to their doorsteps. Others, terming mass transit ‘child transit,’ believed that SEMTA would facilitate school busing for racial desegregation. Most of all, whites resented the redistributionist implications...[of such proposals] serving majority black Detroit, asking why ‘Coleman Young’s welfare city can have a free ride while Oakland County foots the bill.’<sup>15</sup>

Facing what seemed to be an insurmountable mountain of adversity, the struggling transit authority was presented with a veritable miracle by then President Gerald Ford. The Michigan native who assumed the Presidency following the resignation of Richard Nixon, Ford was running for re-election in the 1976 Presidential campaign against Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter. Unsure of his prospects for winning his home state, Ford brokered an agreement between the Federal government and SEMTA (in meetings between SEMTA CEO Larry Salci, Bureau of Urban and Public Transportation Director Jim Kellog, Michigan Governor William Milliken, and US Department of Transportation Secretary William Coleman) in what would become known as the “SEMTA New Starts Plan...[garnering an] unprecedented commitment for \$600 Million for broad capital improvements for transit in Metro Detroit.”<sup>16</sup>

There was, as with many things too good to be true, a catch attached to the agreement. “SEMTA proposed to raise the matching [regional] funds from [a] one half

cent gas tax for Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb County.”<sup>17</sup> While the Michigan State Legislature passed the tax three years later in 1979, there was a caveat attached, namely, that the “tax had a 5 year sunset clause...[stipulating that] unless there was a merger/consolidation of the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) into the SEMTA regional system the tax would expire.”<sup>18</sup>

While SEMTA had planned all along to eventually acquire the city operated transit agency, the aforementioned racial and economic issues were present as ever, presenting no less of a threat to the transit agency’s survival than before. Thus the race was on to work out an agreement between the City of Detroit and her suburbs to create a plan of action that all involved parties could accept.

All the while SEMTA attempted to move forward in securing its economic viability, and in 1979 Detroit was selected as one of three cities to showcase new steel and rubber wheel monorail technology as part of a federal grant program separate from the New Starts Program. What would result was the creation of the People Mover, initially intended to be a downtown circulator for an eventual regional subway system. The contract for its construction was eventually “awarded to UTDC (Canada) in 1980 by SEMTA...[for] a 1.7 mile steel wheel technology single track system for a fixed price of \$114 million.”<sup>19</sup>

Fig. 2-1, Early Photograph of the People Mover<sup>20</sup>



With plans for the People Mover in place, and continual expansion and consolidation of the regional transit assets (including a number of interurban commuter rail services), SEMTA received what appeared to be another miracle. “It negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with DDOT for a consolidation of DDOT into SEMTA, a consolidation for the regional gas tax required by the Michigan Legislature.”<sup>21</sup>

However, once more things were perhaps too good to be true. Ever since the 1967 Detroit Riot tensions between whites and blacks had been palpable to say the least. In the midst of SEMTA's struggles to mediate between the growing African-American population of the city and the near entirely white population of suburbia, 1974 saw Coleman A. Young elected as the first black mayor of Detroit. What ensued, in no small terms, a wholesale alienation greater than had already been taking place between Detroit and her suburbs along racial lines. This process, though it had been occurring slowly but surely over the last two decades (and arguably earlier), was pushed over the brink by Mayor Young's vehement rhetoric.<sup>22</sup>

What resulted was a battle between Mayor Young and the suburbs over the conditions of SEMTA's proposed merger with DDOT. "Detroit Mayor Young stated a condition of the merger was not only a new fixed guide-way rail system for the Woodward corridor (which had been planed by SEMTA), but he demanded heavy rail technology, a higher capacity system which requires total grade separation."<sup>23</sup> There were a number of problems with this suggestion, including cost (the proposed heavy rail system could cost an estimated \$1 billion whereas SEMTA's initial plan would only cost \$400 million)<sup>24</sup> and questions of ridership numbers (transportation experts estimated the lower population density of Detroit could not sustain ridership numbers to warrant the higher capacity heavy rail system).<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the largest issue, however, was that of racial integration, which though not the nominal topic of debate nevertheless sat at the heart of the issue. "An insurgent suburban growth coalition, helmed by officials in the wealthy northern county, exploited these sentiments to fight the subway and ensure the suburbs profited from Detroit's continued hemorrhaging, even after President Ford offered the region \$600 million in federal transit funds."<sup>26</sup> While "SEMTA tried to reassure officials that the number of future jobs in transit [that] would shift to Detroit from the suburbs was 'not great...even in the worst case' there was still considerable contention as to the racial issue."<sup>27</sup>

Using some language similar to that of the 1929 subway foes, but now targeting an entire city with intimations of criminality, the mayor of one suburb challenged that 'Oakland County and Macomb County are being held hostage by the City of Detroit,' and Detroit politicians were 'making every possible effort to legally rape the voters of southeastern Michigan by shoving a subway down their throats.'<sup>28</sup>

Mayor Young continued to vie for his heavy rail alternative along the Woodward corridor and believed he had Federal support, as he was an early political backer to President Jimmy Carter, who came into office in 1976. But with the defeat of Carter to Ronal Reagan in 1980, "the Reagan DOT New Start investment criteria became more cost/benefit oriented and less economic development oriented."<sup>29</sup>

As such, the continual discord between the City of Detroit and her suburbs cast doubt on the efficacy of continued Federal support for the development of regional mass

transit in Detroit. Finally, “The US Congress, at the request of the Reagan Administration, terminated the SEMTA \$600 million New Starts Authorization commitment. In 1987-88 the Michigan Legislature, out of frustration with poor regional cooperation, dissolved SEMTA and created [the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation, or] SMART.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus SEMTA met its end despite showing signs of growth and achievement while it maintained its Federal funding. Yet this would not spell the end of regional mass transit for Metropolitan Detroit, per se. As we can see today, the entities of DDOT and SMART continue to operate in the city and suburbs respectively, and the People Mover, standing as a lasting testament to the debacle of failed regionalism, continues to be operated by the City of Detroit. Other attempts at organizing regional mass transit have been undertaken since the dissolution of SEMTA, such as the creation of the short-lived Detroit Area Regional Transit Authority (DARTA) in 2003<sup>31</sup>, however these attempts have been largely failures that did not come close to SEMTA both in overall scope and execution. It has only been in recent years that anything coming close to the size and sway once held by SEMTA has even been proposed.

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<sup>1</sup> H.B. Craig, II, *SEMTA History—Part One: Detroit’s Move Towards Regional Mass Transit* (Detroit Transit History, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Utpal Dutta, “Detroit Transit History Chapter 4- Transit Politics and Leadership In Detroit (1862-2007)” (University of Detroit Mercy Transit Research Team, 2013), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Craig, II, *SEMTA History—Part One*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Dutta, “Chapter 4,” 19.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>14</sup> H.B. Craig, II, *SEMTA History—Part Two: The New Regional Transit Authority Moves Forward* (Detroit Transit History, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Dutta, “Chapter 4,” 20.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>20</sup> H.B. Craig, II, *D-DOT Equipment Photos—1980’s* (Detroit Transit History, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Dutta, “Chapter 4,” 21.

<sup>22</sup> Steven Gray, “Coleman Young, Revisited” (Time—The Detroit Blog, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Dutta, “Chapter 4,” 22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>25</sup> Larry Salci, (Former CEO of SEMTA), interviewed by Kevin Kostin, Phone, July 17, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Dutta, “Chapter 4,” 20.

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<sup>27</sup> Idib., 20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 23.

## Chapter Three

Despite an environment of defeat in the wake of SEMTA's failure, Detroit and her residents are resilient as ever, echoing the words of their city's motto as they push toward the goal of mass transit once more. At this point we turn this thesis from the path of a historical account and begin focusing on that which has yet to transpire or is just at the beginning of its incubation. To this end we may cite a number of initiatives worth speaking of, but for sake of conciseness we will focus on, in no particular order, five such proposals in some degree of detail: (1) the Detroit Future City Project, (2) the University of Detroit Mercy Transportation Center (UDMTC), (3) the M-1 Light Rail Project, (4) the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternatives Analysis (AA), and (5) the SEMCOG Regional Transit Coordinating Council (RTCC).

### (1) Detroit Future City

The Detroit Future City Project strives towards a fourfold objective that, as stated by Detroit Collaborative Design Center Director Dan Pitera<sup>i</sup>, comprises the following<sup>1</sup>:

1. Align and connect assets that will ultimately create new innovations
2. Think about the future of a place in multiple ways, i.e. multiple futures
3. Variety, not singularity
4. Adapting to change

While the plan encompasses five distinct 'planning elements,' each of which tackling a myriad of interrelated issues, "The highest priority for systemwide change is transportation or mobility."<sup>2</sup> That is to say, it is mass transit that will be of the greatest influence on the resurgence of Detroit. However, the city is currently

heavily car-dependent (over 85% of journeys are taken by car) and while the Motor City legacy may persist for several decades to come, real change is happening now. Rising fuel prices and environmental issues are starting to bite. Dispersed job centers limit access and choice of employment for working and low-income families without cars. This means that diversifying...transportation options...is fundamental.<sup>3</sup>

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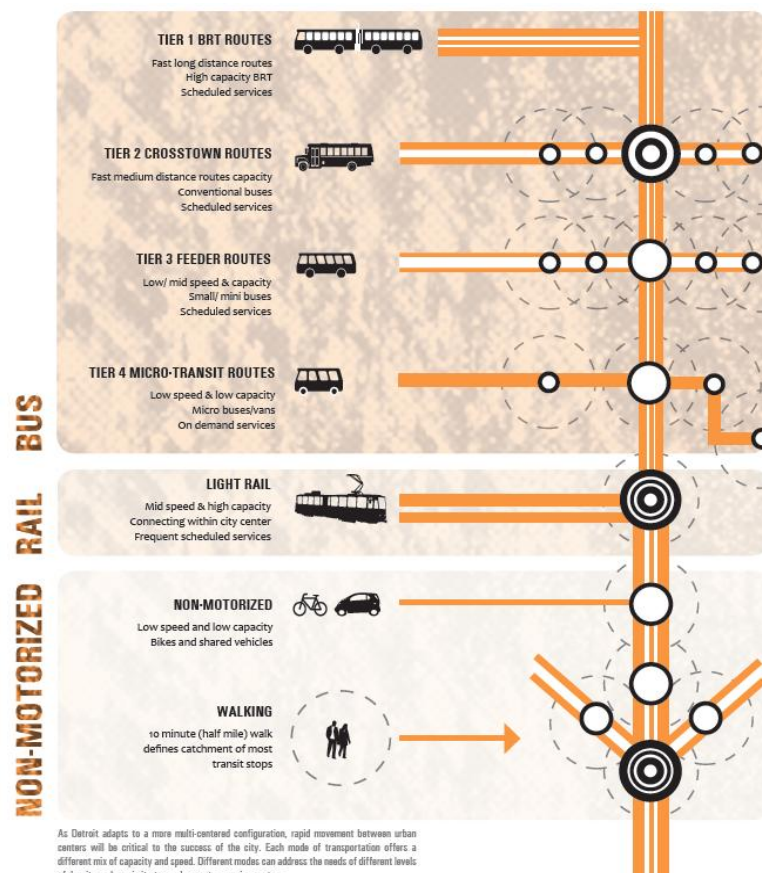
<sup>i</sup> The Detroit Collaborative Design Center (DCDC), an entity operating out of the University of Detroit School of Architecture, worked with the Detroit Works Project in conducting and implementing the Long-Term Planning aspect of the program.

The plan's long-term goals can be summed up as follows:

By 2030, the Detroit metropolitan region has an integrated regional public transportation system that efficiently serves the region's 21 dispersed, yet interconnected employment centers. A new regional transportation authority aids the region in creating better transit connections, while public transit within Detroit will create better connections among neighborhoods and Detroit's seven new employment districts. A public transit loop will create a ring through the middle of the city, intersecting each of the key radial boulevards to provide more efficient intermodal connection points and different vehicle modes of rapid transit, from light rail, to bus rapid transit, to mini-buses<sup>4</sup>

This 'reconfigured transit network' will consist of the combination of multimodal systems of transportation, divided between non-motorized, rail, and bus. These modes may be further broken down into separate yet interconnected methods of transit that will take advantage of the relative strengths of the others to create a cohesive whole.

Fig. 3-1, Reconfigured Transit Network<sup>5</sup>



Given the current situation Detroit finds itself in, the Detroit Future City Project posits that the current approach to mass transit is fundamentally flawed and unsustainable. “Only 9% of Detroiters use public transit...[and buses run at] 75% capacity during peak hours. The national average capacity for United States buses during peak time is 105%.”<sup>6</sup> Instead of providing a uniform type of service across the city where buses operate on roughly equal headways, the proposed alternative calls for a more strategic approach to mass transit within the city.

Providing for adequate accommodations to pedestrians and bicyclists, including the installation of ‘greenways’ throughout the city will then link to into the various bus and rail lines that serve distinct purposes based on the area of the city they are operating in. For instance, light rail service, as it provides for a higher capacity than any of the bus alternatives, will be implemented in the downtown area (more on this in the M-1 Light Rail Project section below). Bus service will be tailored to the population density along its route, with Tier 3 Feeder Routes serving the lowest population areas, conventional buses on Tier 2 Crosstown Routes serving moderate population areas (and serving to connect the city laterally), and finally Tier 1 BRT Routes serving the highest density long-distance routes (such as the radial avenues).<sup>7</sup> The following images show the contrast between the current system (Fig. 3-2) and the proposed Detroit Future City Project goals (Fig. 3-3).

Fig. 3-2, Existing: Current Public Transit Routes<sup>8</sup>

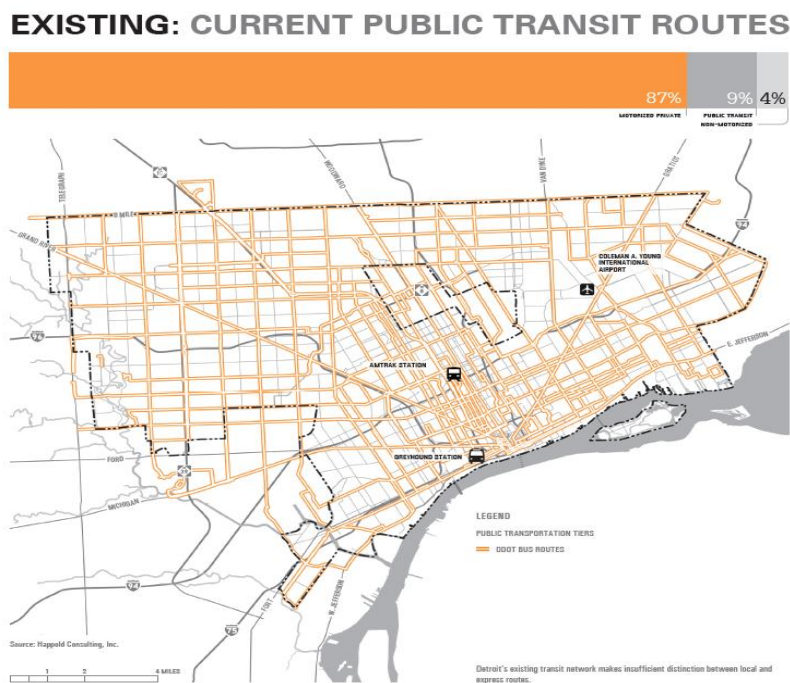
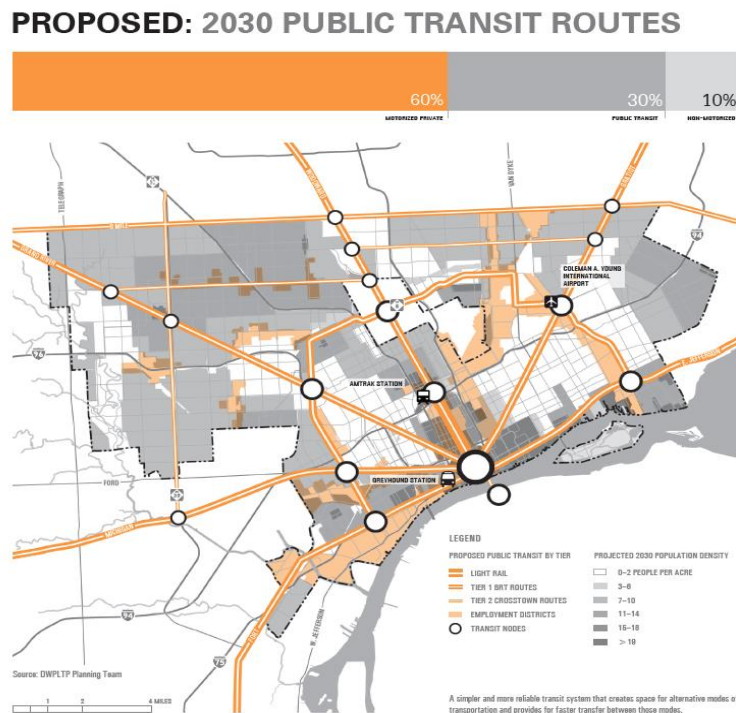


Fig. 3-3, Proposed: 2030 Public Transit Routes<sup>9</sup>



Note the population density statistics on Fig. 3-3 as denoted by the various shades of grey. The most dense areas have the largest number of high-capacity lines servicing them, whereas those areas that are in white have the lowest density lines. This plan allows for the transit nexus to be “affordable in the short term and...flexible in the medium term in order to respond to change [in the system] further down the line.”<sup>10</sup>

Overall, the vision of the Detroit Future City Project holds that “The current inefficient pattern of mid-scale transit routes serving all areas of the city at similar speed and occasionally in parallel should be replaced by a clear, tiered system of rapid transit routes linking the major employment centers and beyond Detroit, supported by smaller feeder routes.”<sup>11</sup>

## (2) UDM Transportation Center

A collaborative study under the banner of the Mineta National Transit Research Consortium<sup>ii</sup>, the UDMTC conducted its own far-reaching study beginning in 2012 that

<sup>ii</sup> Consisting of Bowling Green University, Grand Valley State University, Howard University, the University of Detroit Mercy, Penn State University, Rutgers University, San José State University, the University of Nevada Las Vegas, and the University of Toledo.

would eventually delve into the history of transit in the Metropolitan Detroit area and use a number of peer regions for a comparative analysis of the potential improvement of regional transit here in Detroit.

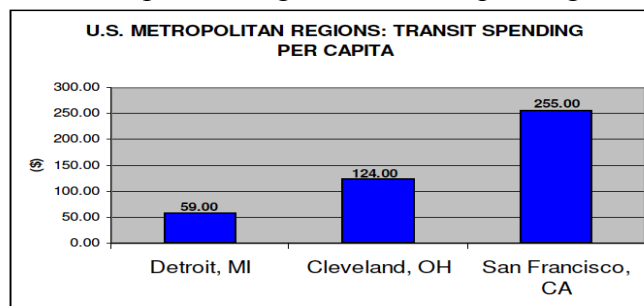
The project centers on what is termed ‘transit oriented development,’ which is the implementation of mass transit solutions that mesh with and enhance the existing framework of the city systems as they stand, looking to the future of growth in the metropolitan area. However, according to the study Detroit has not as of yet been entirely comported towards this end goal.

Approximately 192,000 households in the SEMCOG region have been identified as households without access to a private automobile. Despite this figure, the modal split for transit in the region is very low: only 2.5 percent of people commuting to their place of employment do so using public transit (mostly captive riders). In contrast, 94 percent of commuters travel to work by car, van, or light truck. Thus, the Detroit metropolitan area cannot be designated as a transit-oriented community.<sup>12</sup>

The UDMTC points to a historical trend (one that I will be making a heavy point of in the next chapter) of dysfunctional regionalistic attitudes in the metropolitan area, specifically between Detroit and her suburbs “about the structure, governance and funding of a regional transit system, and the lack of support among the public at large for a viable transit base.”<sup>13</sup> This includes the failure of SEMTA and the loss of the \$600 million Federal grant from the Ford Administration due to the implications of racial and economic divisions on the overall success of a truly regional system.

Furthermore, Detroit is cited as spending a paltry sum on its transit system compared with other smaller cities (per capita) (see Fig. 3-4 below).

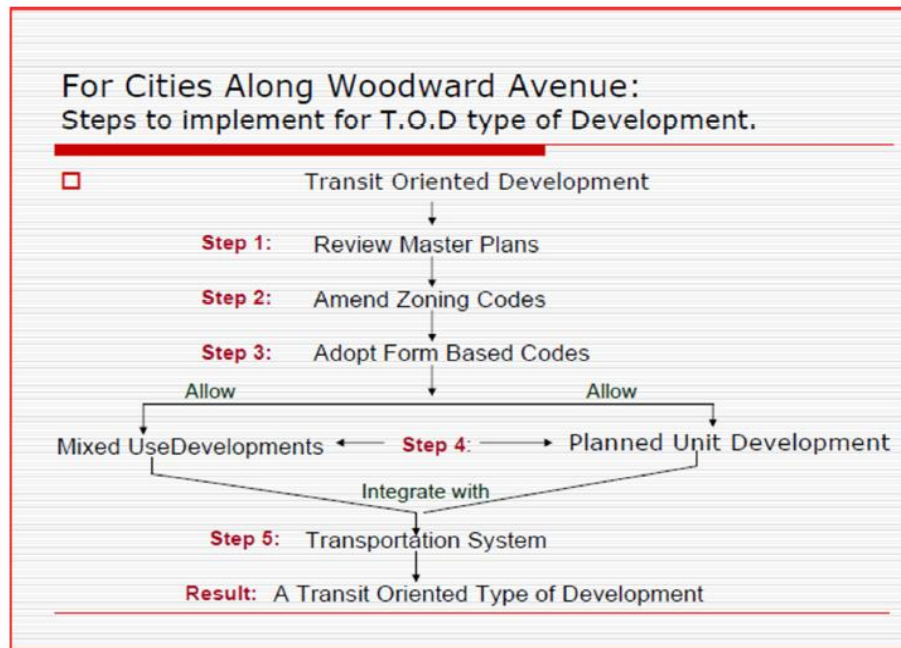
Fig. 3-4, US Metropolitan Regions: Transit Spending Per Capita<sup>14</sup>



What is suggested to ameliorate these issues is a forward-looking partnership between the municipalities in the metropolitan region, the existing transit providers (DDOT, SMART, the People Mover), all proposed transit modes (M-1 Light Rail Project, Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit AA, etc.), and the regional transit authority charged

with coordinating all aspects of mass transit. The overall ‘transit oriented development’ schema is represented in the figure shown below.

Fig. 3-5, Transit Oriented Development Flow Chart<sup>15</sup>



### (3) M-1 Light Rail Project

In 2007, a group of Detroit area investors began to develop a plan to build a modern light rail line along Woodward Avenue from downtown Detroit to roughly the Midtown area. After “numerous feasibility studies to identify the initial project definition” and with “much analysis and review of other peer light rail and streetcar systems” the suggested, and current, “3.3-mile circulating streetcar along Woodward Avenue between Larned Street and West Grand Boulevard”<sup>16</sup> was selected.<sup>iii</sup>

<sup>iii</sup> According to the M-1 Rail website, “As consensus grew and public support evolved around transit, the project grew and in 2010 changed from a small modern streetcar route of approximately 3 miles in length to a larger Light Rail Transit (LRT) system approximately 9 miles in length.” I was eventually determined that the proposed “\$500 million 9-mile LRT project was not feasible.” (“About M-1 Rail”, M-1 Rail, 2013).

Fig. 3-6, Concept Art of Streetcar Unit<sup>17</sup>



According to their website, “The mission of M-1 Rail is to create a catalyst for investment, economic development and urban renewal that positively impacts the entire region through the construction of a streetcar circulator system running along and connecting Woodward Avenue from the Riverfront to the New Center and North End neighborhoods.”<sup>18</sup>

Construction will have begun by the time this thesis is published, and completion is expected by late summer 2016 with the following route layout:

Fig. 3-7, M-1 Light Rail Project System Map<sup>19</sup>



As it stands, the project is being funded largely by private backers (a list of which can be found on the M-1 Light Rail Project website), but as of 2010 has received “\$25 million through a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) I Grant.”<sup>20</sup>

Overall, “The M-1 Rail Woodward Avenue Streetcar project is envisioned to be one element of a future, modern, world-class regional transit system where all forms of transportation, including rail, bus, vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian, are considered and utilized to build a vibrant, walkable region that includes a thriving Downtown Detroit. This city center is envisioned by supporters of M-1 Rail to become a foundation for growth and prosperity throughout the surrounding neighborhoods adjacent to the Central Business District, Midtown, New Center and North End.”<sup>21</sup>

#### (4) Woodward Avenue Regional Transit Alternatives Analysis

One of the two official governmental approaches to mass transit as outlined by SEMCOG is their Woodward Avenue Regional Transit Alternatives Analysis (AA). Their statement of purpose, as outlined on their website, calls for a review of “rapid transit options for a 27-mile corridor along Woodward Avenue from Downtown Detroit to downtown Pontiac,”<sup>22</sup> inducing all communities along the route (such as Ferndale, Royal Oak, Birmingham, etc.).

The AA process will take a comprehensive look at regional mobility needs in southeast Michigan and guide the alternatives discussion through a streamlined environmental review process. The Woodward corridor is the first of four corridors mentioned in the governor’s recent proposal for a new regional transit authority and bus rapid transit system for a 113-mile regional transit network<sup>23</sup>

Three modes of transit were considered by the AA, which include<sup>24</sup>:




1. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) “Bus Rapid Transit in a fixed guideway mimics rail while offering more flexibility to serve destinations. To the riding public, BRT looks, feels, and performs like rapid transit service that is frequent and speedy. BRT stations designed with the unique characteristics of the community in mind often become neighborhood focal points and offer potential for transitoriented development. BRT vehicles provide smooth, quiet comfort at average speeds of up to twice those of conventional buses.”
2. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in Mixed-In Traffic: “also offers a higher performance transit option than traditional bus. BRT mixed-in traffic shares the lane with vehicular traffic on busy corridors. Low floors make for easy boarding, including for passengers with disabilities, and multiple doors cut dwell times to improve headways in high-travel corridors.”
3. Light Rail Transit (LRT): “a form of electric railway system that is able to operate single or multiple cars along fixed rights-of-way at ground level, on aerial structures, in subways or in streets. It is able to board and discharge passengers at station platforms or at street, track, or car-floor level and is normally powered by overhead electrical wires (catenaries).”

Eventually, the study found that BRT (both fixed guideway and mixed-in traffic) was the most effective and affordable mode for the Woodward corridor (see Fig. 3-8 below). While various elements of the system may change depending on need, some common characteristics of such a mode can be summarized as follows<sup>25</sup>:

- Stations rather than ‘stops’
- Ability to carry a larger number of passengers than a standard bus
- Pre-boarding tickets – Riders buy tickets before boarding the BRT vehicle...[minimizing] boarding time
- Passenger Information Systems (PIS) – Electronic display showing real-time passenger information on departures, arrivals, delays, etc.
- Level Boarding – The floor of the transit vehicle is at or very close to the same height as the station platform or the sidewalk...[allowing riders to] easily walk on to the vehicle rather than stepping up as with a standard bus
- Priority Signalization – BRT vehicles would have priority at signalized intersections
- Pavement Striping/Overhead signage designating BRT only lanes

Fig. 3-8, Woodward Corridor AA Mode Evaluation<sup>26</sup>



EVALUATION CRITERIA RESULTS		 BUS RAPID TRANSIT <small>MIXED WITH TRAFFIC</small>	 BUS RAPID TRANSIT <small>EXCLUSIVE LANE</small>	 LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT <small>EXCLUSIVE LANE</small>
PHASING	1 = MORE PHASES	5	3	1
	5 = LESS PHASES			
FLEXIBILITY	1 = NOT FLEXIBLE	5	4	1
	5 = MORE FLEXIBLE			
INTEGRATION WITH EXISTING TRANSIT SYSTEM (FEEDER ROUTES)	1 = HARD TO INTEGRATE	4	4	2
	5 = EASY TO INTEGRATE			
CAPITAL COST	1 = HIGHER COST	5	3	1
	5 = LOWER COST			
OPERATIONAL/ MAINTENANCE COSTS	1 = HIGHER COST	5	3	1
	5 = LOWER COST			
RIDERSHIP	1 = LOWER RIDERSHIP	1	3	5
	5 = HIGHER RIDERSHIP			
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	1 = LOWER POTENTIAL	3	4	5
	5 = HIGHER POTENTIAL			
RELIABILITY	1 = LESS RELIABLE	3	5	5
	5 = MORE RELIABLE			
SOCIAL EQUITY	1 = LESS EQUITABLE	3	3	3
	5 = MORE EQUITABLE			
FINAL EVALUATION RESULT		3.55	3.85	3.35

The eventual goals of the AA seem to be focused on providing the most sustainable yet simultaneously flexible system of rapid transit in the Detroit Metropolitan area, and prioritize a seamless integration into the communities that will be touched by the route. “SEMCOG recognizes that a thoughtfully structured alternatives analysis process that emphasizes meaningful public participation efforts will encourage the development of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) that stakeholders and the broader community can support. The public’s aspirations and concerns are critical to the shaping and evaluation of alternatives.”<sup>27</sup>

#### (5) SEMCOG Regional Transit Coordinating Council

Finally, we look at the broader version of SEMCOG’s plan (as opposed to the previous study which is merely the study of one corridor), which seeks “to provide a more detailed analysis of the existing transit services in the region, recommend enhancements and to develop a recommended transit network for Southeast Michigan (including Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland Counties) and to include commuter rail (CRT) service from Washtenaw, Monroe and St. Clair counties.”<sup>28</sup> The key goals of the RTCC are presented as follows<sup>29</sup>:

- Providing safe, affordable, clean, convenient, on-time transit service
- Providing better transit options to seniors and the disabled

- Promoting Transit Oriented Development
- Promoting regional economic growth
- Making Southeast Michigan a destination to attract and retain younger residents
- Increasing overall access to workplaces, healthcare providers, entertainment/sports events, retail establishments and cultural venues
- Making it happen as soon and as cost-effectively as possible

In order to accomplish these goals, the plan calls for two things—a regional transit authority and a dedicated source of funding. The RTA “should have the powers to fund, plan, build, implement and operate transit services throughout the region...[and] regional funds are needed to match Federal capital dollars or to bond capital projects...[and to] provide on-going operating funds.”<sup>30</sup> These measures have the potential to move a proposed transit framework forward in a timely and efficient manner.

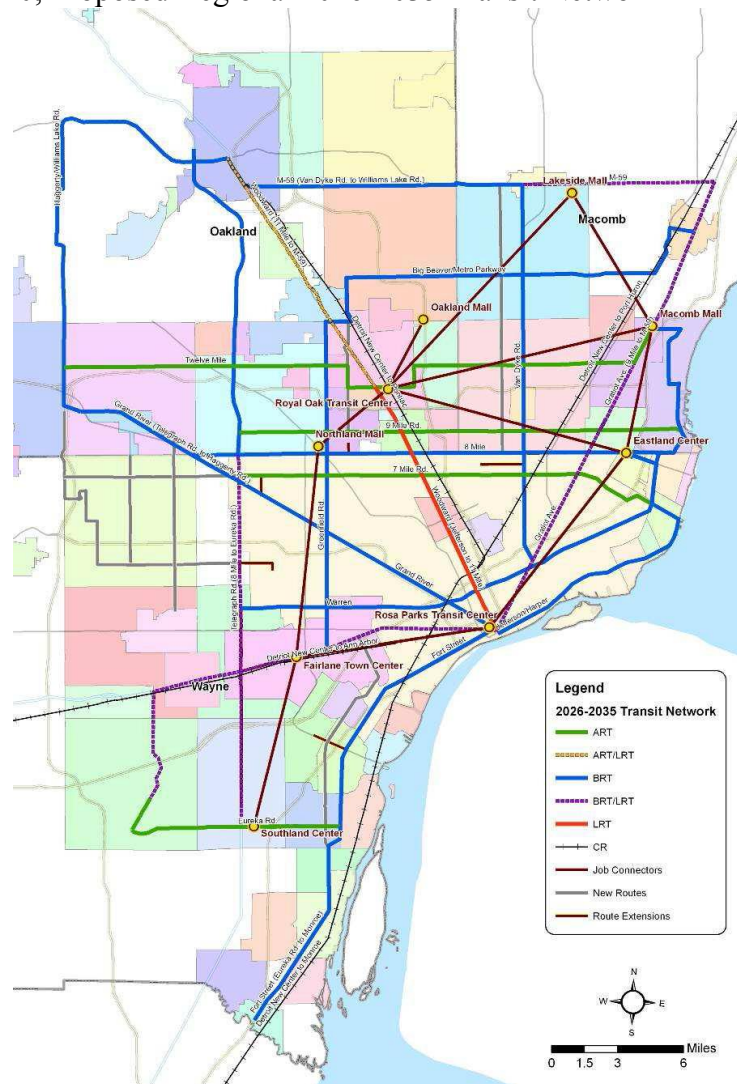
However, SEMCOG, “through the assessment of existing services,” has identified “several issues related to [the] coordination of”<sup>31</sup> transit services currently in operation, including DDOT and SMART. Recommendations for fixing such issues include a combined system map and stop signage, better integration with technology (such as Google Maps services, etc.), shared transfers, and inclusion of current opt-out communities.<sup>iv</sup>

Such measures will follow a ‘phased implementation’ strategy, since the current providers (DDOT, SMART, People Mover, etc.) cannot be replaced ‘overnight.’ Thus elements of the transit network will be upgraded sequentially based upon which elements are most in need of improvement. A multimodal and modular framework will be used in order to accommodate said changes, including use of Arterial Rapid Transit (ART), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and Light Rail Transit (LRT) as well as commuter rail for long distance connectivity to other regions that rely upon the Detroit Metropolitan Area (i.e. Ann Arbor, Port Huron, Toledo, and Pontiac). In following the ‘phased implementation’ strategy, not only will service be improved in the short-term but also can be increased based on need in the long-term (see Fig. 3-10 for eventual planned transit framework).

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<sup>iv</sup> Currently a number of communities have elected to ‘opt-out’ of SMART coverage. Fig. 3-9 above shows these communities in grey, as contrasted with the ‘opt-in’ communities highlighted in pink.

Fig. 3-10, Proposed Regional 2026-2035 Transit Network<sup>32</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Dan Pitera, Director – Detroit Collaborative Design Center, interviewed by Kevin Kostin, In person, March 10, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Detroit Future City, *Detroit Strategic Framework Plan—City Systems* (Detroit Works Project, 2012), 189.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>4</sup> Detroit Future City, *Detroit Strategic Framework Plan—Forward and Executive Summary*, (Detroit Works Project, 2012), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Detroit Future City, *City Systems*, 190.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 190.

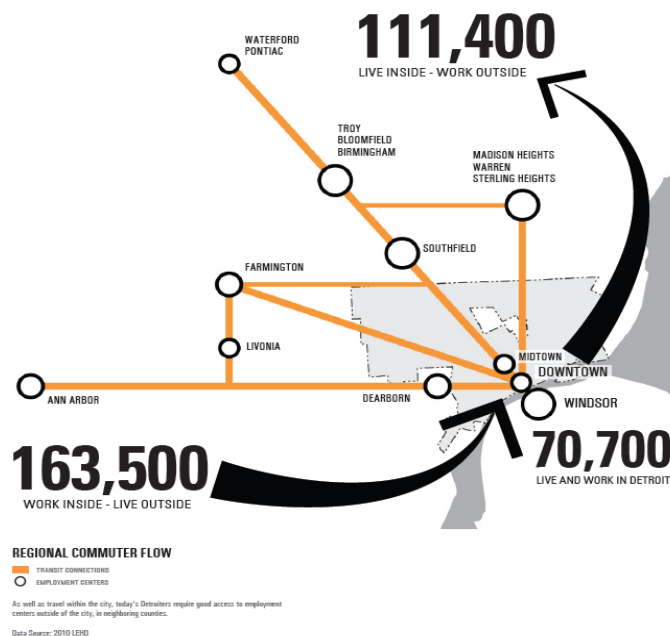
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- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 190.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., 192.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., 193.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 189.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 191.
- <sup>12</sup> Utpal Dutta, “Detroit Transit History Chapter 8- Transit Oriented Development” (University of Detroit Mercy Transit Research Team, 2013), 55.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 56.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 56.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., 61.
- <sup>16</sup> “About M-1Rail – History of M-1 Rail,” m-1rail.com (M-1 Rail, 2013).
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> “Streetcar Line – Station Stops,” m-1rail.com (M-1 Rail, 2013).
- <sup>20</sup> “About – History,” (M-1 Rail, 2013).
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> “Project Purpose and Need – Overview,” woodwardanalysis.com (Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternatives Analysis, 2014).
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> “Evaluation of Modes – Overview,” woodwardanalysis.com (Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternatives Analysis, 2014).
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> “Information Center – Steering Committee,” woodwardanalysis.com (Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternatives Analysis, 2014).
- <sup>28</sup> SEMCOG Regional Transit Coordinating Council, “Comprehensive Regional Transit Service Plan” (SEMCOG RTAA, 2008), 1.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 6.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1.

## Chapter Four

In this final chapter I intend to draw relevant conclusions about the history of mass transit in Metropolitan Detroit as it pertains to the city's future progress in that area. This chapter provides for the combination of historical perspectives and forward-looking vision that, I sincerely hope, will provide at least some degree of inspiration to those living in Southeastern Michigan to effect a positive change in the transit systems of our shared region.

And it is for this last point, the fact that we currently live in a *shared region*, not merely a collection of cities with shared borders, that I decided to write this thesis in the first place. But what does the concept of regionalism entail, exactly? According to the University of Detroit Mercy Transportation Center (UDMTC), regionalism can be defined as the “development of a unified working relationship between political, business and public leadership towards a common goal. That goal is the development of a public transit system for southeast Michigan that improves the lives of our citizens and helps to strengthen our economy.”<sup>1</sup>

Fig. 4-1, Viewing Detroit as a Unified Region<sup>2</sup>



Keeping this in mind, we can look at exactly what we have to work with. The Detroit Future City Project states that “Detroit is...”<sup>3</sup>

- in the top 20 largest American cities
- home to 714,000 residents who are resilient and are already working to change the course of the city's prospects
- a city of global economic assets, including intermodal border crossings and industrial infrastructure that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the region
- known globally for a brand of innovation in 'making things' and growing in reputation for small-scale models of ingenuity
- home of a civic network of committed, proactive community-based and philanthropic organizations
- a land-rich environment that can accommodate growth and innovation without displacement
- poised to reposition itself as Michigan's leading urban center once again if there is a coordinated regional urban agenda that enables more mutually beneficial relationships with the region, state, and nation

Noting the last of the above bullet points, we again see that the missing 'piece of the puzzle' is a 'coordinated regional urban agenda.' This theme has been a historical development that can be traced to the earliest days of mass transit in Detroit. Looking back to the conflicts over municipal ownership during the tenure of Mayor Hazen S. Pingree or the fight between Mayor Coleman A. Young and the suburbs over the acquisition of DDOT by SEMTA and the overall structure of a regional mass transit system provide just the proverbial tip of the iceberg when it comes to such dysfunctional attitudes towards regionalism in Detroit.

That being said, what can be done to fix the problems facing mass transit in Detroit? The UDMTC provides four provisional solutions to this question:

1. Effective leadership that understands transit and builds wide support. This needs to include many leaders from different segments of the community, working together across geographic, political, economic and racial differences
2. Education of the public that leads to understanding of the benefits of regional transit to all citizens, and then to public opinion and political pressure to move forward.
3. Building of a wide and deep coalition of support
4. Director(s) of transit systems that provide the efficient, affordable, reliable service that diminishes or eliminates the public's disillusionment and distrust of transit authorities.

While some deep-seeded racist and classist attitudes cannot be immediately overcome, steps should nonetheless be taken to reverse such modes of thinking. Furthermore, we have begun to see an unprecedented cooperation amongst communities in the Metropolitan region on issues other than transit, such as "decisions of government agencies and voting citizens to support and sustain regional assets such as COBO Hall,

the Detroit Zoo and the Detroit Institute of Arts.”<sup>4</sup> Such investments of the wider community into the City of Detroit reflect “a desire to retain and enhance existing assets that are valued and highly regarded by many.”<sup>5</sup>

Currently, effective mass transit is seen as a necessity for the positive development of Detroit as has been shown through the studies examined in Chapter Three of this thesis. And as stated by the UDMTC, news outlets generally “implied that people perceive mass transit quite positively and believe that it is a key factor in reviving the City of Detroit and the surrounding region. More commonly, there have been disagreements between groups and communities regarding specific plans or proposals for mass transit. These disagreements have played a role in preventing progress.”<sup>6</sup>

A subsequent development of this lack of regionalism is an equally crippling lack of coordination between the extant and proposed transit modes within the region. Currently there is already the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), and the People Mover all currently operating in the region. And when this thesis is published, the M-1 Light Rail Project will have already begun preliminary utility relocation along the Woodward Corridor and the Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternatives Analysis (AA) has concluded initial studies on the corridor. While up to this point in my research I have seen much talk about potential future coordination amongst the various entities, to the best of my knowledge no comprehensive plan has been created as of yet. Also of note is the lack of coordination at the present moment, with DDOT and SMART routes connecting at the border of Detroit and her suburbs<sup>i</sup> and a poorly executed transfer system.<sup>ii</sup> There is furthermore no coordination that I am aware of between the People Mover and any of the aforementioned systems as well.

If transit in the region is to be successful, it must involve an effective coordination between all the above entities in conjunction with the city, state, and federal government and associated agencies involved in the process of bringing effective mass transit to Detroit. While one may only be hopeful that this will happen, the current state of affairs is not entirely encouraging. On January 22, 2014 I attended a public forum meeting for the M-1 Light Rail Project regarding their operating licenses.<sup>iii</sup> In talking with members of the public at the hearing, as well as in listening to the concerns voiced in the public response portion, it became apparent that the main concern was the lack of coordination between various systems.

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<sup>i</sup> With the exception of the morning and evening rush hour SMART buses that run all the way downtown along select routes.

<sup>ii</sup> Since DDOT charges \$1.50 for a single fare whereas SMART charges \$2.00, the multi-system fare card available requires someone to carry the extra 50 cents when transferring from a DDOT to SMART bus.

<sup>iii</sup> The list of questions and the subsequent answers given by M-1 can be found on their website (“M-1 Rail News – Public Comment Responses Now Available,” M-1 Rail, 2014).

This problem may be understood in the following way. As of the present moment, both DDOT and SMART operate buses along Woodward Avenue, and the People Mover has a station at Grand Circus Park only feet away from Woodward. The M-1 Light Rail Project proposes to run their 3.3 mile light rail line up Woodward from Larned to just north of Grand Boulevard, both flowing in traffic and in medians that will be constructed for the project. Finally, the proposed Woodward Avenue BRT system would potentially run along the same corridor as the current DDOT and SMART buses and the proposed M-1 line. One can plainly see that without some degree of advanced coordination the entire scenario is poised to become a greater mess than one could argue it already is.

During the course of the meeting I could not help but think of the state of affairs during the administration of Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, where the constant discord between the City of Detroit and her suburbs as to the structure of mass transit in the region led to the revocation of the \$600 million Federal grant extended to the city under the Ford Administration. That was perhaps the most promising time in the history of mass transit in Detroit, and the lack of proper coordination and agreement between the various parties involved led to a complete breakdown of negotiations. While it is still too premature to say the same of the current state of affairs, I would urge caution to all involved in the process of bringing a functional mass transit system back to Detroit. Learning from the mistakes of the past is perhaps the most powerful tool we have to effect positive change in the present.

Looking once more to the four goals of the Detroit Future City Project, in moving forward with transit in Detroit the region must ‘align and connect its assets’ through effective and improved transit, thus allowing for the ‘creation of new innovations.’ It must ‘think about its future in a multiplicity of ways,’ understanding that there is not just one outcome for Detroit. And it must seek ‘variety, not singularity’ in selecting its modes of improved transportation—not favoring the bus *over* the light rail or the BRT, but instead using all modes available to create the most efficient multimodal system possible. These three goals lead to a culmination in the fourth, namely, a city that is able to ‘adapt to change’ and effectively grow, in part through the catalyst of mass transit, thus regaining the quality of life and [blah] that residents of Detroit once had.

Despite all appearances, I believe Detroit to still be a great city and am proud to call it home. While the past has levied her share of trials and tribulations on the city and her people, their spirit has proven to be indomitable and the result is a city that has been battered and beaten to the point of defeat yet never resigns herself to such a fate. So long as there *is* a Detroit, her citizens will strive to push forward against all adversity and will look both to the city’s rich past and to her even brighter future, one that will be forged from her own ashes through the hard work and relentless determination of her people. The fate of mass transit in Detroit shall certainly be no exception to this rule

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Hanifin and Scott Douglass, “Detroit Transit History Chapter 1- Transit Leadership and Politics,” (University of Detroit Mercy Transit Research Team, 2013), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Detroit Future City, *Detroit Strategic Framework Plan – City Systems* (Detroit Works Project, 2012), 189.

<sup>3</sup> Detroit Future City, *Detroit Strategic Framework Plan – Forward and Executive Summary* (Detroit Works Project, 2012), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Utpal Dutta, “Detroit Transit History Chapter 4- Transit Politics and Leadership In Detroit (1862-2007) (University of Detroit Mercy Transit Research Team, 2013), 25.

<sup>5</sup> Hanifin and Douglass, “Chapter 1,” 13.

<sup>6</sup> Dutta, “Chapter 4,” 25.

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