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Region should not waste taxpayers' money on bus systems or 'People Mover on wheels'

Does Metro Detroit need a transit agency?

State Rep. Leon Drolet

Though Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and others want to give a Metro Detroit transit authority a fourth try, it remains a costly boondoggle.

The plan behind creating a regional transit authority is to merge Metro Detroit's suburban bus system with the Detroit's bus system. It's highly unlikely this would create less waste. Michigan public transit is already an expensive failure. The Suburban Mobility Area Regional Transit system (SMART) is considered more cost-friendly than the Detroit Department of Transportation system, but even SMART buses are wasteful for virtually all taxpayers.

The more than 90,000 people in my Macomb County district pay more than \$3 million a year in SMART and gasoline taxes for public transit, yet just 94 of them regularly use public transit. The annual cost for each transit rider in my district is more than \$30,000. It would be cheaper to buy each a new car every year.

That's why DARTA boosters want to herd reluctant suburbs into a regional transportation plan by force and never allow them to leave. A legislative effort to create a regional authority and allow suburban communities to opt out passed the state House but was rejected by the governor and other DARTA proponents.

Some mass transit proponents want to use a regional authority to create Speedlink, a rapid bus line or People Mover on wheels that will cost \$2 billion to build and \$200 million a year to operate. These rapid buses would run in dedicated lanes on already congested metro-area roads, taking space that should go to the cars people actually use.

Mass transit receives up to 700 times more in subsidies per passenger mile than roads, according to the Reason Public Policy Institute. DARTA promises more of the same waste and should be killed. But if a regional authority is created, at least let Metro Detroit communities that will receive no benefit from DARTA decline to participate.

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