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SEMCOG, Cities to consider transit options for entire Woodward Avenue corridor

Detroit, MI – A formal analysis of transit options for the Woodward Avenue corridor, originally announced in October to consider extending light rail from Eight Mile to downtown Birmingham, will now be considering the entire 27 mile length of Woodward, from the Detroit River to Pontiac. The change in the project's scope reflects Governor Snyder's proposal for a region-wide rapid transit network, as well as the evolution of light rail planning in the city of Detroit to a downtown circulator system. The project is expected to begin this spring and include technical and financial analyses along with opportunities for public engagement.

City Councilmember Steve Baker, who co-represents the City of Berkley on the project's steering committee, said the project team has had to change its assumptions, but not its goals: "We set out to look at the needs along our portion of Woodward Avenue, connecting Oakland County and Detroit as part of a regional transportation system. That's still our goal, and now we have an idea of what the whole system could look like."

The Alternatives Analysis, a required step for any transit system, is primarily funded by a \$2 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration and will be managed by SEMCOG. "We've been in constant contact with the Governor, the FTA, and the local representatives over the past few months," said Carmine Palombo, director of transportation programs at SEMCOG, "in order to make sure that this project is coordinated with all of the other work underway."

Heather Carmona, executive director of the Woodward Avenue Action Association, said the coordination extends beyond just transit. "We're working with the cities to make Woodward work for everyone who travels along it, and at connecting all transportation modes to economic development opportunities."

The formal change in scope of the project comes close behind the Michigan Legislature's introduction of bills to create a regional transit authority (RTA) that would cover Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, and Washtenaw Counties, providing coordination between the local bus systems and overseeing creation of the rapid transit network.

Richard Murphy, transportation director at the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, explains that this is no coincidence: "Detroit and the Oakland County suburbs recognize that better transit on Woodward will spur economic development both north and south of Eight Mile—but they need a regional transit authority to build and run the system. Governor Snyder has proposed that the RTA work towards a rapid transit network including Woodward Avenue, and this alternatives analysis will let them move quickly towards that goal."

The study was initially led by a steering committee with representatives from Ferndale, Pleasant Ridge, Huntington Woods, Royal Oak, Berkley, and Birmingham. With the expanded scope, Detroit and the other municipalities along Woodward—Highland Park, Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township, and Pontiac—have been invited to join the group.