

Elevated rail in Houston?

United Press International
HOUSTON — Metropolitan Transit Authority Manager Alan Kiepper is sticking to his prediction that Houston will have Texas' first rail transit system by 1990, despite the outlook that his proposed downtown elevated railway might not be approved.

Response was favorable to Kiepper's systemwide proposal: a \$1.83 billion, 18.2-mile rapid rail system reaching southwestward and northward from downtown along what the MTA

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sees as the "spine" of Houston's employment and residential areas.

Kiepper says the 17-station system, reaching from the West Belt through downtown and northward to Crosstimbers, will help unravel Houston traffic.

The proposal included a 2.3-mile, glass-canopied elevated rail atop Main Street to link the system to downtown. This caused the controversy.

Developer-builder Frank Glass, chairman of the SpawGlass Construction Co., who owns four blocks along Main and has invested \$14 million in a building at the corner of Main and Texas in the heart of downtown, sounded the first complaint.

He suggested an elevated rail would be a noisy negative on an already fading Main Street, turning the first floors of the buildings into basements. He said a Main Street subway would be better in the long run.

County officials objected to the elevated leg on behalf of downtown businessmen.

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by quoting a letter from a reader: "A Train on Main is Plainly Insane."

Last week City Council apparently killed it by officially objecting to the Main Street elevated rail. But Kiepper remains optimistic.

Kiepper proposed the futuristic rail system in September and the MTA board voted later that month to build it, but left undecided how it would travel through downtown.

Kiepper said the additional cost of substituting a subway downtown would be \$340 million during building and \$3.5 million a year during operation.

Others are suggesting moving the elevated rail to a side street, an idea the MTA is considering.

In a recent interview, Kiepper said he was used to such controversies.

"I think my responsibility is to put recommendations before the board and not get too emotionally involved with them," he said.

Kiepper came to Houston last May after 10 years in Atlanta, where he directed construction of the Atlanta rail system. The Houston bus system which Kiepper took over is struggling.

"Up until May of 1981, Houston still operated its entire bus system out of one garage that was built in the early 1900s as a trolley car barn," he said. "We didn't even have a preventive maintenance program when I came."

Houston's MTA, with 1,200 square miles and a one-third larger population to serve, fields 391 buses to Atlanta's 700. MTA carried 48 million passengers last year; Atlanta's system 107 million.

But Kiepper sees great potential to do a quality job building Houston's system, using the one-cent sales tax base, possibly tax-supported bond issues and other money, even without the federal financing no longer available for rail.

Kiepper estimates it will take three years to get the bus system up to a reasonable level and five years to make it superior.

Suicides linked to economy

United Press International
In Fremont, Calif., just across the bay from San Francisco, officials of a United Auto Workers local chapter are blaming unemployment for the suicides of eight workers.

In Detroit, with unemployment exceeding 15 percent, the director of a suicide prevention center said calls from people considering suicide would reach 4,500 this year — compared to 1,500 in 1980 — and suicides would be up 5 percent.

And in Houston, funeral director Sam Garza handled the burials of five suicide victims last month.

"I think it's the recession and the fact that a lot of people are unemployed," said Garza.

Experts agree. Studies by psychologists have linked high unemployment to a plethora of social ills — depression, broken marriages, child abuse, crime and suicide.

With unemployment at 10.8 percent nationwide — the highest since 1940 — some of the social maladies that experts associate with unemployment are beginning to surface.

Mattawan, Mich., police found the bodies of Larry Perin, his wife and their two children in their rural home the day before Thanksgiving. Investigators said Perin, an unemployed automobile mechanic, strangled his children and wife, then shot himself.

Tony Garza, 53, and his wife, Kay, 50, lost their home and map-making business in Columbus, Ohio, and moved to San Antonio to start new lives.

Their bodies were found in a 1973 Chevy in south San Antonio Oct. 13. Authorities said Garza shot his wife, then himself.

In Garza's pocket police found 54 cents and a note. "We came to San Antonio to

work, not to die. But Reagan economics has nothing trickling down to us," the note said.

In Houston, the Harris County Medical Examiner's office reported 386 suicides in

through New Year's period.

A Houston funeral home director, noting most suicide victims were young, observed: "The older people who went through the Depression understand hard time. But the younger ones just can't seem to handle it."

In Fremont, where the shutdown of a GM plant has left 7,000 members of UAW Local 1364 jobless, union officials said eight members have committed suicide since the beginning of the year.

Local 1364 Vice President John Scampas said there may have been other factors in the suicides, but added: "I worked there 18 years before the layoffs and I really knew of only one suicide in the plant."

In Duluth, Minn., and the surrounding Iron Range country, unemployment stood at 18.6 percent — second highest in the nation. Social service officials reported increases in domestic vio-

lence, family breakups and alcohol abuse — suicide.


"It's not the style here to admit suicide," a spokesman said.

United Steelworkers Jack Donahue in Pittsburgh, where unemployment is 15 percent — reported the divorce was up and at least one worker in nearby Butler committed suicide.

Laid-off steelworker Bragg, out of work for more than a year, said he walked around one day last summer, then walked from his field near Midland, Pa., the barrel of his rifle to his head and fired. He missed.

"I don't know if I should out or whatever," he said. Now, Bragg, the father of two girls, is doing odd jobs and looking for full-time work.

"I'm not going to give up. I'm not going to give up. I'm not going to give up. I'm not going to give up."



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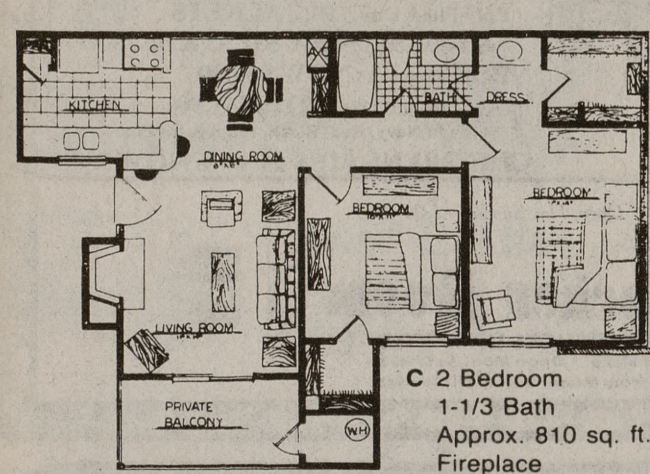
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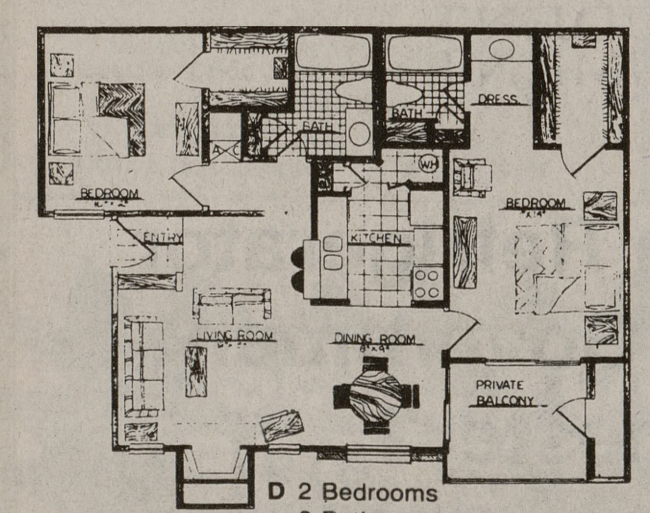
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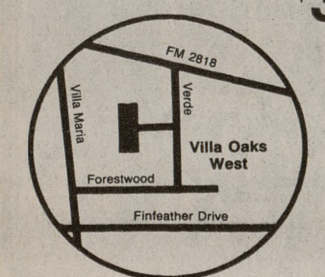
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