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The Quarterly

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Planning that is Credible, Credentialed, and Connected

Plans For A Better Transit Experience



If better is possible, good is not enough...

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) received the final draft of the [2014 Plan For Public Transit In Berrien County](#). The plan offers an opportunity to move the public transit discussion forward in Berrien County.

Why do we need a Plan for Public Transit in Berrien County?

Today Berrien County is the only county in the state of Michigan with four independent transit systems: Berrien Bus, Twin Cities Area Transit Authority, Buchanan Dial-A-Ride, and Niles Dial-A-Ride. Each of these independent public agencies provide essential services within their designated service boundaries. However, the coverage and level of the services is inconsistent across the county and many residents and employees do not have public transit options available to them. A portion of the county, including St. Joseph township, Lincoln township, Royalton township, the City of Bridgman, has limited or no public transportation service.

“We have a patchwork system that truly can’t move people through the county because there are different fares, different service hours, different service areas and there is very little or no connectivity,”
 Kim Gallagher, SWMPC Planner

Each of the four agencies are independently funded and regulated, making it difficult for one agency to coordinate with another to move a person from point A to point B between each agency’s territory. Having a consolidated single system would eliminate the those regulatory boundaries and a new authority could be running routes without the present regulatory issue attached to travel between urban and rural areas.

Communities in Berrien County face several serious challenges over the next ten years that include: meeting the needs of the aging population and tackling poverty, while attracting and retaining young people and supporting growth in the regional economy. An improved and more robust countywide transit system will put Berrien County in a better position to rise to these challenges.

It is about the passenger:

The current system makes it especially difficult for people with disabilities to travel throughout the county because there are multiple systems and multiple fares. In some instances it can take a full day to travel from St. Joseph to Niles and back again using the current transit systems. Conversations now will explore how our most vulnerable populations can remain independent with access to fresh food, employment and educational opportunities, health care, and recreational facilities.

To move the conversation forward we must:

- Have a baseline understanding of public transit in Berrien County
- Understand the benefits and concerns resulting from consolidation of the four public transit services in Berrien County.
- Understand the steps needed to move public transit systems toward a consolidated model within Berrien County

If you would like to learn more about this plan please visit www.mywaythere.org or contact Kim Gallagher at gallagherk@swmpc.org or by phone at 269-925-1137 x1518

New Section Of Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail Open in Niles township!



A large number of supporters turned out on August 9th, 2014 to cut the ribbon and open a new 3.3 mile section of the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail. The new trail section is complete from the Indiana State line to Brandywine creek Nature Park (just north of US 12). The section represents Phase one for Niles Township of the 34-miles trail from Niles, MI to Mishawaka, IN. The Trail will help link communities together, help promote tourism, and provide a great recreation opportunity. Niles Township has just one mile remaining to complete its portion of the trail. Indiana plans to finish their two remaining gaps in 2017.

For more information please visit: www.swmpc.org/inmitrail.asp or follow the Friends of the IN MI River Valley Trail on Facebook. www.Facebook.com/FriendsoftheIMRVTrail

Staff Departure

Recently SWMPC said farewell to Suzann Flowers who worked as an Associate Planner after starting as an intern in 2007. We would like to wish her well at her new job as a Transportation Planner at the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study.

2015 Graham Woodhouse Award Nominations Due

Nominations for the 2015 Graham Woodhouse Award Nominations are due **December 1, 2014**. The award is presented annually for projects that exemplify intergovernmental cooperation by local units of government. Anyone may nominate a project which includes at least two government agencies with any number of non-profits and/or other businesses also involved. The project should be completed, or at least some phase of a multi-stage program completed.

Nominations may be sent by email. Printed material may be delivered in person or mailed.

Download the application at:

www.swmpc.org/gwhistory.asp

Send to:

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

376 West Main Street, Suite 130

Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Email: mooret@swmpc.org

Questions? Call Terri Moore

269-925-1137 x 1520



Survey: Niles-Buchanan Area Residents Want Better Pedestrian, Bicycle, Wheelchair, and Public Transit Infrastructure!

Between January and June of 2014, SWMPC conducted a survey of residents in the Niles-Buchanan-Cass area to assess how well the transportation network is working for them, what ways it is falling short in meeting their needs, and where they would like to see better facilities for non-motorized transportation.

SWMPC staff are still analyzing the data, but one of the most surprising aspects of the survey was the number of people that are walking long distances (three miles or more) to key destinations, such as work, medical services, or shopping, on a daily or almost-daily basis. While some of those trips may be recreational and therefore good for personal health, walking more than three miles to reach work, grocery stores, or medical centers can pose serious physical challenges, especially where infrastructure is inadequate. The graphic at the bottom of this article shows the percentage of respondents who want the area to become more accessible.

When asked where they wanted to see improvements to non-motorized infrastructure, respondents overwhelmingly identified the two key regional corridors of S 11th St (M-51), particularly in Niles Township, and US-12, particularly in the Edwardsburg area. Respondents perceived these areas to be highly unsafe on long stretches for

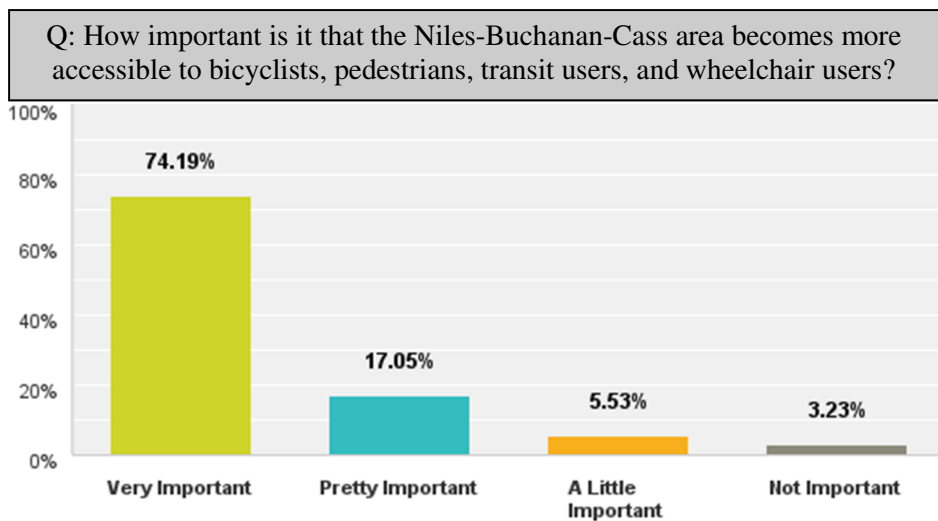
pedestrians, bicyclists, and wheelchair users, and that they ought to be a priority for future investments of federal, state, and local dollars.

In an open-ended section of the survey, residents commonly identified snow shoveling on sidewalks during the winter as a major need. In many cases, the lack of shoveled sidewalks results in safety issues for children trying to get to school in the early morning. Residents said that sidewalk shoveling ordinances might exist, but there needs to be better enforcement by local officials.

This was not a survey about public transit, but the second most common response in the open-ended section was that there was a need for longer bus hours for Niles Dial-A-Ride. Some Niles area residents have quit jobs because they cannot make it to work when they need to, and others have gone from full time to part time work for that same reason. One respondent was even embarrassed about putting his or her family on public assistance programs simply because she or he had to go from full time to part time due to bus service hours. These members of our community are willing to work and have found stable employment, but they require a better public transit service to get them to and from their life-sustaining destinations.

More detailed survey results are available. The survey is officially closed, but SWMPC wants to hear your feedback on how the transportation system in all phases is working for you, wherever you might live in Southwest Michigan! Let us know what we can do to help you and your community to improve the system.

Please contact Gautam Mani at 269-925-1137 x1524 or manig@swmpc.org to share your thoughts or for more information.





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The SWMPC Mission is to promote a sustainable high quality of life through facilitation of sound planning and decision making

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Calendar of Events 2014

<u>September</u>	
25 th	10:00 am Joint NATS & TwinCATS TAC & Policy Mtg***

<u>October</u>	
11 th	SWMPC Office Closed
20 th	9:00 am TwinCATS TAC & Policy Mtg**
28 th	1:00 pm NATS TAC & Policy Mtg*

<u>November</u>	
4 th	Election day
11 th	SWMPC Office Closed
17 th	9:00 am TwinCATS TAC & Policy Mtg**
25 th	1:00 pm NATS TAC & Policy Mtg*
27 th - 28 th	SWMPC Office Closed

*NATS Meeting 1345 E. Main Street, Niles, MI **TwinCATS Meeting 1123 Territorial Road, Benton Harbor, MI
 ***Berrien RESA 711 St. Joseph Ave, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

For more information and other events visit: www.swmpc.org/calendar.asp

2014 SWMPC Board Meeting Schedule	
SWMPC Full Commission Meetings <i>Location: Lake Township Hall, 3220 Shawnee Bridgman, MI</i> October 21, 2014 9:30 am	SWMPC Administrative Committee Meetings <i>Location: SWMPC Conference Room</i> September 16, 2014 9:30 am December 16, 2014 9:30 am