



Local News

Insights sought for Berrien County transportation study

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BENTON HARBOR - With the public's help, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission wants to gain insight into Berrien County's transportation future.

The public's next chance should be in a few months, associate planner Anna Rahtz said. Commission staff is working out details and will make an announcement.

About 55 people attended the last forum, held June 1 at Michigan Works in Benton Harbor.

"They were representing a range of people, from social service agencies, to government agencies, transit riders, people with disabilities, bicyclists (and) train enthusiasts," Rahtz said. "We got a lot of good feedback about tying together all the different aspects of transit."

That feedback will be taken into account as the commission works with consulting firm KFH on a study of Berrien County's transportation needs, Rahtz said.

"Basically, the goal of the study is for citizens to travel more easily across the county, or outside the county," Rahtz said.

For KFH, one priority will be reviewing different ways to coordinate or consolidate aspects of public transit among the four providers in the county, Rahtz said. Those providers are Berrien Bus, Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority, and Buchanan and Niles Dial-A-Ride. The final document will be known as the Countywide Transit Consolidation Feasibility Study.

The study is expected to take about 2 1/2 years, though the time line may be shortened, Rahtz said.

"One of the things that people were concerned about was having a 2 1/2 -year planning process, so they're (KFH) probably going to shorten that," Rahtz said.

The commission is paying KFH about \$165,000, she said.

For further details about the study and meetings, visit www.swmpc.org.

Commission associate planner Trevor Thomas said "there's definitely a synergy" between the feasibility study efforts and the commission's "Walk & Roll" project, which aims to promote nonmotorized alternatives to car transport, like improved bicycle and pedestrian routes.

"Part of transit is being able to get to and from transit stops, so they both work hand in hand - in terms of getting people better accessibility, from their homes, to their jobs, to retail (businesses), and stuff like that," Thomas said.

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