

## **PUBLIC TRANSIT**

### **COORDINATION EFFORTS: Background**

In August 2005, President Bush signed into law the SAFETEA-LU, legislation that provides funding for highway and transit programs. SAFETEA-LU includes new planning requirements for the FTA Section 5310 (Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities), Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute – JARC), and Section 5317 (New Freedom) programs, requiring that projects funded through these programs “must be derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit- human services transportation plan”. This provision is aimed at improving transportation services for persons with disabilities, older adults and individuals with lower incomes, and ensuring that communities are coordinating transportation resources provided through multiple federal programs.

In March 2006, FTA issued proposed circulars with interim guidance for use of federal FY 2007 funding through the Section 5310, JARC, and New Freedom Programs, including the coordinated planning requirements.

In the State of Michigan, the Michigan Bureau of Urban and Public Transportation (UPTRAN) assigned the responsibility for developing a local coordination plan to counties. To respond to the federal and state requirements, the SWMPC took the lead in the development of a countywide Coordinated Transportation Plan for Berrien County. The plan is not solely limited to the Section 5310, JARC and New Freedom Programs, but includes a wide spectrum of human services, public and private transportation offered by Berrien County’s locally operated transit systems, private providers and local human service providers. The Coordinated Transportation Plan also assesses the transportation needs of older adults, people with disabilities and low income individuals. The plan will continue to evolve developing strategies for addressing identified gaps improving efficiencies of services and prioritize specific strategies and projects for implementation. In addition the plan will identify potential organizations or structures that could implement coordination activities and create new services on a regional basis.

The Coordinated Transportation Plan will be in place so that beginning in FY2010 projects funded through the Section 5310, JARC and New Freedom Programs will be included in the locally developed coordination plan.

**Census Data**

Since the plan is meant to address the transportation needs of three potentially transit dependent populations (seniors, people with disabilities, and people with lower incomes), Census data was gathered at block group level for the entire county, and analyzed to determine highest need.

**Table 5.0** shows the number of elderly, disabled and persons below poverty in Berrien County, as well as the percentage of the general population that they represent:

<b>Table 5.0 Berrien County Census Data</b>			
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	<b>Number of People</b>	<b>% of Total Population</b>	<b>Statewide %</b>
Total Berrien County Population	162,453	100%	
Seniors (65+)	23,449	14%	12.30%
People with Disabilities	30,301	20%	18.70%
People with incomes below poverty level	20,202	13%	10.50%

Source: 2000 Census

The data demonstrates that Berrien County as a whole exceeds the statewide average in every category. Obviously this is a county with a significant population of seniors, people with disabilities, and people with lower incomes, and one that therefore has extensive transportation needs.

**Profile of Transit Dependent Population**

To evaluate transportation needs specific to each population group, Census block data for persons over age 65, disabled persons, persons below poverty level, female householder with no husband present with children as well as households with no vehicle were mapped. Laying out the geographical distributions of each group provided a visual representation of the analysis of high, medium, and low levels of transit need throughout the county.

This population profile was used to identify areas of the county that have either high densities of persons in need of public transportation services or high percentages of the population with such needs.

### **Future Trends and Issues**

The population of the United States is aging – its older population will double over the next 30 years. By 2030, one in five Americans will be 65 or older. In Berrien County those numbers are not much different. In 1980, only 11% of the population was age 65 and above. By 2020, that number of older adults will represent 33% of Berrien County’s population. As the number of older people continues to increase, important issues affecting this population segment need to be addressed. One such issue is preserving the mobility and enhancing the safety of seniors.

### **Ongoing Transportation Needs**

Like most small urban/rural areas, older adults, people with disabilities and people with lower incomes in Berrien and Cass Counties need a variety of transportation services designed to meet particular needs. From the Census data and information from previous knowledge of the county, the following overall transportation needs and issues for older adults, people with disabilities and people with lower incomes identified:

- Transit dependent persons living in low density areas have limited access to fixed route public transportation and need transportation options to access jobs, medical facilities, shopping and other community services.
- Transportation services that cross county and state lines are needed in the region to access destinations outside of Berrien County, including medical services and jobs in Kalamazoo, South Bend, Indiana, and Battle Creek.
- Appropriate travel training in the use of public transit routes is needed, especially for older adults and people with disabilities unfamiliar with services or unsure in traveling without any knowledge of system.
- Simplified point of access is needed to obtain transportation services regardless of the funding agency, transportation provider, or type of service.
- Infrastructure improvements are needed in areas with high concentrations of no vehicle households to allow for non-motorized transportation (biking/walking).

- Sufficient marketing is needed to ensure information is available on transportation options.
- Job opportunities for transit dependent population is often available in areas of the county not currently served by a public transit agency.

**Public Transit Providers**

Four different t agencies in the Niles/Buchanan/Cass study area provide transit service. Two of these are rural county bus systems—Berrien County Bus and Cass County Transportation Authority. The other two serve city populations--Niles Dial-A-Ride and Buchanan Dial-A-Ride. All of the services provide demand response while just one provides limited fixed route services. Because there are four different transportation providers within the study area each having a distinct service area, service can be fragmented, especially for the general public. Currently there are no official signed or publicized transfer points within the study area.

In 2007 the four individually funded agencies had a combined budget of over \$2.7 million dollars, provided service to over 233, 500 passenger trips utilizing a combined inventory of 44 vehicles. The average cost per passenger trip was just under \$12.00. **Tables 5.1-5.4** brake down the four transit agencies into their service description, hours, operation, millage, and coordination.

<b>Table 5.1 Buchanan Dial- A -Ride</b>	
<b>Service Description:</b>	Demand-response/Immediate request service within the city limits of Buchanan and regular shuttle service to Niles.
<b>Hours:</b>	Monday-Friday 7:00am-5:30 pm.
<b>Operations:</b>	Buchanan Dial-A-Ride was created in 1980 and is sponsored and under contract by the City of Buchanan and Buchanan Township. It is contractually managed by Transportation Management Inc. Buchanan Dial a Ride provides approximately 10,500 passenger trips annually by demand response and shuttle service utilizing three vehicles which are all lift equipped. Dispatch and vehicles is housed in Berrien Bus facility located Berrien Springs. Buchanan Dial A Ride is supported by a local millage.
<b>Millage:</b>	Yes, Current Millage: 1.0 Renewal Period: 4 Years Beginning: August 2008 Ending: August 2012
<b>Coordination:</b>	Transfer points with Berrien Bus and Niles Dial a Ride
<b>Outreach:</b>	Brochure

<b>Table 5.2 Niles Dial-A- Ride</b>	
<b>Service Description:</b>	Niles Dial a Ride provides two types of service that include one fixed route and immediate request. The fixed route is serviced by one vehicle that service housing complexes and retail establishments in the City of Niles and Niles Township. The service provided consists of demand-response/immediate request service within the city limits of Niles, Niles Township and Bertrand Township.
<b>Hours:</b>	Hours of demand response service are Mon-Fri from 7 AM to 5 PM and Sat. from 10 AM to 3 PM. The fixed route service hours are Mon-Fri 10 AM to 5 PM
<b>Operations:</b>	Niles Dial- A- Ride was created in 1974 and is sponsored and under contract by the City of Niles. It is contractually managed by McDonald Transit Associates and monitored by the City of Niles transit coordinator. Niles Dial- A- Ride provides almost 80,000 trips annually by demand response/immediate request service and one fixed route. There are eight vehicles in the fleet that have passenger capacity ranging from 10 to 17; all of them are lift-equipped for the disabled. Vehicles and dispatch are located in downtown Niles.
<b>Millage:</b>	Yes- Current Millage: .25 Renewal Period: 2 Years Beginning: August 2008 Ending: August 2010
<b>Coordination:</b>	Transfer points with Berrien Bus and Buchanan Dial A Ride
<b>Outreach:</b>	Website and brochure

<b>Table 5.3 Berrien Bus</b>	
<b>Service Description:</b>	Berrien Bus is the sole rural public transit provider for all non-urbanized areas in Berrien County. Service primarily operates on a 24-hour reservation curb -to -curb demand response model. Berrien Bus provides contract services to Gateway to serve clients who are unable to use regular service.
<b>Hours:</b>	Monday-Friday 5:00am – 5:00 pm. Trips must be reserved 24hours in advance
<b>Operations:</b>	Berrien County Public Transportation was created in 1983 sponsored and under contract by the Berrien County Board of Commissioners. . It is contractually managed by Transportation Management, Inc and monitored by the county transit coordinator. Berrien Bus provides approximately 119,500 passenger trips annually utilizing twenty-four vehicles that have a passenger capacity ranging from 12 to 33; twenty three of these are lift-equipped for the disabled. Vehicles and dispatch are located in Berrien Springs.
<b>Millage:</b>	No
<b>Coordination:</b>	Berrien Bus coordinates with local agencies that include Gateway Agency, Berrien County Health Department and Michigan WORKS!
<b>Outreach:</b>	Brochure

<b>Table 5.4 Cass County Transit</b>	
<b>Service Description:</b>	Cass County Transit provides countywide semi-fixed route and demand-response service within designated rural areas of Cass County. The semi-fixed route provides service twice daily from Cass County to Niles and from Cassopolis to Dowagiac three times daily. Demand response service requires a twenty four hour reservation.
<b>Hours:</b>	Monday – Friday 6:00 am – 6:00 pm
<b>Operations:</b>	Cass County Transit began as a State demonstration program in 1988 sponsored and under contract by the Cass County Board of Commissioners. It is contractually managed by Transportation Management, Inc and monitored by the county transit coordinator. Cass County Transit provides approximately 27,500 passenger trips annually utilizing eleven vehicles that have a passenger capacity ranging from ten to seventeen; all of them are lift equipped for the disabled. Vehicles and dispatch are located in Cassopolis.
<b>Millage:</b>	No
<b>Coordination:</b>	Transfer points that integrate service with Niles Dial-A-Ride, Berrien Bus and Dowagiac Dial-A-Ride.
<b>Outreach:</b>	Brochure