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# Commission recommends consolidating Berrien Co. bus system

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By Rachel Brown  
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BERRIEN COUNTY, Mich. -- The four public transit bus systems in Berrien County could soon be consolidated into one system.

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission said it is a challenge for riders to have four transit providers in one county.

They hope by next year it will be consolidated.

“Honestly I’ve been waiting here approximately like 40 minutes,” said Charles Miller.

It is a 40 minute wait he has become used to, but he said he is getting tired of the bus system slowing down his day.

“It’s draining me from what I got to get done. You got a lot of people that’s got a lot of jobs. You know people that got work,” Miller said.

Ten minutes later his bus finally came.

Slow service is one of the many reasons John Egelhaaf, Executive Director for the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, wants change.

“How can we make it less challenging, better service delivery, lower cost,” Egelhaaf said.

Right now there are four bus systems that run throughout the county. The separate buses don’t always connect to one another, some only run a few times a day, and each bus system has its own fare structure.

After conducting a 3-year study, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission recommends the county-wide transit authority.

“If you have one provider, the service would be consistent across wherever you’re going

to,” said Egelhaaf.

Joanne Johnson with the Disability Network of Southwest Michigan said a single bus system would improve the quality of life for riders who depend on its service.

“It means that they can have jobs and know that they can get there. It means that they know that they can go to church on Sunday that they can visit family and friends. That they can get done what they need to get done,” Johnson said.

The bus system would still provide service to all areas it currently does and would also cover areas that aren’t serviced right now.

The cost to ride would be the same on each bus.

The hope is that buses would come more frequently.

“Transit doesn’t have to be about the last best option. It can be one of the options that can be considered much higher up the chain,” Egelhaaf said.

The recommendation to consolidate will now go to the Berrien County Board of Commissioners. If approved, the planning commission hopes to consolidate by next year.