



# The Quarterly

## Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

*Planning that is Credible, Credentialed, and Connected*

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### **Connecting People to Employment**



The Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority (TCATA) was recently awarded a continuation grant from the Federal Transit Administration's Job Access Reverse Commute Program in the amount of \$455,000.

The funds will assist people with lower incomes in Benton Harbor to access entry level jobs by continuing reliable fixed route transportation service with extended hours. The bus routes, known as the Red Route and Blue Route, provide service to over 175 targeted employers, which are located in areas not previously served by public transit service in the St. Joseph Township and Stevensville areas. These fixed routes originate in areas with high

poverty rates, unemployment and no vehicle access. Clusters of entry level employment opportunities are available within a ten mile radius of the City of Benton Harbor. Many of the opportunities have not been accessible by public transportation because the areas have not been serviced

#### **Take A Taxi!**

The transportation costs to an individual by taxi to access these destinations is \$30.00-\$44.00 per day making it cost prohibitive for entry level worker.

by any transit agency or hours of transit did not match the varied workers' hours.

Expansion of the service hours of the current fixed routes will improve availability of transportation to underserved people. The fixed routes now operate up to 14 hours a day, six days a week, in order to accommodate those working earlier and later shifts and on Saturdays. These increased hours of service will enable people to secure entry-level jobs in food service, retail, lodging and job training opportunities that require earlier and later shifts. For information about the bus service please visit:

[www.GoRideshare.org](http://www.GoRideshare.org)

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# TRANSPORTATION

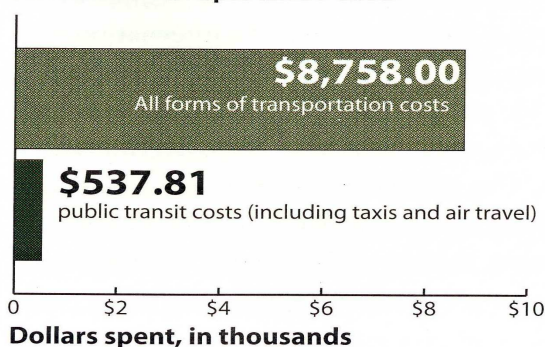
## Passenger Rail for St. Joseph and Bangor

Southwest Michigan is home to the Pere Marquette (PM) Amtrack rail service, a 176-mile line that connects Chicago to Grand Rapids making stops in New Buffalo, St. Joseph, Bangor and Holland. According to Amtrak, the PM's ridership has increased 6.6 percent with ticket revenues increasing 11.6 percent during 2000-2008.

In 1996, a nine-state rail initiative was formed called the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI). The goal of the initiative was to develop a passenger rail system that offers business and leisure travelers shorter travel times, additional train frequencies, and connections between urban centers and smaller communities.

In 1998, the State of Michigan communicated with the WesTrain Collaborative, a group that had been formed to promote train travel in Western Michigan, about the potential plan for high-speed rail in Michigan. The WesTrain group gave its approval of the MWRRI Plan, which included seven phases, of which Phase 5 would be realigning the PM route from Holland to Grand Rapids to Kalamazoo. This would take service away from the St. Joseph and Bangor stops. The realignment would link the cities of Holland, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo while bypassing the cities of Bangor and St. Joseph.

### Household Transportation Costs



In 2007, a statistically average household spent more on transportation than it did on clothing, health care, and entertainment combined (\$7,432). The average outlay for new cars and trucks was \$1,571.80.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007

Graphic Courtesy of Planning Magazine, November 2009

## Asset Management Reports Available Online!

The 2010 asset management reports are now available to all southwest Michigan communities. Asset management is a program started by the Michigan Department of Transportation in 2003 to assess and track the conditions of roads in Michigan. Since 2003, we have been working to rate the condition of our federal-aid eligible roads. See reports by county at

[www.swmpc.org/asset\\_mgmt.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/asset_mgmt.asp)

Feeder bus service to Niles would be available to those who would like to ride the train from St. Joseph to Detroit or Chicago. In May 2009, members of the Twin Cities Area Transportation Study committees wrote to MDOT Director, Kirk Steudle, requesting that the Bangor and St. Joseph stops be added back to the PM line. MDOT has recently agreed to reevaluate the MWRRP (Mid West Regional Rail Plan) and to reopen the study of alternatives for the PM. It is not known at what time this alternatives study will be conducted.

MDOT is currently updating its State Rail Plan for passenger and freight rail, and seeking public comments for this plan through Spring 2011. Comments can be submitted by visiting

[www.michigan.gov/mirailplan](http://www.michigan.gov/mirailplan).

## 2011 Graham Woodhouse Nominations

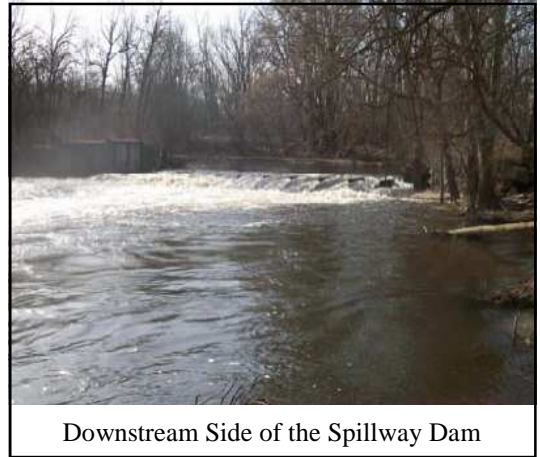
The SWMPC is seeking nominations for the 2011 Graham Woodhouse award due December 1, 2010. The award is presented annually for projects that exemplify intergovernmental cooperation by local units of government. To download the application visit:

[www.swmpc.org/board.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/board.asp)

## ENVIRONMENT & MORE

### Watervliet Dams Slated for Removal on the Paw Paw River

The St. Joseph River and its tributaries are fragmented by at least 190 dams and an unknown number of culverts. The Watervliet Spillway and Diversion Dams are the only barriers on the Paw Paw River mainstem from Lake Michigan to the Village of Paw Paw. The Paw Paw River is a major tributary to the St. Joseph River Watershed which covers 4,685 square miles in Michigan and Indiana. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) considers the Paw Paw River one of the highest quality freshwater systems in the Great Lakes Basin. The Watervliet dams restrict movement of fish and aquatic species to over 220 miles of river and streams. Berrien County with help from its partners, City of Watervliet, Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc., National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Michigan Department of Natural Resources & Environment (MDNRE), SWMPC, TNC, Two Rivers Coalition and Friends of the St. Joe River Association have secured federal and state grants to fund the removal of the Watervliet Dams.



Downstream Side of the Spillway Dam

#### Watervliet Dams Removal Benefits

1. *Improved Safety:* The dams are a safety hazard for recreational users (those fishing, canoeing and kayaking). According to MDNRE Dam Safety Unit this is the only dam in the St. Joseph River Watershed known to have structural problems.
2. *Improved Ecological System and Fishery:* The dams fragment the river habitat by preventing migration of most aquatic animals (native fish, mussels). With removal, the Paw Paw River will see increased fish diversity and improved water quality. Gravel and cobble upstream from the dams may become re-exposed which will provide new colonization habitat for fish. The improved and connected habitat will result in more fishing and recreational opportunities.
3. *Improved Economic Opportunities:* Recreation on the Paw Paw River is an activity that will bring people and money to the communities along it. This project will enhance the economic opportunities related to the river.

The Berrien County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2006) and the Paw Paw River Watershed Management Plan (2008) recommend the removal of the Watervliet Dams. The SWMPC was the lead author on both of these plans. MDNRE and USFWS ranked the Watervliet Dams Removal project as their priority project in Michigan.

### Volunteer Center of Southwest Michigan Holds SWMPC Board Training



At the July SWMPC Board Meeting, Doris Higgins, Executive Director of the Volunteer Center of Southwest Michigan (left) led a Board training session with SWMPC staff and SWMPC Board members. The training session was held at the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians' Tribal Council Lodge located in Dowagiac, MI.



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## Calendar of Events 2010

[www.swmpc.org/calendar.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/calendar.asp)

### October

**18<sup>th</sup>** 9:30 a.m. TwinCATS  
**26<sup>th</sup>** 1:30 p.m. NATS  
**27<sup>th</sup>** 9:00 a.m. Connecting the Dots  
 Trails Workshop (Lawrence)  
**28<sup>th</sup>** 1:00 p.m. Friends of St. Joe  
 River Watershed (Three Rivers)

### November

**2<sup>nd</sup>** Election Day  
**11<sup>th</sup>** SWMPC office closed  
**15<sup>th</sup>** 9:30 a.m. TwinCATS  
**16<sup>th</sup>** 1:30 p.m. NATS  
**18<sup>th</sup>** 1:00 p.m. Friends of the St. Joe  
 River Watershed (Three Rivers)  
**25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>** SWMPC office closed

### December

**1<sup>st</sup>** Graham Woodhouse  
 nominations due  
**20<sup>th</sup>** 9:30 a.m. TwinCATS  
**28<sup>th</sup>** 1:30 p.m. NATS  
**23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>** SWMPC office closed  
**31<sup>st</sup>** SWMPC office closes at noon

**NATS**=meets in Niles  
**TwinCATS**=meets in Benton Harbor

### 2010 Board Meeting Schedule

#### **SWMPC Full Commission Meeting**

*Location: Southwestern Michigan College  
 Mathews Room West-Dowagiac, MI  
 October 19, 2010 at 9:30 a.m.*

#### **SWMPC Administrative Committee Meeting**

*Location: Vincent Place Conference Room-Benton Harbor, MI  
 December 21, 2010 at 9:30 a.m.*