

## **Public Transit**

### **COORDINATION EFFORTS: Background**

In August 2005, President Bush signed into law the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), legislation that provides funding for highway and transit programs. SAFETEA-LU includes new planning requirements for the Federal Transit Administration's (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 Southwest Michigan Planning Commission 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 State 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:

**Table 5.0 Berrien County Census Data**

<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%	12.3%
People with Disabilities	30,301	20%	18.7%
People with incomes below poverty level	20,202	13%	10.5%

*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 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 County 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 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.
- Berrien County has over a 31.5 square mile area with a population of over 37,000 people that is not served by public transit.

### **Transit/Multi Modal Infrastructure in Berrien County**

Berrien County's current infrastructure has limited coordination between modes of transportation within the county which could allow a person to connect to a destination beyond Berrien County.

Currently Berrien County has passenger rail service in the communities of St. Joseph and Niles. Both of these communities have daily passenger service on Amtrak. Connectivity for outbound and inbound rail passengers is limited to the service hours of public transit. An example of the lack of connectivity between modes can be found with the St. Joseph Amtrak stops. The morning train inbound to Chicago stops during the service hours of Berrien Bus. The evening Amtrak stop outbound to Grand Rapids arrives after Berrien Bus service hours end.

Greyhound service is available in Benton Harbor but again connectivity upon arrival for inbound passengers, or to reach the station for outbound passengers is limited to the service hours of public transit.

### **Public Transit system**

Berrien County is served by four public transit agencies including; a Countywide agency that services the Census designated rural area of the County and three dial-a-ride services that service the Census designated small urban areas of the County. All of the services provide demand response service and two provide limited fixed route services.

Each of the providers has a distinct service area and there are no official signed or publicized transfer points for passengers in the county. Approximately 31.5 square miles in the census designated St. Joseph Benton Harbor small urbanized receives no service from any public transit agency in the County. This area of no service is home to a population of over 37,000 people, hundreds of entry-level employment opportunities and medical services.

In 2007 the four individually funded agencies had a combined budget of over 3.5 million dollars and combined inventory of 56 vehicles with a total seating capacity for 883 passengers. Of those 883 seats 116 were available to accommodate wheelchairs. The four agencies provided service to 381,390 passengers in 2007. Of those passengers,

14% were seniors while 34% were disabled. The average cost per one way trip was \$9.00. (Transit map in appendix I)

**Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority (TCATA)**

The Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority is located in downtown Benton Harbor and has been in operation since 1974. TCATA is designated recipient of the 5307 funds for the Census designated St. Joseph Benton Harbor urbanized area. Currently TCATA services approximately half of the urbanized area (14 square miles) which encompasses the city of Benton Harbor, the city of St. Joseph and Benton Harbor Township. The remainder (35.5 square miles) of the St. Joseph Benton Harbor census designated urban area receives no service from any public transit provider in the county. TCATA receives local support from a millage collected by the City of Benton Harbor. Because of this millage the fare structure provides reduced fares for Benton Harbor residents. TCATA provides an average of 400 trips per day primarily by demand response/immediate service and one fixed route. There are twenty-three vehicles in the fleet that have passenger capacity ranging from 8 to 19; all of them are lift-equipped for the disabled. Vehicles and dispatch are located in downtown Benton Harbor. Hours of operation are from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday-Friday and 8:00am-4:00pm on Saturday.

**Berrien County Bus (Berrien Bus)**

Berrien County Public Transportation is a transit service 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 County Public Transportation is the designated recipient of 5311 funds for the Census designated rural area of Berrien County. The service provided consists of demand-response service to all Census designated rural areas within Berrien County. Berrien County Public Transportation coordinates with the three other public transit services in Berrien County by providing service to their respective facilities to transfer passengers.

There are twenty-four vehicles in the fleet that have 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. Hours of operation are from 5:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday-Friday and for special purposes on weekends and evenings. Trips must be reserved 24 hours in advance.