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THE INITIATOR

SEPTEMBER 2009

Shaping Allegan County Transportation

How well is Allegan County meeting the transportation needs of its citizens? That's the focus of an ongoing study led by Disability Network/Lakeshore. Funded by a grant from MDOT, the study aims to increase awareness and support of Allegan County Transportation (ACT) and develop a five-year strategic plan for the county's transit needs.

In Phase 1 of the study, which concluded last January, community stakeholder organizations, businesses, and elected officials were surveyed to determine unmet transportation needs and opportunities. The Transportation Workgroup, comprised of 14 community members, also held focus groups with local stakeholders to gather feedback, discuss needs in their areas, and identify people with unmet transit needs.

Dean Kapenga, an Allegan County Board of Commissioner who serves on the workgroup, says, "We discovered a wide array of people whose needs are unmet, including seniors, people with disabilities, and people looking for work. If we could expand the system, we could service many people who have trouble getting to work, buying groceries, going to the hospital, or getting the social services they need."

During Phase 2, completed in April, 240 ACT riders were surveyed to learn rider demographics, travel patterns, unmet needs, and satisfaction with current transit service. Over 490 prospective riders were also surveyed to determine reasons for not using the services, changes to the service that would increase their likelihood of using public transit, and their perceptions and awareness of ACT services.

Currently in Phase 3, the workgroup has completed the first draft of ACT's five-year strategic plan. This plan outlines the critical findings of the research and provides goals and recommendations for addressing those issues. This September, the workgroup will host several community input sessions throughout Allegan County to gather feedback on the plan. Kathryn Gillen, Public Policy Specialist at Disability Network/Lakeshore and project manager for the study, explains, "The workgroup has created five transit expansion options. Now we're gathering community input to see which of these options citizens will support." Following the input sessions, the workgroup will modify the plan accordingly.

The final phase of the study will run from October through December 2009. Via phone surveys, registered voters will be asked about their awareness and perceptions of ACT services as well as their support for potential millage rates. Their feedback will be incorporated into a final plan, which will then be presented to the Allegan County Board of Commissioners for approval.

"Disability Network has been a real asset to us," says Dan Wedge, Director of ACT. "They know this community and have a good understanding of how public transportation should function here. They've also done a great job of keeping us on task and putting the data in a professional format people can read and understand. We're always looking for ways to better serve our community, and this study will help us do that."



"It's very helpful to get feedback from the community, to learn what they value in public transit and how they envision a transit system meeting their needs."
— Dan Wedge

Key findings of ACT Study

Of all respondents surveyed in Phase 1:

- 34.8% noted they use volunteers to help meet unmet transit needs
- Work and medical appointments were the number one traveled destinations
- 52.4% stated the inability to get people the services they need is how transit needs affected their organization or business
- 83.6% said they either strongly or somewhat strongly supported increased transit services
- 92.1% cited the need for regional transportation in the next three years as very or somewhat important

To learn more about the ACT study, contact Kathryn Gillen at kathryn@dnlakeshore.org.

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Electronic Newsletter

Did you know that Disability Network/Lakeshore has an electronic newsletter that includes: more info, pictures, video, links and upcoming events? Visit www.dnlakeshore.org to register!

Join Us on the Web

Disability Network/Lakeshore is now on Facebook and Linked-In.

Volunteers

We rely on our wonderful volunteers for so much of what we accomplish. To find an opportunity that fits your skills, interests and schedule, please contact Annie Hilchen at 616 396 5326.

Donations

As a non-profit organization, we welcome gifts of all sizes. You may make a tax-deductible contribution by mailing a check (payable to Disability Network/Lakeshore) to:

Disability Network/Lakeshore
426 Century Lane
Holland, MI 49423
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426 Century Lane
Holland, Michigan 49423
t 616 396 5326 800 656 5245
f 616 396 3220
www.dnlakeshore.org

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Who we are

Most people equate disability with limitations. It's our job to change the perceptions and realities that prevent people with disabilities from sharing in the community. Every year, we provide training, mentoring, and referrals to help people with disabilities and their families live productive lives. Because disability touches so many people, we also work on a larger scale, helping governments and businesses make changes that benefit not just those with disabilities, but everyone in the community.