



## Study poses transportation questions

Posted by Cathy Runyon November 24, 2008 16:53PM

Eastern Ottawa County is a great place to live and work - if you can drive. For those who cannot drive, getting to work, stores, or appointments can be a challenge.

A study now in progress seeks to identify transportation needs in the community. Interviewers want to hear from the individuals affected.

When Sue Busscher, with Hudsonville Public Schools, became aware that some employees were having a problem getting to work, she called Hudsonville Mayor Don VanDoeselaar.

"There was a small group that wanted to look at how to solve some transportation issues for some who were disabled and not able to drive and could not get to work, appointments, and that sort of thing," VanDoeselaar said. A committee was assembled and began an initial survey of providers and those who were being impacted by lack of transportation.

That committee, working through the Disability Network, applied to the Michigan Department of Transportation for funding to do a study on the needs in the community. They received a grant of \$99,000.

About that time another larger regional study was begun to try to determine whether it was feasible to connect major population centers with public buses serving Grand Valley State University and downtown Grand Rapids. Information gathered in the Disability Network study could be helpful to the regional study, VanDoeselaar said.

The Disability Network committee is now in the process of interviewing people who have been identified as needing transportation, but more contacts are needed, according to Kathryn Gillen, publicity specialist with the Lakeshore Disability Network.

The study is focused on the townships of Allendale, Blendon, Jamestown, and Georgetown, and the city of Hudsonville.

"We are missing people from Jamestown and Blendon township especially," said Gillen. "We are hoping to get names of people who live there for one-on-one interviews." She said the group hopes to complete the study by the end of the year.

Pamela Haverdink, director of the Georgetown Senior Center, is on the committee. She said Georgetown has the only transit network available at this time. The study may help determine whether it should be expanded, or whether a public system should be added for the area. Two seniors who use the Georgetown buses have been interviewed for the study, along with a driver.

The study seeks to determine transportation needs by asking people how they currently get to work, school, medical appointments, social events, and other activities in the region, and whether they have been disappointed in existing transit options.

Trained volunteers will conduct preliminary interviews with individuals from the community, including those who provide transportation for someone else, and representatives of businesses.

Some sample questions are: How are you personally affected by the lack of public transportation in the community? How often is your schedule changed in order to accommodate the person for whom you provide transportation? What changes in your transportation situation would make life easier for you or your family? What would be some ideal solutions to improve the current transportation needs of the community?

The study will include input from agencies and organizations by asking whether the lack of transportation services for members affected the organization, whether the organization provides transportation for members and how many use it, and what effect public transportation might have.

Volunteer interviewers will note the race, gender, and approximate age of the respondent, and evaluate the responses as to persuasiveness. Some respondents also will be asked if they would like to have their stories videotaped for later use in a presentation that can be used to communicate the transportation needs of the community to elected officials.

Anyone interested in being interviewed should contact Kathryn Gillen at the Disability Network, 396-5326.

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