

The Allegan County News



CONTACT US:
Kaechele Publications, Inc.
233 Frowbridge St.
Allegan, MI 49010
Phone: (269) 673-5514
Fax: (269) 673-5515

The Commercial Record

The Plainwell & Otsego

Union Enterprise

Group aims to define, help solve transport needs in county

By Daniel Pepper
Staff Writer

Wednesday, September 24, 2008 4:26 PM EDT

As a way to emphasize the county's needs for public transportation, the United Way ceremony was set next to the construction site of the new transportation facility.

A Holland-area non-profit hopes to find out what those transportation needs are.

Kathryn Gillen of Disability Network Lakeshore spoke to the Allegan County Board of Commissioners at its Thursday, Sept. 11, meeting.

"We will be conducting a study on the county with regard to unmet needs," Gillen said. "Plus, we're looking to develop a five-year strategic plan and increase support for public transit in the county."

The Disability Network is a disability advocacy group, but it is branching out to deal with transportation for the general public.

"Transport is focused on all residents, not just those with disabilities," Gillen said.

The first step, she said, will be to determine the public's transportation needs.

"We're looking at the unmet needs and then coming up with the best strategic plan for Allegan County," she said.

The effort, Gillen said, will include trying to figure out the practicalities of improving transportation.

As the study continues, the network will organize community input meetings and conduct resident surveys.

The plan is to form a group of 10 to 15 people and work with businesses, non-profits, churches, organizations and residents to develop plans.

The group plans to break the county into five regions and make sure it gets input from each one.

The study is funded by a grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation and will run from September 2008 to 2010.

Allegan County Transportation director Dan Wedge said his department had been involved in originally seeking the grant, which was funded in its second year.

Wedge said the Disability Network had a proven track record, doing similar studies of the City of Holland's bus system and for Ottawa County.

"They were very successful in getting consumer-driven information, not just what this agency feels and the other agency feels," Wedge said.

Having an outside agency conduct the survey, rather than his department, was an advantage, Wedge said.

"Well, first of all I'm sort of a one-man department, so I need to be up on the day-to-day operations," he said. "I think having someone from the outside gives a more unbiased perspective.

Anyone wishing to offer input or ask questions should contact Gillen at (616) 396-5326 or kathryn@dnlakeshore.org.

Dan Pepper can be reached at dpepper@allegannews.com or at (269) 673-5534 or (269) 685-5985.