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THE INITIATOR

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Ready to Roll: Study Identifies Transportation Opportunities

The future of public transportation in the lakeshore area just took another leap forward. On March 18, over 40 community members and organizations gathered to discuss the region's top transportation needs.

The meeting was the next step in a multi-phase study. Genevieve Risner, Director of Public Policy at Disability Network Lakeshore, says, "Our goal was to uncover information, giving community organizations and transit groups the tools they need to move forward. I think we've succeeded in delivering that information."

During the first part of the project, surveys of 1,500 taxpayers and people with unmet needs identified areas for improvement. Based on those findings, two local organizations have applied for Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) New Freedom funds to address the top needs: work and medical transportation.

Linda LeFebre, MAX Coordinator for Macatawa Area Express Transportation Authority, says her group has applied for an MDOT New Freedom grant to create a Night Owl service and more accessible bus stops. "We'd like to extend our services to midnight," she says. "That would enable people who need transportation to take jobs on any shift. Right now, they're restricted to jobs that match the bus schedule."

LeFebre has also applied for grant money to make area bus stops more accessible. "A ramp would help people with disabilities, mothers with strollers and seniors with carts," she says.

Pioneer Resources is hoping to address medical transportation needs. Tiffany Bowman, Director of Transportation at Pioneer Resources, says, "We applied for a New Freedom grant to expand transportation options. We're hoping to extend services outside the current 10-mile radius, so a person from Allendale can go to Holland Hospital or take part in other community activities. We also want to provide services beyond ADA requirements, such as bed-to-bed personal assistance."

Pioneer has applied for additional funds to support ongoing communication among transit providers. "In our focus groups, they said it was the first time they'd talked together, and they found it really valuable," says Bowman.

Risner adds, "I'm really excited about these projects because they're designed to meet the needs we identified." Pending MDOT approval, both projects could begin as early as next year.

Attendees of the meeting prioritized:

- Expansion and Connection: Providing transportation connections to Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties.
- Education: Teaching riders, the public, and community organizations how and why to use existing systems.
- Coordination: Seeking new partnerships among transit providers, businesses, and other groups to meet current and future transit needs.

Now that research is complete, the community is invited to start brainstorming solutions.



"I'm really excited about these projects because they're designed to meet the needs we identified."
—Genevieve Risner

By the Numbers

Among those surveyed with unmet needs:

- The top destinations are work (39%) and medical appointments (38%).
- 48% said they needed to reach places in Ottawa County.
- 56% said they could pay \$1/one-way ride or less.
- 29% need personal assistance while traveling.
- 61% want public transportation that runs where and when needed.

Among taxpayers:

- 74% said they would support a .4 mill homeowner's tax to pay for improved transportation.

Among community organizations:

- 100% said the need for regional transportation will be important in the next three years.

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:
Kim Romero
616 396 5326

Donations

As a non-profit organization, we welcome gifts of all sizes. You may make a tax-deductible contribution by calling 616 396 5326 or mailing a check (payable to Disability Network/Lakeshore) to:
Disability Network/Lakeshore
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Join Us
Your gifts of time and resources can help us change everything for the better.



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Who we are

Most people equate disability with limitations. But 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.