

Transportation Stakeholder Online Survey
April 2007

Completed by 81 respondents, representing church or faith-based organizations (21), governments (11), senior or health care organizations (8), small (8) and large (4) employers, education (6), transit providers (5), organizations serving disabled/low income (4) and temporary employment agencies (3). Survey completed to represent transit needs of: individuals with low income (39.5%), seniors (38.3%), employees (37.0%), clients/consumers (33.3%), individuals with physical disabilities (33.3%), taxpayers (29.6%), individuals with developmental disabilities (27.2%), members/ parishioners (27.2%), individuals with severe mental illness (24.7%), and students (16.0%).

Organizations meeting people's transit needs by MAX (32.1%) and volunteers (27.2%). One-third (33.3%) do not provide or pay for transportation.

In fiscal year 2006, total spent reported by respondents = \$4,538,694 (remove largest two, then total is \$2,338,694). Total rides reported = 2,294,021 (remove largest two, then total is 294,021).

In past twelve months, # of people who had UNMET transportation needs = 4,890.

Affect on organization of unmet transit needs: inability to provided needed services (44.4%), decreased participation in programs (39.5%), lost jobs (18.5%), inability to employ (14.8%), decreased productivity (13.6%), and decreased pool of employees (12.3%).

Why are needs unmet: bus does not cover needed geography (48.1%), too costly to own and maintain vehicle (46.9%), no family/friends willing to drive (44.4%), don't have a license (40.7%), bus has insufficient hours (30.9%) and days (23.5%).

One-fifth of respondents indicated the people they work with would pay \$1 or less (19.2%) and almost one-fourth indicated \$1-\$2 (23.3%). Over 40% didn't know (43.8%).

When asked where people needed to go but couldn't reach due to lack of transportation, work was the destination with the most responses, followed by medical appointments. Other destinations with a number of responses included court-related, grocery stores, retail stores and schools

Seasonal trends – one-third of respondents (34.2%) noticed seasonal trends when transit needs are greatest. Three-fourths of those (76.9%) indicated that winter is when transit needs are greatest.

Of the seven cities/townships, rank top three areas with greatest unmet transit needs: The three with the most 1, 2, 3 rankings = Holland Township (27), Zeeland Township (27) and Park Township (22). The most "1" rankings: Holland Township (14), Holland City (11).

Rank factors according to which would have greatest impact on improving unmet needs:
Expand transit services to new areas – Ranked #1 by 59.3%.

Rank factors – greatest impact in existing public transit service area:
Expand geographic area covered – Ranked #1 by 48.1%, top three by 58 people
Increase hours of service – Ranked #1 by 25.9%, top three by 51 people

In the next three years, do you believe the need for Regional Transit will be:
Very Important – 69.7% - Somewhat Important – 30.3% - Not at all Important – 0.0%

Table 1

Please Indicate What Type Your Organization Is:		
	Frequency	Percent
Church or faith-based organization	21	25.9%
Government	11	13.6
Senior or Health Care Organization	8	9.9
Small Employer	8	9.9
Education	6	7.4
Transit Provider	5	6.2
Organization serving disabled/ low income	4	4.9
Large Employer	4	4.9
Temporary Employment Agency	3	3.7
Chamber of Commerce	1	1.2
Tourism– related	1	1.2
Court– related	1	1.2
Other (specify)	8	9.9
Total	81	100.0

Other:

- Human Services
- Information and Referral
- Meat Process Plant
- Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Non-profit
- Organization serving primarily Hispanics with various needs
- Outdoor Education Facility
- Private Environmental Group - Not an agency
- Traffic facilitator
- Transportation/ Logistics

Table 2

How Many Full-time Employees Does Your Company Have?		
	Frequency	Percent
< 50	2	16.7%
51-76	4	33.3
130 - 250	5	41.7
2300	1	8.3
Total	12	100.0

Table3

How Many Part-time Employees Does Your Company Have?		
	Frequency	Percent
0	1	9.1%
1 - 4	5	45.4
9 - 12	4	36.3
50	1	9.1
Total	11	100.0

Table 4

What Municipalities in Macatawa Area Does Organization Serve?		
	Frequency	Percent
Fillmore Township	37	45.7%
Holland City	59	72.8
Holland Township	58	71.6
Laketown Township	39	48.1
Park Township	48	59.3
Zeeland City	57	70.4
Zeeland Township	52	64.2

Table 5

Organization Completing Survey to Represent Transit Needs of:		
	Frequency	Percent
Students	13	16.0%
Employees	30	37.0
Clients/Consumers	27	33.3
Members/Parishioners	22	27.2
Taxpayers	24	29.6
Seniors	31	38.3
Individuals with low income	32	39.5
Individuals with severe mental illness	20	24.7
Individuals with developmental disabilities	22	27.2
Individuals with physical disabilities	27	33.3
Others	6	7.4

Others:

- All
- County residents
- DV Survivors
- Individuals who primary language is not English
- Serves ALL residents of Ottawa County
- The entire community
- Tourists
- Truck Routing in Townships
- Volunteers
- We are a training agency for bus drivers
- Work First Participants

Table 6

How Is Organization Meeting Peoples Transportation Needs?		
	Frequency	Percent
Macatawa Area Express (MAX)	26	32.1%
Volunteers	22	27.2
Pioneer Resources	9	11.1
In-house transit system	7	8.6
Taxis	6	7.4
Saugatuck/ Douglas Interurban Transit	4	4.9
Allegan County Transportation (ACT)	3	3.7
Voucher program	2	2.5
Does not provide/ pay for transportation	27	33.3
Other (specify)	13	16.0

Other Responses:

- Church Bus/Vans (2)
- Development of non-motorized Trails
- Gas cards for those outside of church, Families Victorious Ministry gives rides to their participants
- Gas cards, bus passes
- Gas vouchers & car purchase program
- Group home providers, other contract provider
- However, we occasionally offer rides on an emergency basis
- If not eligible for transportation assistance, client needs to find their own way in.
- Occasionally providing a car
- Our Home Health Aides provided limited transportation
- Providing college student transportation
- We are able to offer transportation through volunteers but on a very limited basis
- We are more involved in the planning/funding aspects
- We do provide transportation for employees
- We have a telephone in our lobby that connects directly to MAX - We've had sister offices donate prepaid Max punch cards that we can give to those in need.
- We provide referrals to agencies that offer transportation.
- We transport only in case of emergency
- We use a handicapped van to pick up seniors for a meal and for church

Table 7

In Fiscal Year 2006, How Much Did Your Organization Spend on Providing Transportation for People		
	Frequency	Percent
Donation*/Minimal/\$50/\$100/\$250/\$400/\$500/\$500**	11	13.6%
\$1,800—\$2,000	2	2.5
\$4,800—\$6,000	2	2.5
\$45,000—\$94,000	5	6.2
\$100,000	2	2.5
\$300,000—\$900,000	3	3.7
\$1,000,000—\$1,200,000	2	2.5
0	38	46.9
?/Unknown	5	6.2
N/A / Did not answer question	11	13.6
Total	81	100.0

Donation* - by volunteers

500** - Drivers are free so just the cost of gas and drug tests and CDL licenses

Table 8

In Fiscal Year 2006, How Many Rides Did Your Organization Provide?		
	Frequency	Percent
10 or less	6	7.4%
20 - 52	5	6.2
100 - 200	3	3.7
360 - 500	3	3.7
900 - 1,000	3	3.7
6,000 - 9,000	2	2.5
46,000 - 100,000	4	4.9
400,000	1	1.2
1,600,000	1	1.2
0	28	34.6
?/Unknown/Many	9	11.1
N/A / Did not answer question	16	19.8
Total	81	100.0

Table 9

How Do Unmet Transportation Needs Affect Your Organization?		
	Frequency	Percent
Inability to provide needed services	36	44.4%
Decreased participation in programs	32	39.5
Lost jobs	15	18.5
Inability to employ	12	14.8
Decreased productivity	11	13.6
Decreased pool of employees	10	12.3
Does not affect organization	9	11.1
Lost revenue	7	8.6
Decreased pool of volunteers	6	7.4
Don't Know	11	13.6
Other (specify)	8	9.9

Other:

- Clients are unable to make it to appointments, personal, medical, or other. They cannot interview for jobs or lose their jobs due to lack of transportation.
- DHS can provide transportation services for a maximum of 60 to Work First and/or employment for WF eligible individuals
- Educational training
- Employees who do not have a driver's license will carpool with employees who do. Occasionally we have had employees miss work because the employee they were carpooling with was taking a vacation or sick day and they had no way to get to work.
- Inability for loved ones to visit patients as they may desire
- Our agency keeps track of all unmet transportation requests.
- Poor perceptions of service delivery
- Primarily, our concern is for employees with temporary physical issues that affect their ability to drive a car. Occasionally, we also lose an employee due to lack of transportation.
- Primary focus is to plan for a multi-modal transportation system to serve entire area.
- The facility is open dawn until dusk with 4.5 miles of walking/trails with sections for the disabled. The trails are only as accessed as though able to have their own transportation. The north side of the property borders 143rd and is easily serviceable.
- Unmet transportation needs mean the church is not responding to the needs of the community adequately--taking care of neighbor.
- Visitors have a difficult time getting around due to limited transit service and unreliable taxi service. Boaters have no way to get downtown. People who arrive by train have difficulty visiting the area attractions or going to the beach.

Table 10

In the Past Twelve Months, How Many People Has Your Organization Worked With Who Have Unmet Transportation Needs?		
	Frequency	Percent
1 - 5	9	11.1%
6 - 10	4	4.9
11 - 15	5	6.2
20 - 25	5	6.2
35 - 50	4	4.9
60 - 100	9	11.1
120 - 150	2	2.5
1000	2	2.5
2500	1	1.2
20%	1	1.2
90%	1	1.2
0	10	12.3
Unknown / ? / Many	12	14.8
N/A / Did not answer	16	19.8
Total	81	100.0

Table 11

Of the People You Work With Who Have Unmet Transit Needs, Why Are Their Needs Unmet?		
	Frequency	Percent
Bus does not cover needed geography	39	48.1%
Too costly to own and maintain transportation	38	46.9
No family/friends willing to drive	36	44.4
Don't have a license	33	40.7
Bus has insufficient hours	25	30.9
Bus has insufficient days	19	23.5
Gas prices too high	16	19.8
Don't have vehicle with wheelchair lift	12	14.8
Don't know how to use public transit	7	8.6
Unsafe/ bad experience on bus	2	2.5
Don't know	11	13.6
Other (specify)	13	16.0

Other:

- Availability of volunteers
- Cannot afford to take bus
- Current on-demand system does not work for Dr. Appointments because of uncertain pick-up time.
- Don't have a vehicle with hand controls
- Don't know how to drive and it's too expensive to pay for classes
- Has not surfaced as significant problem
- Lack of local funding for public transit.
- Mostly seniors who no longer drive or are hesitant to drive in bad weather.
- One employee doesn't have a driver's license and one doesn't have a car.
- Participants with Dementia unsafe without an attendant on Public Transportation. Need door to door service with personalized attendant care. Only have 1-2 attendants and have 68 people using our transportation
- Physically unable to drive
- Students without transportation would not be able to attend classes at the Thompson M-TEC
- Suspended driver's license
- The need for transportation is immediate. Cannot wait for bus or agency's requirement of signing up 3 days in advance.
- They [students] don't have a car on campus
- They expect a transit system similar to larger cities.
- Unable to drive due to a physical disability
- Unpaid fines to get drivers license reinstated
- We need Sunday and special evening events transportation available

Table 13

In the Past Year, Were There Any Destinations in West Michigan That People Needed to Go But Could Not Reach Due to Lack of Transit?		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	31	38.3%
No	8	9.9
Don't Know	34	42.0
Total	73	100.0

Table 14

What is the Maximum Amount People You Work With Would Pay For One(1) One-way Ride to Travel in the Macatawa Area?		
	Frequency	Percent
\$1.00 or less	14	19.2%
\$1.01 - \$2.00	17	23.3
\$2.01 - \$3.00	5	6.8
\$3.01 - \$4.00	2	2.7
\$4.01 - \$5.00	2	2.7
\$5.01 - \$6.00	1	1.4
Don't Know	32	43.8
Total	73	100.0

Table 15

Does Your Organization Notice Any Seasonal Trends When Transit Needs Are Greatest?		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	26	34.2%
No	27	35.5
Don't Know	23	30.3
Total	76	100.0

Table 16

In What Season Do People You Work With Have the Greatest Unmet Transportation Needs?		
	Frequency N = 26	Percent
Winter	20	76.9%
Summer	7	26.9
Spring	3	11.5
Fall	2	7.7

Table 17

Rank the Top Three Areas With the Greatest Unmet Transit Needs				
	1 Greatest Need	2	3	Total
Holland Township	14/ 17.3%	8/ 9.9%	5/ 6.2%	27
Zeeland Township	6/ 7.4	12/ 14.8	9/ 11.1	27
Park Township	4/ 4.9	11/ 13.6	7/ 8.6	22
Fillmore Township	6/7.4	6/7.4	6/7.4	18
Holland City	11/ 13.6	2/ 2.5	3/ 3.7	16
Zeeland City	6/ 7.4	6/ 7.4	5/ 6.2	17
Laketown Township	2/ 2.5	5/ 6.2	6/ 7.4	13
Other (specify)	3/ 3.7	-	-	3

Other:

- All areas out of MAX or Harbor Transit areas
- Countywide transportation
- Fennville
- Grand Haven, Grand Haven Township, Spring Lake, Spring Lake Township, West Olive, Nunica
- Students come to M-TEC from all these areas and none stand out as having the greatest unmet need

Don't Know—24—29.6%

N = 81. Not everyone answered the questions, so totals do not reach 100.0%

Table 18

Rank Factors According to Which Would Have the Greatest Impact on Improving People's Unmet Transit Needs				
	1 Greatest Impact	2	3	Total
Expanding transit services to new areas	48/59.3%	7/8.6%	3/3.7%	58
Improving transit services in existing areas	16/19.8	28/34.6	7/8.6	51
Consolidating transit services	4/4.9	14/17.3	25/30.9	43
Other (specify)	2/2.5	4/4.9	-	6

Don't Know - 9/11.1%

N = 81. Not everyone answered the questions, so totals do not reach 100.0%

Other:

- Cost
- Door to door transportation
- Expanding hours to cover other work shifts
- Getting some type of funding for existing companies
- Having all information in Spanish as well - this may already be the case - I'm not sure
- Longer service hours and Sunday service.
- People coming to FV would not be helped by other transportation

Table 19

Rank the Top Three Factors That Would Have the Greatest Impact on Meeting Transportation Needs in the Existing Public Transit Service Area				
	1 Greatest Impact	2	3	Total
Expanding geographic area covered	39/ 48.1%	12/ 14.8%	7/ 8.6%	58
Increasing hours of service	21/ 25.9	19/ 23.5	11/ 13.6	51
Increasing days of service	6/ 7.4	13/ 16.0	14/ 17.3	33
Lowering cost of service	5/ 6.2	8/ 9.9	4/ 4.9	17
Adding amenities (benches, shelters, etc.)	6/ 7.4	6/ 7.4	2/ 2.5	14
Increasing accessibility of vehicles	6/ 7.4	3/ 3.7	4/ 4.9	13
Improving customer service	3/ 3.7	1/ 1.2	7/ 8.6	11
Other (specify)	1/ 1.2	1/ 1.2	12/ 14.8	14

Other:

- Door to door service
- More routes
- To my knowledge the Thompson M-TEC is not served by any public transportation system

Don't Know - 11/13.6%

N = 81. Not everyone answered the questions, so totals do not reach 100.0%

Table 20

In the Next Three (3) Years, Do You Believe the Need for Regional Transit Will Be:		
	Frequency	Percent
Very important	53	69.7%
Somewhat important	23	30.3
Not at all important	0	0.0
Total	76	100.0

Table 12

Of the People You work With, What Days and Times Do People Need Transit When It's Not Available?						
	6:00am-9:59am	10:00am-1:59pm	2:00pm-5:59pm	6:00pm-9:59pm	10:00pm-1:59am	2:00am-5:59am
Monday	23 /28.4%	7 /8.6%	17 /21.0%	14 /17.3%	9 /11.1%	9 /11.1%
Tuesday	23 /28.4	10 /12.3	18 /22.2	13 /16.0	9 /11.1	9 /11.1
Wednesday	23 /28.4	8 /9.9	18 /22.2	14 /17.3	10 /12.3	9 /11.1
Thursday	23 /28.4	8 /9.9	17 /21.0	13 /16.0	10 /12.3	9 /11.1
Friday	23 /28.4	7/8.6	17/21.0	14/17.3	9 /11.1	9 /11.1
Saturday	17/21.0	8 /9.9	8 /9.9	9 /11.1	5 /6.2	7/8.6
Sunday	18 /22.2	16 /19.8	12/14.8	7/8.6	4 /4.9	4 /4.9

Don't Know—30 / 37.0%

Transit Survey Open-Ended Comments

12. If you answered “Yes” to question #11, please specify what places people needed to go but could not reach by listing the exact names of destinations.

Work

- Allendale to Herman Miller Fillmore Township to Falcon Woods Daycare Mervenne Beverage Steak and Shake Laketown Township to Kandu Industries Meijer on 16th Street Disability Network/Lakeshore
- Any employment in Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa Counties. Our Pioneer contract is for only Ottawa County.
- From home on West Lakewood to work on north 136th
- Herman Miller, Turner Corlette
- Hudsonville, areas of Zeeland
- I am occasionally called by people who want to work in Holland, but can't get there on a daily basis.
- Job Connections 120 Clover Holland
- Jobs on Northside of Holland
- Many Employers in Allegan County.
- Max Transit expanded to meet more employees the ability to arrive at work and another issue is to provide the ability to conserve gas cost to and from their work place and personal needs met.
- Michigan Wood Fibers, Great Lakes Finishing, EMH Manufacturing, Formed Solutions, Jarzembowski Builders, Castle Park Association
- No mass transit system in all of the Holland/Park township areas
- South 40th Street
- TLC -- a warehouse business across from Zeeland hospital. Laketown -- to connect to work

School

- Allegan Public School
- M-Tec Pioneer is only for work and job club. Max doesn't go to M-Tec. Stepping Stones in Muskegon. West Michigan CDL in Kent County
- Same
- Sheldon Pines. No local public schools would help one child to & from.
- Thompson M-TEC
- West Ottawa schools

Grocery Store

- Family Fare and/or Meijer
- Family Fare in Zeeland from with in the city of Zeeland
- Family Fare in Zeeland Township
- Grocery Stores on Northside of Holland
- Washington Street Family Fare

- Work First only funds employment related rides. If client lives outside of Harbor Transit or Max, it is difficult to get to stores.
- YES

Retail store

- Bridgewater Square - stores Downtown Zeeland
- Downtown
- Malls
- Same as grocery store
- There are necessary items people need which they cannot purchase in our small area - Saugatuck Township. Customers would like the option of going to Holland when they need to, not just the two days a week we now provide service.
- YES

Medical appointments

- Allegan General Hospital, Grand Rapids area, Battle Creek VA Hosp, Holland Hosp and Holland rehab
- Gambro Dialysis Clinic Zeeland/ Grand Rapids Dialysis/ Muskegon
- Grand Rapids
- Holland Hospital
- In Kalamazoo
- Physicians and Hospitals
- Prime Care on Riley
- Same
- See the response for retail stores. People cannot always schedule medical appointments on the days, and within the exact hours, we provide Holland service.
- We have had to turn customers away for dialysis apts. due to us not being able to pay for a new lift & local bus routes don't operate during the hours they need transportation.
- YES
- Zeeland Community Hospital downtown Grand Rapids

Social Service Agency

- Allegan County DFS
- Max transports for DHS but only for people who live on the route. Otherwise the person needs to come up with their transportation.
- Social Security Office
- YES

Church

- Beaverdam Reformed Church - some older members live in Zeeland and don't have consistent rides available
- Church on both sides of Holland
- First Reformed Church of Holland
- Going to church services - especially at night
- Harderwyk Ministries, to church and classes

- No one has said they could not get to church
- Ridge Point- but I think now they have expanded their services and we are on the route.
- Second Reformed Church
- Sunday morning service at our church Calvary Reformed Church, 995 E. 8th St., Holland MI 49423
- Sunday morning when our bus is maxed out.
- YES

Court

- Fillmore Complex Probation and Court appointments
- Fillmore St. in West Olive Courthouse in Grand Haven Courthouse in Grand Rapids
- In Kalamazoo
- Ottawa Circuit Court - Grand Haven
- The client needs to get a ride or risk penalties. We had someone that we met with at FOC that rode his bike to the court house in Grand Haven from Allegan County. A lot of our non-custodial parents resort to bikes.
- YES

Social/recreational

- Evergreen Commons
- The Piper, Downtown Saugatuck
- This has not been listed as a need with us
- YES

Other

- Often find individuals cannot travel between Grand Haven and Holland for appointments at Department of Human Services, Community Action Agency, or doctors. There is also no public transportation in Jenison, Hudsonville area.
- Ottawa County Jail - West Olive
- Our funds only take people to and from work, work related and training activities. The funds do not support the other activities. The lack of countywide transportation limits their access to opportunities.
- People from Allegan County, Allendale, Hudsonville, and Grandville needed to come to Evergreen Commons Adult Day Health Program and returned to residence in the afternoon
- Pick up Angel Food off Riley on the north side of Holland
- Schools or jobs outside of Holland Zeeland
- Vocational training in Grand Rapids
- Zeeland Township Board meeting

20. Regional Destinations: Greatest need for transit in the next 3 years:

- More need for regional approach as well - Grand Rapids, Grand Haven/Muskegon, Grandville, etc.

Please share an anonymous story about someone you know with unmet transit needs, if you have one.

- This is not a story of one individual but many. We are a school program for individuals with disabilities. Our students are from the ages of 18-26. The goal of our program is to teach our students life time independence both within their home, community, and work. We teach our students to use the MAX and we use it extensively to teach community awareness and use. Our goal is that our students leave our program with a job. Since none of our students drive they must depend on other transportation such as MAX in order to get to work. At the present time we service students from the greater Holland and Zeeland area, as well as some Allegan county residents. Our difficulty with transportation is that in order to have a job there must be transportation. At the present time there are no transportation options except for expensive taxi service for our students that live outside of the present MAX designated areas. This greatly hinders their ability to secure a job and become more independent and productive m
- I know many individuals who struggle to get drivers license, as many have come from other countries and the process to obtain a license is very long and expensive. Once they do have one, it is very expensive to have a car and purchase gas. However, many work various shifts and transportation using the buses is not practical, as they have to wait for long periods of time or cannot get to certain destinations. In the winter, this is not very convenient.
- A single, middle aged woman unable to drive because of epilepsy is a regular bus rider. Church members also provide transportation for her. she depends on MAX to get to grocery shopping as well as a volunteer job at Holland Hospital.
- Winter weather puts an older, somewhat disabled person at a great disadvantage. She can drive when the weather is good and is proud of her efforts to maintain some independence. Though we provide valet service at church, she will insist on walking slowly with her walker from the designated parking spots. She will hardly, however, venture out of the house when the weather is cold and/or stormy.
- There is someone I know that is in a facility like an assisted living home who would like to come to church. Volunteers pick her up when they can. I don't know if she would take a bus or not if it came out that far - north of town.
- We had a homeless man living with us who was working temporary jobs until he found steady employment. The bus was hard to schedule. Demanded a lot of personal information in a humiliating way. And then was over 40 minutes late 3 of the 5 days he needed a ride. He lost the job opportunity, and transportation contributed to the loss. Personally, I worked hard for the village to pass at the last election, and I was very frustrated. I was his primary transportation for 90% of his needs, and I was hoping the bus could be a partner in helping him. I hope we can improve.
- An elderly women who can no longer drive but is still in very good physical health has to depend on a ride for everything and often, often she cannot have her needs met or be able to be in the company of people because she cannot get to a location/event. She is from a big city and would gladly use public transportation were it available to her here in Zeeland.
- No individual story - just general need for transportation to and from court - Grand Haven and Jail - West Olive.

- We receive many phone calls asking for transportation daily but are unable to provide rides for individuals needing it to go to work. Because we rely on volunteers we can only take rides for court/doctor appointments. Unfortunately people need transportation for more than this.
- A senior citizen, resident of northern Park Township, who is interested in attending Evergreen Commons, was told that bus service - both MAX and Evergreen is not available to her.
- Client received employment but was not able to maintain it due to unreliable transportation from cab company. Another client was not able to take employment because they would have to travel too far. Our Work First clients need to find employment close to home if they don't have their own transportation. They can't commute from Hudsonville to Holland for a job on our current transportation system.
- We have had students on occasion that are unable to pay for their own vehicles or who have unreliable transportation. They are forced to find other students attending to try to catch rides. There is no public transportation to the Thompson M-TEC. People who have been laid off or are in transition after domestic problems are often very vulnerable financially. One accident or major car repair can render them unable to pay for insurance or repairs. Students with unreliable transportation have a very difficult time completing their program of study. There are not alternatives available for these students to take affordable public transportation.
- No transit service to the township's only major apartment complex
- An employee attempting to gain or arrive at a employer without expansion of a regional transit system and the consolidation of all transit- system within the regional area to provide more efficiency of transit within the SW region of Ottawa County. Too many transit system- s not coordinated to meet need, So move to consolidation to improve cost factors to all in the County.
- One man needed transportation to get to dialysis 3 days a week. He is on a fixed income and is in a wheel chair. The local bus transit does not run late enough for him to get home again. I have worked out a way for him to get the medical treatment he needs for \$60.00 a week. However the "competition" charged this senior \$40.00 per day plus \$0.37 per mile!! How can any one get the medical help they need when they have to pay so much.
- Joe comes to Evergreen Commons Adult Day Health program 5 days per week. He has dementia - Alzheimer's and would stand up every time the bus stops thinking it is his home. If he were left off at the curb by his house he would wander off into the neighborhood. He requires the driver to escort him into the house where his wife who is disabled is waiting for him.
- Patient requiring special medical services provided only in the Grand Rapids area
- Grandmother - who does not drive was outside of local transit operations, unable to meet personal transit needs.
- We have several patients who can't keep their appointments for a number of reasons - some do not understand how public transportation works, some find the bus comes to infrequently, others don't have access because of where they live. Of course, cost is an issue.
- I see many parents seeking transportation for students going to private or charter schools going unmet. A growing senior population is placing add demands on public transit.

- Zeeland Senior no longer drives due to mild confusion - still has valid license. Children go to Florida in winter. Senior experiences health issue requiring numerous Dr. visits and is forced to find other means of transportation. Current on-demand system is OK for delivery to Dr. appointment, but depending on wait and number of tests, return pick-up is a stab in the dark. If the Dr.'s running late, bus is gone and mildly confused senior and Dr. office staff left determining Plan B. Senior is tempted to start driving again.
- A young man with a cognitive disability living in a mobile home community in Zeeland Township was having difficulty getting to work in Fillmore Township. He took Pioneer Resources to work everyday. When Pioneer had to increase their fares, his limited income made it extremely difficult for him to afford the cost increase. After looking at his income in extreme detail to help him budget, even with very modest expenses, the only items from his budget that could be reduced were heat and food. When the young man doesn't work, he relies on his mom to transport him. His mom has expressed concern about what will happen to the young man when she is no longer around. She worries that he will be stranded and isolated as he'll never be able to have a license or drive a car.

Additional comments or questions:

- I was unable to answer how much we spend on MAX transport yearly. As stated we are a school program that runs for nine months out of the year. At the present time we have approximately 35 students at our location. We use the MAX extensively and schedule about 30-35 reserve MAX runs per week with many more student riding the fixed routes each week. All of our students have a disability pass and are able to ride the MAX at half price. We have also been very please that MAX has permitted staff to ride free of charge during times we are training students to make use of the transportation system. We appreciate MAX very much and are very thankful they provide services to our community.
- There are probably people out there who need this service that we are just not aware of.
- Most transportation needs come through Families Victorious. This organization helps with addictions. They transport people to Wednesday morning and Thursday evening meetings. They also help with court dates and taking them to places after they get out of jail.
- I am a big believer in public transportation not only to provide a needed service to those with disabilities but to all persons who no longer drive or cannot afford to get a car. Also, I believe that we are to be good stewards of our environment and we need to pay much more attention to that!
- It is my hope that we will be able to take a serious look at the unmet transit needs of the larger West Michigan area, based on the large number of commuters between Muskegon, GR, and Holland.
- For a small company I was surprised by the distance a number of our employees travel to work. We have employees from Grand Haven, West Olive, Grand Junction, Fennville, and Bloomingdale.
- Would it be a solution to have churches "contract" for a MAX bus for use on Sundays and on special evening events?
- As the population ages I assume that there will be an increased demand for transportation just to be able to travel to necessary destinations. Regions with strong transportation infrastructures will attract people looking for mobility in later years.
- 99% plus people in our municipality have their own vehicles
- Multiple agencies fund and/or provide funds for transportation. It would be interesting to examine all the funding sources and map out the opportunities and limitations of each of the funding sources.
- There is no more important item than a consolidated transit system to meet the needs of our Citizens in Ottawa County and to provide more hours of availability and to provide for cost efficiency.
- we use the Max buses for occasional transportation needs of people in our school district. The service area has expanded but is still very limited on the north side of town.
- Our small business operates 24 hours a day 7 days a week including holidays. We lack funding for a wheel chair lift. If there is any way to obtain some sort of funding or assistance with this matter it would be great. Rosebud taxi has had to turn away quite a few possible new accounts due to no lift. We are in this business not to get rich but to help our community the best way possible. Its hard to tell people no.
- We would love to partner with the MAX transit but I would need one or two designated buses with one of our attendants on each bus to exclusively pick up our participants every AM - 7:30 - 9:30 and every PM- 2:00 - 4:30 Monday through Friday.

- I think bus routes and schedules should be more readily available -perhaps delivered to public facilities.
- Transportation is a critical need for many people with disabilities. In the existing service area, many people with disabilities need to access jobs in the evenings and outside of the service area as well as to medical facilities in other counties. In addition, we work with people who live in townships without transit who, primarily, call for help with rides to jobs and medical appointments. Other than volunteer transportation programs, which usually do not end up meeting people's needs for various reasons, and friends/family - there are not any options for people to access these critical destinations in our community.

Seven Focus Groups Overview
Summary of Findings
May 2007

When asked to compare the summary findings from the stakeholder online survey, stakeholder focus groups compared the data to their unmet transit needs of their clients/customers. What does the transit need look like?

The need for regional transportation, throughout Ottawa County and to surrounding counties, remained a theme in every focus group.

Most stakeholders were very knowledgeable about the history and current issues of transit in this community. All of the organizations that attended focus groups said that transportation was an issue for people with whom they work. Work continued to be the issue with the most discussion, followed by medical appointments. Other areas with a number of comments included tourism, court related appointments, human services and programs, church and school activities.

With regard to transportation to and from work, stakeholders believed transportation geography needs to be expanded regionally. Employees need to get into and out of the Macatawa Area to access employment. People are turning away job opportunities and losing existing employment because they can't get to employment destinations. Some reasons for inability of employees to get to jobs include: public transit doesn't take them where they need to go, they may not have a license or a dependable automobile, and gas prices and taxi rides are too expensive. Most stakeholders encourage people to use public transit because of the affordability factor when possible. However, even when public transit serves an employees origin and destination, often, it doesn't run early or late enough to accommodate shift workers, it's inconvenient due to the 1 hour pick-up window and traveling in winter, and it's inconsistent (people have lost jobs or received tardies at work due to late drop offs). Public transit doesn't accommodate same day requests for work for many temporary employees. For all sizes of employers and many of the other stakeholders, the greatest need for transit is among temporary, lower paid, shift employees.

With regard to medical appointments, stakeholders believe transportation geography needs to be expanded regionally. People in the Macatawa Area need access to medical facilities in Grand Rapids, Muskegon, and Kalamazoo citing kidney dialysis and specialist appointments. In addition to regional access, stakeholders believe we need better medical transportation for people within the Macatawa Area, especially for seniors and people with disabilities. Major issues affecting these populations include: uneasiness when riding the bus because of a fear of getting lost or riding with strangers, inability to predict when appointments will end and not knowing what to do if their appointment runs late or finishes early, need for high levels of personal assistance (helping people out of their homes onto the bus, carrying medical equipment such as oxygen tank or dialysis machines and bags, and assisting people with dementia to ensure they get from their origins to their destinations safely).

For court related appointments, stakeholders believe that transportation geography needs to be expanded within Ottawa County. Many people who are moving through the court system need to reach the courthouse in Grand Haven or need rides from Grand Haven or Fillmore corrections

complex to other parts of Ottawa County once they are released from jail or prison. Many people moving through the court system do not have a license or cannot afford to reinstate their license (driver responsibility fee cited). Because people recently released from jail or prisons have not been working, often, they do not have any money; even a \$1 bus pass is not affordable.

In addition, stakeholders believe there is a need for transit expansion within the Macatawa Area, throughout Ottawa County and, especially, to Allegan County to provide access to day programs/services for many different populations. Stakeholders believe transit expansion in the Macatawa Area will also provide more tourism opportunities for boaters and other visitors to our community who might like to go from marina areas to downtown or shopping areas. Stakeholders also mentioned a need for Sunday service to provide access to churches in the Macatawa Area. There is also a need for transportation for before and after school activities for school children.

Stakeholder focus groups identified issues affecting the ability to meet the identified needs. What issues exist?

Across the board, transit providers report turning people away because of capacity issues, service area constraints, inability to serve the type of request or demographic due to the requirements of funding sources, or inability of vehicles and/or staff to provide the type/level of service required.

Funding is a problem. State and federal funding for transportation continues to decrease for public transit systems. Private transit providers do not have access to public funds to expand their service or purchase accessible vehicles to meet requests for certain special needs service.

Annually, millions of dollars come into the Macatawa Area for transportation. Yet, each funding source provides for a different type of transit or specifies a different population that can be served with those dollars. The result is that many different organizations provide different types of transportation and other organizations are trying to fill gaps with volunteer programs, voucher systems, or organization's budgetary allocations for transit.

Gas prices continue to increase. Increasing gas prices are impacting transit providers' budgets. While no major reduction in services has happened yet, organizations worry about how gas prices will impact volunteer drivers, especially since most programs do not reimburse drivers for fuel consumption.

The number of people living in the community and the number of people needing transportation continues to increase.

Stakeholder focus groups compared what changes or improvements they believe would address transit needs with stakeholder online survey results. What changes should be made?

Many stakeholders would like to see public transportation expand within Ottawa County and to surrounding Counties such as Muskegon, Grand Rapids, Allegan, and Kalamazoo.

Stakeholders believe there needs to be an affordable, on-call type transit service to fill the gaps where public transit is not ideal. Some cases would include temporary employees who get a last minute, same day assignment or are asked by their employer to stay late to work overtime, passengers who need to drop children off at daycare before traveling to work, court and medical appointments that could take an unspecified amount of time, and passengers who require a heightened level of assistance. When describing what this transportation might look like, many stakeholders recommended vans or shuttles.

Conduct more marketing and education about the existing types of transportation so stakeholders and potential riders have a thorough understanding of how systems can be used. Make sure this information is easy to find, easy to read, and in multiple language formats.

Research successful transit systems in other communities to look for innovative ways to meet our community's transit needs. Use of technology, swipe cards instead of cash, was suggested as a way to improve ease of pay for both providers and users of public transit.

Research funding coming into Ottawa County and how it's being spent to find the most cost effective and efficient way to consolidate resources and meet people's transit needs.

Look for partnership opportunities where organizations and/or businesses could work together, collaboration, to provide transportation.

Coordinate/reinstate a carpooling system or informal transportation network.

Provide transit vouchers that organizations could distribute to people to use.

How might transit improvements be paid for? What existing and new resources might be available?

Overall, most stakeholders did not know how these improvements could be paid for. However, some ideas included: apply for JARC funds, implement local fundraising efforts to pay for vouchers, create organizational partnerships where businesses and organizations purchase their own vans in partnership, consolidate resources, encourage employer participation, local government through increased local taxes, increase user costs/fees, look for other grant resources.

What is the best way to communicate with people with unmet transit needs?

Overwhelmingly, stakeholders felt that one-to-one, on-site surveys would be the best way to communicate with the people they work with. Some other suggestions included: attaching brief surveys to check stubs (employers), sharing of databases (if organization already had a list of people with transit needs), conducting on-board passenger surveys (transit providers), individual onsite surveys, holding group interviews onsite or additional focus groups. For reaching employees with transit needs, it would be best to work with temporary employers.

How would stakeholders like to be informed about the information gathered through this process?

Most stakeholders would like to be informed through email. Information posted on a website would also be helpful. Few stakeholders were interested in attending a follow-up meeting though it was suggested that any follow up meeting be focused on a useful outcome i.e. a strategic plan.

Stakeholders would like a tool that they could use to share the findings of this project with elected officials, funders, and other stakeholders.

Focus Group One
Small and Temporary Employers
5 group members

“How does this information compare with the unmet transit needs of your employees/customers?”

Small and temporary employers agreed that the summary data was comparable to what they see as stakeholders. Transit concerns for small and temporary employers were distance from location at stops, lack of education about public transit for employees, language barriers, and confusing information, maps, and website. Issues of liability and personal safety were raised.

I think it's very comparable. A lot of people don't know where we are. I don't think a lot of our employees would understand how to get transit to and from work. Most of our employees are Asian or Hispanic. Language is definitely a barrier. Also, maps and charts on the internet are confusing and difficult to understand.

I've driven with both hands on the steering wheel because we don't know who's sitting next to you (personal safety).

I see some real transit gaps for people with special needs and elderly. People don't have internet access, don't have maps, and don't know who to call. Where there are individuals with a caregiver, their caregiver has to figure this out. Getting to stops is difficult. I look at an elderly parent who can't walk two blocks to get to a stop. There are a lot of specialized needs including childcare - a need to get kids to daycare or school - then get to work so it's very difficult and complicated.

“What transportation changes or improvements would allow you/your organization to provide better service to your customers and employees? What transit improvements would help your business?”

Small and temporary employers reported that their employees would use public transit if it were affordable, stopped at their location of employment, and reliable, meaning on time or at the times needed for shift work.

Most of my employees would use MAX. We have a lot of times that we find a job for someone, but people can't use MAX because the bus doesn't start running early enough or doesn't go to the location where the job is.

We have a lot of people who work second shift. The hours are not workable for our second shift workers.

I think MAX right now is the only really affordable transportation. Our number one challenge is getting people to work. A lot of people will take a cab to work. Cabs are too expensive for low income people.

Members of the chamber of commerce participated in this focus group and discussed improving transit for tourists, especially boaters, to get to shopping areas and grocery stores.

I really think we have a lot of opportunity for boaters and campers who want to get into town on both sides of the lake. The MAX beach run is a great start. Those are dollars (coming from tourists) to be spent in our community.

Equally important is getting hotel people out to the parks. There should be stops at the marinas. They need signage and need to ensure the bus is there when it says it will be.

“How might these improvements be paid for? What resources are available?”

Focus group members talked about combining resources for efficiency, shuttle vans, car pooling, business support, and employer contributions.

The hotels should be challenged to shuttle people from downtown or downtown to the next town so people can move around without having to rely on public transit. Hotels could join together to fund a van to run between each of them.

I can't think of anyone who's going to want to pay for it. I wish our employers would see a value in it and want to fund it. We have some generous businesses in the community so that's a possibility.

I think a lot of employers would be willing to chip in if it got people to work on a regular basis.

There are carpooling sites already in town. It's not talked about a lot now. Gas prices will affect transit again. Gas prices will make personal transit cost prohibitive. At one time carpool lots were promoted big time.

Sometimes I think if liability issues could be taken care of... this huge pool of baby boomers are going to retire and (might) be willing to volunteer. Maybe transit could be one way of volunteering.

“What is the best way to reach the people you work with who have unmet transit needs?”

Could you drop off surveys (on-site)?

Maybe we could put a survey in check stubs.

“How would you like to be informed about the information gathered through this process?”

We need more education about what we already have.

Next step should be a spring board for our next steps.

**Focus Group Two
Transit providers
10 group members**

“How does this information compare with the unmet transit needs of your customers?”

Transit providers identified getting people to work and medical appointments as the top two concerns. They identified issues they have as transit providers meeting the need. These issues included time and schedule of public transit, limits with fixed stops vs. availability of door-to-door service, and geographic limitations of current geographic area of service. Transit providers agreed there is a need for regional transit. Transit providers expressed concerns about meeting the transit needs of special needs and elderly customers.

From the perspective of impoverished families that we work with, the need we see is for rides to work. A lot of people don't have licenses or have bad driving records.

I see that as a need for regional transit service – to get to the airport at reasonable process at top quality service.

The biggest concern I hear is punctuality of getting to work because we work with a lot of people who need to get to work.

I hear from seniors about the need to get to medical appointments.

Most of the calls that come into our office are to employment or medical appointments. For medical calls, we get a lot of calls for trips to Grand Rapids or Muskegon.

Our issues are mostly people who live outside of our service area.

We turn down requests constantly during certain times

Another huge issue is no shows. If people who don't show would take into consideration the other riders – they're taking up space that other people could use

We get calls constantly from people who need to get to the courthouse in Ottawa County.

“What transportation changes or improvements would allow you/your organization to better serve your customers?”

Transit providers agreed regional transit is needed. They also explored ideas for increased resources and the need for resources for transporting people with medical or physical disabilities.

I feel there needs to be improvements around transportation information so that clients could have all the information about resources that are available to them.

What we hear from our customers is that there is no regional transit – especially among senior citizens.

Funding, funding, and funding, we're at maximum capacity. We could serve more passengers if we had more funding. It would be helpful if we had a countywide authority to help coordinate services.

Funding to help with specialized vehicles; it's too costly. As far as those people who need the wheelchair service multiple times per week, Medicare and Medicaid doesn't pay for it. It drains all their resources.

It's important that people who need transportation communicate that to their legislators.

“How might these changes or improvements be paid for? What resources are available?”

Transit providers suggested grants from local community foundations, local revenue increases, raising fees for service, more use of community volunteers, and better agency consolidation and coordination.

The community has to realize the difference between state and federal funds. There are state and federal funds available but there has to be a local match in order to even apply for the money. We have to raise local funds. That would help local transit so we can apply for state and federal money. The bigger issue is how to bring more money into the state. Every program that receives state funds is affected.

Consolidating and coordinating programs. When each organization provides their transit, it's more costly. Agencies only take care of their clients, whereas as a public transit provider we can serve everyone.

Medicare and Medicaid changes would play a big role. The only other thing I've proposed is to raise the rate so that we can do it efficiently and just work with the people who can afford the service.

I think there is one thing from a public standpoint – the term limitation places a very severe role in what happens on our level. With the continuous change of legislators, the only thing they can do is come up with more hoops for people to jump through.

“What is the best way to reach the people you work with who have unmet transit needs?”

Transit providers recommended that we conduct surveys at the Vet's club, churches, volunteer-based organizations, senior centers and contact Ottawa County 211. A point-in-time study was suggested.

“How would you like to be informed about the information gathered through this process?”

Bullet point format that highlights information gathered that we could share with legislators – a tool to take information to others in the community.

Focus Group Three
Courts
2 group members

“How does this information compare with the unmet transit needs of your customers?”

Court employees discussed the unmet transit needs of their clients based on geographic locations for the court/corrections system given main sites are in Holland, Grand Haven, and on Fillmore in West Olive. They identified issues of liability in transporting clients, personal safety issues, high costs for transportation. Also, the ability of their clients to get and keep a job based on unmet transit needs.

I'd say it's pretty close to what's going on right now. Our biggest issue is that our court is in Grand Haven but our office is in Holland. We have volunteers who are running a van up there every other week.

One of the number one issues is jobs. One of the problems that people have is that they don't have a driver's license and they can't afford to get their license back. The Secretary of State implemented a driver responsibility fee on top of reinstatement fees.

They don't have transit to look for a job or they lose their job. We work with the Work First program and they do provide some services to people who have a job, they help people find a job and provide transit for 90 days during their orientation. They provide limited transportation on a temporary basis.

We have about 650 people who report for probation at the Holland office. About 20 percent need transportation.

“What transportation changes or improvements would allow you/your organization to better serve your customers?”

Court employees recommended expansion out of the general area, between Holland and Grand Haven and between Holland and Fillmore and expansion of hours. Affordable transportation and expanded hours of service were discussed.

Affordability is an issue and transit times. Even though \$1 or \$2 seems like a small amount, especially in situations where people have been in prison for a while, even \$1 or \$2 is high.

“How might these changes or improvements be paid for? What resources are available?”

Expansion of the services bonds or county tax proposal. As far as looking for bus tickets, I think there are businesses that might be willing to donate.

We need a volunteer organization to help.

Maybe we should involve people already working at that company to help people get a ride who need it (transportation network).

I wish I knew someone who could help them fix their car – someone to refer them to or an agency that could loan cars out until they could get them fixed. To help them get their license back – help people take out a loan and let them repay it very slowly so they can get back on their feet.

What is the best way to reach the people you work with who have unmet transit needs?

Court employees recommended on-site interviews.

How would you like to be informed about the information gathered through this process?

Email the final report, website is good too.

Focus Group Four
Senior and Health Care Organizations
8 group members

“How does this information compare with the unmet transit needs of your customers?”

Senior and health care organizations were very descriptive about the unmet transit needs of their customers/patients. They described the limits of public transit including lack of specialized vehicles and need for specialized training for staff. Also mentioned were the limits of time/hours of public transit, geographic limitations and the unmet need for regional transit.

I have patients who can't make it to their dialysis run because on Saturday mornings there isn't a MAX bus that can get them to dialysis. They have to arrange rides with volunteers. I have a patient who can't ride the MAX bus because she wouldn't get off at a MAX stop. That's an issue, some patients have dementia or who are hooked up to a dialysis machine and haven't eaten...

My biggest issues is that we have seniors who need transit in the winter – seniors don't want to drive in winter or when friends or family leave to go snow birding in the winter – they don't have transit anymore. I see a huge need for Sunday transportation.

From my perspective, I see people who should not be driving but who do drive because there is no other option. There is no Sunday route. It's really difficult to use MAX for a medical appointment because of the uncertainty of the appointment. They don't want to be late. They are used to being on time – very on time. It's not so much the dropping off as it's the picking up time.

I deal with a special needs population, they need more than curbside pick up – they need door-to-door. What we're talking about are people with dementia who can't ride a bus without an attendant. The other group is people who are wheelchair dependent – they may not have a caregiver at home who can wheel them out of the house – so they need an attendant who can do that.

I deal primarily with the homebound population. They need assistance – there are time and liability factors – in helping people in and out of cars.

If there was an integrated system – more community wide – for events – maybe people would become more used to using it. Just having transit doesn't mean people will use it. People are afraid to use it.

“What transportation changes or improvements would allow you/your organization to better serve your customers?”

Senior and health care organizations suggested that improvements start with education to increase participation and eliminate stigma associated with public transit. They also suggested expansion of the geographic area, increased days and hours of service, and removal of language barriers.

More education is needed about how to use the bus system. Cost is always an issue. We should get rid of the stigma.

I agree with changing the public perception – making mass transit more commonplace here. I'm looking at it from a slightly different perspective – gas prices – if people embrace mass transit they will use it more and save money. I also see the benefits of using MAX for people with special needs. Geography – yes maybe people can get to the hospital by bus but they may be living somewhere without access to the bus. I like the idea of long distance transportation. A lot of our staff live in Grand Rapids. People often talk about how much they're spending on driving, especially with our part-time employees.

I think we need to expand the geographic area and expand the Saturday transportation and also along with the language, with Hispanics, we also have an Asian population. Language is a barrier.

Maybe we need a champion in each community like a senior who uses transit. Maybe another thing that could be discussed is training for the drivers about dealing with seniors – what to do and what to expect. If I was coming at this from a driver – I might be concerned about my responsibility and what's expected from me. We've had one resident who's had good experiences with MAX and has shared that with everyone else.

One thing is to focus on volume; we need to appeal to the general public. Busing is for everybody. It's not just for people without transit.

I think it would be important for us to explore successful models of what other communities are doing. Midland seems to have a very successful model of transportation, so does Ann Arbor.

“How might these changes or improvements be paid for? What resources are available?”

Senior and health care organizations suggested that providers secure more grant funding, tax increases, and increased rider fees.

There are some grants, and I know that's getting tighter and tighter. The case could be made that there's a greater community benefit to more transit and to ask people to pay for that through taxes.

I would say for my residents, they would be willing to pay for their rides. They would pay more than \$1. I don't think they're looking for a handout. Maybe that's part of the education – if you ride on this system it's this much versus this much. If we had a reliable transit system that seniors felt comfortable using, at least my residents will be comfortable using it. From my understanding they're just looking for something they can use comfortably and reliably.

The more people you can appeal to, the more people you can meet the need. I like the idea of appealing to diverse people (age, diversity). It might be just another niche of marketing.

I go right to the strategic alliance – integrating those three areas. Partnerships are important and exploring other models to see where people get their funding, knowing that state and federal grants will go down to the cities.

“What is the best way to reach the people you work with who have unmet transit needs?”

Senior and health providers suggested on-site interviews.

I think having someone coming to our lobby would work well. Give them a free bus pass. Many of our people come from the mission or are right out of prison.

I like the idea of talking to the current ridership. If they don't have an unmet need, they probably know someone who does.

“How would you like to be informed about the information gathered through this process?”

I would like something that could go to direct care workers.

I would like to know the information and the strategic plan. The strategic plan – what are the steps that we are going to do is what I'm interested in. I am willing to participate as long as we can see results.

We need a second layer of feedback. People on the front lines might be able to substantiate the feedback. A strategic plan is essential.

**Focus Group Five
Large Employers
3 group members**

“How does this information compare with the unmet transit needs of your employees?”

Large employers reported that most full-time employees have their own transportation and that when gas prices go up they see more carpooling among employees. Large employers had more concerns about part-time and temporary employees who receive lower salaries and experience more transportation issues with getting to work with high gas prices. Temporary employees are more likely to use public transit and then employers are concerned with the reliability and access issues. They also reported some concerns with the availability of public transit to transport employees who experience medical or on-the-job accidents. With “no-fault” absence policies, employers are less likely to know the reasons their employees miss work but they know anecdotally that transportation is a contributing factor.

Most employees have transportation. What jumps out to me is that we have an attendance policy that they can miss 5 days in a year. What are the reasons that people are missing work? Transportation can be in those reasons for missing work. It's a no-fault attendance policy.

For employees that do not have a license, they have to rely on people to drive them or they rely on MAX. We have a stop right in front of our facility that is used quite often. 97% of our employees come from outside the area. The other issue is that we employ a temporary workforce, so that's a group that we can tell when we have more temps than normal that the MAX stops more often than normal (high costs of own transportation).

Legal issues are reasons why employees don't have a license. Temporary medical issues prevent people from being able to drive. Shift workers it is more of an issue – depending on the shift – 2nd or 3rd shift.

Our shifts run 6 am to 6 pm. They can get to the 6 pm. But when people need to get to 6 am, they need another way to get to work.

The more that gas goes up, the more people will carpool. Our onsite temporary manager wanted to know that with increasing gas prices, what could they do – a worker was going to quit and draw unemployment because she couldn't afford to make the drive from Muskegon to work.

“What transportation changes or improvements would allow you/your organization to better serve your customers?”

One issue identified strongly by this group is the lack of public transit at hours to accommodate shift workers and to expand geographic regional transit.

Better hours to accommodate shift schedules.

We need an on-call type of transportation because you don't need a big bus to pick people up (employees need is immediate).

Sometimes we have to call an ambulance to have people brought to emergency room (no taxis available) and that's a huge cost to the employer.

We need transit coverage for a wider area.

“How might these changes or improvements be paid for? What resources are available?”

When you look at what people say they're willing to pay, that's not very much. I tell employees that if their car doesn't work, and you get an unexcused absence and lose your job, then is \$5 for a ride unreasonable? (Increase costs - \$ come out of employees' pockets.)

There might be time that as an employer we might be willing or encouraged to pay for transit when an employee is injured to get that person back to work, like a voucher system.

“What is the best way to reach the people you work with who have unmet transit needs?”

Employers recommended contact through temporary employers and Michigan Works office.

“How would you like to be informed about the information gathered through this process?”

Email.

Focus Group Six
Human Service Organizations
5 group members

“How does this information compare with the unmet transit needs of your customers and clients?”

Human service organizations were concerned about unmet transit needs for their clients. They work with people with disabilities and people who are poor/unemployed who struggle with transportation issues for getting to work, agency appointments, and medical appointments. Human service providers discussed the geographic limitations, time constraints, and funding issues affecting transit accessibility and availability.

There are some real issues with capacity at this time to get people with developmental disabilities to get people to day services. We are creatively finding ways to get people to jobs in outlying Zeeland areas. We cannot provide transit ourselves.

I would say at first glance in terms of the survey results it is very representative of the people we serve. It's unrealistic to think that people we work with will live, work and shop all within MAX boundaries. In order to get people to work, they need access to a broader geographic region. Getting local units of government to do it (regional planning) is a huge roadblock.

Our people from Coopersville who have to get into Holland for Work First; they need daycare. It would be nice if everyone could have their own car, but we run into an issue a lot about horrendous fines that they owe between \$1,000 and \$2,000 to get their licenses.

We have so many people that have to go to dialysis and that's in Zeeland, Grand Rapids, and Muskegon. If you have to go to dialysis you have to go 3 times per week and you have to go during crappy hours. We look for volunteer drivers. Between churches and family and friends, people manage to get there and back. .

We work with Pine Creek Schools, and we have transit issues. If our kids want to stay after school they don't have a way to get home. If you want your child involved in after-school activities, you have to have a way to get them home.

There seem to be peak times where you can't get anything scheduled in. If you want anything booked before 8:30, you might as well forget about it. The transit system is not available to do rides. We have to slip in before major runs in mornings. You have to wait until like 10:30. Just because you request on-demand service does not mean you receive on-demand. You have to pick another time that's close to that. You would want to request an hour ahead of where you want to be. You could be left sitting out in the cold because they couldn't pick you up. If we have anyone who has a daycare drop off, that's one ride. Then you have to wait for another ride. It could be an hour or an hour and a half later. I can't schedule anyone who has a child to take a route bus. (The bus needs to have wait time for parents to come back out, and riders have to pay again for the second ride).

It comes down to – you tell people don't take a job (because they can't get there). We're trying to get people off public assistance and help them be self sufficient, but we're limiting people's

options because we can't meet their transportation needs. We try to explain to people that we can only provide temporary transit, in 60 days they need to provide their own transit.

It's gotten worse because our resources and our ability to provide and pay for transportation have gone away. We used to have a huge pot of money from MDOT to pay for transit. They've started to reinstate those funds but they weren't reinstated in a helpful manner. It was poor planning. Now we have \$70,000 coming into Ottawa County to pay for transit, but

Lakeshore Vineyard hands out free food but we put flyers up and tell our clients, are you taking advantage of these? People will say that they are unable to get there. These are places that give our free turkeys, etc. some people can't even take advantage of resources in our communities because of transportation.

For 90 percent of our people it's unrealistic for people to own a car. Given the time they work and place they work, transportation is limited.

“What transportation changes or improvements would allow you/your organization to better serve your customers?”

Human service providers suggested changes or improvements to transit that include regional planning, better coordination of service, collaboration with other organizations, a transit hub for outlying areas, and improved accountability for transit resources coming into the area from state sources.

I don't know that we're ever going to find a system that meets all of our needs, yet be funded in a way that would keep it running. The extension into these townships would be very helpful. The folks I work with on transit will never be able to use the routed system. They will always need to door-to-door system.

We know where our clients live and where they need to get to. The unknown is when they get the job. It would be nice to overlap clients. If we plotted out where our clients live and they're in certain housing complexes, and they are in the MAX route, but it would be nice to see a comprehensive map of where people need to go.

(How can we work together?) We were just 3 agencies that aligned. If MAX doesn't meet our needs, then we have to purchase transit services from someone else. When schools are closed, Pioneer shuts down transit which meant people couldn't make it to work.

If we could call and say we have 10 more riders, maybe they could send additional buses because it's more cost effective than putting more buses on the road for only two people.

In Hudsonville where community buildings are, if there was a hub of transportation, that could serve your Hudsonville, Jenison transportation. That could help employees. You could save a lot of the cost if you had a hub in other places.

“How might these changes or improvements be paid for? What resources are available?”

While transit funds have been reduced, human service providers were concerned with the inefficient use of money that is available and suggested that there could be better coordination and collaboration among those who provide and need transit in the county.

JARC funds, we got \$70,000.

Examine where all these dollars are going in our community and overlay all the rides. Look at are the funds being leveraged in a cost effective measure?

They need rides at 1 in the morning and there won't be a lot of carpooling opportunities at that time.

We'll buy people monthly passes for MAX if they live on the route. It gives people more flexibility because they can use it to go other places and it doesn't count against their 60 days of transportation.

Sometimes we'll give someone \$100 in gas vouchers to help with the first few days of employment. This money comes from our budget – for supported services.

“What is the best way to reach the people you work with who have unmet transit needs?”

Human service providers were willing to share their client database for survey purposes, but also suggested on-site surveys as the best way to reach people with unmet transit needs.

We could do a preliminary map because we have everyone in our database. We could abstract a list of people who have transit needs and provide it as a map.

On-site surveys, you'll get a snapshot of 60 people who are there right now – more even because of both sites. Even if people have the opportunity for work, they don't know where they'll be living in a month, so they don't want to take a job and have to quit.

“How would you like to be informed about the information gathered through this process?”

Email final report.

Focus Group Seven
Education, Government, Tourism, and Environment
12 group members

“How does this information compare with the unmet transit needs of your customers and clients?”

This focus group heard the results from both the stakeholder online survey and the prior six focus groups. They concurred with prior findings and additionally focused on transit issues including road commission concerns for location of stops, turn around space, and vehicle size. Some members shared the history of public transit in the Holland area and shared their perceptions of prior focus groups findings.

I was thinking about the people who need to go to Grand Haven from Holland, other than a cab, there is nothing unless you can find someone who wants to take you there. I would think maybe passenger vans would be more economical for those types of trips.

The main thing is to the hospital (Zeeland). We've taken care of that problem but not for our own residents. We pay to get people back home from the hospital, we did that because most people were used to that service.

The very first dial a ride system was here in the City of Holland. In 1980 Michigan was awarded a national honor by President Carter for a carpool program which was the first one in the nation. You would think that with the amount of time that's gone by and the ways transit has been examined that something could have been learned over all these years at the local level and how people are still having unmet transit needs.

Something that struck me was that did we look at the transit needs between Holland and Grand rapids. It's an important thing as we develop into a metro area.

The first transit system we had is in Saugatuck Township. Some of the special needs were taken care of by that system.

I view transportation in much larger definition as broader. This may sound a little cold hearted, the first dial a ride system was run as a taxi system, layered on top of that was a process to try to wean people from the door-to-door service. We need to discuss what the mission is of our transit system. I'm not convinced that our mission is to transport people at whatever time of day they need to go someplace. I've heard about the need for Sunday service, but I've also seen church vans in the parking lot.

“What transportation changes or improvements would allow you/your organization to better serve your customers?”

This focus group recommended learning from research on the topic and learning what works from other communities. They emphasized the importance of the use of technology in any improved transit system.

I brought up earlier about the Rapid Transit, they're transporting half a million students during the school year. Why can't we do it to move kids all around? The school is covering some of that cost. I don't know if it's cheaper for schools to do it through public transit. You almost have to look at a regional wide transit millage.

I think it has to be "easy pay."

I come from the wireless industry, and wireless phones can be used to debit cards. I don't think we're that far away from that kind of technology coming here. Every kid I saw in the high school has a cell phone.

It's almost like you need two systems. You can have vans go out to an area where there aren't that many folks (Laketown) for those who need to get to the doctor. Then, in more high traffic areas, we can use mass transit.

I suspect so much time has gone by that there must be some studies where we could learn something. I just have to believe that American ingenuity is such that, we certainly have the incentive with the way gas prices are right now... that must be a way to help wrestle these vehicles away from individuals.

I still come back to the issue of collaboration. I'm interested in seeing how we can work together.

I was from Atlanta before I lived here and I didn't use public transit. I don't think we'll ever wrestle Americans away from their cars. When I had a long commute, I used public transit. If you want to talk about urban sprawl, we had people commuting 3 hours each way. Atlanta built huge parking lots near the transit systems, so you could drive your car somewhere. We're trying to fill a gap, so we should determine where the greatest need is and try to fill that gap. We'd look at MAX and determine whether MAX has been successful then determine whether we want that type of service in Park Township. I made the transition to public transit because I could keep a schedule. I knew I'd be on time.

The reason I say trains is that it's a transit vehicle that is there. It is a means of getting someplace. If you needed to get to Kent County, you could take the bus to get to the train station, then that the train to get other places.

Expanded fixed routes are a good thing. The transfer station at the train station is a good thing. The current ridership numbers are a good thing. Grand Rapids is a necessary thing. The number of medical facilities is going up in Grand Rapids and I think that will require transit to GR. I think we need transit to the North. It's got to be convenient, affordable and timely.

“How might these changes or improvements be paid for? What resources are available?”

This focus group explored ideas for funding an improved transit system.

State, federal and local units don't have money. There are too many other needs. To increase the state sales tax, to increase the gas tax, none of that is going to go through, unless we have a millage and then we need a regional millage for transportation.

We don't have enough gas tax money to fix the roads.

One thing I can say is that we already have rail between Holland and Grand Rapids.

Let's ask people around this table for a nice contribution. There's nothing wrong with asking people for money. You need to look under all the rocks. Write grants. You never know. Grand Rapids just passed an increased millage for public transit.

Where I've seen philanthropic donations come into the transit system, it usually is around a specific transit dependent group.

I'm in the millage arena. I've got a view that when the economy turns around, and in 2008 that other millages will be sought. Maybe this philanthropic idea will work. Put them all together and maybe we can get this to work.

I think eventually the people who get left behind are the people at big box workers on US 31 to fill all these jobs. The private sector could step up and fund these things because stores need to have workers. There's an economic need there. That might be one of our focus areas.

You don't have to do this today. All these ideas like funding are something to look at. Some of the things that have been talked about are real good ideas. Growth is there. This is a big thing.

The issue of philanthropy – two summers ago national headlines reported that this region had the greatest amount of donations. But usually philanthropic helps to have a discussion like we're having here, but not usually public infrastructure. Jeff is going in the right direction talking about public/private partnerships. When I sit down with people what I hear about steady employment for people is that the hardest thing is getting people to work. Depending on employer attitudes, maybe we need a different approach.

“How might we be able to connect with people with unmet transit needs?”

Temporary Services, The mission, Women in Transition, Community Health, Mental Health, Michigan Works

“How would you like to be informed about the information gathered through this process?”

Website, MACC, West Michigan Strategic Alliance