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Public transit could be an option for more Allegan County residents

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By **Greg Chandler | The Grand Rapids Press**

ALLEGAN — A proposed five-year plan seeks to make public transit available to more Allegan County residents.

A two-year study by a county-wide work group proposes to expand the present Allegan County Transportation service to include a five-day-a-week reservation-based service known as demand response.

Currently, the 11-year-old ACT service generally serves clients of various agencies and organizations that have contracted with the transit service. Because of a lack of local funding, most county residents cannot get access to the transit system, said Kathryn Gray, a public policy specialist with Disability Network Lakeshore.

"With the implementation of this plan, more residents (will be) provided access and mobility throughout their community," Gray said.

Governed by the county Board of Commissioners, ACT serves an area that includes the county's major transportation corridors — M-40 from Holland to Allegan, M-89 from Plainwell to Fennville and the area near U.S. 131 between Wayland and Martin. Its customers are generally people who use it to get to either their jobs, job-training programs or access services such as Community Mental Health, but supporters say there's a greater need for residents to access transit to get daily tasks done.

"The work group has identified a need for additional local funding that is not tied to contractual agreements with local organizations or grant sources," ACT Director Dan Wedge wrote in the report, presented last week to the Board of Commissioners. "With fewer restrictions on the people ACT can serve and the trip types ACT can provide, the transit system would have resources to offer rides to the general Allegan County public."

Under the proposal, ACT would operate weekdays from 5:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. with limited additional transportation until 11 p.m. for people going to or from second-shift jobs. Weekend hours would also be offered on a limited basis. Currently, ACT runs only on weekdays from 5:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

ACT has seen its service grow from nearly 14,000 passenger trips in its first year of service in 2001 to more than 47,000 in 2009. Despite that growth, the service has had to turn away residents because they don't live close enough to the transit's main corridor routes.

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Specifics on whether a county-wide millage might be offered to help fund ACT still must be discussed with county officials, Gray said.

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