

Regional bus system planning hits bump

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The plan to link the region's urban areas with a bus system has hit a bump in the road.

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires buses to pick up any disabled citizens along the route, which could elongate commutes, according to Mark Knudsen, director of the Ottawa County Planning and Grants Department.

"It could be a costly road bump," Knudsen said. "The primary riders have to be able to depend on a bus that is regular."

For months, representatives from Grand Rapids, Holland, Grand Haven and several other cities have been discussing a bus system linking the region's urban areas. Several local leaders are excited about the possibility.

Officials from the city of Grand Haven and Harbor Transit, the local bus system, are in support of a regional transit network.

It wasn't until recently that the group of planners discovered the ADA issue.

"We're working with MDOT to ascertain what options we have," Knudsen said.

Geneviève Risner, public policy director for Disability Network Lakeshore, said government-sponsored fixed-route transit systems must provide complimentary services for residents with disabilities unable to reach bus stops.

In a recent study, Disability Network Lakeshore found a regional transit study as the top unmet need in the Holland area.

"We see any system that

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they would create as being a huge benefit, both for people with disabilities and the general public," Risner said.

The Ottawa County Planning Commission is also hoping to use a \$110,000 Michigan Department of Transportation study to identify the feasibility and need for a regional commuter system.

Grand Haven Mayor Roger Bergman, who proposed the idea for a commuter system in early February, expects it to reach the regional transportation needs of the greater population — not just commuters. He said the system would likely pick people

up in cities, which would be drop-off points for existing transit systems such as Harbor Transit.

"Certainly all customer needs would be taken into account," Bergman said.

Jim Bachmeier of Grand Valley State University is involved in the planning process and a member of the Disability Network Lakeshore Board. He isn't particularly alarmed by the issue. He said the possibility of serving the disabled population could make the project more attractive.

"The reality is there are a whole bunch of folks that need transit," Bachmeier said. "Between the price of gas and the environmental impact, more people are looking at this as an alternative."

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