



## COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD — Transit system connects community

By Dean Whittaker

Community Advisory Board

Posted Sep 16, 2010 @ 12:25 PM

Holland, MI — This week, as I sat in the Haworth Center listening to Randy Thelen of Lakeshore Advantage and Mayor Kurt Dykstra describe the economic opportunities that the two new lithium-ion battery plants bring to our community, I was struck by how fortunate we are to have such capable young leaders and how connected we all are to one another.

Our lives are intertwined by the place we have chosen to live. As a friend of mine says, "We do life together." We are connected by our work, the churches we attend, the schools where our children go to learn, our medical facilities, our neighborhoods, and the many places we choose to patronize within our community.

Another way in which we are all physically connected is through mobility — how we move in and around our community. How we get around town, and the options we have for doing so, say a lot about us and our community.

Obviously, our most common mode to get around town is the automobile. But how would you move within the community without an car? A bicycle, perhaps, for those physically able to use it, though inclement weather limits its use for much of the year. Our outstanding bike path system supports the effort to make our area easily traversed.

Another mode of travel is our MAX (Macatawa Area Express) system. During a visit with Ruth Stegman of the Disability Network, she explained to me the importance of having a means of transportation for those of us unable to drive or without an automobile.

I, like others, have been perplexed to see what appears to be empty buses driving around town. So to satisfy my curiosity, I went over to our bus-train station and visited with MAX passengers and drivers.

I was told that the capacity of the bus is designed to meet maximum demand use (going to and from work). I was surprised to learn that the MAX moves over 1,000 people per day, many with disabilities but certainly not the majority.

I had not realized that the city of Holland, Holland Township, and the city of Zeeland are connected by MAX, as are the major shopping areas, retirement homes, medical facilities and schools. (To learn more about MAX, go to [www.carchamax.org](http://www.carchamax.org).) Interestingly, the buses I saw had racks on them to carry passengers' bicycles, combining two modes of transportation. They also had curb-level chair lifts to facilitate wheelchair access with trained drivers to assist.

Unfortunately for me, I live in Park Township, where property owners do not pay the MAX millage and as a result we are without a means of public transportation. This necessitates the use of the car to transport kids to school and other events and requires seniors (of which I am one) to seek rides from neighbors or friends when we are unable to drive or lack the resources to own a car. It limits our mobility options and puts more of us on the road, causing more congestion, pollution and increased oil dependence.

The MAX continues to improve. It is one of the many ways in which we are connected as we "do life together." Hats off to the many organizations and individuals, including the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council, the city of Holland, and the Disability Network, which have the commitment, courage and the compassion to create a sense of belonging through community's mobility.

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