



Everything Michigan

Study shows demand, support for transit system in eastern Ottawa County

By Greg Chandler | The Grand Rapids Press

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OTTAWA COUNTY -- Pam Haverdink recently received a phone call from a refugee family living in Georgetown Township, asking about whether there was bus service in their area.

"They wanted to get hooked up (to a transit system) so we could get them to Grand Rapids," the director of the Georgetown Seniors program said.

Haverdink, whose program provides transit service to seniors and people with disabilities in eastern Ottawa County, says calls such as this underscore the need for a transit system serving the township, the county's largest municipality, as well as surrounding communities such as Allendale Township and Hudsonville.

According to a recent study, more than 400 residents in the eastern half of the county have called a community organization in the past nine months about an unmet transit need, with more than half of the calls related to medical needs. One in five said a lack of transportation has prevented them from looking for, getting or keeping a job.

"There's nothing available for people who are right on that line of having one car, or no car at all," Haverdink said.

The 70-page study from Disability Network/Lakeshore, made possible by a \$99,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation, also indicated nearly 60 percent of those seeking transit service would be willing to pay \$2 to \$5 for a one-way trip.

"People are saying they will use public transit," said Kathryn Gillen, a public policy specialist for Disability Network, the point person for the study.

The study also included a phone survey of more than 1,000 residents, which showed 75 percent support the establishment of transit in eastern Ottawa County and 62 percent would support a millage to provide transit to the region.

The eastern Ottawa study is separate from a second study being undertaken in the county to explore potential transit linkages between Grand Rapids, Holland and Muskegon.

A 12-member workgroup has been presenting findings from its study throughout the area. It has already appeared before the township boards in Georgetown and Blendon, and this week presented its report to Ottawa County commissioners. The report soon will be presented to city officials in Hudsonville, Haverdink said.

"If we decided today to (start a transit system), it's going to take two to three years before it will come to fruition," she said.

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