

**CALHOUN COUNTY
COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT-HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN MEETING
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS, MULTI PURPOSE ROOM
150 S. KENDALL STREET
BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN
SEPTEMBER 22, 2011
1:30 PM**

PRESENT: Rich Werner of Battle Creek Transit, Rev. Mark Woodford, Jerry Hutchison of Marshall Dial-A-Ride, Sue Rush of CIR, Melinda Weaver of Community Action, Michele McGowen of Disability Network of Southwest Michigan, Jerry Sigourney, Larry Kaiser of CIR, Ebony Thorpe of JONAH, Jolene English of Area Agency on Aging, Fred Featherly of MDOT, Carl Gibson of Calhoun County Senior Services, Brenda Cheney of Indian Trails, Rev. William Stein of God's Taxi/CALTRAN, City Clerk Deidre Laser, and Mayor Susan Baldwin

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Rich Werner opened the meeting and stated the purpose of today's meeting was to talk about the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for Calhoun County. Mr. Werner asked each of the participants to introduce themselves.

OVERVIEW OF COORDINATION PLAN REQUIREMENTS:

Rich Werner indicated the plan must be developed through a process that includes the opportunity for participation by public, private, non-profit, and human services transportation providers and was set forth in 2007 and updated in 2009.

Fred Featherly of MDOT added that the local community implements a coordination plan which incorporates all public and private transportation providers. The goal is to help plan the use of the funds to help the community as a whole and as efficiently as possible.

Rich Werner asked Mr. Featherly who is responsible to implement the plan.

Fred Featherly stated it is a group effort and should be used as a planning document. Periodically, stakeholders should review the plan and collectively coordinate services. Battle Creek should be taking the lead, but it should involve everyone.

DISCUSSION OF EXISTING TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES:

Rich Werner noted that the 2009 Plan completed by the Corradino Group is on the Battle Creek Transit's website. In 2010, Mr. Hutchison met with a group and there were no significant changes to the plan. Mr. Werner provided a handout that included the following names of transportation providers: Battle Creek Transit, Marshall Dial-a-Ride, Community Action Agency, Marian Burch Adult Day Care Center, Life Care Ambulance, Michigan Works, Area Agency on Aging, City Cab, Wheels to Work, Indian Trails, God's Taxi, All Around Cab, Casino Transport Service, Dream Limousine, Courtesy Limousine, and Mobility Transport.

Mr. Werner asked if there are any additions or corrections to the list.

Mr. Hutchison noted that All Around Cab is no longer in business.

Rev. Stein stated that Battle Creek Taxi Company should be removed and City Cab added.

Carl Gibson noted that Community Action Agency provides 21,000 trips per year. Under the Area Agency on Aging, it is not doing business as Burnham Brook, and the service is funded through 5310 funds and senior millage.

Mr. Hutchison remarked that Marshall Dial-A-Ride does not provide service on Saturday.

TRANSPORTATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

Michele McGowen felt public transportation providers do not have lifts that are bariatric rated for people and equipment that exceed the 600 pound weight limit. Ms. McGowen said there is a growing need in the community, and it would be nice if there was a van in circulation that could address 1,000 pounds.

Carl Gibson believed that medical appointments take priority with transportation agencies. As an outcome for this group, Mr. Gibson would like to get the medical community on board as part of the solution.

Rev. Stein would like to bring government agencies to the table. He noted that Kalamazoo County just approved a transportation millage and improved their county-wide services. Jackson Transit has Jackson Transit Authority that coordinates city and county transportation.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLAN UPDATES & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Sue Rush spoke about the "United We Ride" program that supports the creation or expansion of a community-based one call transportation center. She believed it would ensure people with disabilities and people of low-income to have good access to transportation and would better coordinate county services. For more information, Ms. Rush provided the web site of <http://www.unitedweride.gov>.

Ebony Thorpe felt that more people need to come to the table and there needs to be a central hub.

Sue Rush agreed that more people need to come to the table and suggested that United We Ride could include a collaborative grant effort.

Rev. Stein said through CALTRAN and God's Taxi, he has been talking about the same thing for the past two decades. Because of the politics involved, he did not think the area could provide a coordinated transportation program or effectively impact the needs of the people. Rev. Stein would like to see interest from agencies on the eastern and southern parts of the county. He felt that the 5310 funding has been lopsided and earmarked for the metropolitan Battle Creek area. The last transportation study was conducted by the Corradino Group whereby the City of Battle Creek obtained a \$100,000 grant. He felt that the coordination of transportation is very important and there are a lot of groups who do not have representation sitting at the table. Rev. Stein has heard complaints that some of the teletransit buses are driving around town with no passengers. Lastly, Rev. Stein asked the group to consider: Who needs the resource? Are there funds to facilitate the goal? Can we eliminate the politics in order to provide a true coordinated transportation model?

Rev. Woodford suggested listening to the people we are serving, running buses at night, hiring a local consultant, bringing the outlying townships to the table to discuss transportation, and working together.

Rev. Stein stated the county did a Cotran Study about thirty years ago and anyone who is interested can obtain a copy through BCATS.

Rich Werner stated the strategies in the 2009 Plan really do not fit what was discussed today. He stated he heard that there needs to be the whole county at the table including medical providers.

Rev. Stein felt it is an opportune time for the county to have a millage question regarding transportation on the ballot.

Mayor Baldwin stated the county dismantled the transportation subcommittee because there was no funding. Some townships do not see the value of placing dollars into a program. Both Jackson and Kalamazoo have created authorities which are not run by the city or county.

Ebony Thorpe asked what was the goal today.

Rich Werner said the goal was to have discussion today. The meeting meets the requirements, but it does not solve the issues.

Jerry Hutchison felt the group's goal is to take a look at what has been done in the past and determine if it is still valid. If there are additional items that weren't part of the 2009 process, they could be included in the current plan update. The strategies were developed as broad-based strategies and not meant to be locked in stone. Mr. Hutchison said it is important to review the plan on an annual basis. The idea of consolidating services began in 1979. He felt that groups have not gone beyond the talking stage as the county has not established a critical mass of need. While everyone recognizes transportation issues, there have not been the right circumstances or the right people to effect change, and funding has been an issue. Governments will always consider cost versus benefit.

Rev. Stein suggested that a project fund be established through the Battle Creek Community Foundation regarding transportation. Corporations and individuals could contribute to the fund, and agencies could better coordinate transportation services through a centralized dispatching program. He would also like to see some of the United Way funds utilized for transportation. There may also be HUD dollars available through the Community Block Grant program. Rev. Stein did not feel that all of the available resources have been exhausted.

Ebony Thorpe recommended coordinating a meeting with other community organizations.

Sue Rush noted that she has a study that was funded through the Community Foundation in 2009. It indicates type of transports by time of day, day of the week, and by zip code. She liked Rev. Stein's idea to seek alternative streams of funding into the project.

NEXT STEPS:

Larry Kaiser asked if there was a way that people could comment to the plan on line.

Rich Werner stated that citizens can contact Battle Creek Transit.

Larry Kaiser asked if there could be an article in the Shopper which provided a link for more information.

Mayor Baldwin suggested sending out a news article to all of the media outlets in the county.

Michele McGowen recommended inviting Albion Community Foundation to the table.

Sue Rush said that CIR created hubs for people to meet to help cut costs from providing transportation door to door.

Michele McGowen asked if there are bike racks at the Park and Ride lots in the county.

Carl Gibson commented that there are some, but not in all of the rural areas.

Carl Gibson asked Mayor Baldwin if she could contact Kelli Scott for feedback to the draft plan.

Sue Rush stated as a collaborative effort, but the group looks at Battle Creek Transit to be a leader.

Rich Werner offered to put together a draft plan and send it out to everyone who attended today. He also offered to place the plan on the website and contact the media to solicit citizen comments.

Mark Woodford suggested Mr. Werner place an article in the Battle Creek Shopper.

Rev. Stein recommended naming the group the Calhoun County Ridership Coalition. We could offer all of the names of the organizations that are at the table, bring in other organizations, and approach the foundations for funding.

Rich Werner said he would like to have the opportunity to sift through the recommendations and develop a draft update. He anticipated scheduling another meeting within the quarter to establish committees.

Mayor Baldwin suggested formulating specific questions during the media outreach to elevate the discussion.

Rev. Stein suggested publishing the Corradino Study and selecting five specific questions that the public can answer.

Fred Featherly concluded that Battle Creek is making great strides.

Rich Werner thanked everyone for their attendance.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 PM.