

EXPANDING PUBLIC TRANSIT IN EMMET COUNTY

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Provided by FEET - *Friends Enhancing Emmet Transit*

Q. Do we really need a public transit system?

A. Multiple studies have been conducted over the past several years, all showing the need for additional public transportation services in Emmet County. These include Emmet 20/20, the comprehensive NEMCOG/MDOT study done in 2005, the Corradino Study, and the 2008 Char-Em Community Needs Assessment.¹

Q. We already have buses driving around mostly empty, so why are additional transit services needed?

A. Right now, there are two transit services, each providing relatively limited services in Emmet County. Friendship Centers Transit provides bus service to seniors and the disabled, mostly in the greater Petoskey area. They are not able to meet the demand. Straits Regional Ride (based in Cheboygan) also provides some limited dial-a-ride service in Emmet County. They also regularly turn down requests for rides to and from specific locations. The existence of two bus services in the same area is confusing for potential riders. A single, more comprehensive system for everyone would be more convenient and efficient. With more buses, hours, and routes, more people will be able to use them.

Q. Can a community like ours support a public transit system?

A. All of our neighboring counties and most rural counties in northern Michigan have a viable public transit system.¹ The Benzie Bus system was started in 2007, and its ridership grew 75% in the first year. Charlevoix County's transit system currently provides more than 110,000 rides per year and ridership continues to grow there.

Q. Is there community support for expanded transit?

A. A survey conducted in Fall 2015 for Emmet County¹ showed more than 50 percent of survey respondents felt public transportation as a medium to high priority for the county and 78 percent said county voters should be able to vote on the matter. About 60 percent said they would be willing to pay more taxes for public transportation.

Q. How can we afford more transit services?

A. A County Transit System could be funded by a modest millage, fares, and state and federal funding. The concept is that Emmet County would contract with an existing provider to expand services rather than start and run a new transit service.

Q. What will it cost me?

A. A millage of .25 - .50 mils could provide the necessary support. For the typical Emmet County home owner, the annual cost would be \$1 – 2/month or \$12 – 24 annually – about the cost of a tank of gas. Businesses with greater taxable value would pay proportionately more taxes. Businesses can also receive a tax credit for subsidizing employee transportation. The goal is to keep fares as low as possible, with reduced prices for seniors and persons with disabilities.

Q. Will the bus get me where I want to go?

A. No transit service will provide rides to everyone, to and from any location, and at all hours. However, an expanded, coordinated service has the promise of meeting a great deal of the need. The system would combine dial-a-ride with a flex/fixed route with pick up and drop off locations. Routes will incorporate major shopping and employment areas, as well as medical facilities and possibly recreation areas (i.e., ski resorts). The details of routes and hours will be determined by transit experts.

The plan is to start relatively small, and services will change and expand with community demand and as funding is available.

Q. Who develops a transit system?

A. The Emmet County Board of Commissioners could form either a Transportation Authority or a Transportation Department. Funding raised through the millage would be used to contract with an existing provider (e.g., Straits Regional Ride and/or Charlevoix Transit) to provide expanded services. This would be much more cost-effective and efficient than starting a stand-alone Emmet County system. Emmet County is already a partner in Straits Regional Ride. Current Friendship Center services would be folded into the expanded service.

Q. When will it start?

A. It is up to the Emmet County Board of Commissioner to determine how and when to proceed. Details of services and funding are under consideration. With Commissioners' agreement, Emmet County residents could decide this issue on the November 2018 ballot. If the ballot initiative was successful, expanded transit services could begin in early 2019.

Q. Will an Emmet County system work together with Charlevoix County and other surrounding systems?

A. Yes! A system which coordinates service between our neighboring counties is our ultimate goal to make regional transportation effective and convenient.

Q. How will it work?

A. Expansion of public transportation solutions in three phases is proposed. It could start with limited hours and service, circulator routes and demand-response (dial a ride) in and around Petoskey, Harbor Springs, and Alanson with a Pellston/Mackinaw flex/route. Services and routes would be revised and expanded, as demand increases. It won't provide every ride that every person needs to every location, but it will make a huge difference in meeting the need.

Q. Will seniors lose their rides with the Friendship Center?

A. Friendship Center buses and service will be incorporated into the new system. Seniors and persons with disabilities will be given priority, so no loss of service to this group will occur. With a more comprehensive system including additional hours, buses and routing, seniors will see an increase in service over time.

Q. What are the benefits to our Community?

A. A public transportation system in our community would meet many needs:

- Help people, especially low-income workers, get to jobs. Help businesses retain workers.
- Give people in the community greater access to cultural, leisure, and recreational activities
- Reduce traffic congestion
- Enhance access to downtown shopping
- Reduce energy consumption and harmful greenhouse gas emissions
- Provide dependable transportation to work, school, appointments, or shopping
- Lift-equipped buses will allow the disabled mobility and independence
- Bike racks on buses will allow recreational cyclists and commuters to ride the bus to work or trail heads and return by bike
- Racks for skis and snowboards will allow young people and others to get to ski hills without a car

There are many economic benefits from public transportation which have been well documented. Transit service will assist in the economic development of both Petoskey and Emmet County.

- The Michigan House Committee on Transportation white paper, "Public Transportation in Michigan: An Economic Development Tool Whose Time has Come" cites economic benefits. ²

- ☒ Public transportation not only helps to maintain and create jobs, it also moves people to and from their jobs.
- ☒ Transit lowers household expenses and frees up income for other needs.
- ☒ Riding public transportation can save an individual an average of \$10,064 a year over the cost of operating a car.³
- ☒ Every \$1 invested in public transportation generates approximately \$4 in economic returns.³
- ☒ The proposed system would bring State and Federal dollars into Emmet County.

¹ Studies and data are posted at www.emmettransit.org

² Public Transportation in Michigan. Report from the Chair of the Public Transit Subcommittee, House Standing Committee on Transportation. 2008.

³ "August 2014 Transit Savings Report," The American Public Transportation Association (APTA). APTA 2015.

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