

the review

the official magazine of the  michigan municipal league

September/October 2013

TRANSIT-ORIENTED
DEVELOPMENT

TRANSPORTATION
FUNDING

MICHIGAN'S
BRIDGES

GRAND RAPIDS
SILVERLINE

BENZIE
**RURAL
TRANSIT**

PALM BIKE TOUR:
PLACEMAKING ON WHEELS

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On the Cover:

The PALM bike tour (Pedal Across Lower Michigan) is a six-day, 269-mile trek from Lake Michigan to Lake Erie. This year's tour, the 32nd, started in Norton Shores and ended in Luna Pier. There were 825 bicyclists pedaling on city streets and rural roads, through seven Michigan communities.



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michigan municipal league

the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

Volume 86, Number 5

Better Communities. Better Michigan.

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. Our goals are to aid them in creating desirable and unique places through legislative and judicial advocacy; to provide educational opportunities for elected and appointed officials; and to assist municipal leaders in administering community services. Our mission is that of a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs to passionately push change for better communities and a better Michigan.

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Please recycle this magazine

Follow The Yellow Brick Road

What would Dorothy have done if there had been no Yellow Brick Road to follow to get her and her buddies to Oz?

I suspect there wouldn't have been much of a Munchkinland or Emerald City, either one...and therefore no book.

Thankfully there was, of course, and that bright ribbon of transportation infrastructure is the perfect plot device for guiding Dorothy's troupe all the way to the Wizard with only a few detours to fight off wicked witches, evil monkeys, and such.

Here's a little-known bit of trivia: author L. Frank Baum summered here on Lake Michigan during his most prolific writing years. Some have even speculated that he got his inspiration from a road paved with bricks near Holland. Did you also know that in the original book, the Yellow Brick Road isn't even complete in some places? In other spots, it's broken up and ruined by erosion. And even in the 1939 movie, poor or missing signage nearly gets Dorothy lost forever.

Which all makes me think maybe those literary legends *are* true...because this is starting to sound a lot like the Michigan roads we all know.

So imagine if Baum were writing his book today. A whole crowd of irate Munchkins is jumping around chanting in their sing-song voices: "*follow the Springport Road...*" They'd never have made it through Jackson County because that section has been closed indefinitely due to massive structural failure.

Or maybe Dorothy could've followed the yellow dividing line through Grand Rapids with a group of lawmakers on the West Michigan Street Summit tour in April. Nope. Toto would've dropped out of sight forever at the first set of potholes.

I think you get the picture.


We can build wonderful cities and villages; create unique places that people want to be. But we also need to give people a way to get there, and ways to get around safely and efficiently once they do.

Thriving metropolitan regions are doing just that through multi-modal transportation systems that work for all users, from pedestrians and bicyclists to public transit riders and motorists.

No doubt about it, we need to get off our legislative back-sides and come up with a funding plan to *fix our roads*. But bad as they are, it isn't just about repairing our deteriorated highways and roads—it's also about non-motorized trail networks, rural and urban mass transit systems, Complete Streets makeovers, and adequate infrastructure to support the new generation of electric and hybrid cars.

Studies have shown that every \$1 invested in public transit returns about \$6 in local economic activity. Each year, Metro Detroit's peak-time commuters spend an average of 52 hours sitting in traffic congestion, wasting 34 gallons of gas per person.

A major new report from the Frontier Group and the U.S. PIRG Education Fund shows young people ages 16-34 drove 23 percent fewer miles in 2009 than they did in 2001. During the same time period, they took 24 percent more bike trips, walked to their destination 16 percent more often, and rode a whopping 40 percent more passenger miles on mass transit.

Fixing our roads and highways will save lives, create jobs, and cut vehicle repair costs for Michigan motorists. Fixing our outdated ideas about transportation will save our future. And that's a Yellow Brick Road that we all need to follow if we really want to reach the Michigan of our dreams. But it all has to start right here. Like Dorothy said, there's no place like home. 



Daniel P. Gilmartin
League executive director and CEO
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Why Important **POLICY SOMETIMES BECOMES POLITICS'** *Little Brother*

By John LaMacchia

Despite the abysmal state of Michigan's roads, the Legislature went on summer break without passing an increase to state transportation funding. The question on everyone's mind is, "How could this happen?" The one word answer is: politics. For a more complete answer we would need to go back to the lame duck session in December of last year.

In February, Governor Snyder laid out his vision to raise \$1.2 billion in new funding to fix Michigan's roads. The plan included significant increases to vehicle registration fees and nearly doubled the tax on gas. As you can imagine, it was largely shot down by legislators and the general public.

On the eve of the governor's State of the State address, Michigan Municipal League President David Lossing made this statement:

"Michigan's transportation infrastructure is in critical condition, threatening thousands of jobs, the state's economy, our cities, and public safety. Michigan roads consistently rank among the nation's worst. Our local roads and bridges are in desperate need of funding for essential maintenance. We need transit system and infrastructure improvements that will help create the types of communities attractive to a skilled workforce and those industries that are thriving in the 21st century economy. We can cut all the taxes we want, but if we can't move goods from point A to point B, it won't do us any good. Bottom line: it's time

to replace the plywood patches on too many Michigan highway bridges with pavement. It's time to fix our roads and rebuild our infrastructure so Michigan is again attractive to employers and a talented workforce."

The irony of the situation is that everyone agrees there is a problem. It has been widely recognized for some time, along with an acknowledgement that a fix needs to happen. Our long-term costs are continuing to increase while our roads continue to crumble. But the urgency among legislators to address this issue leaves something to be desired. After months of debate, and a variety of ideas and plans, the Legislature, even with strong leadership by Senator Roger Kahn and Representative Wayne Schmidt who were steadfast in their commitment to solving the state's transportation needs, left for summer break with no solution in sight.

Shattered Trust

History would tell you that Democrats and Republicans have trouble playing in the same sandbox, but at no time in the last decade has the tension between the two parties been as high as it was during last fall's debate about making Michigan a Right to Work state. The governor's decision to endorse and eventually sign Right to Work legislation after he had repeatedly said it was not on his agenda resulted in a volatile political landscape and a lack of trust between the two political parties.

When Governor Snyder laid out his vision for improving Michigan's infrastructure only a few short weeks after signing the Right to Work legislation, he knew he would need help in the form of Democratic votes. He made his plea to them at the end of his State of the State address, asking the Legislature to move beyond what happened in the past, stating that this issue was "a no-brainer" and that the Legislature should use common sense and just "get it done."

This was a bold request by a governor who knew full well that a severe lack of trust had developed as a result of the signing of Right to Work. Unfortunately for him, Democrats were only part of the problem. Many in the Republican Party would not support the governor's plan to increase transportation funding. Some had signed a no tax pledge, others were worried about making controversial decisions before primary challenges in the upcoming election, and still others thought greater efficiencies within the Department of Transportation needed to be found before discussing new taxes and fees.

**"IT'S TIME TO FIX OUR ROADS
AND REBUILD OUR INFRASTRUCTURE
SO MICHIGAN IS AGAIN
ATTRACTIVE TO EMPLOYERS AND
A TALENTED WORKFORCE."**

— David Lossing, Mayor of Linden, League President

Politics Overshadows Policy

Due to the lack of support for the governor's plan, both Democrats and Republicans found themselves in a unique negotiating position. They had some leverage. This leverage led to a variety of requests, including:

- more funding for education,
- scrapping the Snyder plan and having the public vote on a sales tax increase,
- a public statement by the governor saying he would veto any repeal of prevailing wage,
- elimination of the tax on pensions, and
- reinstatement of the earned income tax credit.

Policy was no longer the focus. Politics were dominating the landscape of this debate. Horse-trading and deals were attempted, but to no avail. Summer had arrived and this issue was cast aside until the return of the Legislature this fall.


There are no winners in this scenario. Another construction season is lost, long-term costs continue to rise, and the lack of a commitment to investing in a modern transportation system continues to hurt our communities. With cost of inaction at \$3 million dollars daily and over a billion dollars annually, Michigan can no longer continue to under-invest in its roads, bridges, streets, and public transit.

When the Legislature returns in September, there will be a renewed sense of optimism on this issue. The governor will try again to achieve his goal of increasing transportation funding and the idea of creating good policy will be the lead story.

The League's Transportation Position

The League, while not endorsing any specific plan, is fully supportive of working towards the goal of increasing transportation funding. Building a modern transportation system is long overdue. Supporting multi-modal transportation systems that connect and support all users, from pedestrians and bicyclists to public transit riders and auto riders, will be a top priority for the League.

There is a great opportunity to benefit from new funding. Advocating on behalf of finding a responsible way to improve Michigan's infrastructure will be the key to the success of good policy. Be active; communicate with your legislators and members of your community. Remind them of the significant challenges you face and why investing in the transportation needs of our communities will help drive economic growth, attract and retain talent, and create livable communities.

With strong advocacy, good policy will overcome the perils of politics. 

John LaMacchia is a legislative associate at the League. You may contact him at 517-908-0303 or jlamacchia@mml.org.

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MICHIGAN TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

By Kirk T. Steudle, P.E.

Four cents probably seemed like a sizable amount at the time.

It proved to be not nearly enough.

Four cents is how much Michigan's gasoline tax rose in 1997, from 15 cents to 19 cents per gallon. It was the last incremental increase in a dedicated funding source for state roads and highways.

Since 2004, motor fuel tax revenue has been declining because of better fuel efficiency, the depressed economy, and growing numbers of hybrid and electric vehicles. The effects increasingly can be seen in the condition of Michigan roads and highways.

A recent study forecast that by 2016, the percentage of state trunkline pavement in good or fair condition will drop below 70 percent—about the same deteriorated state as in 1997 (Gordon Proctor, Shobna Varma, and William Roberts, *The Road Not Taken—Michigan Highway Funding Decisions: Lessons from the Past and Implications for the Future*, May 2013). The study further predicts that pavement and bridge budgets, when adjusted for inflation, will be at their lowest levels since 1997.

Backbone of the Economy

State trunklines are the interstate highways and M- and US-numbered routes. They are the backbone of Michigan's economy. Their 9,652 miles carry 50 percent of all traffic in the state and 65 percent of the commercial traffic.

The asset management approach taken by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) strives to keep 90 percent of state trunkline pavement in good or fair condition. Asset management emphasizes preventive maintenance because it's more cost effective to keep pavement in good or fair condition than repairing it when it falls into poor condition. According to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), every \$1 spent to keep a road in good condition avoids \$6 to \$14 needed later to rebuild the same road once it has deteriorated significantly.

As recently as 2010, 91 percent of state trunkline pavement was in good or fair condition. But it slipped to 87 percent in 2012, and will continue to slide unless more money is invested.

How much more? MDOT estimates an average of \$917 million in additional funds is needed each year to preserve pavement condition at 90 percent good or fair. And this is just to preserve existing pavement—not to extend highways or build new ones.

EVERY NEIGHBORING MIDWESTERN STATE INVESTS MORE PER PERSON IN ITS ROADS THAN MICHIGAN DOES.

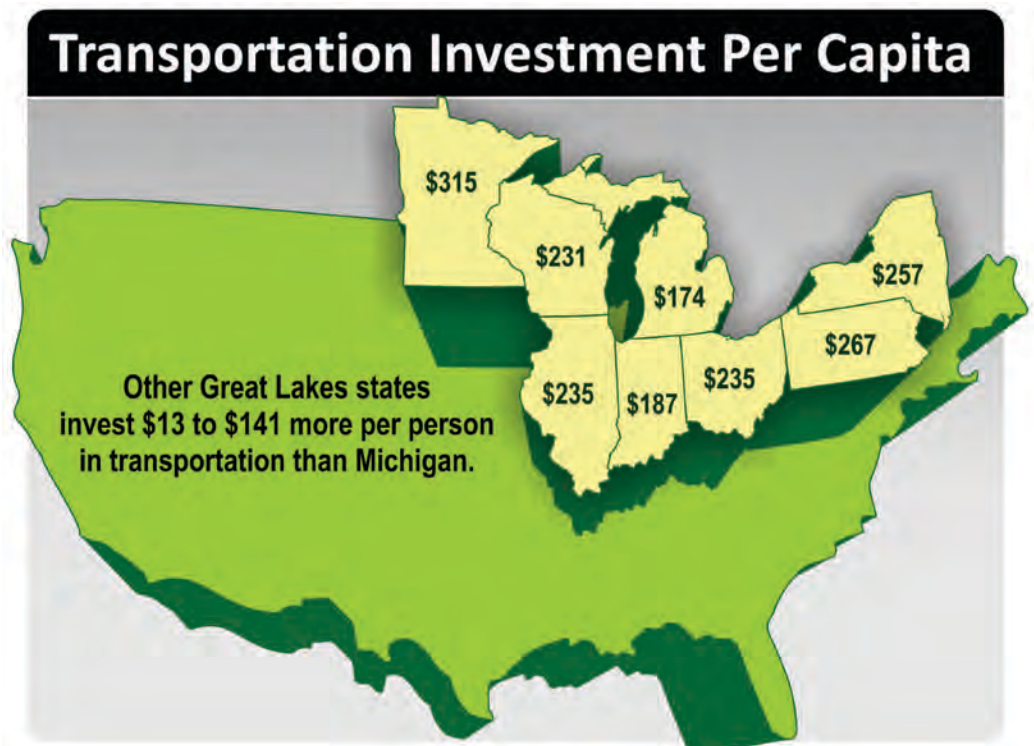
How Roads Are Funded

There are three roughly equivalent sources of road funding in Michigan: the state motor fuel tax, state vehicle registration fees, and federal aid. None of the six percent state sales tax goes to roads, not even the sales tax on motor fuel.

So how do you raise another \$917 million every year? In his February 7 budget message, Governor Snyder proposed a combination of increases in the motor fuel tax and vehicle registration fees that would raise \$1.2 billion annually in new transportation revenue. Others, though, have proposed looking elsewhere.

Some say money wrung from making MDOT more efficient could go toward pavement preservation. Yet since 2009, MDOT has saved an average of \$63 million a year through efficiencies and innovation. MDOT has 27 percent fewer employees than in 1997, and 15 percent fewer since 2010. Although MDOT will continue to innovate and be more efficient, these savings represent only a small fraction of the money needed to fix Michigan's roads.

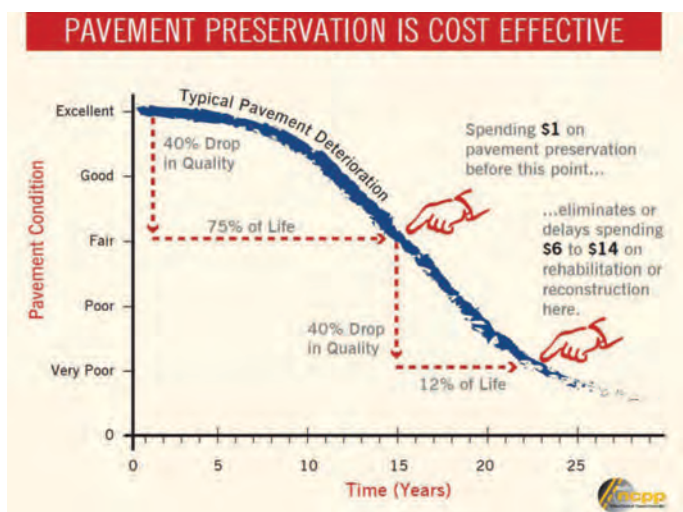
How about toll roads? Federal law prohibits converting interstate freeways to toll roads.



Squeezing more money out of Washington to fix the state's roads also has been suggested. Given the Highway Trust Fund's own financial woes, it's unlikely that Michigan will be receiving increased federal highway dollars anytime soon.

A \$351 Million Boost

There's a little bit of good news in the 2013-14 state budget. The budget includes \$351 million in one-time funding for roads. While MDOT's thankful for this appropriation, it's not as much as it may seem. About \$120 million will be used just to match federal aid. A new Priority Roads Investment Program will receive \$115 million, and that will go to state and local roads. The remaining \$115 million would be available for roads after February 1, 2014, providing there are no higher priorities and no permanent transportation funding solution. It's a start, but again, the governor's goal is an additional \$1.2 billion.



As recently as 2010, 91 percent of state trunkline pavement was in good or fair condition. But it slipped to 87 percent in 2012, and will continue to slide unless more money is invested.

Is \$1.2 billion an exorbitant amount? Every neighboring Midwestern state invests more per person in its roads than Michigan does. Ohio, which is Michigan's closest match, invests about \$1 billion more than Michigan in its roads every year.

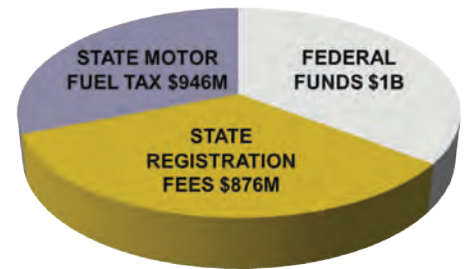
People may disagree on the best way to raise new transportation revenue, but one thing is indisputable: sooner is better than later. An investment of \$12 billion over the next 10 years will bring pavement condition back to 90 percent good or fair by 2025. Doing nothing raises that price tag to \$26 billion in 2025.

The same holds true for city and village streets. MDOT, together with local road agencies, will be in a \$50 billion hole in 10 years if there's no increase in road funding.

Benefits of Investing in Roads

Fixing Michigan's roads and highways has many positives. It will save lives, create an estimated 12,000 jobs, and cut repair costs for Michigan motorists by an average of \$81 a year per vehicle.

As the Michigan Legislature begins its fall session, new transportation revenue will be one of the top agenda items. Debate will continue on how much money is needed, and the best way to raise



Michigan Road Funding Sources

it. Any proposed solution must avoid the shortcomings of the 1997 gasoline tax hike—namely, the revenue has to be adequate to do the job, and able to keep pace with rising costs.

Time is of the essence. Every year's delay in investing in Michigan roads adds another \$100 million to the bill. The number is never going to get smaller.

Governor Snyder put it best in his 2013 State of the State address:

"We can decide how long we want to argue about it, how political we want to make it. Or we can just use some common sense and get it done."

Kirk T. Steudle is director of the Michigan Department of Transportation. You may contact him at 517-373-2090 or MDOT-Director@michigan.gov.

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BRIDGES

Can Be Economic Assets

By Roger Marks, P.E.

First, let's all agree that the sooner we all view the state's road and bridge infrastructure as assets to our long-term economic viability instead of an annual program that can be suspended without cost, the sooner we can determine the best way to fix the financial burden that maintaining these assets require.

The undeniable fact remains that Michigan is part of the interstate highway system and we have all accepted and incorporated that infrastructure into our economic system. Consider that 35 percent of all US/Canada trade flows through Michigan. Each year \$520 billion in freight is moved on Michigan's highways, rail, and water ports. Trucking accounts for 67 percent of all freight tonnage moved in Michigan. And what's more, 80 percent of Michigan's tourism traffic is automobile based¹ and, with out-of-state tourism, reached the \$1 billion mark in 2011.²

Every county in the state of Michigan has at least 5-10 bridges, some with more than 500 structures. Historically speaking, bridges were designed and built with a 50-year

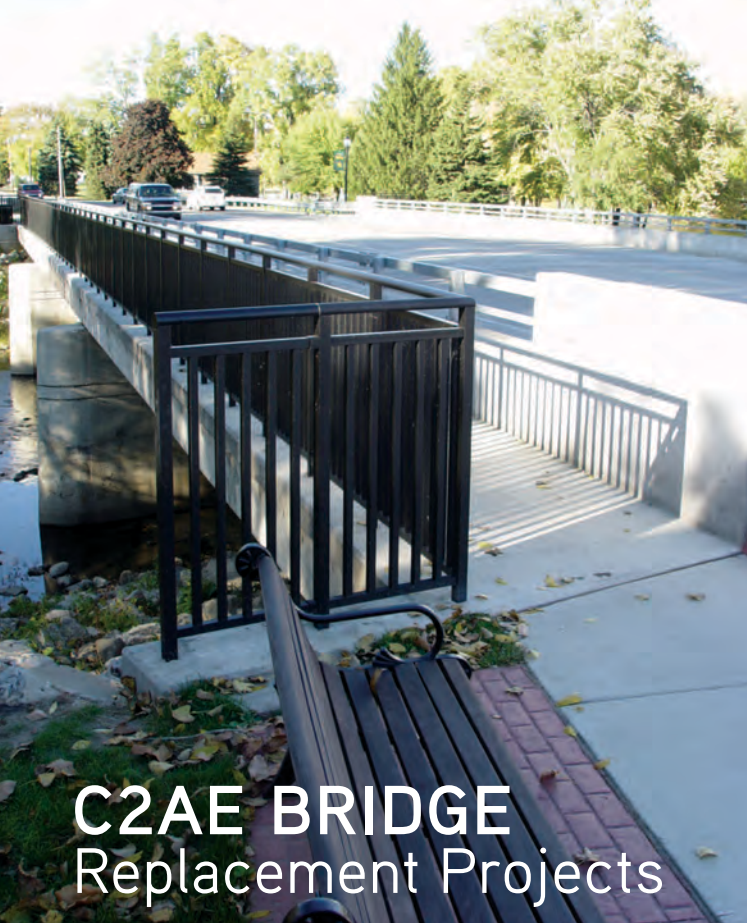
lifespan, and the average age of bridges nationwide is approximately 43 years.³ Without proper funding, could this spell disaster for the economic backbone of our state?

By 2016, the estimate is that 61.46 percent of our bridges will be in fair to poor condition.⁴ Allowing bridges to deteriorate into ruin is not a responsible option. Someday, tragedy could strike Michigan like it did in the Minneapolis I-35 Collapse when 13 people lost their lives. The decision to rely on this system was made decades ago; if we don't do what is needed to maintain it, we are unintentionally deciding to lose the asset and could put our travelling public in danger or force the public to have long detours because of closed bridges.

The Real Cost of Waiting

Deferring maintenance is more than a looming fear, it is a lost opportunity. Michigan has the opportunity to retain its infrastructure that provides reliable logistics to businesses, international trade, creating jobs, and creating a taxbase, which would fund additional economic development. This cycle is an





C2AE BRIDGE Replacement Projects

City of Corunna Shiawassee Street Bridge

Significant structural issues, including deterioration of the center piers and concrete box beams necessitated the replacement of the 1961 structure. Funded by the MDOT Local Bridge Program.

City of Williamston Putnam Street Bridge Replacement

Replacement of the two-span bridge with a single-span box beam structure. The bridge serves as the major link and sole city river crossing between the downtown business district and the residences and schools to the north, as such; one lane remained open during construction. Funded by the MDOT Local Bridge Program.



investment in the future of our state, not an expense—plain and simple. The real cost of waiting looks like this:

- Over a 25-year period, deferring regular, timely maintenance can cost three times as much as preventive maintenance.
- Once a bridge is more than 20-percent deficient, new construction is often required at a substantially higher cost.
- Repair work on roads and bridges generates 16 percent more jobs than new construction does.⁵

Ahead of the Curve

According to the 2013 Transportation for America report, Michigan spends far more (on average) doing repair work on bridges, rather than new construction. If a bridge's rating gets too low, it becomes a replacement project, not just a repair project. Once a bridge is more than 20 percent deficient, new construction is often required at a substantially higher cost. So the state's repair versus rebuild rate represents an incredibly efficient practice that optimizes the amount of money we spend.

But What Else Can the State Do?

When a politician runs on a lower tax platform, it's difficult to adjust to the harsh reality facing our infrastructure needs once elected. It is especially hard when 2/3 of the 2011 state Legislature were freshman legislators, still grasping election promises.

A 10-year/\$1.2 billion per year budget increase was on the table in the 2012 session, but it stalled. The \$351 million in additional funding allocated as a stop gap isn't enough.

BY THE NUMBERS


	U.S. AVERAGE	MICHIGAN AVERAGE	
Average age of all bridges	43 years	43 years	Average daily traffic on deficient bridges in Michigan: 7,542,647
Average age of deficient bridges	65 years	64 years	
Structurally deficient bridges	11%	12.3%	Ranked 18th in the nation
Funding spent on repair	13%	20.5% (\$166 M)	Michigan spent all of its 2012 federal allocation on bridge repair
Funding spent on new capacity	30%	5.9% (\$48 M)	

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. (2008). *Bridging the Gap: Restoring and Rebuilding the Nation's Bridges*. Washington, DC: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

Michigan Department of Transportation. (n.d.). *Structurally Deficient and Functionally Obsolete*. Retrieved 10 2013, July, from State of Michigan Department of Transportation: http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9618_47418-173622--,00.html

Governor Snyder shares the opinion that the state needs to invest more in our infrastructure assets now, rather than paying more later. He proposed raising the state sales tax from six percent to eight percent, devoting a minimum of 90 percent of the newly generated revenue to transportation projects. Currently, only one percent of the state's sales tax goes towards road projects; nearly 75 percent to school aid funding.⁶

What other creative options are there? The city of Williamston is launching a project to repair the city's main artery between Interstate 96 and downtown Williamston this summer. The \$528,000 project is funded in part by a state transportation grant and, reportedly, will play a key role in creating 69 new jobs for automotive supplier Williamston Products. This type of funding is available to other municipalities and companies that work together, but only on tangible projects (not speculative developments).⁷ This kind of public/private sector partnership surely must be the model for the future.

A direct relationship between an investment in a community and an immediate benefit is at least one way the political discussion can shift towards a dialogue about how we, as a state, look towards the next chapter of Michigan's future. 

Roger Marks, P.E. is director of Transportation Services for C2AE. You may contact him at 866-454-3923 or roger.marks@c2ae.com.

With contributions from Al Kaltenthaler, P.E., S.E., vice president of TranSystems.

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business alliance program

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CBS News reported that thousands of U.S. bridges are vulnerable to collapse. There are 66,749 structurally deficient bridges and 84,748 functionally obsolete bridges in the U.S., including Puerto Rico, according to the Federal Highway Administration. (Source: cbsnews.com, 5/25/13) Photo: Wikimedia Commons



Transit-Oriented **DEVELOPMENT** *and New Mobility*

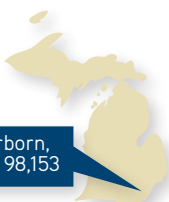
By Luke Forrest



Images: Michigan State University School of Planning, Design and Construction

Mayor John B. O'Reilly, Jr. didn't need to look far

Dearborn,
pop. 98,153



for inspiration when he addressed a group of community leaders and staff about the construction of a new intermodal passenger rail station in Dearborn. He began by asking the crowd to imagine a Dearborn in which children could safely and cheaply bike or ride public transit to shop, visit friends, or attend a Detroit Tigers game. He talked about workers switching between transit modes with ease on their way to or from the office. Lest the audience think he was being unrealistic, he revealed that this was his memory of Dearborn as a child and young man. The city, and the wider Detroit region, he said, had in the ensuing years become too one-dimensional in terms of transportation and land use. The construction of a new transit station offered Dearborn a chance to lead the way back to a more balanced approach.

Recognizing the importance of this new station and the implications for real estate development around it, in autumn 2012 the city, along with key partner institutions such as the University of Michigan–Dearborn, The Henry Ford Museum, and Ford's land development and management company Ford Land, requested assistance from a new program called PlacePlans. PlacePlans is part of Governor Snyder's Mlplace Partnership and is supported by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

In Dearborn's case, the PlacePlans effort addressed dual challenges: diversifying the community's housing stock and its transportation options. City staff identified the lack of connected, walkable/bikeable neighborhoods featuring a mix of housing types and commercial and office uses as an obstacle to attracting and retaining residents. Consumer research has increasingly shown that these types of districts are preferred by large segments of the population. Connected, walkable/bikeable neighborhoods are further enhanced when they are connected to regional transit systems.

PlacePlans

PlacePlans is a Mlplace Partnership initiative to help communities design and plan for transformative placemaking projects. Mlplace is building on the earlier success of five pilot placemaking projects developed by the League's Center for 21st Century Communities. The outcomes of these projects were translated into a formal assessment process called "PlacePlans," which will help solidify placemaking as a key economic development strategy for Michigan communities.

Mlplace received more than 30 letters of interest from communities across the state wanting to participate in the PlacePlans process. From this group, four initial projects were selected, representing a cross section of project type, size, and geographic location. In addition to Dearborn, they include a downtown plaza in Alpena, a mixed-use downtown space in Sault Ste. Marie, and a riverfront/downtown development project in Allegan. The communities will work with the MSU School of Planning, Design and Construction (SPDC) through its Small Town Design Initiative.



When is the next round of PlacePlans?

The League, in partnership with MSHDA and MSU, is soliciting letters of interest from communities desiring technical assistance in one of two categories: physical design and strategic planning. Submit a letter (maximum two pages) describing your project by 3:00 pm, Friday, October 4, by email to lforrest@mml.org. Visit placemaking.mml.org for more details.

The PlacePlans team chose to address Dearborn's transportation challenges by focusing on two objectives:

1. Mapping the existing mobility network, including all modes of transportation, and building on that map with ideas for network improvement.
2. Developing a vision for the transit-oriented development (TOD) district surrounding the new transit station, supported by attractive visual images of a possible future.

Both objectives involved significant engagement with community stakeholders. The city hosted a workshop in May, an event that focused on improving mobility. The city hosted four other public workshops between autumn 2012 and summer 2013. The core PlacePlans team included faculty and students from MSU's School of Planning, Design and Construction (SPDC) and staff from the League. Technical expertise was provided by the University of Michigan's Sustainable Mobility & Accessibility Research & Transformation (SMART) team.

Improving Mobility and Accessibility

Dearborn has numerous individually strong land uses near the new transit station, including:

- two downtowns
- two health centers
- a community college
- a state university
- a regional mall, and
- numerous large office complexes.

Access to these nodes is, in most cases, primarily oriented around private automobiles. UM SMART was a logical partner for this piece of the project, given that Ford Motor Company is heavily involved with both SMART and Dearborn. Despite its reputation as a car company, Ford is leading the way globally in creating new multimodal transportation solutions.

SMART focuses on innovation and implementation in the arena of "New Mobility," defined as "connected, multi-modal, sustainable, door-to-door sustainable transportation and



Images: Michigan State University School of Planning, Design and Construction.

Dearborn leadership sees an opportunity for economic growth in the district around the new transit station, given its proximity to the Henry Ford Museum, the west downtown, and the Rouge River. The goal is to develop a pedestrian and transit-oriented, mixed-use, livable neighborhood.

accessibility.” In mapping Dearborn’s mobility network, SMART found a plethora of existing and potential assets, from Amtrak to two regional bus systems to a growing network of trails and bike lanes. However, these assets are not integrated or user-friendly. After the community workshop, which included transportation researchers and entrepreneurs working globally, SMART gathered and prioritized the ideas for better integration into a top 10 list for city implementation.




A Vision for TOD Transformation

While increasing public transit options is important purely from a mobility and accessibility perspective, many cities around the world have multiplied the value of transit by focusing on the economic development opportunities around transit stations. Research by the National Association of Realtors found a transit premium, defined as “value added to property by proximity to high-capacity transit,” of up to 150 percent. This includes successful projects in auto-oriented metro regions such as Dallas, Saint Louis, and Minneapolis. Dearborn leadership sees a similar opportunity for the district around the new transit station, given its proximity to The Henry Ford, the west downtown, and the Rouge River. Barry Murray, the city’s director of economic and community development, summarized the goal as “a pedestrian and transit-oriented, mixed-use, livable neighborhood that will provide needed density to help support the adjacent downtown, the transit station, and the entire region.”

The team from MSU SPDC, led by faculty members Warren Rauhe and Wayne Beyea, was charged with developing design concepts and ordinance recommendations to reflect the vision of Murray and the many Dearborn residents who participated in the series of workshops. The recommendations were rooted in the principles of transit-oriented development (TOD), summarized by Beyea as:

- Focus upon the pedestrian as the highest priority
- Transit station is the prominent feature of town center

- High-density, high-quality development within 10-minute (½ mile) walk encompasses the station
- Includes collector-support transit systems (e.g. buses, taxis, trolleys, streetcars, light rail, etc.)
- Designed to accommodate other modes of transportation (e.g. bicycles, scooters, rollerblades, etc.)
- Managed parking located within 10-minute (½ mile) radius around town center/transit station

The vision for Dearborn’s TOD district and mobility hub is ambitious. It should be, as it has the potential to be transformative for the community. Redevelopment of the train station site is underway, aided by a \$28 million grant from the Federal Railroad Administration. City staff estimate that implementation of the broader goals will take a decade or more. They credit the PlacePlans process with building support among residents and other stakeholders for significant changes and creative solutions to the community’s challenges. 

Luke Forrest is a program coordinator for the League. You may contact him at 734-669-6323 or lforrest@mml.org.

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GOING ON A ROAD

By Carol H. Tan

Have you ever had a problem walking across a street because you felt it was too wide or had too many lanes to cross comfortably? Have you ever wanted to ride your bicycle to your destination but felt uncomfortable because the direct route lacked bike lanes? Have you ever been through a downtown that seemed drab, dull, lifeless?

You're not alone. Pedestrians generally have difficulty crossing wide roads that have multiple lanes in both directions. In some areas, crossing opportunities for pedestrians are located only at signalized intersections that are spaced at uncomfortable walking distances. In some cases, the number of lanes may be unnecessary for the actual volume of motor vehicle travel. Some roads with lower traffic volumes might be good candidates for bicycle travel, but bicyclists avoid them because of the lack of dedicated bike lanes.

Historically, adding more lanes has been one of the preferred solutions for reducing traffic congestion. In some downtown areas, however, accommodations such as adding lanes and removing parking spaces have resulted in fewer opportunities for people to stop and shop, reducing business for retail stores.

DIET

One approach that engineers and planners use to address these problems is the road diet. Not only can this tactic improve pedestrian and bicyclist mobility and revitalize a downtown, but also it can increase safety by reducing conflicts between motor vehicles.

>>>WHAT IS A ROAD DIET?

The road diet approach involves narrowing travel lanes or shoulders or eliminating some of them to provide more space for pedestrians and bicyclists. A typical road diet consists of converting a four-lane roadway (two in each direction) to a

three-lane (one in each direction plus a center turn lane) and adding sidewalks and/or bicycle lanes. At times, this reconfiguration can be accomplished by simply restriping the lanes in conjunction with a resurfacing project.

Peter Lagerwey, former coordinator of Seattle's pedestrian and bicycle program and now senior planner with the Toole Design Group, sees street rights-of-way as an urban resource that various users are competing for. The rights-of-way provide space for general-purpose lanes, turning lanes, bus and bicycle lanes, parking, sidewalks, buffers, street plantings, and outdoor restaurants. "Roads are to serve all of us," says Lagerwey. "Streets exist 24/7, but peak traffic may be a concern for as little as 30 minutes a day. If you build to peak traffic, you are going to have excess capacity. The good news is that we have overbuilt many of our roadways, and we have a lot of opportunities to do road diets."

Gabe Rousseau, bicycle and pedestrian program manager for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), notes, "Road diets offer a number of community benefits from increasing roadway safety to improving mobility for pedestrians of all ages and abilities, and even helping with traffic congestion."

>>> BENEFITS

In theory, road diets have potential drawbacks, but in fact, case studies in a number of states suggest that problems usually do not occur. Instead, this approach offers a number of benefits in terms of traffic operations, safety, and livability when applied in the appropriate situations.

Operations. On a four-lane street, speeds can vary between lanes. Due to slower vehicles stopped in the left lane waiting to make a turn, drivers must slow or change lanes. On the other hand, road diet streets with two through lanes plus a center turn lane separate left-turning vehicles from the through vehicles. The speeds of motorists in the through lanes are limited only by the speed of the lead vehicle in their own lanes.

Safety. The reduction in vehicle interactions resulting from a road diet potentially can decrease the number and severity of crashes. Typical incidents that occur on four-lane streets include rear-end crashes from left turns, side swipes, left turn/broadsides, and multiple-threat crashes in which a vehicle stopped for a pedestrian blocks the view of the driver in the adjacent lane. Reducing the number of through lanes and providing a center turn lane addresses these crashes by (1) separating left-turning traffic from through traffic, (2) reducing the number of oncoming lanes through which a left-turning driver must search for a gap, and (3) removing the multiple-threat situation because there is no longer an adjacent lane. (See, for example, guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/tools_to_reduce_crossing_distances_for_pedestrians.cfm.)

A Highway Safety Information System (HSIS) summary documents research that analyzed data from California, Iowa, and Washington State used in earlier separate road diets safety evaluations. Their study, summarized by FHWA in *Evaluation of Lane Reduction "Road Diet" Measures on Crashes*

Lane reductions
can increase
safety for
pedestrians,
bicyclists, and
motorists while
improving the
quality of life in
downtowns
across the
country.





The road diet approach involves narrowing travel lanes or shoulders or eliminating some of them to provide more space for pedestrians and bicyclists. Photo courtesy of www.pedbikemages.org/ Greg Griffin.

Livability. If sufficient space is available, highway agencies can add street trees along the sidewalks for aesthetics. According to Lagerwey, street trees change the feel and character of a street. After a road diet and addition of landscaping, the messaging given by a street is: Slow down, this is a neighborhood, a place to respect bicyclists and pedestrians. Overall, road diets can lead to an improvement in livability, making walking and bicycling in downtown areas more pleasant. Other benefits include the economic impacts on businesses of a street that caters to all users, as well as increases in real estate values.

››› CASE STUDIES

A road diet project in Vancouver, WA, reduced crashes by 52 percent on an arterial with ADT (Average Daily Traffic) of 17,000 vehicles. Traffic speeds went down 18 percent, traffic diversions did not occur, and an overwhelming majority (67 percent) of users surveyed felt safer.

A road diet conversion in Athens, GA, on an arterial with 20,000 ADT resulted in crashes going down 53 percent in general and 60 percent at unsignalized locations. Traffic diversion was less than four percent, and 47 percent of users perceived the number of lanes and street width as “just right.” Another 33 percent were unsure, and only 20 percent were unhappy.

In Clear Lake, IA, a downtown segment of U.S. 18 with 12,000 ADT was converted from four to two lanes plus a center turn lane. A significant reduction in crashes was evident, and aggressive speeding went down by 52 percent.

››› PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE

Gaining public acceptance is important but can be challenging. Without the support of the residents and business owners, the road diet may not happen or, if it is installed, residents may criticize the transportation department’s efforts. Common concerns include impact on traffic flow, congestion, cost, increased traffic on neighborhood streets, and access to and from driveways and side streets.

A transportation agency can address concerns about traffic flow and congestion by providing the results of success stories where road diets improved mobility for all road users. When road diets are applied appropriately, traffic will remain relatively unchanged. Lagerwey offers a word of caution, however: “Pay attention to the signalization to avoid potential backups. See if you need to put in a left-turn arrow so your

(FHWA-HRT-10-053), measured crash reductions of 47 percent on predominantly U.S. and state routes in small urban areas (average population: 17,000) and 19 percent on corridors in suburban areas surrounding larger cities (average population: 269,000).

Lagerwey says, “In general, when you complete a road diet, you can expect close to a 30-percent overall crash reduction factor. There are at least 50 to 60 standard traffic operation tools that we have to reduce crashes. Getting close to a 30-percent crash reduction factor is a really high number in terms of the effectiveness of a particular treatment.”

Besides reducing crashes between motor vehicles, road diets can decrease other incidents by providing designated spaces—sidewalks and bicycle lanes—that reduce opportunities for conflicts between motor vehicles and other road users. Creating these spaces reduces the number of motor vehicle travel lanes, so pedestrians have fewer lanes of traffic to cross, again decreasing the potential for incidents. The center left-turn lanes also provide space for pedestrian crossing islands, which reduce crossing distances and can help prevent motorists from using the center turn lane as a passing lane.

The new street environment created by a road diet enables motorists to be more aware of the presence of pedestrians and bicyclists. Changing the environment of a street to one where motorists are expecting to see bicyclists and pedestrians can make it safer for those users.

One of the foremost reasons for increased safety from road diets is the reduced instances of speeding. Road diets encourage motorists to drive at the desired speed of the roadway.

road diet doesn't backfire. The public reaction will be that there is a problem—not with the signal, but with the road diet—and they will want to get rid of it.”

Road diets are relatively low-cost improvements, especially if a repaving project is ongoing. In the case of reconstruction or repaving, most of the effort for a road diet improvement involves restriping only. In the larger picture, however, it is important to note that implementing a road diet can result in changing the roadway design to match the context of the desired land use. Land use and transportation need to be integrated. A road diet's success can be dependent upon land use policies that support the desired transportation function.

Safety and economics are the major positives. As discussed earlier, research has shown that road diets potentially can result in significant reductions in total crashes, depending on the type of roadway and land use. As for economics, easier left turns into driveways and private parking lots can encourage more customers to stop for shopping, thus improving business.

Agencies can gain public acceptance for road diets by holding workshops. To measure and document the success of a project, before-and-after satisfaction surveys are crucial.


>>>NEXT STEPS

Nearly every community in the United States has opportunities to implement road diets. Highway agencies can use street and location criteria to identify potential candidates for road diets. In “Road Diets: Fixing the Big Roads,” Lagerwey and coauthor Dan Burden describe a number of additional case studies and suggest that candidate roadways meet some of the following criteria (see walkable.org/assets/downloads/roaddiets.pdf):

- Moderate volumes (8,000-15,000 ADT)
- Roads with safety issues
- Transit corridors
- Popular or essential bicycle routes and links
- Commercial reinvestment areas
- Economic enterprise zones
- Historic streets
- Scenic roads
- Entertainment districts
- Main streets

When deciding to implement this treatment, road managers, engineers, and planners need to consider whether the street meets any of these criteria and whether it is on a transportation improvement plan. Lagerwey offers a rule of thumb: If the prospective road is in an urbanized situation with a number of left turns, short blocks, and a signal at every corner, then a road diet could be appropriate in some situations with a traffic volume as high as 25,000. On the other hand, if a

road has virtually no left turns and few signals, a road diet might be inappropriate if the ADT is over 18,000.

The steps for implementing road diets will vary from community to community. The process depends on who owns the road, plus the local and state regulations. Requirements probably will differ on the kind of study and analysis needed. Road diets help to reclaim the street space for enhanced use rather than devoting them just to moving peak hour traffic. “When you start looking at total street capacity, the story we have to tell about road diets becomes even better,” says Lagerwey. “This is more than just something for bicyclists and pedestrians; this is energizing the street, it’s economic development, it’s a way we can reclaim and ‘re-peopize’ our streets. The good news is this: literally every community in America has opportunities to do road diets.” 

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Because of space limitations, this article was modified from its original version, which was published in Federal Highway Administration's *Public Roads* magazine (September/October 2011, Vol. 75, No. 2) as “Going on a Road Diet” (www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/11septoct/05.cfm).

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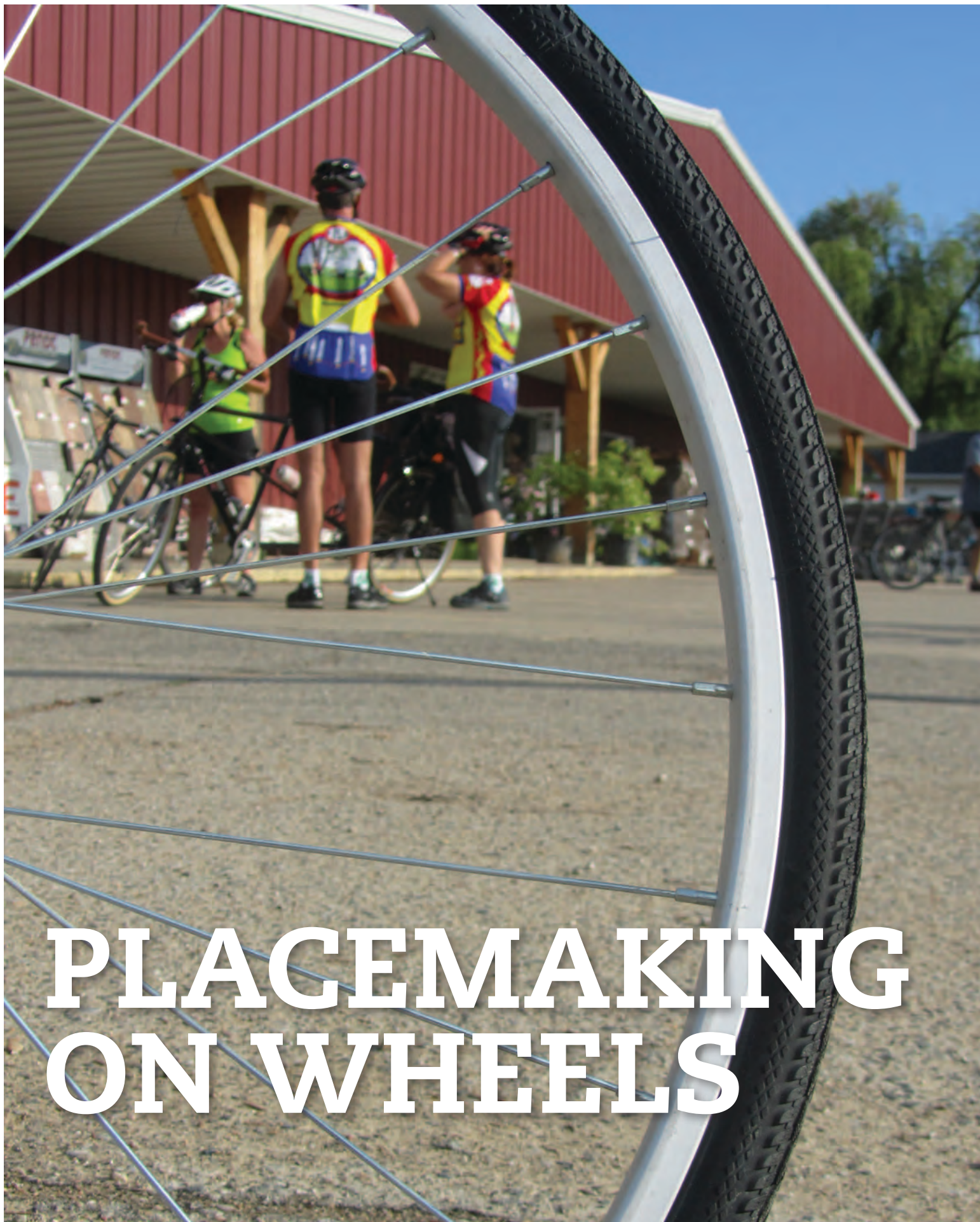




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PLACEMAKING ON WHEELS

By Elizabeth Shaw

Pedal Across Lower Michigan Highlights Bikeability

Six days, 825 bicyclists, two Great Lakes, seven communities, and 269 miles of city streets and rural roads... add all that together, and it's easy to see why the PALM bike tour puts the pedal power to "placemaking on wheels."

For the past 32 years, Pedal Across Lower Michigan (PALM) has been empowering, educating, and engaging cyclists of all ages, shapes, and sizes—and sending out a loud and clear public message that bicycling in Michigan is accessible pretty much everywhere to everyone.

During the week of June 21-28, 2013, I biked PALM XXXII from Norton Shores on Lake Michigan to Luna Pier on Lake Erie to check out Michigan's Complete Streets progress and bikeability issues across the state.

Back in 1982, during the first PALM from Berrien Springs to Detroit, pretty much nobody in Michigan was talking about bikeability or Complete Streets, and certainly not about how those things can enhance placemaking. But the goals were similar—to promote bicycle tourism in Michigan, encourage bicycling as an everyday mode of transportation, and raise public awareness for safe bicycling.

The goals haven't changed in 32 years, said current PALM chair Kevin Novess, Sr. But they have become more challenging as urban sprawl puts more commuters and commercial development on formerly quiet, rural roadways.

Promoting Bicycle Tourism in Michigan

"It's gotten more difficult to find routes. Some roads that were suitable 20 or 30 years ago aren't anymore due to the increase in traffic," said Novess. "On the other hand, thanks to Complete Streets legislation, we're starting to see more and more communities putting in bike lanes and such. But there's still a big, big difference between what you see in cities and villages, and what's out there in the townships in between."

We rode from Norton Shores to Grandville past rolling fields of blueberry bushes and asparagus fields, and quaint farmhouses and cottages overlooking quiet wetlands and lakes. We savored a mid-morning watermelon break on the shady shore of a slow-moving river at Eastmanville Bayou Park. In Allendale, the school band boosters



PALM promotes bicycle tourism in Michigan, encourages bicycling as an everyday mode of transportation, and raises public awareness for safe bicycling.

treated us to a fundraising lunch of sandwiches and ice-cold drinks, serenaded by tuba players playing *Louie Louie* in the shade.

We pedaled through rainstorms from Lake Odessa to Charlotte, and sheltered beneath a park pavilion in Vermontville, where the village church opened its doors to hundreds of drenched cyclists seeking a clean, dry rest-room break. The night before the tour hit Freeport, the owner of the Shamrock Tavern told us she'd packed more than 100 box lunches in hopes of drawing even a fraction of the 800+ tourists cycling through town.

We sipped icy slushes next to a river dam in Manchester, and gorged on pulled pork sandwiches at the famous Grass Lake Diner. In Washtenaw County, the Ann Arbor Bicycle Touring Society hosted a rest stop heaped with homemade cookies. The Dansville mayor greeted us in the gym of her K-12 school, joking that we'd tripled the village population when we camped there overnight.

A ride doesn't get much better than this.

"It's a way to see parts of Michigan you would never see and towns you would never stop in driving your car," said Detroit engineer Eric Rainer, who was on his third PALM tour. "Before I started riding PALM, I would've said 'where is Dansville and what the heck is Paw Paw'? It takes me away from the city and shows me all these beautiful old downtowns that are just so peaceful and unique. Even if you've lived in Michigan your entire life, you always learn something new."



Local leaders are realizing that physical design and walkability are key components to building and sustaining highly livable communities with a unique sense of place. "[PALM] is a way to see parts of Michigan you would never see and towns you would never stop in driving your car," said Detroit engineer Eric Rainer, a three-time participant.

Complete Streets— Bicycling as Transportation

Increasingly, local leaders are realizing that physical design and walkability are key components to building and sustaining highly livable communities with a unique sense of place. About 100 Michigan communities have adopted local Complete Streets policies. But without adequate funding and the political will to get it done, most of Michigan's roads will continue to lack some of the essential elements that make road bike travel truly safe and accessible.

"Every legislator should have to ride a bike across the state before they can vote on road funding," said



Ellie Knesper of Ann Arbor, a PALM staffer who's ridden the tour for the past 29 years. She said it as we bounced along a bombed-out stretch of pavement in rural Monroe County, notorious for its deteriorated road surfaces. The day before, we'd run the gauntlet through heavy traffic on a state trunkline, where the roughly patched asphalt made it dangerous to ride far enough to the right to allow vehicles to pass in the same lane. Not a happy scenario for the cars or bikes.

Bad roads affect every user, not just cyclists. Even something as simple and straightforward as wide paved shoulders on a rural highway can make all the difference in enabling a cyclist to feel confident and drivers more able to maintain a safe passing distance without getting frustrated.

Complete Streets policies are slowly changing this dynamic, but retrofitting our roadways is a lengthy and costly process made even more challenging by shrinking local revenues. As of this writing, the Legislature has yet to vote on future transportation funding.

Raising Public Awareness for Safe Bicycling

We also need laws that adequately protect vulnerable users on *all* our streets, complete or not, and education that ensures everyone—motorized and non-motorized users alike—understands the rules of the road. But bicycle safety education is virtually absent both in public schools and driver education classes.


"There is a very common misconception among motorists that bikes should not be on the road. If we had some education going on maybe that could change," said League of American Bicyclists (LAB) certified bike



There are direct economic impacts from PALM's placemaking on wheels—riders eat meals and stop to shop along the route. (p 26 bottom left: the Shamrock Tavern in Freeport and the famous Grass Lake Diner in the village of Grass Lake (above).

safety instructor Al Lauland. "Bikes fare best when they act and are treated as vehicles. In my estimation, the number one component to making Michigan more bike-friendly is to get vehicles educated on how to share the road with bikes and educate cyclists on how to share the road with cars."

Progress is being made. Thanks to the efforts of groups like LAB and the League of Michigan Bicyclists (LMB), better legislation is making its way into state and local law, such as the recent introduction of Vulnerable Roadway User bills in the State House of Representatives.

In 2013, Michigan climbed from #19 to #12 on LAB's annual list of bike-friendly states, and now offers more than 2,300 miles of rail-trails. Rides like PALM empower us all to share the road. Now we all need to do our part to ensure those roads are fit to share. 

Elizabeth Shaw is a communications coordinator for the league. You may contact her at 734-669-6318 or eshaw@mml.org.





BUILDING THE FIRST BUS RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM IN MICHIGAN

BY BILL KIRK

In early April of 2013, Governor Rick Snyder was joined by transit officials and business leaders to celebrate the groundbreaking of Michigan's first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. Scheduled for completion in August 2014, this project represents the first major investment in a new modal project by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in Michigan. The regional transit authority in metropolitan Grand Rapids, known as The Rapid, has been planning this project and navigating the federal, state, and local approval process since 2003.

Comparable projects around the country and the globe have demonstrated huge success not only with respect to more convenient, efficient travel, but also in catalyzing economic development in the corridors they serve. The Division Avenue corridor stretching from downtown Grand Rapids to southern Kent County will be another example of this success.

WHAT IS BRT?

Bus Rapid Transit is an incredibly efficient and effective mode of public transit that was first introduced and built in Curitiba, Brazil in 1974. BRT combines the speed and convenience of Light Rail Transit (LRT) with the cost-effectiveness of bus service. In order to achieve travel times that compete with light rail, BRT systems employ a variety of operational components that allow a BRT vehicle to travel through a corridor much faster than traditional bus service.

BRT systems generally utilize a dedicated lane (similar to a carpool lane on a highway), and also operate with technology that allows the vehicles to communicate with traffic signals in order to move through intersections faster. In addition, BRT stations are similar to rail stations in various ways, including: pre-paid ticketing (similar to subway systems), and "level" boarding (eliminating the need for any ramps for assisted boarding). Finally, most BRT systems have limited stops. For instance, in this particular project, the BRT vehicles will stop approximately every mile, compared to the local bus service that stops almost every quarter mile. The result is an express service designed for faster commuting that will travel the Division Avenue corridor to downtown Grand Rapids in approximately 30 minutes, compared to regular bus service, which would take almost an hour to complete the same trip. From a funding perspective, BRT costs about 1/10 to build compared to light rail.

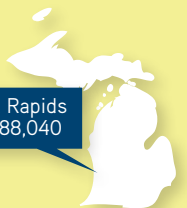
BRT STATIONS

For this project, 33 independent stations are being constructed. These stations are state of the art, and are already beginning to have a positive economic development impact on the properties and neighborhoods around them. This impact, referred to as transit-oriented development, has revitalized and enhanced corridors, business districts, and neighborhoods all over the world. In Grand Rapids, the Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF) and Brookstone Capital are both working on large scale, mixed-use developments on the BRT line, and both organizations have cited proximity to the BRT as a critical component. ICCF has completed the first phase of their \$17 million project, which will have a BRT station on the site, and Brookstone was recently approved to move forward on a \$40 million development, which will be less than a ¼ mile from a BRT station.



**BUS RAPID TRANSIT
COMBINES THE SPEED
AND CONVENIENCE OF
LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT
WITH THE COST-
EFFECTIVENESS
OF BUS SERVICE.**

Grand Rapids
pop. 188,040



These stations range from 40 to 60 feet long and are constructed of stainless steel and glass. They will feature real-time arrival information, ticket vending machines, route and schedule information, heated snow-melt platforms, an emergency phone, and closed circuit television surveillance. A raised curb and a “docking strip” will allow BRT vehicles to pull up less than two inches from the platform, creating level boarding just like a subway or light rail car.



Grand Rapids' Bus Rapid Transit project represents the first major investment in a new modal project by the FTA in Michigan. The thirty-three state-of-the-art stations under construction are already showing a positive economic development impact on the properties and neighborhoods around them.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

The Rapid regional transit authority consists of the six-city area in Kent County, including East Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, and Wyoming. The BRT route includes Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and Wyoming. This project has been a fantastic example of regional cooperation. From water and electrical infrastructure to traffic signals, officials from all three cities and the team at The Rapid have been working together to coordinate construction and mitigate issues. Each city's mayor, engineering department, planning department, and traffic safety department have been included in the planning process from the very beginning stages of the project. The construction team at Christman Construction has coordinated with each city throughout this year's construction to ensure that community concerns are addressed and major events are not negatively impacted. The entire process has been open and transparent, allowing for maximum input and feedback from all members of each community.

BUILDING THE FUTURE OF TRANSIT IN WEST MICHIGAN

This BRT project in the Division corridor represents a very important piece of a much larger, longer-term vision for transit in the region. In 2010, The Rapid adopted a 20-year guiding vision, called the Transit Master Plan, which identified projects and service enhancements throughout the system area and the region for the next 20 years. Bus Rapid Transit in the Division corridor is the first major project in the plan, and other corridors have been identified for potential BRT service. One such corridor, Lake Michigan Drive (M-45), just entered the conceptual engineering phase, and over the next year, analysis and public input will inform the design and plan for what will likely be Michigan's second BRT line.

“The BRT project on Division Avenue represents a big leap for transit in the region, as well as the rest of the state,” said Conrad Venema, The Rapid's strategic planning manager and the project manager for the BRT. “We are thrilled to be working in such a collaborative capacity with so many great partners, and we know that demonstrating success on this project will help enhance public transit throughout the state.” 

Bill Kirk is the public outreach coordinator for The Rapid. You may contact him at 616-456-7514 or bkirk@ridetherapid.org.

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BENZIE BUS

RURAL TRANSIT ON A ROLL

BY KELLY THAYER

Benzie County
pop. 17,525



“Public transit *can’t* work here in Benzie County; that’s an urban thing. And people can just rely on their neighbors if they need a ride.”

Those sentiments were regularly spoken here in northwest Michigan back in 2005-2006, as volunteers promoted the idea of starting a countywide bus system. The aim was to serve rural residents who could not or did not want to drive and everyone else struggling to reach work, school, a medical appointment, the grocery store, or even just a friend’s house.

Supporters pointed out that public transit was working well in all the neighboring counties: Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Manistee, and Wexford. A 2002 survey showed that a majority of Benzie County residents wanted and would pay a small tax for a safe and reliable bus service. Backed by these facts, and strengthened by the support of many agencies and local residents, volunteers in April 2006 convinced the Benzie County Board of Commissioners to form the independent Benzie Transportation Authority (BTA).

Taking It to the People

In August 2006, the BTA’s board of directors held an election to launch a countywide public transit system, with connections to neighboring Traverse City and Manistee. Supporters had presented their plan numerous times, circulated fact sheets, planted yard signs, sponsored TV commercials, and even raised funds by holding a pro-transit outdoor folk concert.

On election night, proponents hoped for the best and were elated with the result. With heavy turnout, 58 percent of voters approved the 0.50-mill property tax request to establish and run the Benzie Bus system. The election marked the first time in Michigan that a campaign succeeded in its first attempt to pass a millage to form a new bus system.

In May 2011, a whopping 75 percent of voters renewed the property tax, which contributes about \$500,000 toward Benzie Bus’ annual budget of approximately \$1.5 million. State and federal matching funds pay for about half the cost to run the buses and the full cost to buy them.

"We received strong support from businesses, faith-based and social services organizations, medical, and the environmental community," said Ingemar Johansson, founding volunteer and board member. "This, together with a far reaching and smart campaign, is what brought our community together and made it successful."

Booming Demand for a Ride

Today, Benzie Bus is run by 40 full- and part-time employees operating a fleet of 20 buses and 2 vans. All the vehicles transport riders in wheelchairs, and most also offer bicycle racks.

More than 40,000 one-way rides were provided to Benzie County residents and visitors via the Benzie Bus in 2007, nearly doubling the state's estimate for the first year of service. Demand has soared since then. In 2012, more than 73,000 people took a one-way ride on Benzie Bus (almost 90,000 rides, with transfers included).

Its organizational mission states that "Benzie Bus connects people of all ages and abilities to our community and promotes independence and prosperity through a safe and convenient public transit system." There's direct evidence that the bus system is delivering on that mission. Approximately one-third of riders are senior citizens (60 and older), another third are people with disabilities (including some seniors), and among the rest are students and numerous commuters and shoppers strengthening the local economy.

Partnering to Meet Rural and Regional Needs

A key challenge is meeting the diverse transit needs of a dispersed, rural population in a county of 17,500 residents with only one small city, Frankfort, a few village centers, and

large inland lakes that make many trips long and costly. Benzie County's population is older than the state average, so dial-a-ride service is in high demand, but the service is expensive to deliver. A "flex route" is also offered and runs along the county's two main highways, deviating somewhat from its course to pick up nearby passengers.

Meanwhile, Benzie Bus is considering direct bus routes to serve some of the 2,500 commuters leaving the county each day for jobs in and around Traverse City. Benzie Bus plans later this year to launch a study to continue to gauge residents' transit needs and how best to meet them. Already, Benzie Bus connects hourly in Interlochen via free transfer with the neighboring Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA), which serves Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties.

"Benzie residents rely on our link with BATA to reach Traverse City, which is the regional hub for employment, higher education, and health care," said Susan Miller, executive director of the Benzie Bus system. "And residents



In 2007, Benzie Bus provided more than 40,000 one-way rides, nearly doubling the state's estimate for the first year of service. Demand has soared since then. In 2012, more than 73,000 people took a one-way ride.


"Some people said a bus system would never work in a rural area like ours.

Now people tell us every day that they can't imagine how they ever got along without the Benzie Bus. It has changed lives and even changed a few people's minds."

— Beverly Holbrook, Chair of the Benzie Transportation Authority



The Benzie Bus system directs its dispatch operations and maintenance from a state-of-the-art facility—the Benzie Bus Station, which was completed in 2011 after renovation and expansion of a former car dealership. It was funded by state and federal appropriations and the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. The facility also functions as a backup operations center if needed by the Benzie County Emergency Management Department, and twice has served as a temporary American Red Cross shelter during severe storms and power outages.

The Benzie Bus system operates Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The full fare is \$3 for a one-way trip, and the discounted fare is \$1.50 for senior citizens, people with disabilities, and children 12 and under. Discount passes are also available. 

Kelly Thayer is a Benzie Transportation Authority board member.

For more information call Benzie Bus at 231-325-3000 or toll free at 866-325-3380; or visit us online at www.BenzieBus.com.

from Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties now have a transit option when they come our way for recreation and to visit our unique restaurants and shops.”

Michigan Department of Transportation Director Kirk Steudle said, “This agreement between BATA and the Benzie Transportation Authority is an example of the kind of cooperation among partner agencies and businesses we see with increasing frequency across the state. I applaud this culture of collaboration, especially when a plan is initiated at the local level and we can help make the vision a reality. Tell us what you want to do and then ask how we can help.”

The election marked the first time in Michigan that a campaign succeeded in its first attempt to pass a millage to form a new bus system.

Stretching and Collaborating

Benzie Bus continues to stretch its budget to meet growing demand for a ride. In early 2013, the bus system converted five of its gasoline-fueled buses to also run on cheaper, liquefied petroleum gas (propane), saving about \$30 per day per vehicle. Benzie Bus also generates revenue through contracts to perform preventative maintenance and inspections on county ambulances and fire trucks for a few townships.

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‘Stop the Slump’

As part of a month-long “stop the slump” campaign, focused on promoting workplaces wellness, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan encouraged Michigan residents to bike to work on Friday, May 17, in recognition of National Bike to Work Day. With the support of many downtown business partners, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan hosted a morning reception in the outdoor courtyard of its downtown Detroit Tower headquarters for participants.

“Through our many campus initiatives, from exercise classes to walking the BLUpath, we’ve continually encouraged our employees to bring wellness into their workday,” stated Tricia Keith, senior vice president, Corporate Secretary and Services, at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. “We’re happy to participate in, and support, this collaborative effort to make the downtown Detroit workforce healthier.”

Anyone commuting to Detroit was welcome to join larger groups to bike to work. The following four routes were organized:

- From Royal Oak, following Woodward Avenue
- From Dearborn, using Michigan Avenue
- From St. Clair Shores, following Lakeshore Drive/East Jefferson
- From Northville, following Hines Drive to Michigan Avenue


Organizers made exact meeting times and other logistics for each route available closer to the date and asked those who planned to participate and attend the breakfast reception, to register through Eventbrite (an online event registration site) for planning and communication purposes. The reception and breakfast were free to all registered cyclists.

Despite being better known as the town that brought the automobile to the masses, bicycling culture is on the rise in Detroit; with events such as the Tour de Troit attracting thousands of cyclists to explore the city each fall, and specialty bike manufacturers, such as Shinola and Detroit Bikes, and retailers like the Hub opening businesses in the city.

In recent years, Detroit has installed more than 70 miles of dedicated bike lanes in places like Belle Isle, the Connor Creek Greenway, and throughout Southwest Detroit. Many more are on the way, making it easier for people to bicycle in the city for recreation or as an alternative way to commute to work.

“We’re seeing a tremendous uptick in people bicycling throughout the city, thanks in part to new greenways and bike lanes,” said Todd Scott, Detroit greenways coordinator with the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance and the voice of the blog m-bike.org. “Once people try it, they realize Detroit’s flat terrain and relatively calm roads can make bicycling a preferred mode of travel—even when going to work.”

The 2013 Bike to Work Day activities were organized by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan’s Active Blue employee resource group, with support from American Cycle & Fitness, Miller Canfield, Mode Shift, and Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance.

Throughout the month of May, the Blues encouraged people to incorporate wellness into their workday by highlighting simple ways to “stop the slump.” The “slump” is the period of late afternoon, traditionally between 2 and 4 p.m., when people tend to feel sluggish, tired, and less productive at work. Research suggests that sitting at a desk for long periods of time without getting up has negative health consequences, such as increased risk of heart disease and diabetes and higher levels of cholesterol and blood sugar—even for those who regularly exercise. 

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, a nonprofit organization, provides and administers health benefits to more than 4.4 million members residing in Michigan in addition to members of Michigan-headquartered groups who reside outside the state. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network are nonprofit corporations and independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. For more company information, visit bcbsm.com.



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By Caroline Weber Kennedy

Ontonagon

Ontonagon,
pop. 1,494



Non-Traditional Constituency Drives Complete Streets



The Complete Street ordinance accommodates pedestrians, bicycles, and wheelchairs—both regular and motorized—in a climate that simultaneously welcomes and endures 140 inches of annual snowfall.

Nearly one-fifth of Michigan communities have adopted Complete Streets resolutions. If you're on the list—congratulations! This is the first step toward paving a new, enhanced relationship between people and the physical aspects of your community.

While many Complete Streets efforts are championed by a very large population base, the very northern Village of Ontonagon was approached by a different champion: RICC.

Accommodating Pedestrians, Bicyclists, and Wheelchairs

RICC is the Regional Inclusive Community Coalition, a local self-advocacy group whose members consist of people with developmental disabilities, family members, and their allies. RICC became aware of the Complete Streets initiative and discussed its potential impact for themselves and the entire community. RICC invited village officials to its next meeting, and Trustee Tony Smydra, whose previous work was in the mental health field, was sold. He and Village Manager Joe Erickson then pitched to the village board the vision of Ontonagon Complete Streets as one that would accommodate pedestrians, bicycles, and wheelchairs—both regular and motorized—in a climate that simultaneously welcomes and endures 140 inches of annual snowfall.

In May of 2012, the village board adopted a complete streets ordinance and a short time later presented a certificate of appreciation to RICC for bringing this important issue to its immediate attention.

Linking Public Housing to Downtown

The village performed an evaluation of streets throughout the village, creating a list of streets needing repair, and establishing priorities based on the ON-TRAN bus routes, and other areas for linking sidewalks and trails. For example, a public housing area located several blocks from downtown had an existing three-block path extending through the woods, which ended with a two-block gap to downtown that was forcing users into the roadway.

Ontonagon chose resurfacing the street in this 25 mph zone and adding an eight-foot path separated from traffic by a rumble strip to link public housing residents to downtown. Many of RICC's members live

in public housing and use wheelchairs. This solution allows the village to keep the route plowed and accessible to all users throughout the long winter.


Ontonagon had already instituted the Safe Routes to School program, keeping those sidewalks open year-round. An interesting side note for our friends in snowy communities is that Ontonagon added concrete between the roadway and sidewalk to facilitate wing plows keeping this route cleared. Otherwise, snow banks overwhelm and close the route. Not every solution is ideal, but don't let such challenges become the barriers to achieving something greater. Coupled with the integration of Complete Streets, the village anticipates its walkscore will increase from 65 to about 80.

The trail extension from public housing to downtown will also be integrated into Ontonagon's Recreation Trail Plan, which will soon provide a link to the Lake Superior pathway extending two miles to scenic Ontonagon Township Park and Campground. The village understands that residents don't care about the boundaries of governmental units when it comes to quality of life. "These relatively simple connections to the best assets of our area are what exponentially improve quality of life. Traditional communities were built on a human scale—for people, not cars. Complete Streets help people access their needs as well as community assets, while still accommodating the vehicles necessary for healthy tourism, industry, and



practical maintenance," says Smydra, who was motivated out of retirement and now serves as program coordinator for Copper Country Mental Health's Ontonagon Center.

Gateway to Porcupine Mountains: Enticing Cyclists

Additionally, Ontonagon is working to connect its bike path to M-64, on which MDOT has already widened the shoulders to create a biking route to the Porcupine Mountains. Ontonagon is known as the Gateway to the Porcupine Mountains. Having this connector helps the village become host to the increasing number of touring cyclists, improving its economy and contributing to its unique sense of place. 

Caroline Weber Kennedy is manager of field operations for the League. You may contact her at 906-428-0100 or ckennedy@mmlorg.

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Motivation not relevant in Whistleblowers' Protection Act claim

FACTS:

Bruce Whitman was the police chief for the city of Burton from 2002 to 2007. Charles Smiley, the mayor of Burton, declined to reappoint Whitman in November 2007. Whitman brought an action against the city and the mayor under the Whistleblowers' Protection Act (WPA), claiming that the mayor's refusal to reappoint him was prompted by Whitman's repeated complaints that the refusal to pay Whitman's previously accumulated unused sick and personal leave time would violate a Burton ordinance.

Burton Ordinance 68C allows for unelected administrative officers, including Whitman, to be compensated for unused sick, personal, and vacation time on an annual basis. Because of significant budget restraints, the mayor and city department heads entered into an agreement acknowledged in a memorandum dated March 18, 2003 to forgo payments called for under Ordinance 68C. Two days later, Whitman began a series of objections to various city officials, claiming that the refusal to pay the accumulated sick leave, etc. was a violation of Ordinance 68C and that he would pursue the matter "as far as it needs to go." In January 2004, upon advice from the city attorney that refusal to pay would be a violation of Ord. 68C, the city paid Whitman his accumulated sick leave. In June 2004, the mayor stated that he was considering removing Whitman citing Whitman's actions in pursuing compensation for the accumulated sick leave, etc. After his re-election in 2007, the mayor declined to reappoint Whitman and stated publicly that his relationship with Whitman "got off on the wrong foot" because of the Ordinance 68C issue.

The Whistleblowers' Protection Act protects an employee against an employer's retaliatory employment actions, including discharge, when the employee "reports or is about to report, verbally or in writing, a violation or a suspected violation of a law" of the state, political subdivision, or United States to a public body. The city and the mayor claimed, in defense to Whitman's claim, that a previous Michigan Supreme Court decision requires that the employee must have, as his or her primary motivation for engaging in that conduct, a desire to inform the public on matters of public concern, rather than personal vindictiveness.

QUESTION:

Does the Michigan Whistleblowers' Protection Act require that an employee's primary motivation for engaging in protected conduct be a desire to inform the public of matters of public concern?

Answer according to the Trial Court and Jury:

No. The jury found that Whitman had engaged in protected conduct and that his protected conduct made a difference in the mayor's decision not to reappoint him as police chief. The jury awarded him \$232,500.

Answer according to the Court of Appeals:

Yes. The court of appeals reversed, holding that Whitman's claim was not actionable under the WPA since Whitman intended to advance his own financial interests and had not pursued the issue to inform the public on a matter of public concern. The court of appeals did not address the issue of whether there was a causal connection between Whitman's conduct and the mayor's decision not to rehire.

Answer according to the Michigan Supreme Court:

No. The plaintiff's motivation in an action under the WPA is not relevant to the issue whether a plaintiff has engaged in protected activity and proof of primary motivation is not prerequisite to bringing a claim. The Supreme Court remanded the case to the court of appeals, however, on the issue of whether there was a causal connection between the protected conduct and the failure to rehire, i.e., was the failure to rehire because of Whitman's protected activity under the criteria established in *Debano-Griffin v Lake Co*, 493 Mich 167 (2013).

Whitman v City of Burton, No. 143475, Michigan Supreme Court (May 1, 2013).

This column highlights a recent judicial decision or Michigan Municipal League Legal Defense Fund case that impacts municipalities. The information in this column should not be considered a legal opinion or to constitute legal advice.

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HEALTHCARE REFORM AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

Q. Do we really need to calculate hours for our elected officials under the new healthcare reform?

A: Our research suggests that municipalities will need to track the hours for any paid elected officials just as they would track any variable-hour employee to determine and document whether or not they qualify for benefits under health care reform.

To calculate your FTE employees, it is recommended that you use the 120-hour per month approach.

1. Count the number of full-time employees for each month (those working 30 or more hours per week).
2. Sum the monthly hours worked for all applicable non-full-time employees, then divide the total by 120.
3. For each month, add together the results from step 1 and 2.
4. To calculate the annual average, add each month's total FTE then divide by 12.

FTE CALCULATION EXAMPLE

City X has 43 full-time employees who work 30 or more hours each week. It also has five part-time employees (2 @ 20 hours per week, 1 @ 25 hours per week, 1 @ 27.5 hours per week, and one who works a variable schedule) and five elected officials who each work variable hours per week.

Seasonal and/or temporary employees, however, do have an exemption when calculating full-time equivalents. If your seasonal and/or temporary help work less than 120 days in the year, they do not need to be included in your FTE calculation. However, if they do work 120 days or more, you would need to track their hours to include in the calculation.

Most of the provisions of Health Care Reform go into effect with the first renewal on or after January 1, 2014. Keep in mind, though, that the new taxes and fees will go into effect on January 1, 2014 regardless of plan year.

The League has a Health Care Reform webinar available on our website at mml.org for \$40. In addition, many of our Business Alliance Program participants (www.mml.org/alliance/index.php), as well as your insurance broker/carrier, may also have helpful information available.

Employee Type	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual Average
Full Time	43.0	43.0	43.0	43.0	43.0		43.0	43.0	43.0	43.0	43.0	43.00	43.00
Non-Full-Time (see calculation below)	0	0	0	0	0	43.00	0	0	0	0	0	43.00	43.00
	5.42	6.42	5.42	5.68	5.58	7.12	6.15	6.25	5.68	5.58	5.75	5.75	5.90
Total FTE	48.4	49.4	48.4	48.6	48.5	50.12	49.1	49.2	48.6	48.5	48.7	48.75	48.90
Monthly Non-Full-Time Hours													
Part-Time 1 (20 hrs/wk)	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	
Part-Time 2 (20 hrs/wk)	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	
Part-Time 3 (25 hrs/wk)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
Part-Time 4 (27.5 hrs/wk)	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	
Part-Time 5 (variable hrs/wk)	80	100	80	112	100	144	128	140	112	100	80	80	
Elected Officials (variable hrs/wk)	200	300	200	200	200	340	240	240	200	200	240	240	
Total Monthly Hours	650	770	650	682	670	854	738	750	682	670	690	690	
120 Hour Rule (divide monthly hrs by 120)	120	120	120	120	120	120	120	120	120	120	120	120	
Total Monthly FTE	5.42	6.42	5.42	5.68	5.58	7.12	6.15	6.25	5.68	5.58	5.75	5.75	

OATH OF OFFICE

Q. Do newly elected officials need to be sworn into office within 10 days of being elected?

A: The length of time will depend first on your form of government. General law village officers must take the oath of office within 30 days of receiving their notice of election. For home rule cities and home rule villages, the length of time will be contained in your charter. Here is an example from a city charter:

Section 5.10. - Oath of office and bond.

Every officer, elective or appointive, before entering upon the duties of his office, shall take the oath of office prescribed for public officers by the constitution and shall file the oath with the clerk, together with any bond required by statute, this Charter or by the commission. In case of failure to comply with the provisions of this section *within ten days* from the date he is notified in writing of his election or appointment, such officer shall be deemed to have declined the office and such office shall thereupon become vacant unless the commission shall by resolution extend the time in which such officer may qualify. (emphasis added)

ELECTRONIC RECORDS POLICY

Q. We need an electronic records retention policy. Does the League have a sample?

A: Yes. We have a sample policy in our files provided by the Records Management Services division of the state of Michigan. It is posted on our website or you can receive it by calling or emailing our Inquiry Service at info@mml.org.

TERM LIMITS

Q. Which cities and home rule villages in Michigan have terms of office limits for elected officials?

A: As far as we know (please advise if you have additional information), these cities and home rule villages have some type of term limit provision in their charters: Allen Park, Bay City, Big Rapids, Caspian, Cheboygan, East Grand Rapids, Essexville, Farmington Hills, Ferrysburg, Frankenmuth, Frankfort, Harbor Springs, Hart, Hillsdale, Imlay City, Ishpeming, Livonia, Ludington, Marquette, Melvindale, Negaunee, Niles, North Muskegon, Orchard Lake Village, Owosso, Plymouth, Rochester Hills, Rockwood, Roosevelt Park, South Haven, Standish, Troy, Warren, Whitehall, and the home rule villages of Alpha and Martin.

LIMITS OF TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR CHURCHES

Q. One of the churches in our community is preparing to add a new wing to its building. This will require not only a building permit, but also a special use permit. I know churches are tax exempt, but are they also exempt from fees?

A: Churches are exempt only from ad valorem and sales tax. They are still required to pay for permits and fees.

COMBINING THE CLERK AND TREASURER POSITIONS

Q. Can the position of clerk and treasurer be combined? I know instances where an individual holds both positions, but I have been told that it is illegal. Can you clarify?

A: There is an Attorney General Opinion from 1947 that states that the offices of clerk and treasurer are incompatible. The incompatible offices statute, 1978 PA 566, prohibits a public officer from holding two or more incompatible offices at the same time. This act was amended by 1992 PA 10, to permit the governing body of a municipality with a population less than 25,000 to authorize a public officer or public employee to perform, with or without compensation, other additional services for the unit of local government. Although PA 10 has provided some flexibility from the strict standards of incompatibility (based upon the criteria in PA 566 of 1978) the issue is not always clear. (MCL 15.181 et seq.)

Some general law villages have successfully combined the positions by changing the reporting duties—instead of the treasurer giving monthly reports to the clerk, the combined clerk/treasurer gives the report to the village president.

For home rule cities and villages, some charters permit the combining of offices. Some also stipulate that the offices of clerk and treasurer cannot be combined. Due to the complicated nature of this question, if your municipality is pondering combining the offices of clerk and treasurer you should seek assistance from your municipal attorney. The League has a One Pager *Plus* Fact Sheet, “Incompatible Public Offices” on our website at mml.org; or call our Inquiry Service at 800-653-2483 or email info@mml.org to obtain a copy.

RFP ASSISTANCE

Q. The city manager has asked me to send out RFPs for a new auditor. I've never written an RFP before and I don't know where to start. Can the League help?

A: Yes. The League recently developed an RFP sharing service. League members can use the League's Business Alliance Program (BAP) to help get their RFPs to more prospective bidders. To get your RFP distributed to the right companies in our BAP program, simply email a PDF version of the RFP or bid specifications to rfpsharing@mml.org. We'll email your RFP to the primary contact at all of the Alliance-participating companies offering the services you need. You will also receive a list of the companies that received your RFP, with complete contact information so you can follow up. To enhance this new service, we have also created a sample RFP page on our website mml.org. If you've never written an RFP before, or you want to see what others have written, check out our new RFP information page.

We have sample RFPs in these categories: Architectural Services; Architect & Engineering Attorney/Legal Services; Auditing Services; Demolition; Energy Audit; Engineering Services; Fire; Planning; Solid Waste; Website; Wireless Network; and Miscellaneous.

DISPOSAL OF MUNICIPAL PROPERTY

Q. We have unused and unwanted city property. How do other cities dispose of city property?

A: Disposal of property provisions are typically included in municipal purchasing policies (or ordinances). The League has sample purchasing policies on our website mml.org or you can call or email our Inquiry Service at info@mml.org and we will send you samples.

The League's RFP Sharing Service

Don't know where to send your RFPs?

Through our new RFP Sharing Service, the League makes sending RFPs easy.

- ▶ League members, email your RFP to rfpsharing@mml.org
- ▶ The League will send your RFP to prospective bidders in the Business Alliance Program

It's that easy.



For more information, contact Terri Murphy at 800-653-2483 or tmurphy@mml.org

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Celebrating the

2012

COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARD Finalists



The excitement of being the 2012 Region 2 MML Community Excellence Award winner has added vigor to Baroda's effort to change from the tool & die capital of Southwest Michigan to a tourist destination, according to Village President Bob Getz.

"Where we once had eight tool & die shops employing over 220 people, we now have three employing 61 people. With the help of businesses like Round Barn Brewery, we are repurposing manufacturing buildings to promote our agri-tourism future," said Getz.

The village's next adventure is in placemaking—redeveloping a vacant former elementary school site into a mixed-use project, creating a visitor end designation walkable to our downtown businesses.



"It's quite an incentive package for the right developer, one that expands Baroda's 'Heart of Wine Country' hospitality for residents and visitors alike."

Furthermore, noted Getz, "We know Phase II Reinventing Downtown Baroda will be challenging, but being recognized as an MML Community of Excellence has bolstered our confidence and proven even a small village of under 900 people can reinvent itself and create a positive future."

Baroda,
pop. 873



With the help of Andrews University architecture students, we prepared a one-square block redevelopment plan showing housing, a bed & breakfast inn, and a restaurant surrounded by public gathering space; it's ready for planning commission preliminary PUD approval.

The village council is ready to grant a Commercial Renovation Tax Abatement for the bed & breakfast and restaurant.



Want to see your community featured here? Go to mml.org to find out more about the Community Excellence Awards.