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MACKINAC BRIDGE AUTHORITY

N415 I-75 ST. IGNACE, MICHIGAN 49781 PH: 906-643-7600 FAX: 906-643-7668

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CONTACT: James Lake, Mackinac Bridge Authority spokesperson, 906-250-0993,
lakej1@michigan.gov**

Major traffic backups averted during Mackinac Bridge Walk closure, but still room to improve

Fast facts:

- **Despite more buses and quicker turnaround, some people were not able to board buses prior to 10 a.m. to participate in the walk.**
- **Last year, the Mackinac Bridge Authority had 88 official shuttle buses, compared to 127 this year.**
- **Having the bridge closed to traffic allowed the buses to deliver walkers to the starting line in about 20 minutes, compared to 45 minutes in past years.**

September 5, 2017 – While multiple-mile backups on US-2 and I-75 did not materialize during the closure for the Mackinac Bridge Annual Walk, the event was not without disappointments for some.

An estimated 25,000 people were able to walk the bridge, but the Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) is aware that some people who arrived in Mackinaw City intending to walk were not able to board buses in time for them to participate. In order to reopen the bridge as planned at noon, participants needed to be on an official shuttle bus by 10 a.m. to be at the starting line by 10:30 a.m.

"Due to the closure of the bridge to most public traffic, we needed to shorten the window of opportunity for people to start the walk. Unfortunately, even with additional buses and quicker turnaround time for shuttle trips, some people were still unable to participate," said MBA Executive Secretary Bob Sweeney. "Making sure that doesn't happen again will be a priority for next year. We apologize to anyone who did not get to make their walk as planned."

In addition to the usual school buses that shuttle walk participants, the MBA also secured the services of several charter buses to add to the fleet. In 2016, the MBA had 88 buses for the event, compared to nearly 130 this year. Additionally, the time it took each bus to load and transport passengers dropped from 45 minutes in past years to about 20 minutes this year, largely because the other lanes of the bridge were closed to traffic.

The shuttle buses brought walk participants from Mackinaw City to the start of the walk in St. Ignace, but also transported people who had already participated back to their cars in St. Ignace. While MBA and Michigan State Police (MSP) personnel began bringing people who had not yet walked to the head of the line for bus loading, not everyone was able to board a bus in time.

Because of the bridge closure and need to reopen to traffic, this was the first year with a firm scheduled end for the walk.

MSP and officials with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security advised the Mackinac Bridge Authority earlier this year that the bridge should be closed to public traffic during the walk. In response, the MBA voted in May to close the bridge to public traffic from 6:30 a.m. to noon during the walk. MSP had additional troopers in the Straits area providing traffic control, inspections of the shuttle bus fleet, and patrols on both ends of the bridge.

"The safety and security of all participants was, and will always be, our first priority for the Annual Bridge Walk. We achieved that goal this year, and avoided the traffic backups that many had feared," Sweeney said. "Closing the bridge to traffic was a major change, and we'll continue working on how to improve it in the future."

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