

## MDOT Service Development & New Technology Grant: *"Enhancing Public Transit in the Western U.P."*

### Summary

A website, "Get Around the Western U.P." ([getaroundwup.org](http://getaroundwup.org)), was developed from 2011 to 2013 to provide centralized resources for public transit, carpooling, and non-motorized transportation for the Western Upper Peninsula.

### Inception

In 2011, a Coordinated Human Services – Public Transit Plan and Accessibility Study was completed for Baraga, Houghton, and Keweenaw Counties, which compose an MDOT Rural Task Force district in the northwestern Upper Peninsula. The purpose of the study was to identify and address gaps and overlaps in transit services provided by many entities in this region.

The study was accomplished with participation of stakeholders through group discussions, surveys, and personal contacts. The ultimate recommendation was to develop a regional transit authority over a five-year implementation period through a detailed action plan. This SDNT project was an offshoot of that study as a supporting task to improve awareness and suitability of existing services in the six-county Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region.

### Process

The project began with an expanded inventory of providers in the six-county area. Detailed information from one-on-one contacts by WUPPDR was recorded and compiled for inclusion in the website. Similar websites were examined to help build a foundation for design, but few were found to exist.

WUPPDR formed a workgroup of transit providers and stakeholders throughout the six-county region. Participants included the Hancock and Houghton city transit systems, Gogebic County Transit Authority, On-Tran, Baragaland Senior Citizens, Goodwill Industries, Michigan Department of Human Services, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, and the Baraga/Houghton/Keweenaw Continuum of Care. The workgroup's first meeting was held to provide an overview of the project and take input on what the website should include.

The workgroup helped to establish surveys for users, providers, and other entities, which were sent directly to many parties and were distributed by providers as appropriate. The purposes of the surveys were to evaluate transit use and needs in the larger region and to identify resources that should be included in the website. At a second meeting, results of the survey were presented to the workgroup. The workgroup gave feedback on website content and design characteristics.

Technical development was done by a contracted web developer working in consultation with WUPPDR. Provider inventory information was incorporated along with provider and non-motorized maps, a trip planner to select providers based on an individual user's needs, a third-party carpool/rideshare

matching application ([Carpoolworld.com](http://Carpoolworld.com)), and route and non-motorized maps. WUPPDR staff and some workgroup members beta-tested the website to identify potential problems with navigation and programming, of which there were few. Upon completion of major design and programming, the web developer trained WUPPDR staff on how to modify website content and most formatting in-house.

Following a third workgroup meeting to review all aspects of the website, including methods of marketing and publicity, the website was launched in September 2012. WUPPDR staff attended eleven meetings of local governing bodies to inform officials and the public about the website. Most of these meetings received media coverage. A dedicated press release was also done, resulting in newspaper articles and a TV news spot, and a "tear-off" flyer was posted widely throughout the region (and continues to be). A printable brochure was developed to provide key information about transit provider services. This was made available to providers and distributed to audiences at presentations. After website launch, user and provider surveys were added to the website for feedback to improve content and help guide further development.

The website has been maintained continuously since launch, with updates on an ongoing basis and wholesale confirmations of provider information accuracy to be made every six months. Updates to the website and provider brochure were (and are) to continue indefinitely using WUPPDR's MDOT Regional Planning funds.

Also in late 2012, the countywide non-motorized maps began to be updated for improved detail and accuracy. In early 2013, non-motorized and multi-use trails were inventoried throughout the region and incorporated into the maps. After review by various non-motorized trail groups and through individual contacts, the new trail information, along with information about trail groups and events, was incorporated into the website. The revamped non-motorized section of the website was launched in mid-2013 and publicized through the media. The website navigation scheme was also modified for user-friendliness.

These final upgrades of the website made it a well-rounded, truly multi-modal resource endeavoring to meet all transportation needs alternative to the single-occupancy vehicle, concluding the grant project.

### **Outcome**

Feedback since launch of the website has been positive. All indications are that providers continue to relay their transit users to the website. Continued utilization of posted flyers is evident. WUPPDR continues to maintain a contact list of stakeholders and distribute periodic updates. The website has made a lasting impression on the region and is at the forefront of such efforts throughout the state. As one indication of this, WUPPDR staff has already been asked to present on the project at a state conference in 2014. Thus, the organization's commitment to Get Around the Western U.P. will continue.



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October – December 2011

- Completed inventory of major local resources and transit providers
- Formed workgroup
- Searched for similar websites
- Arranged contract for web development

January – March 2012

- Continued website development: design, search app, provider access for modifications
- Held first workgroup meeting for overview and to accept input on website
- Developed, publicized, & launched survey for users & general public
- Developed & mailed provider/entity survey along with user surveys for them to distribute
- Developed brochures to publicize website; drafted brochure providing transit information
- Presented BHK Transit Study and website at BHK CoC & CCHSCB
- Attended CTC Meet & Greet to publicize website and distribute surveys
- Began meeting with Michigan Tech Transportation Enterprise

April – June 2012

- Maintained working version of website and updated as necessary
- Analyzed provider & user/general public survey results
- Held second meeting of workgroup to discuss survey results and begin beta testing
- Started and configured Carpoolworld trial account

July – September 2012

- Confirmed accuracy of provider content
- Finalized and launched initial public website; continued to maintain & update; incorporated Carpoolworld application
- Held third meeting of workgroup to discuss beta testing results, branding materials, and website launch/publicity
- Created and distributed printable brochure with transit information as well as tear-off flyer
- Attained media coverage
- Attended six local government meetings to present overview of website

October – December 2012

- Continued to maintain and update website
- Developed and gave notice of website user and provider surveys to improve content and look to future
- Began updating non-motorized county maps for user-friendliness and accuracy
- Posted tear-off flyer widely
- Presented website overview at five more local government meetings

January – March 2013

- Six-month contact of major providers to confirm/update information on website
- Updated, uploaded, and reprinted provider info brochure

- Examined ongoing website survey results
- Inventoried land-based trail systems
- Began adding newly inventoried trails to non-motorized county maps

April – June 2013

- Continued website & brochure updates
- Reviewed and confirmed trail map & inventory accuracy w/non-motorized trail groups
- Finalized NM map updates/upgrades
- Distributed and posted info about website for publicity

July – September 2013

- Six-month contact of major providers to confirm/update information on website
- Publicly launched expanded non-motorized content; publicized by press-release
- Revamped website menus
- Continued to post information for publicity