

**Act 129 of 2007
Boilerplate Report
Section 714**

Section 714 of enrolled Senate Bill 240, Act 129 of 2007 states the following:

Sec. 714. (1) The department, in cooperation with local transit agencies, shall work to ensure that demand-response services are provided throughout Michigan. The department shall continue to work with local units of government to address the unmet transit needs in Michigan. (2) The department shall report by March 1, 2008, on its efforts to implement this section over the past 2 years.

Demand-response transit systems are provided throughout Michigan; there is a system in every county that provides some form of demand-response transit service, although the system may not serve the entire county. In ten counties the demand-response system is focused on the transportation needs of the elderly or persons with disabilities for all or a portion of the county, however, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) requires these systems to serve the general public within their service area if they have the capacity.

MDOT's goal for transit service in Michigan is to work with the local units of government on developing and expanding service where there is local support and funding. Transit services in Michigan are planned, developed, implemented, and operated at the local level, and local support is essential. State funding and leadership are important, but local commitment is the critical first step needed to establish and maintain new transit services.

There are two primary ways that MDOT has worked with local units of government to initiate or expand demand-response services.

1) MDOT Technical Assistance

MDOT project managers are assigned to specific geographic areas of the state and are available to meet with local units of government to discuss options available to provide or expand demand-response services. In Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006, funding for MDOT's transit staff was reduced and as such remaining transit staff was focused on distribution and oversight of state and federal funding. Limited staff time was available to assist local agencies with expansion or enhancement of existing services. A partial restoration of staff was completed in Fiscal Year 2007 and this has allowed MDOT to increase its assistance to local governments considering new transit programs. MDOT staff works with local agencies to encourage them to consider new or expanded service that, if successful, would be eligible for state assistance under the local bus operating program at some point in the future.

Some examples of where MDOT guidance and assistance has helped local governments add, expand, or consider new demand-response services within the past two years include:

- **Benzie County** – The County sponsored the formation of transit authority, Benzie Transportation Authority and established a strong local “friend of transit group” which was successful at passing a public transit millage to establish and support a countywide demand-response transit system. The authority began providing service on January 2, 2007, and has shown steady ridership growth. They have also worked with adjacent transit systems to implement some regional service.

- **Kalamazoo County** – Previously there were two transit agencies in the county, Kalamazoo County and the City of Kalamazoo. The two transit agencies merged in 2005 and a transit authority has now been formed. In November 2006, voters approved a first-time countywide public transit millage. The dedicated local funding has allowed for expanding demand-response service throughout the county.
- **North East Regional Ride** – The Thunder Bay Transportation Corporation in Alpena County completed a state funded three-year demonstration project to provide regional demand-response transportation services in a three county region of Alcona, Alpena and Montmorency Counties. In 2006, the three counties and City of Alpena established a transportation authority. The Thunder Bay Transportation Authority is a recipient of local, federal, and state funds for public transportation and provides a foundation for continued growth of public transportation in the area.

2) MDOT Supported Studies, Assessments and Demonstrations

Prior to Fiscal Year 2005, MDOT had a Comprehensive Transportation Fund (CTF) supported program to provide grants to local agencies for transit studies and demonstrations. These CTF grants have been used to study and demonstrate the effectiveness of new or expanded demand-response and fixed route services, specifically aimed at providing transportation services across county lines. In many areas of the state, cross county coordination can be a key component of providing increased or enhanced demand-response service. Based on constrained CTF revenues, this program lost its dedicated state funding in fiscal year 2005. In Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006, there were federal funds available for transit studies (but not demonstrations) to determine existing transit needs and options for providing expanded services either within the county or across county lines. Local funds were needed to match the federal funds. In Fiscal Year 2007, there were again state funds available for match for the federal funds for studies; however, the state program to demonstrate new regional service remains unfunded.

Using federal funds issued by MDOT, the following studies have been undertaken in the last two years¹:

- **Sanilac County** – The County is currently looking at coordinating the transportation providers in the county to improve the efficiency of the service and make service improvements to meet the needs of their customers.
- **City of Battle Creek** – The city is conducting a comprehensive transit service analysis. The analysis will develop recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of public transit to the Battle Creek community. The recommendations may indicate that demand-response service be initiated within the city.
- **Emmet County** – The County has recently completed a public transportation coordination plan. Currently there is limited demand-response service available within the county along with participation with the Straits Regional Ride system. The main goal of the project was to develop a plan to better coordinate existing public transportation providers and explore present and future needs. The county is reviewing funding and service options available for the expansion of service.

¹ Due to the state budget conditions, some of these projects were suspended for a portion of FY 2007 but are now underway.

- **Livingston County** – Livingston Essential Transportation Services led a communitywide effort to develop a public transit feasibility study. The study provided a Six-Year Public Transportation Plan that included capital purchases, transportation service improvements or additions, and organizational activities for improving and expanding transit service in Livingston County. The report also included a cost analysis for the plan. The report is being used by the transit system and countywide coalition to research potential funding strategies. This study is significant because it is the first step toward coordinating the demand-response services and exploring the need for fixed route service.
- **Berrien County** – The Southwestern Michigan Commission regional planning agency is leading a study to identify current public transportation resources and explore how those resources can help facilitate the delivery of services by the social service community in Berrien County. The study will include an action plan manual to guide development of public transportation as a coordinated, sustainable and efficient system.
- **Michigan State University (MSU)** – MSU is working with Jackson Area Transit and the local regional planning agency in a pilot study to create a model to assess public transit service. The methodology would be used to: assess the perceived gaps in transportation services from the consumer’s perspective; determine the actual gaps in service offered by public and private providers; compare perceived and actual gaps; and determine the appropriate strategies to close those gaps.
- **Ottawa County** – Three studies have been funded in Ottawa County. The City of Holland will develop techniques to identify and quantify unmet transit service needs. The City of Grand Haven will develop a Strategic Plan to implement public transportation service to meet unmet mobility needs in adjacent governmental units. The county will conduct a needs assessment and feasibility study to assess the potential for countywide transit service. The work of the three studies is being coordinated.

In Fiscal Year 2008 federal and state funds were allocated for the following projects to be undertaken by MDOT.

- **Community and Economic Benefits of Public Transportation Programs** – This project supports MDOT’s goal for enhancing the transportation system to improve mobility and accessibility, and addressing the public’s desire more modal choices. The project will develop a model that can be used at the state and local level to determine the economic and community benefits of public transportation. The model will help state and local officials determine the extent to which investments in public transit have positive economic and quality of life benefits and should serve as a tool for local governments considering new transit services. This is a multi-year project that will be dependent on future federal funds to reach the desired objectives.
- **Incorporating Passenger Transportation Objectives in Corridor Planning** – The initial thinking for this project is to assist transit agencies in developing five year strategic service plans. It is hoped that these strategic plans will lay out desired service level, types and characteristics for each individual transit system, including goals for connectivity between systems and between modes. A tentative objective for this project is to help local officials plan for future investments in public transit. This is a multi-year project that is dependent on future federal funds to reach the desired objectives.

*Bureau of Passenger Transportation
Michigan Department of Transportation
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