



News Advisory

Blue Water Area Transportation Commission

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Updated Braille Version of System Map and Bus Schedules

Helps Blind Passengers Navigate Local Bus System

PORT HURON, MI — Blind passengers can now request an updated Braille version of the Blue Water Area Transportation Commission's System Map and Bus Schedules. Developed by the Blue Water League of the Blind, this resource includes Braille bus schedules and narrative descriptions of each route, plus a set of bus-flagging cards.

"This Braille information helps put the visually challenged rider on an equally informed level as sighted passengers," says Michael Geno, immediate past president of the Michigan Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired. "The updated schedules and bus-flagging cards are symbols of independence that suggest that the blind can and should be getting out and about on buses."

Geno used his perspective as a blind passenger to develop these updated Braille descriptions of each bus route. These descriptions include standardized interpretations of information derived from BWATC's printed system map. These route descriptions give blind passengers the same information that a sighted person gains from reading the system map. "The route descriptions help a blind person understand what fellow sighted passengers learn from viewing the printed publications used for riding the bus," says Geno.

Geno developed the concept of using Braille route descriptions to help blind passengers navigate the Lansing bus system in 1977. He first applied the concept to BWATC's System Map and Bus Schedules in 1994.

"We appreciate the League's support with this project," says Jim Wilson, BWATC general manager. "We are pleased that we can offer three versions (Braille, audio, and large-print) of our system map to help visually-impaired passengers navigate our routes. Our goal is to make our service accessible to everyone."

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The updated Braille version of BWATC's system map describes the system's nine bus routes with a uniform presentation of all of the turns along the way. This comprehensive route information is comparable to BWATC's printed System Map and Bus Schedules.

By involving a Braille user in the development of their schedule, Geno believes that the BWATC is "setting a higher standard to insure that Braille translations will be meaningful to the person who needs to travel by bus, despite vision loss."

While updating the Braille document, Geno researched what other U.S. cities offer and he believes that BWATC is providing blind passengers with a more comprehensive picture of bus services than is commonly available throughout the country.

BWATC's new bus-flagging cards are designed to help blind passengers flag down the right bus. Each of the cards are enclosed in plastic and have Braille identification labels.

Braille is a tactile communication system that blind individuals use to help them read and write. The system uses character cells that each contain a combination of six raised dots that are "read" by touching them and interpreting their patterns.

The Blue Water League of the Blind offers a wide range of nonprofit Braille services to help local businesses and families address the needs of blind individuals. The BWATC bus schedule that was introduced in 1994 was one of the League's first Braille projects. Questions about Braille and how to have printed materials translated can be answered by calling 982-0717.

The updated Braille version of BWATC's System Map and Bus Schedules still includes the color-coded flagging cards. Passengers who read Braille may obtain one from BWATC, without charge, by calling 987-7373.

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BWATC continues a proud tradition of innovation in public transit that has served Port Huron for more than a century. Port Huron was one of the nation's first communities to operate an electrified transit system in the 1880s and one of the first to operate motor coaches when they became popular in the 1930s. Following an eight-year hiatus, the current bus service began in September 1976. Since then, BWATC has carried more than 20 million riders and continues the tradition of innovation by producing its own compressed natural gas alternative fuel since 1996.



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