



News Advisory

Blue Water Area Transportation Commission

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Annual Bus Ridership Tops A Million in 2010!

Federal Grants Help Local Ridership Grow

Despite National Downturn

PORT HURON, MI — Despite declining national ridership, the number of passengers who ride local buses continues to climb at a record-breaking pace. Annual Blue Water Area Transit ridership rose above one million for the first time last year.

The agency reports serving 1,070,534 riders during 2010. This represents a 7.6% jump since 2009, when there were 994,666 riders, and a 46.1% jump since 2007, when there were 732,726 riders.

While BWAT's ridership increased 8.73% during the third quarter of 2010, national bus ridership dipped by 2.2%. According to American Public Transportation Association President William Millar, "ridership continues to be impacted by the ups and downs of the economy and has declined because many transit systems have been forced to raise fares and/or cut service."

So, why is the local use of buses growing by leaps and bounds?

Local officials credit a wide range of improvements supported by federal grants that have made buses more accessible, convenient, and comfortable for area riders. These include extended hours and new routes and services. Low bus fares (75 cents for adults) and easy-to-use bicycle racks are also factors.

"Our ability to continually grow, when many others are not, is a real tribute to the leadership and employees at Blue Water Area Transit," applauds Jim Fisher, Blue Water Area Transit Commission Board chair and Port Huron City Council member. "The agency has strategically competed for many federal grants that have really made a big difference in how well we are able to serve the community."

One major improvement is the expansion of service hours to better match work schedules. For the fourth year in a row, the Job Access and Reverse Commute program has awarded BWATC one million dollars to make these added hours possible.

Expanded service hours include weekday evening service (Mondays thru Thursdays) until 11:00 p.m., late night weekend service (Fridays and Saturdays) until 3:00 a.m., and weekday morning service starting as early as 5:15 a.m. on demand.

— more —

JARC also pays for a voucher program and a commuter route to Macomb County, with stops in Marysville, St. Clair, Algonac, Clay Township, Pearl Beach, Ira Township, Anchorville, and New Baltimore.

Several federal grant programs have also enabled recent equipment improvements.

Grants from the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program have played a major role in keeping the agency's bus fleet up-to-date. This past year, BWATC used \$4.7 million in accumulated CMAQ funds to purchase 25 new CNG buses. They also plan to purchase up to eleven more buses with CMAQ's 2010 award of \$3.5 million.

BWATC added a \$1.4 Million CNG compressor with funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. A related \$1.3 million purchase of two portable CNG refueling stations and another compressor are planned with grants under FTA's Clean Fuels Program. The agency will also refurbish eight buses and replace their bus-washing system with \$1.4 million from the Federal Transit Administration's "State of Good Repair" program.

New Freedom Program grants provided \$250,000 to install 23 new shelters that provide seating and protection from the wind and rain for riders waiting for buses.

"These grants all offer the unique advantage of not requiring local matching funds," explains Jim Wilson, BWATC general manager. "They have helped us increase ridership, which is good for the environment because there are fewer cars on the road. Our buses run on clean-burning compressed natural gas, which further reduces emissions."

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 21 million riders and continues the tradition of innovation by producing its own compressed natural gas alternative fuel since 1996.

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