



News Advisory

Blue Water Area Transportation Commission

2021 Lapeer Avenue Port Huron, MI 48060

810.987.7373 fax 810.987.2431 www.bwbus.com

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CONTACT: Jim Wilson, General Manager: 810.966.4200 jwilson@bwbus.com

BWAT Well Positioned to Be Part of National Focus on Investing in Transit

Ridership Jumps 11% in FY 2011:

1.16Million Riders Travel Via Blue Water Area Buses

PORT HURON, MI — Ridership jumped 11% in fiscal year 2011 when 1,162,034 rode the bus, compared with 1,044,537 in 2010. Fiscal year 2011 also marked a 43.5% jump since 2007, when local ridership of 707,254 first started to climb.

“This compares favorably with national figures showing a 4% increase in ridership in communities similar in size to ours,” says Jim Wilson, general manager, Blue Water Area Transit.

Much of the local increase results from expanded service hours that better match work schedules. These 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.

The sagging local economy also continues to help explain increases in ridership, especially among those who commute to work. “Individuals who switch from driving to riding public transportation can save, on average, \$819 dollars this month and \$9,824 annually,” according to reports released this month from the American Public Transportation Association. These savings are based on the average national gas price of \$3.43 per gallon, which was reported by AAA on October 13, 2011, and the national unreserved monthly parking rate.

APTA President William Millar points out how “now is the time for our country to invest more in public transportation and prepare for the larger demand that will occur when the recession ends.”

The APTA released a report last month that shows how our country has been providing “consistent, diverse, and stable sources of funding for public transportation.” One of these sources is the federal State of Good Repair Program, which recently awarded BWAT a \$6.86 million grant for its proposed transit hub.

— more —

BWAT's grant was among 300 competitive discretionary grants totaling more than \$900 million announced nationwide by Federal Transit Administration Secretary Ray LaHood to rebuild and renovate America's transit infrastructure and plan for the future.

Of these, 16 projects totaling \$46.7 million were awarded to Michigan transit agencies. According to the FTA, these grants will "put people to work renovating and building needed transit facilities, put more clean-fuel buses on the road and help communities plan for their future transit needs."

"Our ability to continually grow 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."

BWAT's investment in "earth-friendly" compressed natural gas resources has continued to give them an advantage when pursuing grants.

"Federal policymakers understand how important public transportation is to the future vitality of urban communities," explains Jim Wilson, BWATC general manager. "It's no coincidence that transit funding is one of the best sources of public funds available for urban development."

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.

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) is a nonprofit international association of 1,500 public and private member organizations, engaged in the areas of bus, paratransit, light rail, commuter rail, subways, waterborne services, and intercity and high-speed rail.

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