



# News Advisory

## Blue Water Area Transportation Commission

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Million-Dollar Grant Continues for Fiscal Year 2009**

**Expanded Transportation Services**

**Help Area Residents Find and Keep Jobs**

PORT HURON, MI — Brian Faille's three young children smile and giggle when they remember the fun they enjoyed at the beach one day this Summer. They remember playing tag with the seagulls and building sand castles along the shore. The day stands out in their young memories, because it had been a very long time since the family had been able to afford such an outing.

Their financial condition improved this summer when they started receiving funds from one of three grants awarded to the Blue Water Area Transportation Commission (BWATC) to help area residents with transportation needs during fiscal year 2008.

All three grants are under a Federal program called Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC), which is part of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century. Together, they provide a significant increase in public transportation service for St. Clair County residents.

The BWATC has learned that help will continue for another year. All three grants have been renewed and will provide our community with \$1,012,818.00 in funds that will be used during Fiscal Year 2009. The funds represent 50% Federal Dollars and 50% State dollars.

"It is unusual to see such a large investment in our community without any required local matching funds," says BWATC General Manager Jim Wilson.

The Faille family has been helped with funds from one of the grants that uses a voucher system.

To qualify for the voucher system, individuals must be permanent residents of St. Clair County and have incomes at or below 150% of national poverty levels or be currently receiving some form of public assistance. Drivers are reimbursed at the current IRS rate (58.5 cents per mile).

Vouchers may be used to supplement bus passes for traveling:

- to and from work,
- for job search activities, including interviews,
- for job related activities, including physicals and return-to-work slips,
- for purchasing work-related clothing/supplies, and
- to work-related child care providers.

“It’s been wonderful and has provided us with a great deal of savings,” says Brian Faille. “It’s helped us provide for our three children: two-year-old Holly, three-year-old Frank, and six-year-old Faith.”

Watching gas prices rapidly spiral upward, Brian had grown to accept the fact that the cost of his 42-mile commute would eliminate family “extras.” Funding from this grant has changed all that.

The family’s budget woes were caused by the increasingly high cost of Brian’s commute to Champion Bus in Imlay City, where he has worked for more than nine years. Family outings were among many items they were forced to eliminate in order to have enough money to pay for gas.

This grant has helped more than 300 area residents whose efforts to find or keep a job were restricted by the high cost of buying gas at the pump.

A second JARC grant provides expanded hours of service. BWATC buses now run Monday through Friday until 10:00 p.m.

Finally, a third JARC grant supports a new bus route between Port Huron and Macomb County. The new route operates Monday through Friday, with express service along I-94 and local service along M-29. Ridership on this new route reached 1,491 during August and continues to increase.

The nine agencies that provide referrals to BWATC brokers include: The Arc of St. Clair County, Inc. (The Arc), Blue Water Center for Independent Living (BWCIL), Goodwill Industries, the Economic Opportunity Committee of St. Clair County, Inc. (EOC), Michigan Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative (MPRI), The Michigan Works (M-WORKS), Michigan Department of Human Services (MDOHS), Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS), and St. Clair County Community Mental Health Authority.

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



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*news release by gloriajustice@sbcglobal.net*