



# News Advisory

## Blue Water Area Transportation Commission

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### Eco-Friendly!

## Blue Water Area Transit Orders Compressed Natural Gas Buses For Council on Aging Transportation Services

Port Huron, Mich. — The Council on Aging, Inc., serving St. Clair County, is getting six new compressed natural gas buses. CNG is an economical alternative fuel that results in cleaner air than diesel fuel.

BWAT received grant funding from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement program to purchase the new buses. The CMAQ program is funded (80%) by the Federal Highway Administration. The Michigan Department of Transportation contributed a 20% local funding match.

The CMAQ program supports projects that contribute air quality improvements and/or provide traffic congestion relief. The program supports the attainment or maintenance of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone, carbon monoxide and particulate matter.

“We are happy to help the COA modernize its fleet with six new buses,” said Jim Wilson, BWAT general manager. “With clean burning natural gas, not just Council on Aging riders, but the entire community benefits.”

“The Council on Aging is proud to do our part in helping to protect the environment by operating compressed natural gas buses,” said Scott Crawford, COA executive director. “BWAT is a good partner of the nonprofits in our area.”

COA provides transportation for seniors and disabled passengers throughout St. Clair County. Buses are dispatched from each of the Council’s four centers in Port Huron, Marine City, Capac and Yale. Last year, the Council’s countywide transportation service traveled 383,922 miles to provide 65,500 rides, according to Crawford.

“These new buses will replace aging buses that are incurring very high maintenance costs for us,” Crawford explained. The new Champion (model LF-Transport) buses are expected to arrive this fall.

Each of the new buses can carry 16 seated riders (or 12 seated riders with two wheelchairs). Features of the new buses that benefit passengers include:

- A “smart” electronically controlled suspension system maintains a smooth air ride for passengers.
- The driver is able to lift the entire low-floor bus up to 2.5 inches when needed to clear bumps.

- A large passenger-side cab window increases the driver's curbside visibility.

COA buses are able to refuel at BWAT's four public stations in St. Clair County. The refueling station located at BWAT's headquarters in Port Huron (2021 Lapeer Avenue) is open Monday-Saturday, 7 a.m. - 7 p.m. Three more stations are open 24 hours-a-day, seven days-a-week: in Marine City (516 S. Parker), in Capac (15041 Downey Road) and in Port Huron (1529 Hancock Street). The agency accepts Discover, Master Card and VISA at all four stations, which are certified by the State of Michigan.

"Buses using compressed natural gas contribute to cleaner air that we all can enjoy," said Linda Bruckner, Blue Water Area Transportation Commission Board chair and Fort Gratiot Township trustee.

Following a competitive bidding process, Hoekstra Transportation was awarded a contract allowing BWAT to purchase up to 65 buses during the next five years. Based in Grand Rapids, Hoekstra is a distributor for Champion Bus Inc. in Imlay City.

Blue Water Area Transit has just finished celebrating its 40th anniversary, as well as the sesquicentennial of public transportation service in the Blue Water Area.

William Pitt Edison (older brother of the celebrated inventor Thomas Edison) started the local tradition of innovation 150 years ago. He operated horse-drawn trolleys on several routes as the Port Huron & Gratiot Street Railway Company.

The Blue Water Area became one of the nation's first communities to operate electrified trolleys in the 1880s and then motor coaches in the late 1920s. Bus service started in 1927 and continued until an eight-year hiatus from 1968 to 1976. Since BWAT started publicly funded bus service in 1976, the transit agency has carried more than 30 million riders.

BWAT is Michigan's leading producer of compressed natural gas, with the largest fleet of CNG buses in the state. The agency started producing the alternative fuel in 1996 and now operates four public CNG fueling stations.

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