

Emmet County  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
Conference Room, Controller's Office, Emmet County Building  
Friday, February 23, 2007

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**Present:** Les Atchison, Tom Foltz, Tom Shier, Vickie Carpentier

**Absent:** None

**Guest:** None

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Call to order:

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chairperson Tom Shier.

Minutes:

Review and approval of the November 29, 2006 and the February 2, 2007 meeting minutes were tabled to the next meeting.

The agenda for this meeting is to discuss where the Committee stands on: 1) the idea of a public transit system, and 2) the idea of a voucher system. The Committee does not feel that the County should commit to a full-blown transit system.

Les Atchison feels that the Committee needs to put to bed the concept that the County would implement any new tax, and suggested that the Committee unanimously reject the concept of a new tax, and secondly, that the Committee should express their extreme concern about the underutilization of existing bus systems.

The Committee is trying to address transportation issues for people in the poverty level. Based upon the Committee's study, it was discovered that there were some specific transportation needs in the community. The Committee proposed the idea of an alternative 24/7 mode system to address those needs. This alternative system would be a flexible hybrid system. Les Atchison stated that many of the local organizations that currently support a general dial-a-ride busing system are already being supported on line items by the County. For instance, the Health Department, D.H.S., N.C.C.M.H., and other local agencies are already receiving support from the County and have systems in place. Mr. Atchison feels that anything that could be done to help these agencies' systems would be cheaper than the County implementing a half-million dollar program. Mr. Atchison's suggested the use of coupons. The County would have a department that would sell the coupons for a set amount to the agencies (Friendship Center, local taxi services, etc.). The coupons would be used as money. The transportation provider (local taxi service, S.R.R., Friendship Center, etc.) would turn these coupons into the County for a fixed amount, whatever amount the County thinks they can work out.

Les Atchison advised that he had obtained extra-voted millage data for Michigan's 83 counties that show there are 27 counties within the State that have established an extra millage for transportation, but there are 56 counties that have not. M.D.O.T. does participate in transportation systems, in some way or other, in every county within the State.

The Committee members expressed concern with the concept of the County getting into a program that would tax the County's resources to the degree set forth in the dial-a-ride system proposal they received. The members also expressed concerns with possible continuing and increasing costs of such a program to the County, and that once they started in with a program like the one that was proposed they would not be able to get out of it. The Committee also felt that adding a transportation millage would not be in the County's best interest.

Les Atchison stated that he felt the most cost effective method to address the issues expressed by local service agencies regarding transportation for their clients, would be to establish a coupon/voucher system. With this type of program the County would sell the coupon/vouchers to the local service agencies. The agencies would give them to their clients to use to pay for a ride. The County would need to make agreements with the Friendship Center, Straits Regional Ride, local cab services, and others transportation services in the area to accept the coupon/voucher as payment for a ride. The transportation provider would then turn the coupon/voucher(s) into the County to receive payment/reimbursement. The reimbursement amount would be a fixed amount set by the County. A coupon/voucher system would allow more versatility, and would also allow for more predictability of the cost to the County.

The Committee discussed using volunteers to provide transportation to those in need. This discussion centered on the issues of: who would be responsible for the insurance liability coverage on the volunteer driver, who would pay the cost, who would administer the program, and how would administration of that program be done.

Les Atchison suggested that volunteer drivers be part of the County's program, but let D.H.S. administer any volunteer driver program. Then have D.H.S. buy the coupon/vouchers from the County. Les has contacted local transportation services to obtain their thoughts on a coupon/voucher system, and to reassure them that the County is not trying to cut into their business. Les suggested that the program should be set up in a manner so that whoever buys the coupon/vouchers would know that local transportation providers (local taxi services, S.R.R., etc.,) would accept the coupon/voucher. If a coupon/voucher program was implemented, the County would have to establish how much the coupon/voucher would be sold to the agencies for, and how much the County would pay to the local transportation providers to redeem the coupon/voucher. While this type of program would involve cost for the County, the cost would not be as great as other proposals, but it would be more competitive.

Les Atchison advised that Emmet County's IT Department is creating, on the County's internet site, a link to a site for ride sharing/car pooling.

The Committee projects the approximate cost to the County of a coupon/voucher program at significantly less than \$50,000.00.

Les Atchison requested that the Committee's statement to the full Board should reflect that, based on information obtain through their investigation and study, the reasons the County is not interested in establishing a dial-a-ride system is: they are concerned with the study's findings which show an underutilization of all dial-a-ride systems; that establishment of a dial-a-ride system would be extremely costly to the County; and that it would duplicate and compete with program(s) already in place. The study also shows that there is already in place a very good dial-a-ride system operated by the Emmet County Friendship Center. The Friendship Center's system operates in the highest population density area of Emmet County, and it services the two groups that are most in need of a ride - disabled individuals and senior citizens.

The Committee then discussed doing a coupon program - selling the coupon for \$2.50, and then redeeming it for \$5.00. The price could be reviewed and adjustments made based on program data and information received. It would be necessary to see who wants to volunteer, and to check with established systems to see who wants to participate in the program. It was also recommended that the Local Revenue Sharing Board be contacted to explore possible funding assistance. The County would act as fiduciary to sell and redeem the coupon/vouchers. It was suggested that D.H.S. be contacted to see if they would be willing to act in an oversight and data collection position. D.H.S. could use the coupon/vouchers in their volunteer program, and then solicit more volunteers for their program. D.H.S. would determine how the coupon/vouchers would be used, and if they wanted to allow a client one punch or the use of the whole coupon. The County would trust them to be judicious in the coupon/voucher use. Coupon/vouchers would be sold to local service agencies such as D.H.S., W.R.C., Salvation Army, and then the transportation provider (Friendship Center, S.R.R., taxi or other transportation carriers) would turn the coupon/voucher into the County to be redeemed. The coupon/voucher cannot be redeemed by private citizens. The program would require D.H.S. to redeem the coupon/voucher used to pay for their volunteer drivers services.

The Committee supports the idea of doing a pilot coupon/voucher program for a 12-month period. At the end of the 12-month period the program would be reviewed and reevaluated to determine if the program is effective and should be continued. Upon review of the minutes of this meeting, the Committee will recommend to the full Board that the County proceed with a 12-month pilot program.

The Committee then went on to discuss the design of the coupon/voucher. The consensus was that the coupon/voucher should be the size of a standard business card or credit card, it should be printed on paper that is a distinguishable color, and have six (6) punches per card. The coupon/voucher should also include appropriate verbiage that indicates the coupons are to be redeemed for transportation only (not for cash) and are not transferable. The County's civil counsel, Kathy Abbott, will need to be contacted for recommendation and review of the verbiage.

The Committee directed Les Atchison to approach D.H.S. and see if they would be interested in the proposed coupon/voucher system to help with their volunteer drivers.

The Transportation Committee voiced their appreciation to Les Atchison for all the hard work and effort that he has done on the Committee's behalf.

Meeting adjourned at 9:41 a.m.