

Subject: AATA Press Release-New Transit Authority Update
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AATA will focus on transit upgrades to Washtenaw County's urban core following Ann Arbor Council vote to withdraw from Countywide Authority

Ford: "We're committed to meeting the transportation needs in communities that have expressed a strong interest in an expanded transit network"

ANN ARBOR – The Ann Arbor Transportation Authority (AATA) will continue discussions with elected representatives and leaders from Washtenaw County's urban core communities that have a strong interest in developing an expanded transit network, following the Ann Arbor City Council's decision Thursday to withdraw its participation in a proposed countywide transit authority.

"Efforts to extend the benefits of transit to a greater number of Washtenaw County residents will continue," said AATA CEO Michael G. Ford. "This issue is a high priority for our region's economic vitality and growth. Public transit enjoys broad support in Washtenaw County. AATA ridership is at an all-time high, enjoying the fourth highest ridership increase in the nation according to USA Today.

"We respect the Ann Arbor City Council's decision, as well as those local governments that have chosen not to join a new countywide transportation authority at this time," Ford said. "AATA is committed to working with all Washtenaw County communities that remain interested in participating in an expanded transit network."

Although AATA will invite all communities to participate in any new public transportation model that evolves, our initial efforts will focus on communities that have thus far expressed strong interest in being part of a regional transit network: cities of Ann Arbor, Saline and Ypsilanti, the Townships of Pittsfield, Scio, Superior and Ypsilanti and the Village of Dexter.

AATA plans to remain engaged with elected representatives and leaders from these communities on how to most effectively redesign a service program for their residents and recalculate financial impacts based on a new service plan. This process could require six-eight months to complete.

“Leaders from these urban core communities still want to partner with AATA on expanding public transportation services to both businesses and constituents,” Ford said. “It is critical to Washtenaw County’s quality of life that we put together the talent and resources to deliver a public transit system that will serve our entire community.”

The discussion about countywide transit began as a systematic approach to offering AATA transportation services to all of the county’s residents, consistent with constituent needs, Ford noted. The approach was deliberately designed to be inclusive and transparent; recognizing that many of the communities invited to participate would not be prepared to join a new authority immediately, and perhaps some not at all in the foreseeable future. For AATA to pursue a less inclusive strategy would have been to make choices arbitrarily about who to write off without even engaging in the dialogue, Ford said.

AATA also will review existing services and costs to ensure its history of strong fiscal stewardship is not disrupted, he said. The review will determine the feasibility of continuing to provide the services implemented as part of AATA’s initial investment under its Five-Year Transit Program. These services produced successful results within months of introduction but may no longer be sustainable without additional funding, these include:

Doubling the frequency of weekday service on the #4 Washtenaw route to relieve overcrowding and improve on-time performance. This improvement generated a surge in ridership on this route that already had the highest ridership.

AirRide, a public/private partnership with Michigan Flyer that runs between Ann Arbor and Detroit Metro Airport. The AirRide route, which began in April, is providing more than 1,000 trips per week and fares covered local costs in October.

ExpressRide routes connecting Ann Arbor with Canton and Chelsea, which experienced ridership increases of 29 percent and 14.2 percent, respectively, in FY2012.

Expanded NightRide service area eastward to Ypsilanti. The number of riders increased 31 percent in the first year.

“We understand these services enjoy widespread popularity with AATA passengers,” said Ford. “We hope to avoid any reduction or elimination of AATA operations. The best way for us to preserve AATA’s standard of service excellence is to continue to inform the Ann Arbor City Council and all our Washtenaw County elected officials about the importance of expanded public transportation to the future success of our entire region.”

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The Ann Arbor Transportation Authority (TheRide) was chartered in 1969 by the City of Ann Arbor, Michigan, as a not-for-profit unit of government. AATA operates the local public transit system for the greater Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area, enabling the area's residents to reach their destinations at reasonable cost, and offers the region efficient, environmentally sound transportation alternatives. For more information, please visit www.TheRide.org.

TheRide's Board of Directors has endorsed a 30-year Transit Master Plan for Washtenaw County. Updates on the progress of the plan are available at www.MovingYouForward.org.

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