

Connect Berrien seeks public input to improve local transit

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BENTON HARBOR — The Connect Berrien project team is hosting open house meetings to discuss public transit in Berrien County. The

meetings are part of a larger planning effort, known as Connect Berrien, to develop the Berrien County Transit Integration Plan.

Right now, there are four existing transit providers in Berrien County: Berrien Bus, Twin Cities Area Transit Authority, Niles Dial-A-Ride Transportation and Buchanan Dial-A-Ride.

According to Greg Strangeways, consultant with Nelson Nygaard, the transportation systems could be more efficient.

“Berrien County is the only county of its size in the United States to have four transit systems,” Strangeways said. “The ability of the public to utilize these systems to move between and among these providers is extremely difficult.”

Even with the four transit systems, a significant portion of the county has limited transit service, which restricts some resident’s access to employment, shopping, healthcare and educational opportunities.

The Connect Berrien project is an effort to create a countywide service plan with a menu of transportation options that will be efficient and beneficial for residents and visitors. The study will evaluate routes, identify unmet transit needs, and propose service strategies to address the needs.

The study will also recommend modifications to existing transit services to better serve current and potential new transit users.

As part of this study, several public meetings will be hosted throughout the county to gather input from interested participants. Everyone is encouraged to stop by the meeting nearest them to share their wish lists for public transit in Berrien County. Meetings will be hosted as follows:

- 3 to 4:30 p.m. and 5 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 9, at Niles Public Library, 620 W. Main St., Niles.
- 5:30 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 10, at the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, 376 W. Main St., Benton Harbor.
- 5:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday, May 11, at the New Buffalo Township Library, 33 N. Thompson St., New Buffalo.

Following the first round of meetings, participant input will be combined with market analysis and evaluation of existing transit services in order to recommend alternatives to meet transportation needs. Additional meetings to present findings will be hosted during the fall.

This project is administered by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission and is funded by a federal grant from the Federal Transit Administration with matching funds provided by the Lakeland Foundation, the Berrien County Manufacturers Association and the County of Berrien.

Free rides to community meetings:

Call My Way There at the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission by 5 p.m. Friday, May 5, at (269) 925-1137, ext. 1519, to schedule a free ride.

Visit Connect Berrien website at ConnectBerrien.org to learn more.

