Niles Dial-A-Ride Transportation Development Plan
Final Report

March, 2013

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Moving Public Transportation Into the Future

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Background

This document is the final report describing the comprehensive analysis of Niles Dial-A-Ride Transportation (DART) service and operations. The project, initiated by the City of Niles, focused on potential changes in service that will encourage increased use and long-term sustainability of Niles DART services. Through this document, the City intends to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the public transportation system.

This Plan is funded primarily through a grant from the Federal Transit Administration. RLS & Associates, Inc. is the firm hired through an RFP bidding process to provide consulting services to the City through the development of this Transportation Plan.

Study Approach

Six tasks were involved in the completion of the Plan. Those tasks are listed below.

Task Number	Task Description
1	Project Business Meeting and Steering Committee Communication
2	Stakeholder Participation and Inventory
3	Public Participation
4	Evaluation of Existing Service Characteristics
5	Needs Assessment
6	Service Design and Technology Recommendations and Financially Feasible Implementation Plan

The Plan includes an overview of the current Niles DART transportation services, a review of the internal and external factors affecting Niles DART service provision, and development of service strategies that can be implemented over the next five or more years. The project steering committee participated in all phases of the Plan; ultimately, the steering committee selected the most appropriate strategies, and the timeline for implementation of such strategies.

II. DESCRIPTION OF NILES DIAL-A-RIDE TRANSPORTATION

OVERVIEW

Niles Dial-A-Ride Transportation (DART) is a small, city-owned, public transit agency that has served the City of Niles, Niles Charter Township, and a portion of Bertrand Township since 1974. Federal and State grants, a transit millage for the City of Niles, and passenger fares fund Niles DART. The Niles City Council oversees the transit agency. Prior to July 2011, the system was staffed and managed by McDonald Transit, with one City employee. Beginning in July 2011, all management, maintenance, and operations were transitioned to the City; operations are no longer contracted to a third party operator.

Current Transportation Services

Transportation is provided Monday through Saturday. Niles DART operates demand response service on weekdays from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM and Saturdays from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. It also operates the DART deviated fixed route (Route 2) from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, weekdays. Demand response service is available throughout the service area. With a one-hour advance reservation, Niles DART will pick up any passenger and take him or her to the desired destination. The passengers share rides with others, so more than one person is in each vehicle in most cases. The deviated fixed route operates on a fixed schedule with stops at local businesses, shopping centers, grocery stores, and the senior center.

There is no deviated fixed route service on Saturdays. All service is open to the public. No service is offered on Sundays or major Federal holidays that are observed by the City.

Using a cross-boundary agreement with neighboring transit systems, Niles DART transports passengers to a designated transfer point at Auten Road and SR 933 for the transfer point with South Bend Public Transportation (Transpo) every other hour starting at 10:30 AM. The last pick-up at Auten Road is at 4:30 PM on weekdays. Transfers with Buchanan and Berrien Bus are scheduled as needed. Also, Berrien Bus and Cass County vehicles transport passengers to the Niles Base where they transfer to/from Niles DART.

Fare Structure

Passenger fares for the Niles DART service depend on the mode of service (i.e., demand response or deviated fixed route) and the pick-up/drop-off location. The following table illustrates the current fare structure. In addition to the regular fare structure, Niles DART also offers a $20.00 Summer Pass for students which grants youth unlimited rides during summer break.

Niles DART Fare Structure

Fare Category	Price
Demand Response Within City Limits	$3.00/$1.50 reduced fare
Demand Response To, From, Within Township	$4.00/$2.00 reduced fare
Deviated Fixed Route	$2.00/1.00 reduced fare

Source: Niles DART Brochure

Reduced fares are available for adults age 60 and older and individuals with a disability. Passengers who qualify for a reduced fare must show a Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) reduced fare identification card to the driver when boarding the vehicle. Reduced fare identification cards are processed by the City of Niles but issued by the SWMPC, and delivered in the mail. Appropriate documentation to verify age and disability are required.

Niles DART fare media include the following options:

- Cash (exact change only)
- $10.00 Pass
- $20.00 Summer Pass (seasonal and available for students only)
- Tokens (sold in $1.00 increments to agencies)

The $10.00 Pass is sold by drivers on the vehicles or at the DART transit office. Tokens and the Summer Pass are sold only at the DART transit office.

SYSTEM OPERATING STATISTICS

Operating statistics analyzed for this study begin with Fiscal Year (FY) 2007. Annual system ridership was tracked in terms of the number of one-way passenger trips provided during the Fiscal Year (October through September). For the purpose of analysis, a portion of the ridership, annual vehicle miles, and hours for FY 2011 are estimated in the following exhibits based on the actual statistics recorded during the same months of FY 2010.

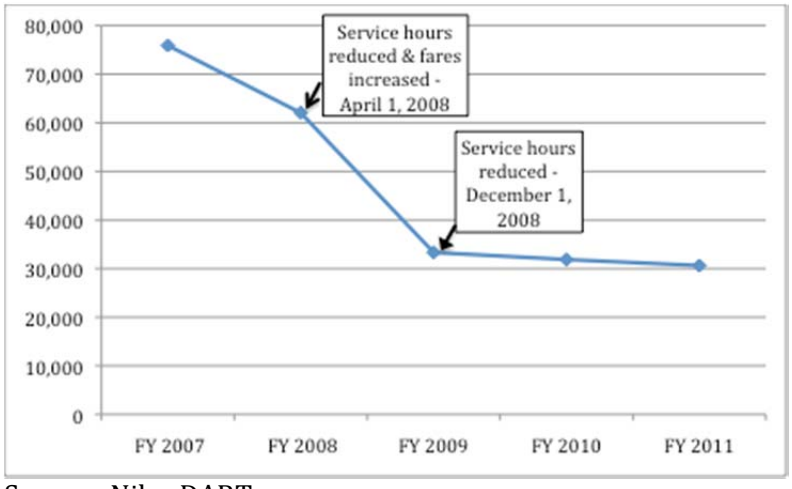
Changes in the operating statistics during FYs 2008 and 2009 are, at least in part, impacted by changes in hours of operation and fare structure. Service hours were reduced and a fare increase was implemented on April 1, 2008. Niles DART also created an hourly fixed route (Route 1). For April 1, 2008 through December 1, 2008, Niles DART operated two point deviation routes and demand-response service. On December 1, 2008, Route 1 was dropped from the schedule and operating hours were decreased. Table II.1 below outlines the changes in hours of operation and the corresponding fare structures.

Table II.1: Niles DART Service Changes

Mode of Service	Changes Implemented April 1, 2008		Changes Implemented December 1, 2008	
	Hours	**Fare**	**Hours**	**Fare**
Demand Response	M-F: 6:00 AM-8:00 PM Sat: 8:00 AM-7:00 PM	City Limits: $3/$1.50 Township: $4/$2	M-F: 7:00 AM-5:00 PM Sat: 10:00 AM-3:00 PM	City Limits: $3/$1.50 Township: $4/$2
Route 1	M-F: 7:00 AM-7:00 PM	$2/$1	Eliminated from Schedule	N/A
Route 2	M-F: 7:00 AM-7:00 PM	$2/$1	M-F: 8:00 AM-5:00 PM	$2/$1

At least in part due to the above noted service changes that were implemented on April 1, 2008, ridership declined by approximately 18 percent between FY 2007 and FY 2008. The trend was significantly more severe between FY 2008 and FY 2009 when ridership declined by nearly one-half (46.3 percent); this second significant decrease in ridership was the result of another reduction of service hours that began in December 1, 2008. Ridership began to level off during FY 2009 and FY 2010. During 2011, the ridership has declined slightly (about 3 percent).

Exhibit II.1: Systemwide Annual Ridership Trend, FY 2007-2011

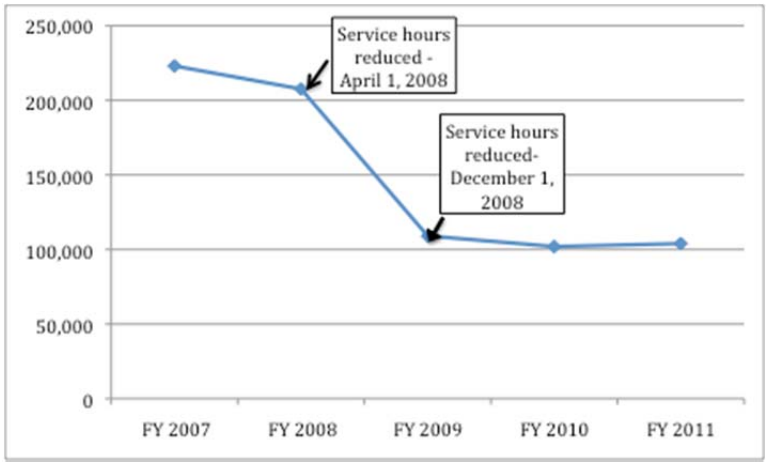


Source: Niles DART

* FY 2011 data is partially estimated based on ridership during the previous year.

The trend for revenue miles mirrored the trend in ridership until FY 2011. Annual revenue miles decreased by only seven percent between FY 2007 and FY 2008. Following the reduction in service hours in December 2008, revenue miles decreased by nearly one-half (47 percent) between FY 2008 and FY 2009. During FY 2011, revenue miles increased by approximately two percent from the previous fiscal year.

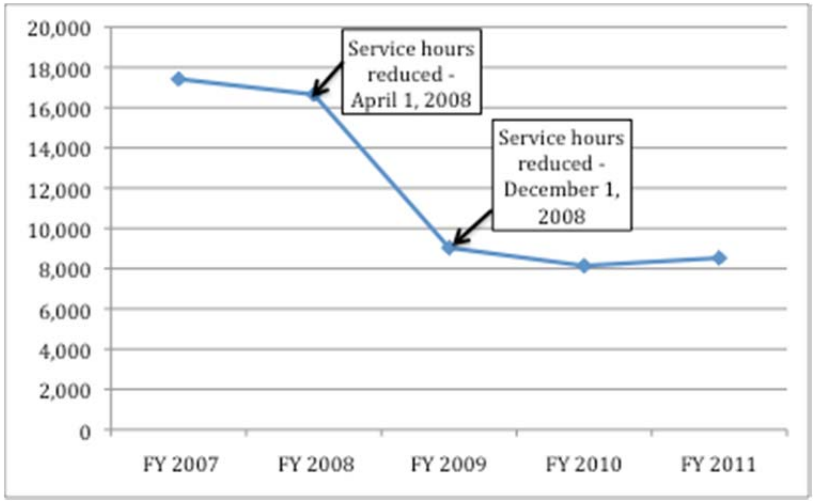
Exhibit II.2: Systemwide Annual Revenue Miles, FY 2007-2011



Source: Niles DART
*FY 2011 data is partially estimated based on miles during the previous year.

Niles DART measures vehicle hours based on the number of hours worked by drivers. During FYs 2007 and 2008, Niles DART reduced annual vehicle hours by approximately more than four percent. This initial reduction followed a new service schedule and fare increase that was implemented in April 1, 2008. Hours declined more significantly during FY 2009, by nearly 50 percent and in FY 2010 by another 10 percent. The reduction in FY 2009 followed a significant change in service hours implemented in December 2008. Driver labor hours were reduced according the new hours of operation. Annual vehicle hours have leveled out and increased slightly during FY 2011.

Exhibit II.3: Systemwide Annual Revenue Hours, FY 2007-2011



Source: Niles DART
* FY 2011 data is partially estimated based on the previous year.

OPERATING STATISTICS BY MODE

The Niles DART operating trends summarized above include demand response and route service. For a more detailed analysis, a review of the changes in annual ridership, vehicle miles, and vehicle hours for the individual modes of service is provided here.

Demand Response

A significant reduction in all operating statistics occurred in FY 2009; and, the decline in ridership was proportional to the reduction in annual vehicle miles and hours. Operations remained fairly steady during FY 2010 and FY 2011 as the system maintained the schedule of reduced service hours of operation that was implemented on December 1, 2008. The change in operating statistics indicates the system's reduced annual operating hours had a directly proportional impact on demand response ridership.

Table II.2: Demand Response Operating Statistics, FY 2007 – FY 2011

Fiscal Year	Passengers	% Change	Miles	% Change	Hours	% Change
2007	53,289	----	Not Available	----	Not Available	----
2008	52,641	1%	162,818	----	13,189	----
2009	24,790	-53%	78,378	-52%	6,533	-50%
2010	24,121	-3%	78,479	0.1%	6,349	-2.8%
2011*	22,534	-6.6%	80,989	3.2%	6,817	7.4%

* 2011 counts for April, May, June, and September are estimated based on FY2010 performance.
Source: McDonald Transit and Niles DART Monthly Reports

Deviated Fixed Route

As outlined in Table II.3, ridership on the Niles route increased by 65 percent between FY 2007 and FY 2008. During FY 2009, ridership on Deviated Fixed Route 2 was only nine percent less than ridership had been the previous year on both routes combined. This small decline in ridership an indicator that the eliminated route was not productive and that most of the route ridership in FY 2008 was on Route 2. Ridership on Route 2 declined again between FYs 2009 and 2010; this is possibly a reflection of the change in operating hours (starting one hour later in the morning and ending two hours earlier in the afternoons). Ridership on Route 2 has somewhat stabilized and is projected to decline by less than two percent in FY 2011.

Route 2 annual vehicle miles and hours declined by approximately 24 and 29 percent between FY 2009 and FY 2010, respectively. Annual vehicle hours for Route 2 decreased by 4.5 percent in FY 2011 and miles reduced by 2.2 percent. The reduction in miles and hours would be a result of fewer deviations from the scheduled stops.

Table II.3: Route Operating Statistics, FY 2007 – FY 2011

Fiscal Year	Passengers	% Change	Miles	% Change	Hours	% Change
2007	5,698	----	Not Available	----	Not Available	----
2008	9,410	65%	44,787	----	3,966	----
2009	8,536	-9%	30,747	-31%	2,506	-37%
2010	7,737	-9%	23,511	-23.5%	1,792	-28.5%
2011*	8,087	4.5%	22,999	-2.2%	1,711	-4.5%

* 2011 counts for April, May, June, and September are estimated based on FY2010 performance.
Source: McDonald Transit and Niles DART Monthly Management Reports

SYSTEM PRODUCTIVITY

According to the ridership and operating statistics provided above, the demand response mode of service in FY 2011 provided approximately 3.82 trips per vehicle hour, whereas the deviated fixed route produced 4.25 one-way passenger trips per hour.

On a national level, the average demand response passenger per hour productivity goal is at least two-passengers per hour. The above average ridership per hour for Niles DART demand response service is likely due to the population density of the core ridership from the City of Niles. The industry standard for deviated fixed route productivity is five to six passengers per hour. The Niles DART deviated fixed route has performed below average in terms of average passengers per hour since its inception.

Table II.4: Demand Response and Deviated Fixed Route Productivity Per Mile and Hour

	Demand Response		Fixed Route	
Fiscal Year	Passengers per Mile	Passengers per Hour	Passengers per Mile	Passengers per Hour
2008	0.32	3.99	0.21	2.37
2009	0.32	3.79	0.28	3.41
2010	0.31	3.80	0.35	4.73
2011*	0.28	3.31	0.33	4.25

* 2011 counts for April, May, June, and September are estimated based on FY2010 performance.
Source: McDonald Transit and Niles DART Monthly Management Reports

Service productivity of Niles DART is compared to productivity of systems of similar size and service area in the Peer System Analysis chapter of this report (Chapter V).

VEHICLE UTILIZATION

Vehicle Inventory

The Niles DART fleet includes six cutaway vehicles and one trolley. All vehicles are wheelchair accessible. Vehicles are equipped with two-way mobile radios for communication with dispatch. The trolley is not in service.

Based on Michigan Department of Transportation suggestions, Niles DART will reduce its fleet to five vehicles. One of the cutaways, and the trolley, will be sold to meet the 20 percent spare requirement.

Vehicle Utilization

Vehicle utilization varies depending on the level of demand at different times of the day. Generally, to meet demand, Niles DART assigns vehicles as indicated in Table II.5. The peak hours of service are 1:45 PM to 5:00 PM when three vehicles are assigned to demand response service. One vehicle is assigned to fixed route service all day.

Table II.5: Vehicle Utilization

Time of Day	Number of Vehicles/ Mode of Service
Weekdays	
7:00 AM to 1:45 PM	2 vehicles/demand response
1:45 PM to 5:00 PM	3 vehicles/demand response
10:00 AM to 5:00 PM	1 vehicle/fixed route
Saturdays	
10:00 AM to 3:00 PM	2 vehicles/demand response

Source: McDonald Transit Interview

Exhibit II.4 illustrates the current bus stop schedule for the fixed route.

Exhibit II.4: Route 2 Schedule

Destination	Time						
DART Office (623 N. Second St.)	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	2:00 PM	3:00 PM	4:00 PM
Hi Rise	10:01 AM	11:01 AM	12:01 PM	1:01 PM	2:01 PM	3:01 PM	4:01 PM
Harding's	10:04 AM	11:04 AM	12:04 PM	1:04 PM	2:04 PM	3:04 PM	4:04 PM
Four Flags Plaza	10:06 AM	11:06 AM	12:06 PM	1:06 PM	2:06 PM	3:06 PM	4:06 PM
Rite Aid	10:08 AM	11:08 AM	12:08 PM	1:08 PM	2:08 PM	3:08 PM	4:08 PM
Martin's	10:12 AM	11:12 AM	12:12 PM	1:12 PM	2:12 PM	3:12 PM	4:12 PM
Big Lots	10:17 AM	11:17 AM	12:17 PM	1:17 PM	2:17 PM	3:17 PM	4:17 PM
Senior Center	10:18 AM	11:18 AM	12:18 PM	1:18 PM	2:18 PM	3:18 PM	4:18 PM
Niles Township Office	10:19 AM	11:19 AM	12:19 PM	1:19 PM	2:19 PM	3:19 PM	4:19 PM
Belle Plaza	10:21 AM	11:21 AM	12:21 PM	1:21 PM	2:21 PM	3:21 PM	4:21 PM
Niles Plaza	10:22 AM	11:22 AM	12:22 PM	1:22 PM	2:22 PM	3:22 PM	4:22 PM
Tank Town (BP)	10:24 AM		12:24 PM		2:24 PM		4:24 PM
State Line	10:27 AM		12:27 PM		2:27 PM		4:27 PM
Auten Rd. & SR 933(IN)	10:31 AM		12:31 PM		2:31 PM		4:31 PM
Rural King	10:34 AM		12:34 PM		2:34 PM		4:34 PM
Wal-Mart	10:37 AM	11:27 AM	12:37 PM	1:27 PM	2:37 PM	3:27 PM	4:37 PM
Big Lots	10:40 AM	11:29 AM	12:40 PM	1:29 PM	2:40 PM	3:29 PM	4:40 PM
Senior Center	10:41 AM	11:30 AM	12:41 PM	1:30 PM	2:41 PM	3:30 PM	4:41 PM
McDonald's	10:43 AM	11:33 AM	12:43 PM	1:33 PM	2:43 PM	3:33 PM	4:43 PM
Martin's	10:47 AM	11:35 AM	12:47 PM	1:35 PM	2:47 PM	3:35 PM	4:47 PM
3rd & Huron	10:49 AM	11:36 AM	12:49 PM	1:36 PM	2:49 PM	3:36 PM	4:49 PM
3rd & Hickory	10:50 AM	11:36 AM	12:50 PM	1:36 PM	2:50 PM	3:36 PM	4:50 PM
3rd & Broadway	10:50 AM	11:37 AM	12:50 PM	1:37 PM	2:50 PM	3:37 PM	4:50 PM
Harding's	10:52 AM	11:38 AM	12:52 PM	1:38 PM	2:52 PM	3:38 PM	4:52 PM
Four Flags Plaza	10:54 AM	11:40 AM	12:54 PM	1:40 PM	2:54 PM	3:40 PM	4:54 PM
Library	10:55 AM	11:40 AM	12:55 PM	1:40 PM	2:55 PM	3:40 PM	4:55 PM
City Hall	10:55 AM	11:41 AM	12:55 PM	1:41 PM	2:55 PM	3:41 PM	4:55 PM
Hi Rise	10:57 AM	11:43 AM	12:57 PM	1:43 PM	2:57 PM	3:43 PM	4:57 PM
DART Office (623 N. Second St.)	10:58 AM	11:45 AM	12:58 PM	1:45 PM	2:58 PM	3:45 PM	4:58 PM

Source: Niles DART

Exhibits II.5A and II.5B on the following pages depict the major trip generators in the area in and sounding Niles. Trip generators include shopping and recreational areas, medical facilities and doctor's offices, and residential areas where residents and visitors frequently visit. A trip generator is also a frequent destination for public transportation service. Below Exhibit II.5B you will find a listing of the major trip generators with their corresponding number to the symbol on the Exhibits.

Exhibit II.5A: Major Trip Generators

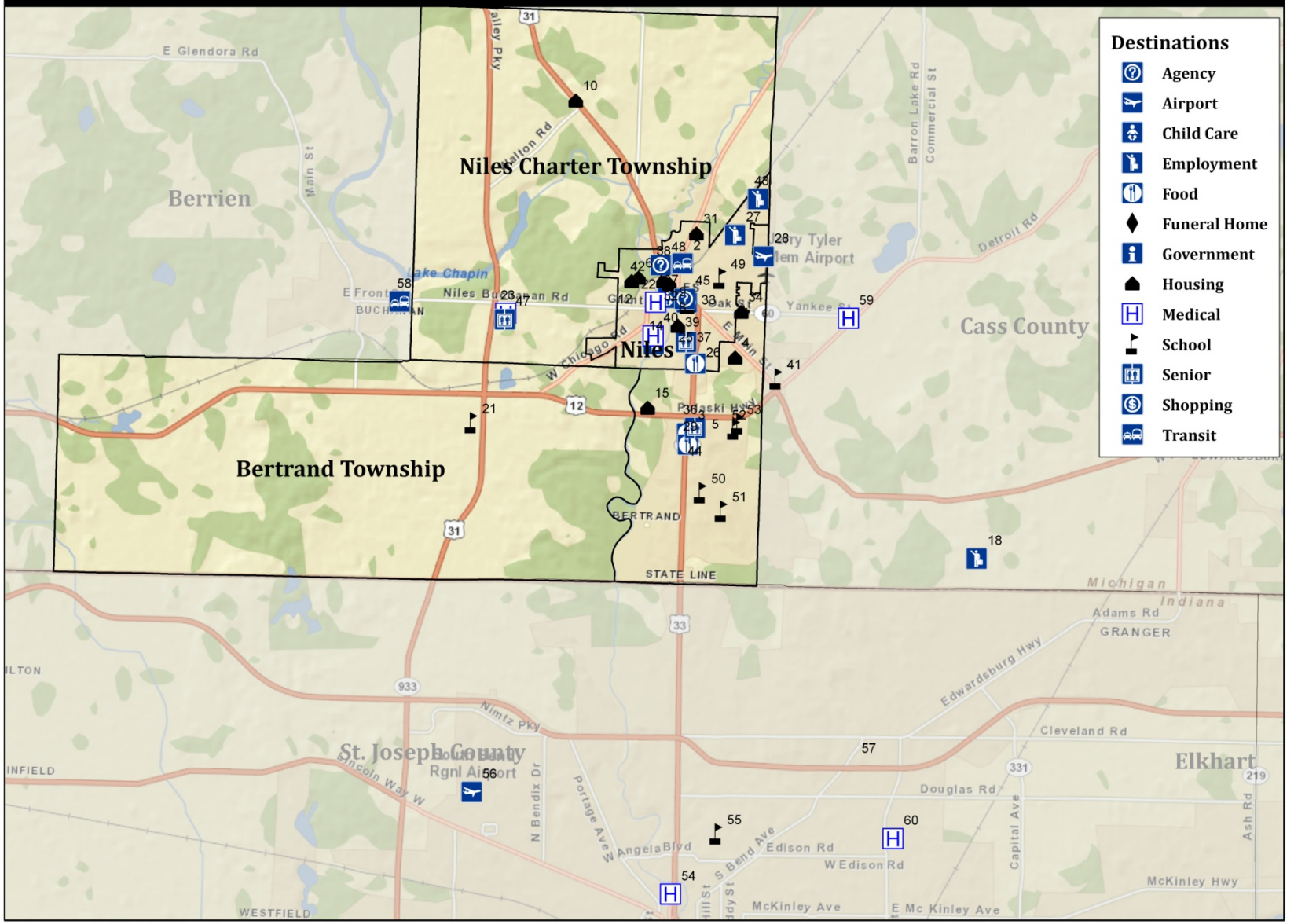
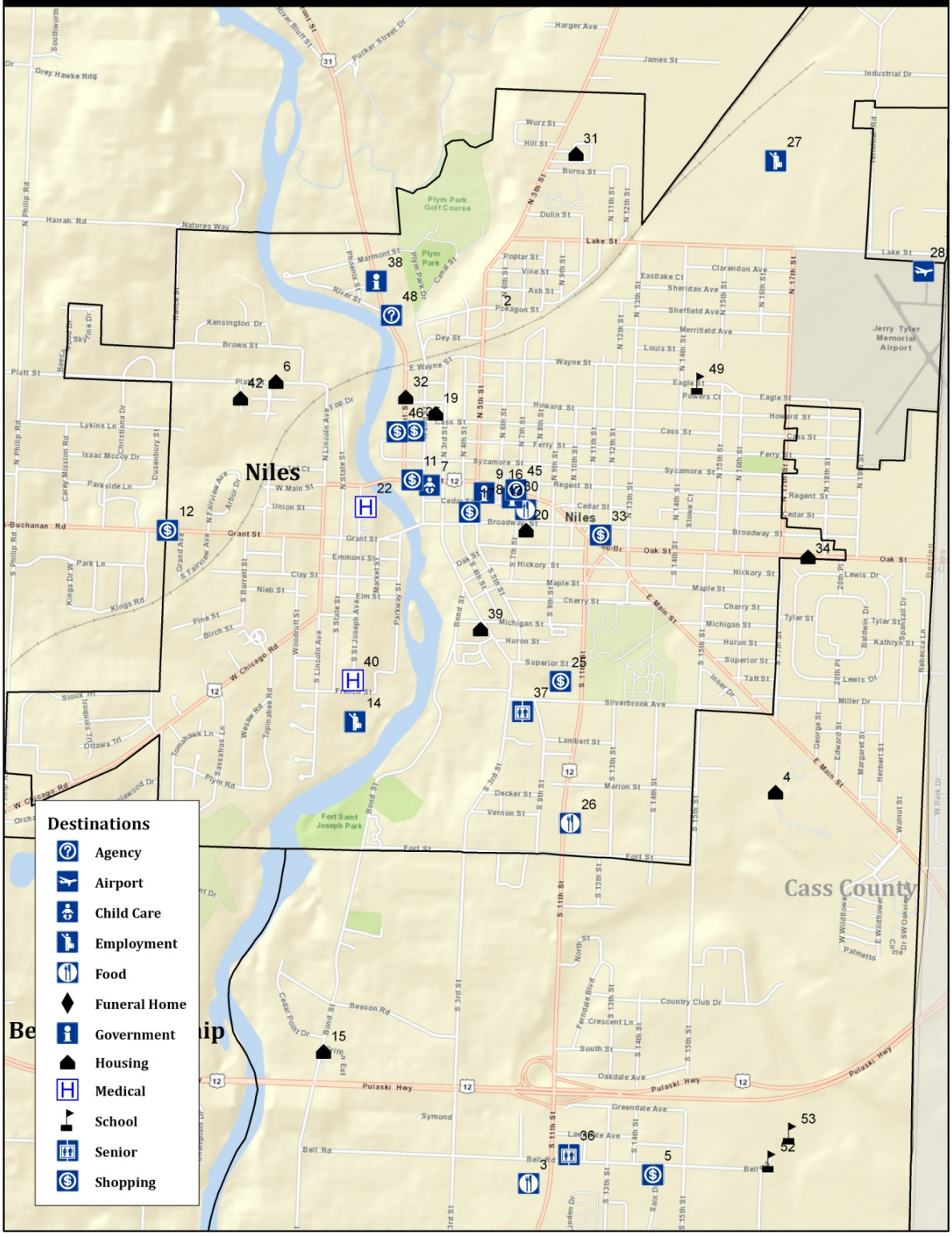


Exhibit II.5B: Major Trip Generators Zoom



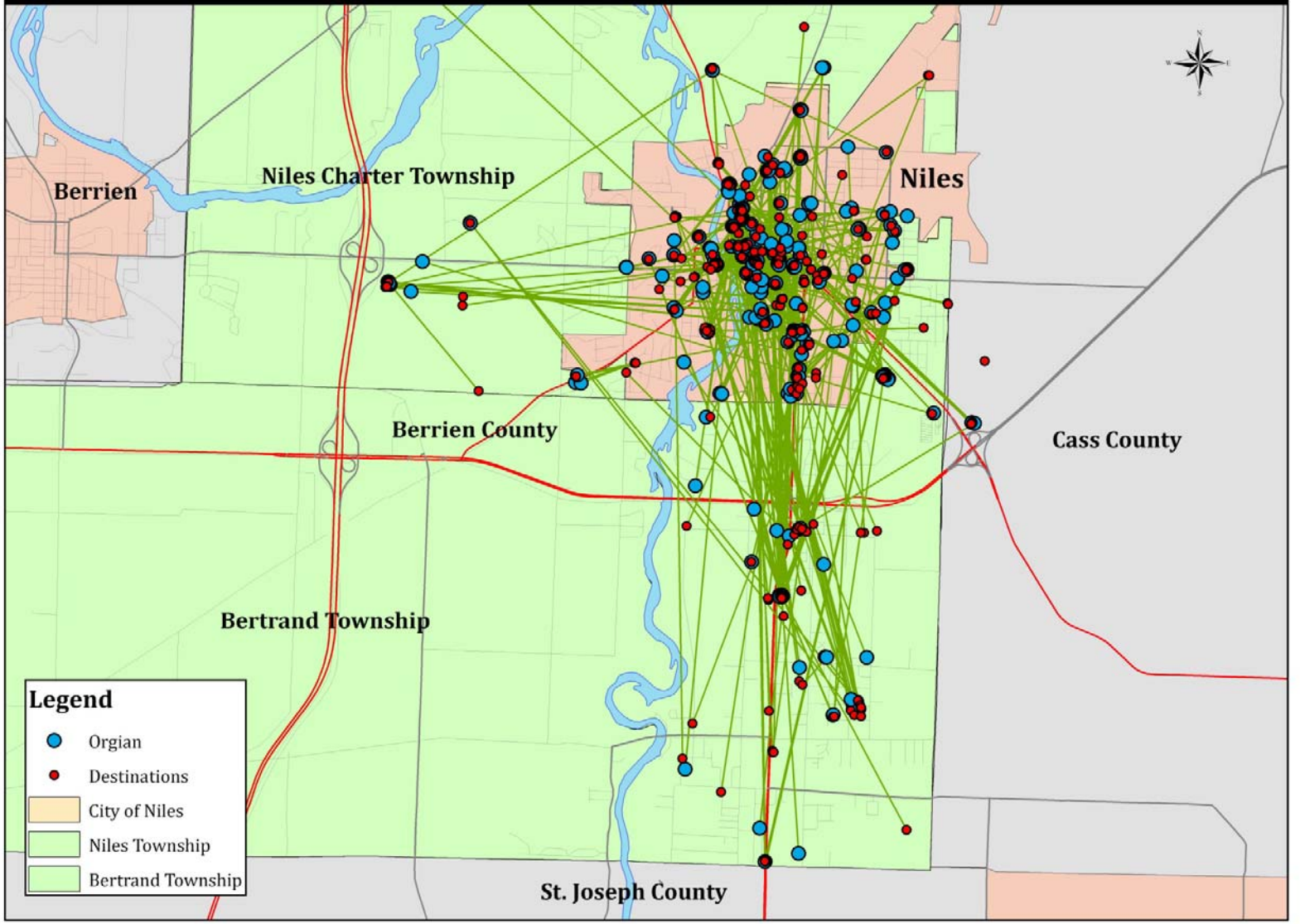
Major Trip Generators

1. Amtrak
2. Belle Plaza
3. Berrien Woods Apartments
4. Big Lots
5. Briar Crest Apartments
6. Children's Center
7. City Hall
8. City of Niles Utilities Department
9. Country Acres Mobile Home Community
10. Family Dollar Store
11. Family Dollar Store
12. Four Flags Plaza
13. French Paper Company
14. Griffin Estates
15. Halbritter Funeral Home
16. Harding's
17. Hess Engineering, Inc
18. Hi Rise Apartments
19. Kling Apartments
20. Lake Michigan College - Bertrand Crossing Campus
21. Lakeland Community Hospital
22. Lakeland Dialysis
23. Lowe's
24. Martin's
25. McDonald's
26. National-Standard Co.
27. Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport
28. Niles Plaza
29. Niles Public Library
30. North Niles Villa
31. Parkview Apartments
32. Rite Aid
33. River Oak Apartments
34. Save-A-Lot
35. Senior Center
36. Silverbrook Nursing Home
37. South County Courthouse
38. Southview Apartments
39. Southwestern Medical Clinic
40. Southwestern Michigan College - Niles Campus
41. Tanglewood Apartments
42. Tem-Pace
43. Walmart Supercenter
44. Women's Care Center
45. Wonderland Theatre
46. Woodland Terrace-A Senior Living Residence
47. YMCA
48. Niles High School
49. Brandywine Public School
50. Brandywine Public School
51. Brandywine Middle School
52. Brandywine High School
53. Memorial Hospital
54. Notre Dame
55. South Bend Airport
56. University Park Mall
57. Buchanan Transfer Point
58. Cass County Medical Facilities
59. Fresenius Medical Care Nephrology

Exhibit II.6 is a map depicting a sample of trip origins and destinations for the demand response service. The sample includes trips completed during the week of January 31 through February 5, 2011. The purpose of the map is to connect and illustrate the point of origin and destination for trips. The lines demonstrate that the origin and destinations are concentrated within the city limits, but several trips are provided in the townships or between the City and the townships. Note that a single dot may represent several trips and that Route 2 trips were not included. The point of the map is not to illustrate the frequency of service to various locations, but to describe the pattern of service.

The sample of trips includes 768 one-way passenger rides. The vast majority of trips on the demand response service had origins and destinations within the City of Niles. Approximately 26 percent (or 196 one-way trips) had at least an origin or destination in Niles Township. No trips were taken to or from Bertrand Township. There were eight trips (0.1 percent) with an origin or destination that is outside of the DART service area in Milton Township (Berrien and Cass County); these trips were very close to the county line and were provided based on an informal agreement between Niles DART and neighboring transit systems. One of the most common trip destinations was the Southwestern Michigan College.

Exhibit II.6: DART 2011 Sample Origins and Destinations



SUMMARY OF CURRENT OPERATING COSTS AND REVENUES

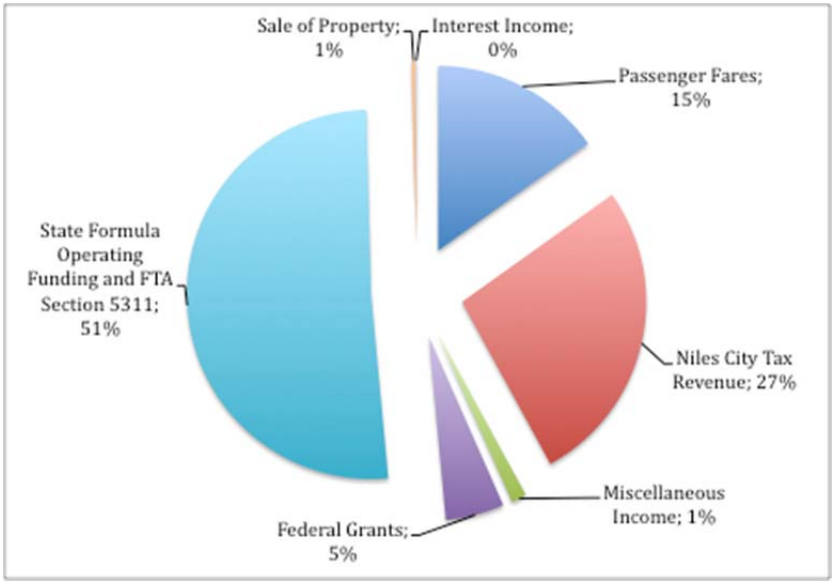
Niles DART Operating Revenue

Federal operating grants from Section 5307 which pass through the State, Federal grants for Preventive Maintenance and Capital expenses from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and City of Niles' real property taxes are the primary sources of operating revenue for the system. As of March 2011, Niles DART began opting out of an application for the FTA Section 5311 program for non-urbanized areas so that it could maximize preventive maintenance funding eligibility from the Section 5307 program.

All of the Niles DART local revenue sources are based on City tax collections, passenger fares, and miscellaneous income. During FY 2006, but in no other years, the system received a portion of real property taxes from Cass County. The system does not receive operating revenue from Niles Charter or Bertrand Townships, or any of the surrounding communities.

Since FY 2006, passenger fares have accounted for as much as 24 percent of the total annual operating revenue for the system. During the most recent two-year period, passenger fares accounted for approximately 15 percent of the total operating revenue. Grant revenue passed through the State from Federal Section 5307 and 5311 accounted for approximately 51 percent of the total annual operating budget. Federal Transit Administration revenue for Capital and Preventive Maintenance provided an average of five percent of the total operating budget. Local revenue sources including a portion of the Niles property tax, delinquent personal and real property taxes, miscellaneous income, and sale of property and interest income made up the remaining 29 percent of the annual operating revenue. Exhibit II.7 illustrates the two-year average operating revenue (FY 2009 and FY 2010) by category for Niles DART.

Exhibit II.7: Two-Year Average Operating Revenue, FY 2009-FY 2010



Source: Niles DART (5311 discontinued as of March 2011)

Niles DART Capital Revenue

More than 90 percent of the capital revenue sources for Niles DART are derived from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 grant. For several years, State capital grants had no or limited real matching dollars because Toll Credits were accepted as a 'soft' match. Toll Credits are no longer permitted and the State does not have enough program funding to assist with the necessary match for Federal capital funding. A long-term solution to replace the toll credits has not yet been achieved.

The system received capital funding to improve the transit offices and garage and purchase new vehicles during FY 2010. The majority of FY 2010 capital funding was derived through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

Niles DART Operating, Administrative, and Maintenance Costs

Sixty percent of the total annual operating expenses for the system are dedicated to vehicle operations. Until mid-2011, the largest line item expense in the operations category was the purchased transportation service contract with McDonald Transit (92 percent), which included driver/dispatcher salaries and wages. Other expenses in this category included a portion of gas and oil, tires, vehicle licenses fees, training, and equipment rental.

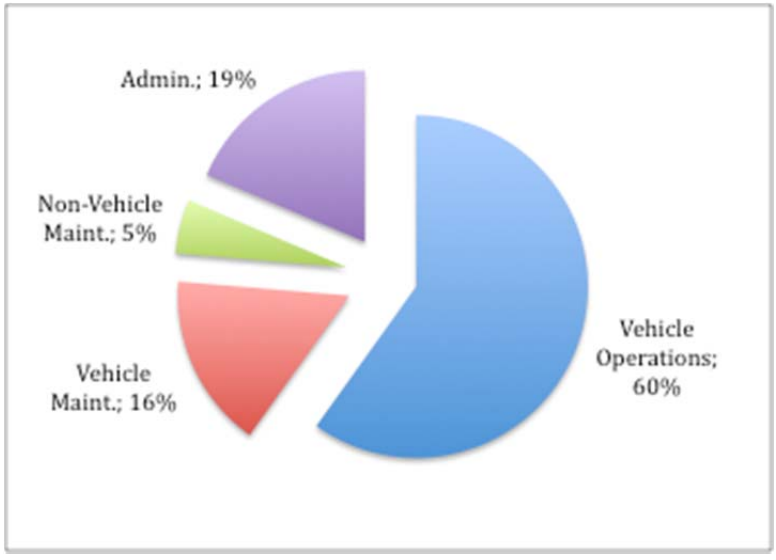
Administrative expenses for the program made up the second largest expense category (19 percent). During the two-year average, vehicle liability insurance made up nearly one-third of the expenses associated with administration of the program. High insurance expenses were a result of the volatility in the insurance consortium with which Niles DART was participating. The City changed its insurance consortium on December 1, 2010 to include Niles DART, saving the system $11,000 in annual insurance liability expenses.

Other administrative expenses included a portion of the McDonald Transit local General Manager's salary, salaries and wages for part-time City employees dedicated to Niles DART, grants administration services performed by the City, office supplies, utilities, insurance, dues and subscriptions, and travel and meetings.

Vehicle maintenance expenses made up 16 percent of the average annual budget. Within this expense category, the purchased transportation services for the McDonald Transit mechanic accounted for approximately 59 percent of the annual expenses. Vehicle parts and supplies accounted for approximately 18 percent; the remaining vehicle maintenance expenses were associated with vehicle repairs and maintenance, garage utilities, vehicle damage insurance, vehicle washing, and towing expenses.

Finally, non-vehicle maintenance expenses such as building repairs and maintenance, office supplies, radio repairs, and purchased transportation services for McDonald Transit accounted for approximately five percent of the annual budget. Exhibit II.8 illustrates the distribution of expenses by category for FY 2009 and 2010.

Exhibit II.8: Operating, Administrative, and Maintenance Expenses by Category, FY 2009 and FY 2010 Two-Year Average

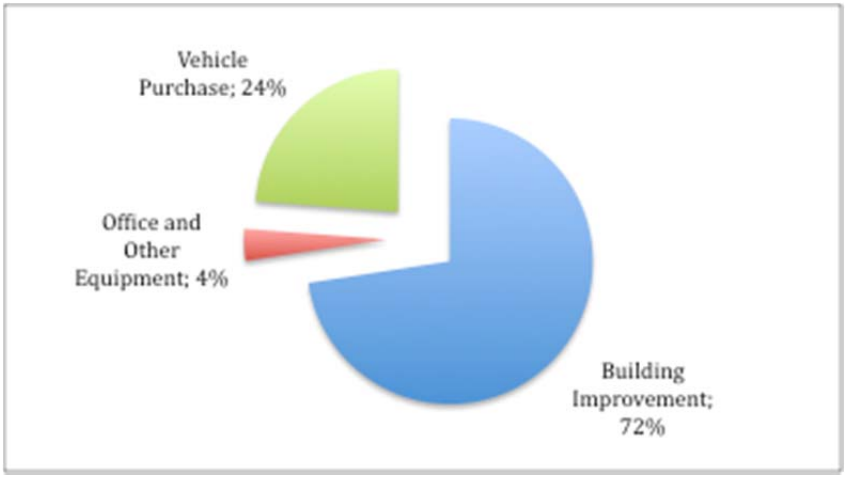


Source: Niles DART

Nile DART Capital Outlay

During FY 2009 and FY 2010, Niles DART improved the transit office building and garage. A significant portion of the funding for building improvements was derived from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The system also purchased vehicles and equipment. Exhibit II.9 illustrates the average capital expenses by category for FY 2009 and FY 2010.

Exhibit II.9: Capital Outlay by Category, FY 2009 and FY 2010 Two-Year Average



Source: Niles DART

SUMMARY

Niles DART is a city-owned public transit agency serving the City of Niles, Niles Charter Township, and a portion of Bertrand Township. The system operates demand response and scheduled route modes of service. Scheduled route service is available on weekdays; demand response service is available Monday through Saturday. In addition to the designated service area, Niles DART also offers connections to neighboring public transportation systems in South Bend, Buchanan, Cass County, and the rest of Berrien County.

Ridership on the system declined by approximately 46 percent between FY 2008 and 2009 and has not yet recovered. A change in operating hours and days of service is directly proportional to the reduction in ridership.

The demand response mode of service in FY 2010 provided approximately 3.8 trips per hour, while the fixed route produced 4.3 trips per hour. Compared to the transit industry standard of at least 2.0 passengers per hour on demand response service and at least 7.0 passengers per hour on a fixed route, Niles DART is above average for its demand response service and below average for a fixed route. Comparisons with peer transit systems were conducted and are included in Chapter V.

Funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Sections 5307 and 5311 Programs accounted for approximately 51 percent of the system's operating revenue on average for FY 2009 and FY 2010. In March 2011, the system opted to discontinue receiving Section 5311 program funds so that it could maximize preventive maintenance funding provided by the Section 5307 program. This decision was made because the City was directed that it could no longer receive funding from both of these Federal programs.

Niles City Tax revenue provided 27 percent of operating revenue, and passenger fares accounted for 15 percent in FYs 2009 and 2010. Other sources of income including State and Federal Preventive Maintenance grants, sale of property, interest income, and miscellaneous income account for the remainder of the operating revenue for the system. Prior to FY 2010, capital revenue is almost entirely derived from FTA Section 5307. In recent years, the capital outlay was primarily dedicated to improving the transit office and garage. An American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant provided the necessary revenue for building improvement expenses. Other capital outlay expenses included vehicle purchases and purchase of office and other equipment for the system.

The majority of operating expenses, 60 percent, occurred in relation to vehicle operations and included driver salaries and a portion of 'gas and oil' costs, during FYs 2009 and 2010. Administrative expenses such as liability insurance, management salaries and wages, and advertising account for another 19 percent of the annual expenditures, on average. It is noted that liability insurance was unusually high during FY 2009 due to no fault of the Niles DART system. Those costs have now been reduced through Niles DART's participation in the City's insurance consortium which started on December 1, 2010.

III. DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographics of an area are a strong indicator of demand for public transportation service. Demographic data that is most often relevant to public transit service was collected and is summarized in this chapter.

The data provided in the following paragraphs was gathered from multiple sources including the U.S. Census (2010 data), the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2005 to 2009, and the State of Michigan. These sources are used to ensure that the most current and accurate information is presented. It is important to note that the American Community Survey estimates have been used to supplement census data that is not available through the 2010 Census. As a four-year estimate, the data represent a percentage based on a national sample and does not represent a direct population count.

POPULATION PROJECTION

The total population of the study area was 28,420 in 2010. The study area consists of the City of Niles, Niles Charter Township, and Bertrand Township. The largest of these areas is the Niles Charter Township, with a population of 14,164. The City of Niles is the second largest area, with a population of 11,599. With a population of 2,657 Bertrand Township has the smallest portion of the total population in the study area. Exhibit III.1 outlines the population estimates for each of the geographic areas included in the study area.

The population of the City of Niles decreased by 600 people, or 4.9 percent between 2000 and 2010, according to the U.S. Census. Conversely, the population of Niles Charter and Bertrand Townships increased by 6.3 percent and 11.6 percent during the same years. Based on the population statistics, the decade long trend has demonstrated a migration of the population from the City toward the Townships.

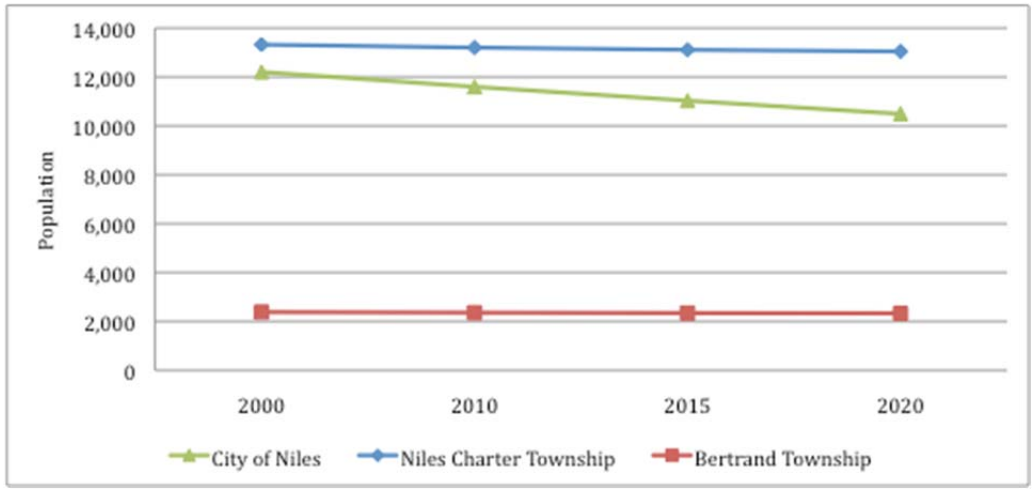
Exhibit III.1 – Population by Geography

Geography	2010 Population
City of Niles	11,599
Niles Charter Township	14,164
Bertrand Township	2,657
Total	**28,420**

Source: 2010 U.S. Census

According to information provided by the Office of the State Demographer, State of Michigan, it is estimated that the population of the study area will decrease to 15,376 by 2020. This is a decrease of 1.75 percent from the year 2000. Exhibit III.2 shows this estimated decrease in population, as well as the trend in population from 2000.

Exhibit III.2 – Population Projections

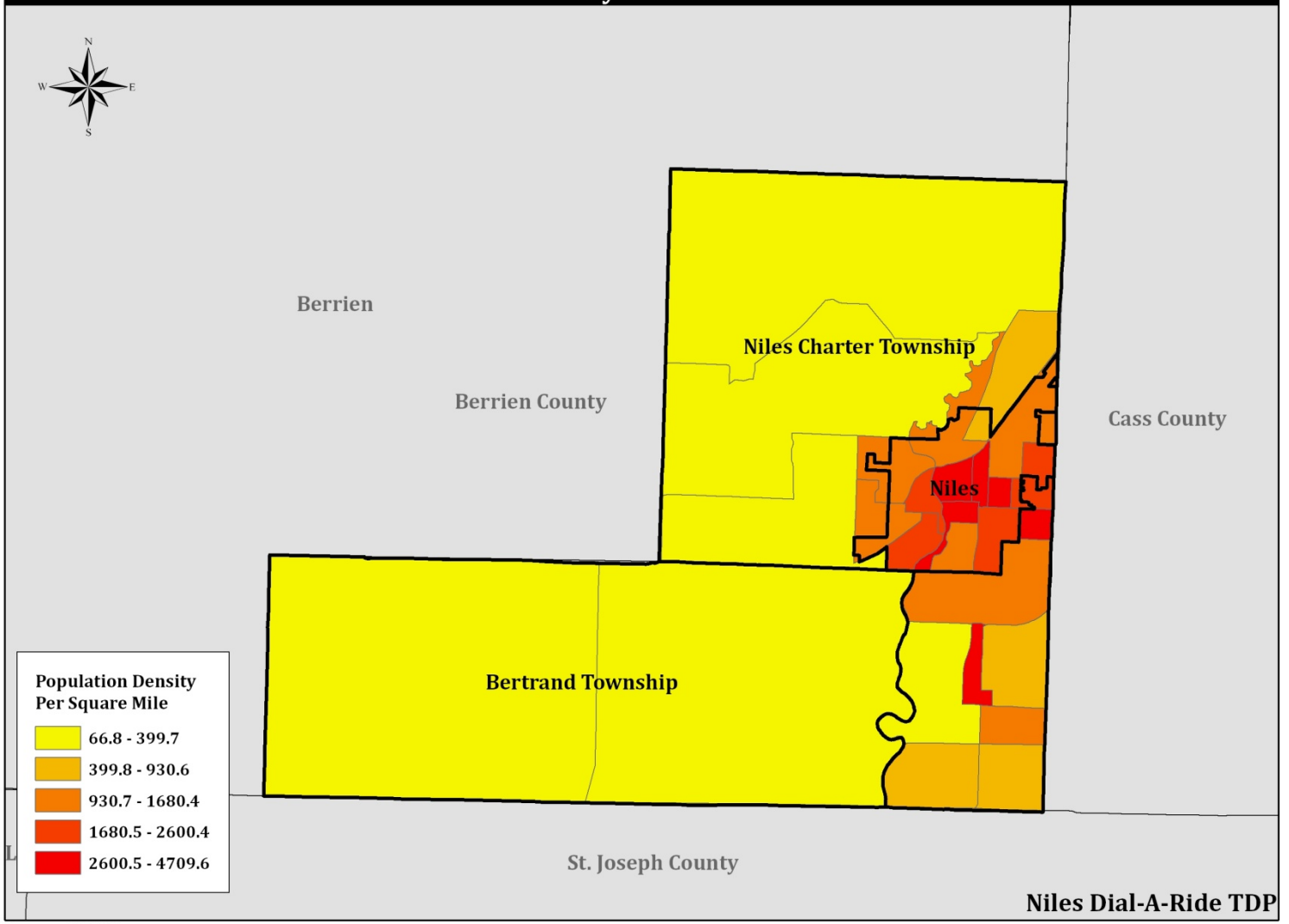


Source: Office of the State Demographer, State of Michigan

POPULATION DENSITY

The population density of the study area is depicted in Exhibit III.3. The block groups with the greatest population densities per square mile are in the City of Niles. These block groups have over 2,600 people per square mile. Block groups in the second highest population density category (1,680.5 to 2,600.4 persons per square mile) are located along the City's border and in Niles Charter Township. Bertrand Township has the block groups with the lowest population density, between 66.8 and 399.7 people per square mile.

Exhibit III.3 - Population Density
City of Niles



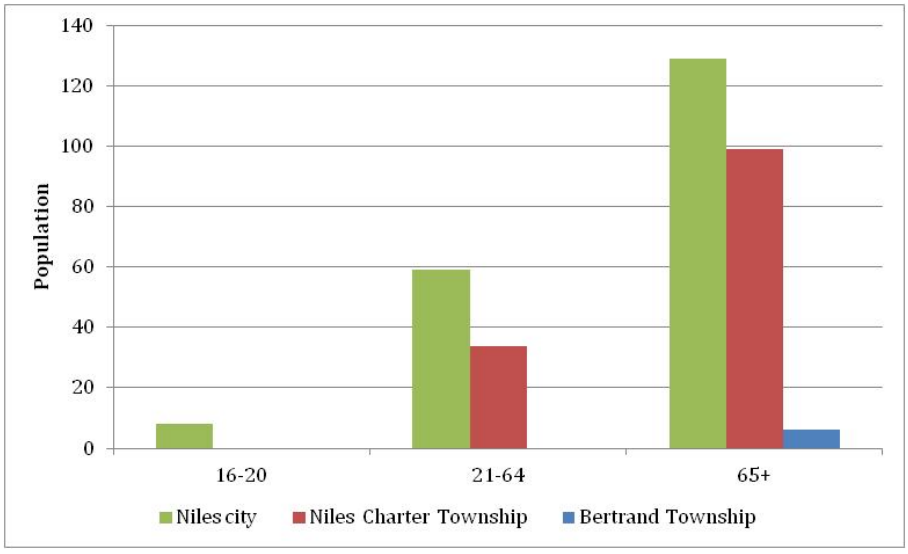
Source: 2010 Census

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Individuals with disabilities represent a demographic that is statistically more likely to use transportation service when it is available. The chart in Exhibit III.4 identifies the total number of individuals with disability by age cohort for Niles, Niles Charter Township, and Bertrand Township. The demographic information indicates a population of 335 individuals with a "go outside the home" disability in the study area. [1]The analysis targets individuals with a "go outside the home" disability, because these individuals most closely match the qualifications of a person that is identified as transportation disadvantaged as defined under the American with Disabilities Act.

With 196 individuals, Niles has the largest population of individuals with a go outside the home disability. Niles Township and Bertrand Township have a population of individuals with a go outside the home disability of 133 and 6, respectively. It is important to note that these individuals are split among three age cohorts. Individuals 16 to 20 comprise the smallest portion of individuals with less than 2 percent of the total disabled population in the study area. Individuals 21 to 64 comprise 28 percent of the total identified population. Individuals 65 and over are the largest segment of this population. This age cohort accounts for 70 percent of individuals with a go outside the home disability. As individuals age, the rate of disability increases. This statistic supports the notion that older adults are more likely to use transportation services.

Exhibit III.4 – Individuals with Disabilities



Source: Census 2000

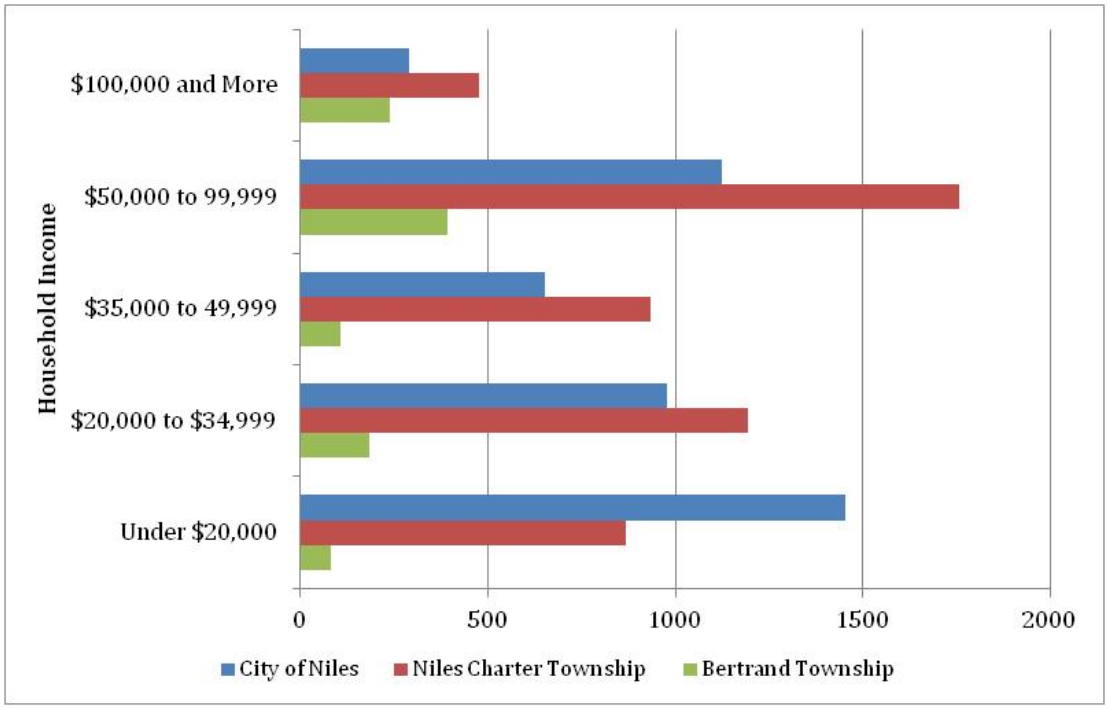
[1] Go outside the home disability (U.S. Census) definition is based on a four-part question: "Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting 6-months or more, does this person have any difficulty going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's office?"

HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

Exhibit III.5 illustrates the household incomes for the study area according to the American Community Survey 2005 to 2009. According to the American Community Survey, 60.1 percent of households in the study area earned annual incomes of less than $50,000. Of those households, 15.8 percent earned between $35,000 and 40,999. Another 21.9 percent earned between $20,000 and $34,999, and 22.4 percent earned less than $20,000 per year.

In comparison to the entire study area, an estimated 32.3 percent of households within the City earned less than $20,000 per year. An estimated 16.6 and 8.0 percent of households in Niles Charter and Bertrand Townships, respectively, earned less than $20,000.

Exhibit III.5 – Household Income



Source: American Community Survey 2005 - 2009

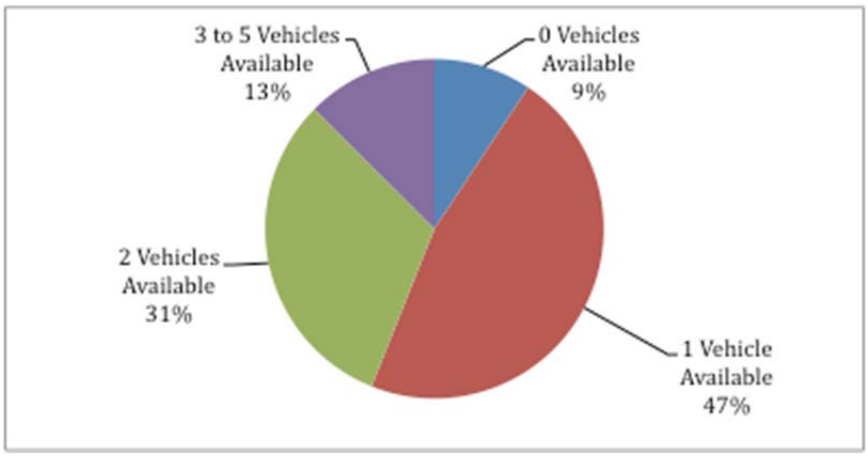
ZERO-VEHICLE HOUSEHOLDS

The number of zero-vehicle households in an area is an indicator of potential transit demand. According to the American Community Survey data for 2005-2009, 9.0 percent, of households in the City had no vehicles available. The portion of households with no vehicles available in Niles Charter and Bertrand Townships respectively, were 4.0 and 3.0 percent. Exhibits III.6 through III.8 illustrate the percentage of households in four categories of vehicle availability.

Exhibit III.9 provides a map of the concentration of zero-vehicle households within the study area, by block group. The block group locations with the highest concentration of zero-vehicle households are within the City and a portion of Niles Charter Township to the north of the City. Over 42 percent of households within these block groups have no vehicle available. Large portions of northern and

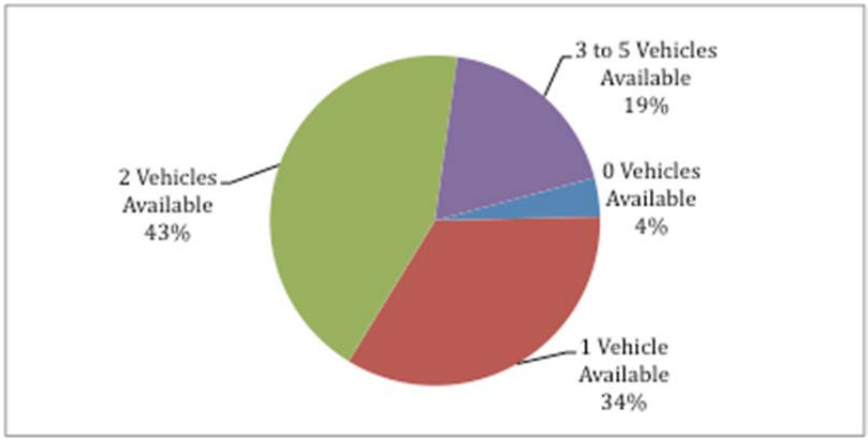
southern Niles Charter Township as well as western Bertrand Township have an estimated 18.5 to 29.3 percent of households with no vehicle.

Exhibit III.6 –Zero Vehicle Households, City of Niles



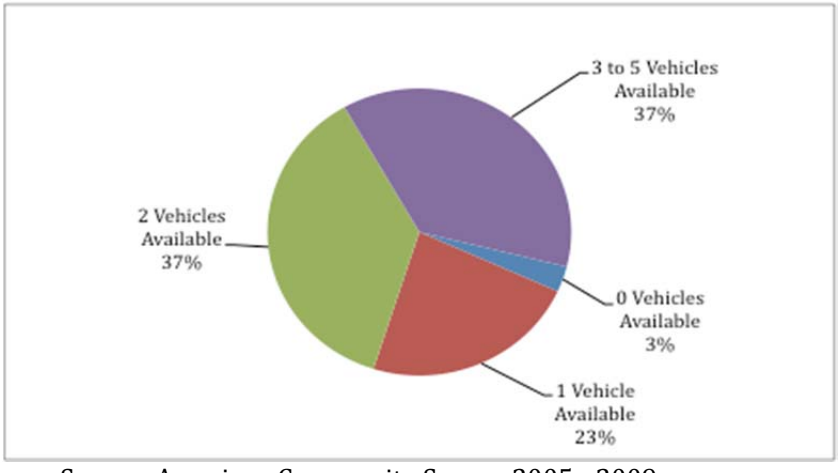
Source: American Community Survey 2005 - 2009

Exhibit III.7 –Zero Vehicle Households, Niles Charter Township



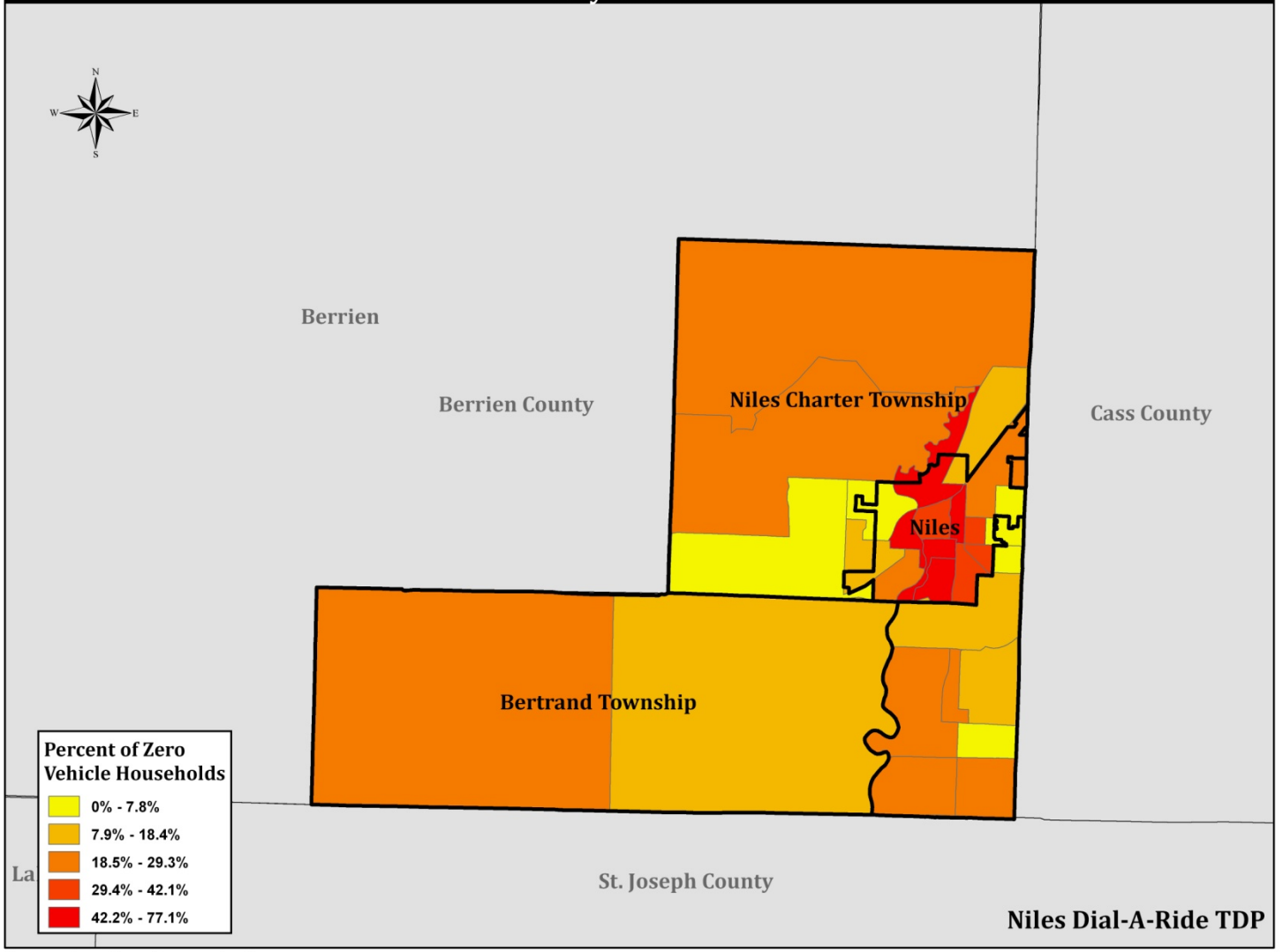
Source: American Community Survey 2005 - 2009

Exhibit III.8 –Zero Vehicle Households, Bertrand Township



Source: American Community Survey 2005 - 2009

Exhibit III.9 - Percentage of Zero Vehicle Households
City of Niles



Source: Americna Community Sruvey

POPULATION PROJECTIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS

Older Adult Population Projections

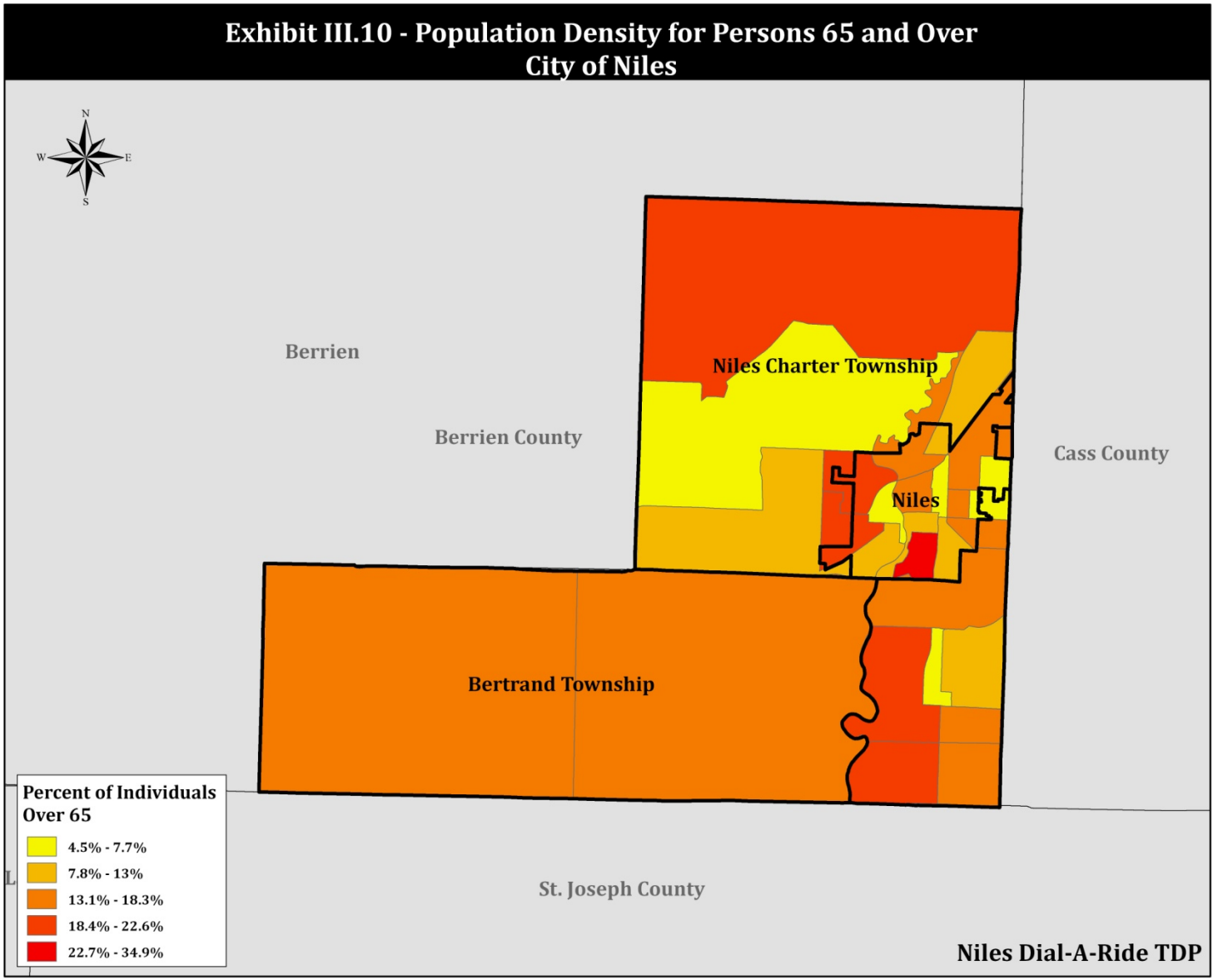
Older adults are most likely to use public transportation when they are unable to drive themselves or choose not to drive. Older adults also tend to be on a limited retirement income and, therefore, public transportation is a more economical option to owning a vehicle. For these reasons, the population of older adults in an area is an indicator of potential transit demand.

There is a trend occurring in the United States relating to the aging of the population. The two age cohorts with the largest percentage of growth over the last decade were the 50-54 year old cohort and the 45-49 year old cohort. People in these two age groups were primarily born during the post-WWII "baby boom," era defined by the Census Bureau as persons born from 1946 through 1964. As communities approach the year 2012, these baby boomers are reaching the age of 65 and are becoming more likely to use public transportation if it is available.

Further, the Administration on Aging (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) reports that, based on a comprehensive survey of older adults, longevity is increasing and younger seniors are healthier than in all previously measured time in our history. Quality of life issues and an individual's desire to live independently will put increasing pressure on existing transit services to provide mobility to this population. As older adults live longer and remain independent, the potential need to provide public transit is greatly increased.

Exhibit III.10 illustrates the population density of persons over 65 years of age by block group. Concentrations of this age group are spread throughout the Niles DART service area. Block groups with the highest concentrations are located in the southern portion of the City. These block groups with individuals 65 and over comprise over 22.6 percent of the total population. The northern and southern portions of Niles Charter Township have a relatively high concentration of older adults, ranging from 18.4 to 22.6 percent. By comparison, Bertrand Township has a lower percentage of older adults, between 13.1 and 18.3 percent.

Exhibit III.10 - Population Density for Persons 65 and Over
City of Niles



Source: Americna Community Sruvey

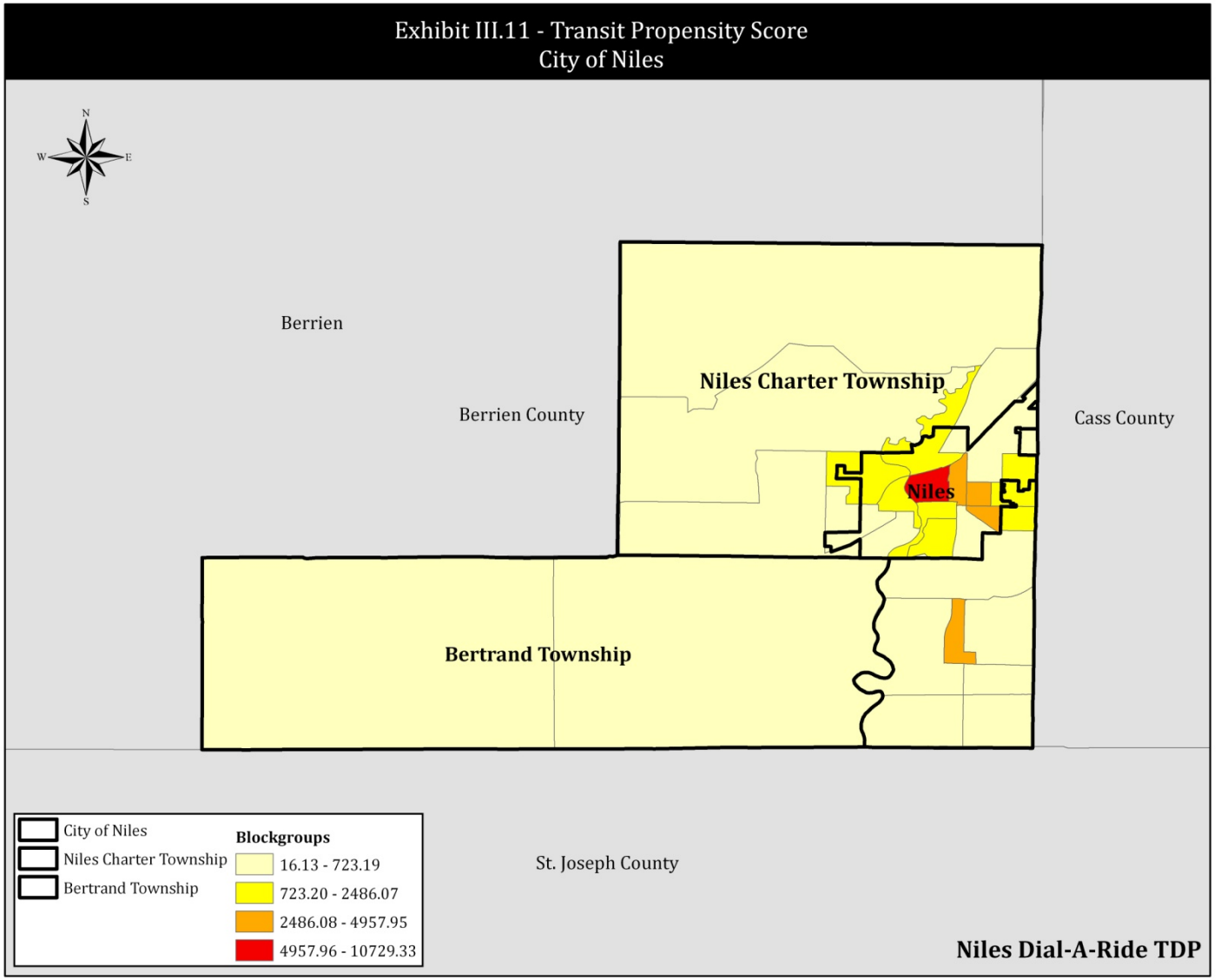
TRANSIT PROPENSITY SCORE

Another way to calculate transit propensity is by using a calculation that gives each Census block group a transit propensity score. Transit propensity is a measure of the likelihood that a local population will use transit service, were it available to them, taking into account their demographic characteristics.

To calculate transit propensity for the Niles DART service area, U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000 data were gathered at the block group level for the entire service area. The data included: total population, total households, households below poverty level, number of persons age 65 and older, number of occupied housing units, and the number of occupied housing units with zero vehicles available. Census 2000 data was used in this calculation because data was not released from the 2010 Census and the American Community Survey five-year estimate at the time of this report.

Based on information provided in the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 28: *Transit Markets of the Future, The Challenge of Change*, transit propensity factors were determined for each of the three demographics in the Niles DART service area. Propensity factors were then multiplied by the proportion of the demographic group for each block group and were summed among the three population segments for each block group. The sum was multiplied by the total population density of the block group. This calculation produced an overall transit propensity score for each block group.

Exhibit III.11 gives a visual representation of where pockets of high transit propensity are located within the City of Niles Dial-A-Ride service area. Block groups with the highest concentrations are located in the center of the City. Areas with the next highest concentration of potentially transit dependent riders lie in the western portion of the City. As illustrated on the map, some portions of the transit dependent population also live in Niles Charter Township and Bertrand Township, near the city limits.



Source: Census 2000

SUMMARY

The population of the study area is projected to continue to decrease through 2020 according to the Office of the State Demographer, State of Michigan.

A total of 28.5 percent of households in the study area earned less than $20,000 per year according to the American Community Survey 2005 to 2009. While the majority of these households are located in the City, both Niles Charter and Bertrand Townships have notable percentage of households who earned less than $20,000 per year.

The highest densities of households without a vehicle are concentrated in the City, but the percentages of zero-vehicle households in Niles Charter and Bertrand Townships is not far behind. The number of vehicles available to a household is an indicator of potential demand for public transit because people who do not have convenient access to a vehicle are the most likely to use transit service if it is available to them.

The aging population is diversely spread throughout the service area, and Bertrand Township has the lowest concentration of individuals 65 and over. Throughout the City and Niles Charter Township, there are block groups with concentrated population of older adults ranging from 18.4 percent to 22.6 percent. These block groups coincide with the locations of senior housing apartment complexes. The highest concentration of older adults is located in the southern portion of the City. In these block groups, older adults comprise over 22.6 percent of the population.

IV. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

METHODOLOGY

To develop a better understanding of Niles Dial-A-Ride Transportation (DART), RLS & Associates, Inc. conducted face-to-face interviews, public meetings, passenger and public surveys, and focus groups. Stakeholders included the general public, human service agencies, government officials, employers, and DART Staff. The following paragraphs describe the results of stakeholder participation to date.

Public and Stakeholder Meetings

A series of public meetings were held at the Niles City Council Chambers, Greater Niles Senior Center, and the Niles High School. Additional input was collected through meetings with the Niles DART Local Advisory Committee (LAC). Public meetings were advertised in the Niles Star newspaper, local community newsletters and calendars, posted on the Niles DART vehicles, and posted at the YMCA and several local churches. Human service agencies throughout the county were also invited to post fliers and invite consumers and staff to attend the meetings.

The objective of these meetings was to establish an understanding of the transportation service that currently exists. Participants of the meetings discussed the existing DART service, their likes, public perception, and recommendations for improvements.

Public Survey

The public survey was distributed in April and May 2011 to local human service agencies, senior centers, and residential communities for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Results are summarized at the end of this chapter. The targeted audience for the survey included transit riders and non-riders, who live in City of Niles, Niles Charter Township, and Bertrand Township. The locations for survey distribution are listed below.

Survey Distribution Sites:

- Area Agency on Aging, Care Management patients in Niles Charter Township, Niles, and Bertrand Township;
- Four Flags Apartment Complex, Niles;
- Greater Niles Senior Center, Niles;
- Hi-Rise Apartments, Niles;
- Salvation Army, Niles;
- STRIVE, Benton Harbor; and,
- YMCA, Niles.

The survey results, while not statistically valid, are valuable because they supplement information that was provided during focus groups and public meetings. The results help to identify the perceptions and knowledge that the general public has about Niles DART service. The purpose of the survey was to conduct expansive public outreach in an effort to better understand public perceptions about Niles DART service. It was not the intent of the survey to provide statistically valid results.

Stakeholder Interviews

In addition to group meetings and the survey, the consulting team also met one-on-one with various community stakeholders. The input received during interviews is summarized in this chapter.

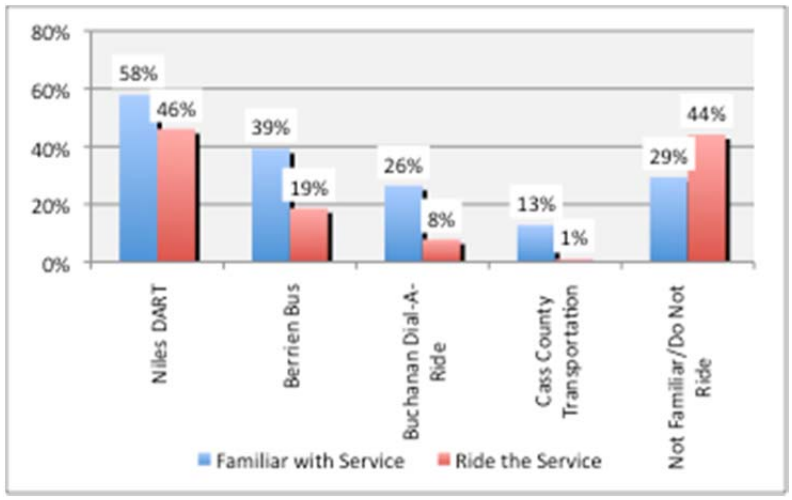
SUMMARY OF PUBLIC SURVEY FINDINGS

The following public survey summary includes the information gained from 191 surveys. Each chart is based on the number of responses received for individual questions. If an individual skipped a question or did not provide a legible answer, the distribution of responses for that particular question will be based on fewer than 191 surveys.

Local Awareness of Public Transportation Services

Survey participants were asked if they were familiar with four public transportation systems in the area and if they ride any of the systems. The following chart illustrates the response rate pertaining to each transportation provider. Ninety-three individuals answered the question. Respondents were asked to choose all answers that applied, therefore, the percentages in Exhibit IV.1 add up to more than 100 percent. Approximately 58 percent of survey respondents were familiar with Niles DART and 46 percent said that they use the system.

Exhibit IV.1: Local Awareness and Ridership on Public Transportation Services



Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

Table IV.1 provides more information about Exhibit IV.1. It outlines the percent of responses, by community, that were familiar with and/or used the public transit systems, by community of residence for the respondent. More than 72 percent of respondents from Niles Charter Township do not ride any of the transit systems that serve the local area. More than 45 percent of respondents from the same township are not familiar with the transportation provided by any of the local systems. According to these results, Niles residents are both more aware of the services available and more likely to use them compared to Niles Charter Township residents. Results from Bertrand Township were not relevant because only one response was received.

Table IV.1: Local Awareness and Ridership on Public Transportation Services

CATEGORY	NILES		NILES CHARTER TWP.		BERTRAND TWP.		RESPONSE TOTALS	
	FAMILIAR WITH	RIDE	FAMILIAR WITH	RIDE	FAMILIAR WITH	RIDE	FAMILIAR WITH	RIDE
Niles DART	**60.7% (51)**	**54.3% (44)**	**45.5% (5)**	27.3% (3)	0	0	**58.3% (56)**	**50.5% (47)**
Berrien Bus	36.9% (31)	18.5% (15)	27.3% (3)	9.1% (1)	**100% (1)**	**100% (1)**	36.5% (35)	18.3% (17)
Buchanan Dial-A-Ride	25.0% (21)	7.4% (6)	18.2% (2)	9.1% (1)	0	0	24.0% (23)	7.5% (7)
Cass County Transportation	11.9% (10)	1.2% (1)	9.1% (1)	0	0	0	11.5% (11)	1.1% (1)
None of the Above	27.4% (23)	40.7% (33)	**45.5% (5)**	**72.7% (8)**	0	0	29.2% (28)	44.1% (41)
Total Number of Respondents	**84**	**81**	**11**	**11**	**1**	**1**	**96**	**93**

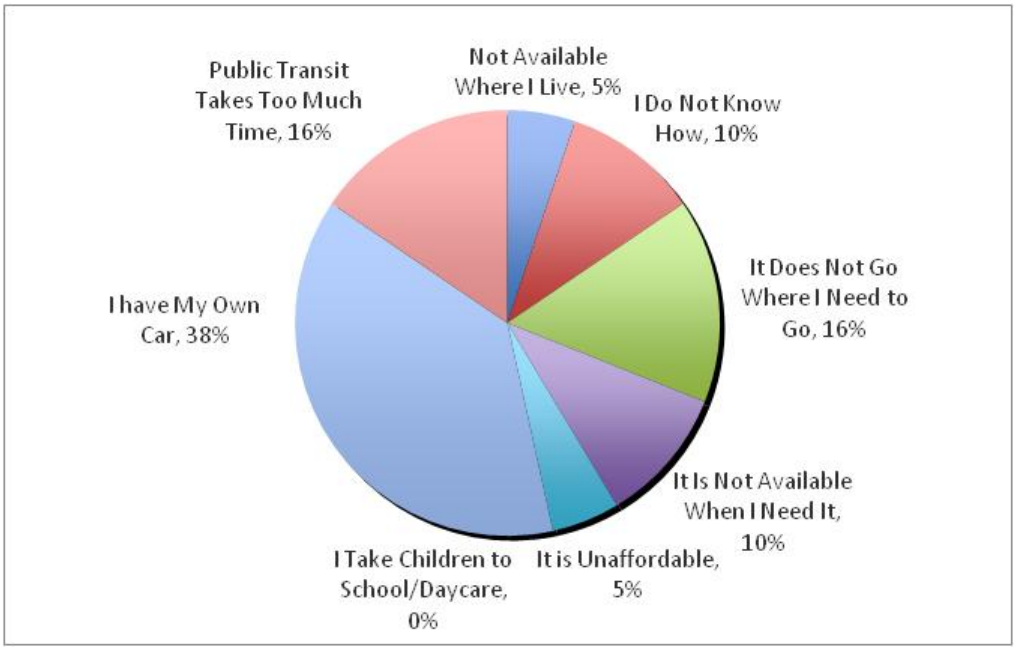
Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

Reasons for Using or Not Using Public Transportation

Survey respondents who stated that they did ***not*** use public transportation were asked to indicate why not. The chart in Exhibit IV.2 illustrates the distribution of responses. Most respondents do not use public transportation because they have their own car (38 percent).

The most common reasons cited by riders who do not have a personal automobile for not using public transportation are 'public transit taking too much time' and 'transit not going where they need to go.' These factors combined with the incidence of service not being available when it is needed, is an indication that if the service area and hours of operation were improved, new riders may be more attracted to public transportation.

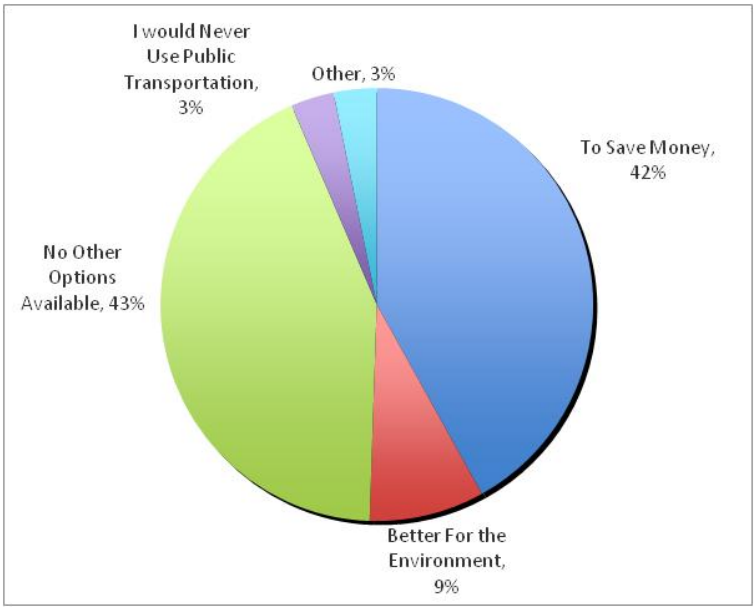
Exhibit IV.2: Why Not Use Public Transportation?



Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

The survey also asked passengers why they would use transportation, if it were easy and available. The results indicate that nearly equal numbers of respondents would ride if they have 'no other options available' or to 'save money', 43 percent and 42 percent, respectively. Eight respondents indicated that they would use public transportation for environmental preservation, if transportation were available to them. Only three percent of respondents indicated that they would never use public transportation.

Exhibit IV.3: Why Would You Use Public Transportation if it were Easy and Available?



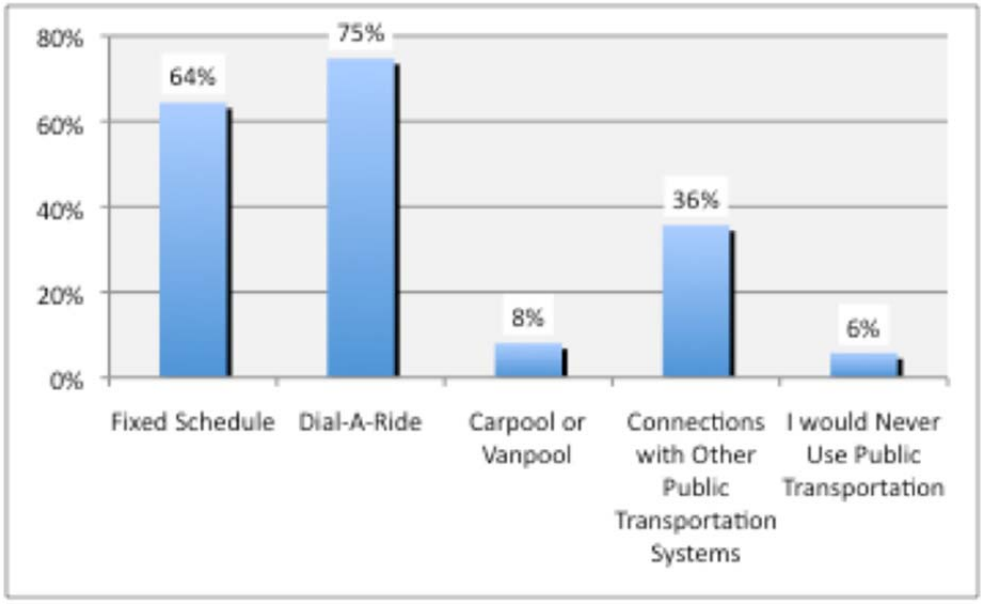
Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

Choice of Service Mode

A total of 87 individuals responded to a question about which mode of transportation service delivery they would consider using in the Niles area. Respondents were asked to select all modes of service that apply, and descriptions of each type of service were provided.

Approximately 75 percent of survey respondents would consider using dial-a-ride service that required an advance reservation and a vehicle that picks them up at the door. Fixed schedule service with bus stops ranked a strong second place selection with 64 percent of respondents. 'Connections with other public transportation systems' was a selection for more than 35 percent of respondents. The high percentage of fixed schedule and dial-a-ride services is most likely an indication that passengers like the mode of transportation service delivery that is currently available to them.

Exhibit IV.4: Choice of Service Mode

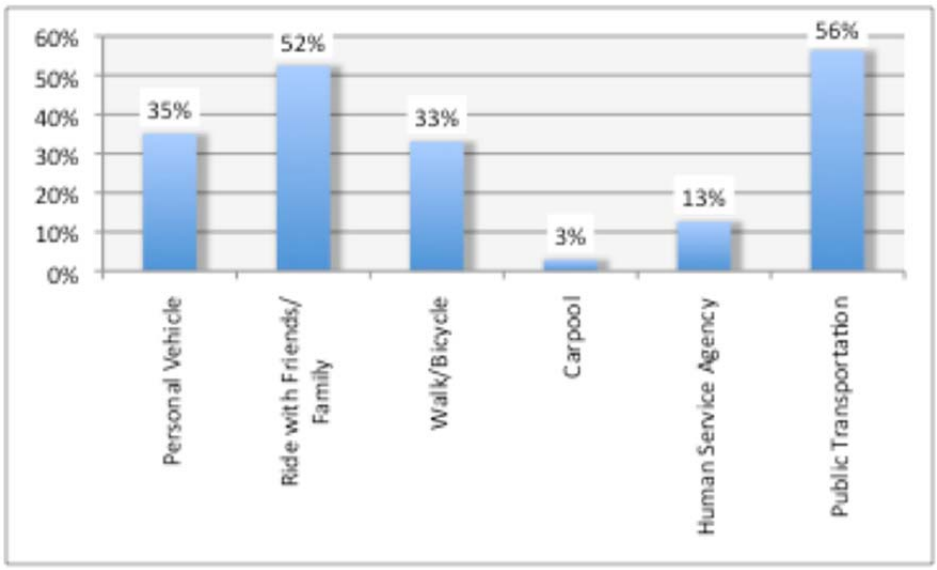


Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

Survey respondents were asked to list the modes of transportation that they have used in the past 12 months. A total of 103 individuals responded to the question. Percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents could choose multiple answers.

More than half, 56 percent, of the individuals who completed the survey indicated that they rode public transportation in the past year. A similar percentage, 52 percent, rode with friends or a family member. Only 35 percent of respondents indicated that they used a personal vehicle and a similar proportion, 33 percent, rode a bicycle or walked.

Exhibit IV.5: Modes of Transportation Used in the Past 12 Months



Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

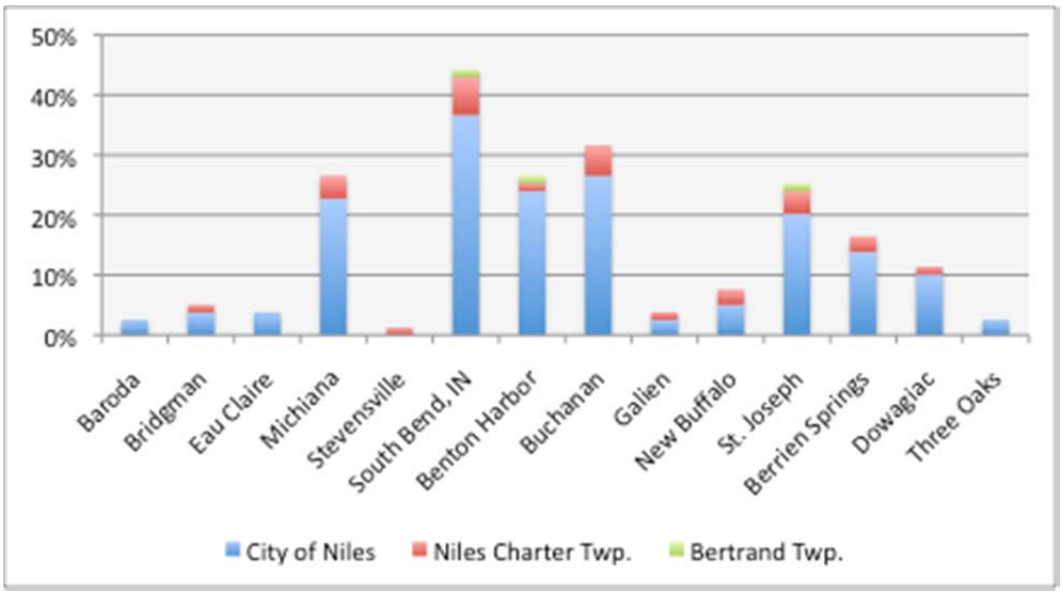
ORIGINS AND DESTINATIONS

Survey respondents were asked where they travel to in the local area for shopping, work, or other purposes. The following chart compares the most common trip destinations with the place of residence of the survey respondents.

The majority of respondents lived in the city (79 respondents), while Niles Charter Township ranked second highest (10 respondents). One respondent was from Bertrand Township and none of the participants lived in Howard Township. Four respondents listed their place of residence as Buchanan, Berrien Woods, Milton Township, and St. Joseph.

According to survey results, South Bend was the most common destination for all residents and Buchanan ranked second. Michiana and St. Joseph ranked third highest among Niles Charter Township residents but Benton Harbor held the third ranking position for Niles residents.

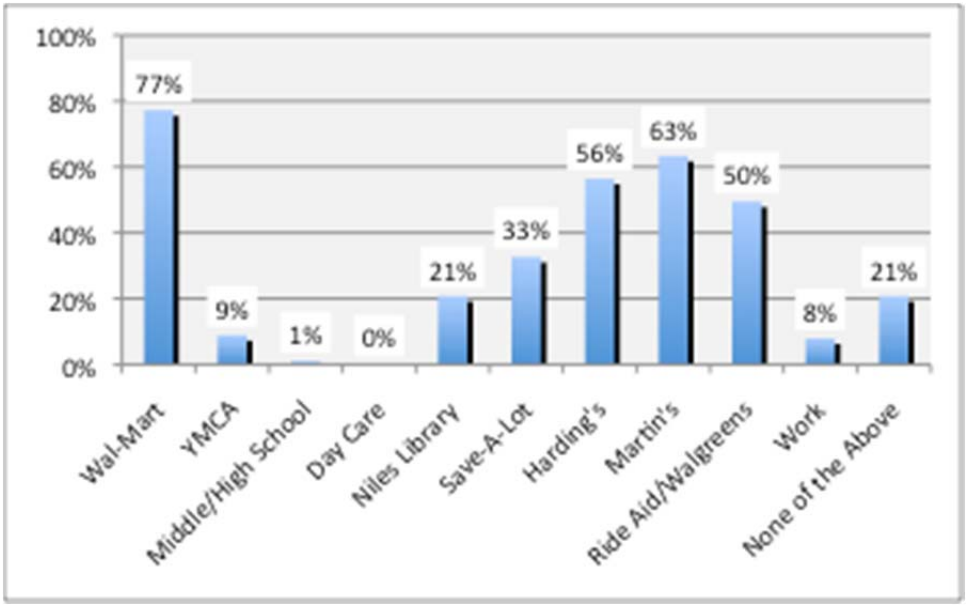
Exhibit IV.6: Community Destination by Survey Respondent's Community of Residence



Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

The most popular destinations among 102 survey respondents were Walmart and Martin's. Harding's and Rite Aid/Walgreens also ranked high. Exhibit IV.7 illustrates the distribution of responses. "Work" destinations included Lowes, Salvation Army, Dairy Queen, City of Niles, Church, Disability Network, and French Paper Company.

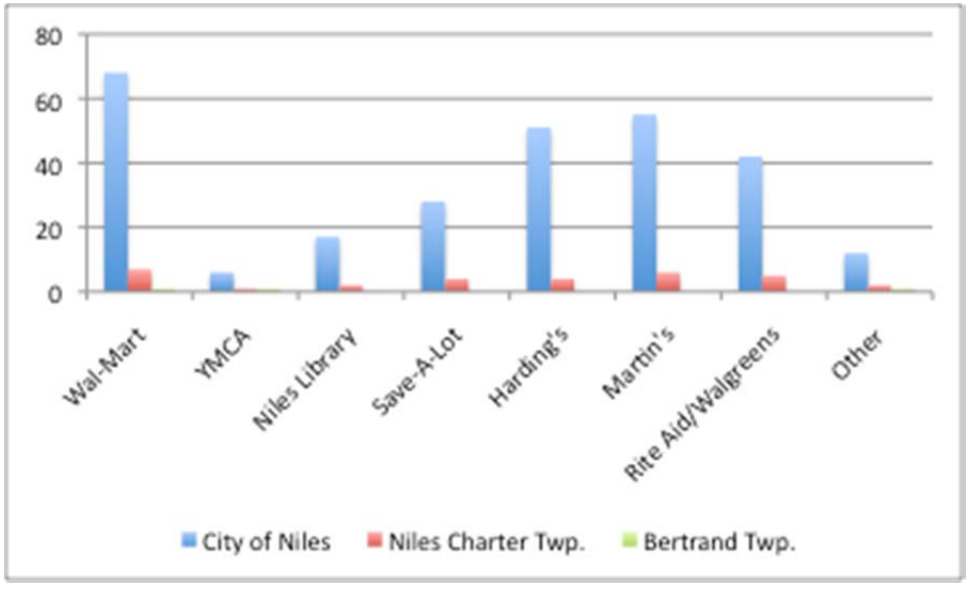
Exhibit IV.7: Popular Destinations



Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

Cross-tabulation of place of residence with popular destinations reveals that Walmart is the most popular destination for residents of all communities in the service area. Walmart, Martin's, Harding's, Rite Aid/Walgreens, and Safe-A-Lot are popular destinations for Niles and Niles Charter Township residents. One resident from Niles Charter Township and Bertrand Township, and six Niles residents also selected the YMCA as a common destination.

Exhibit IV.8: Popular Destination by Place of Residence



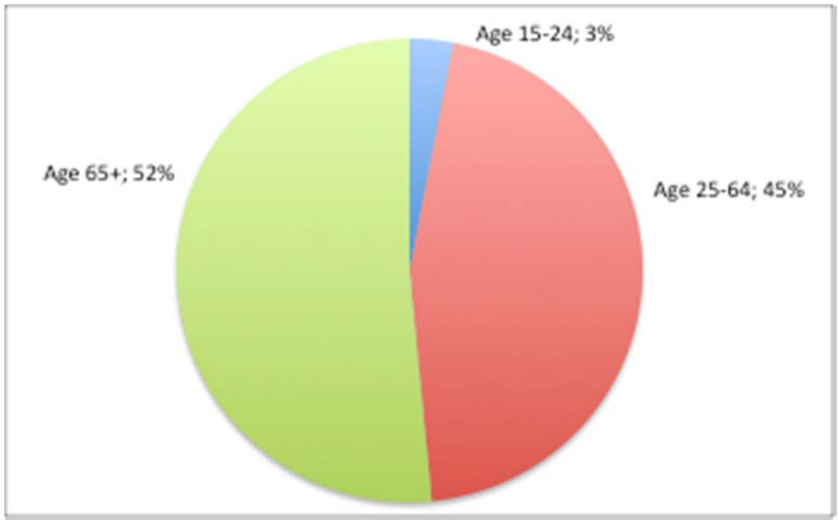
Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA

Age of Survey Respondents

A total of 99 individuals provided their age cohort for the survey. A very small percentage (3 percent) of surveys were received from individuals under age 25. As a result of the age of participants, there is a potential for bias toward older adults. The older age groups make up nearly equal parts of the total survey responses.

Exhibit IV.9: Age Distribution of Survey Respondents



Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

Public Transportation Riders by Age Group, by Public Transportation System

A total of 94 individuals responded to the question about which transportation service they use. Respondents were instructed to select all answers that applied. In general, the responses reveal the following:

- Niles DART had the highest percentage of responses in the oldest age group categories.
- The distribution of Berrien Bus riders included in the survey was mostly between age 25 and 64, while this age group was the second highest percentage for the other providers.
- The majority of riders that used "none" of the transportation providers (also see Table IV.1) were between ages 25 and 64.

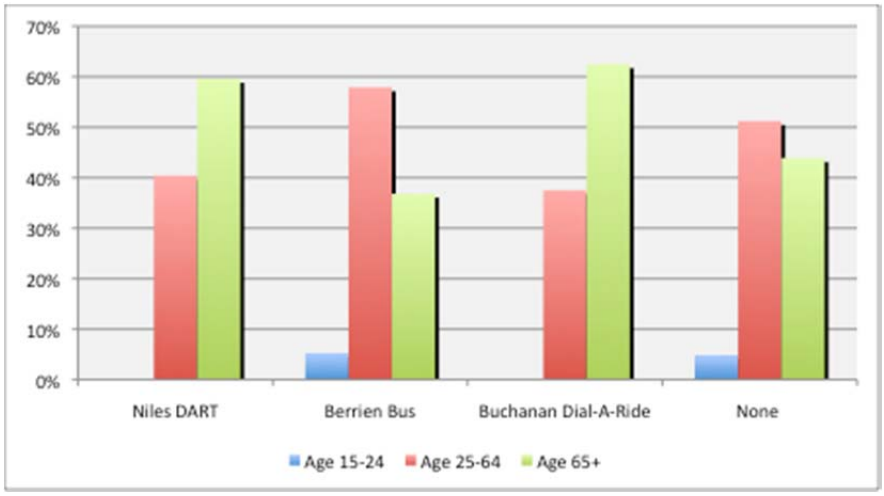
Approximately 60 percent of the Niles DART riders who responded to the survey were age 65 and older, while the remaining 40 percent were between ages 25 and 64. None of the Niles DART riders that participated in the survey were under age 25.

Approximately 58 percent of Berrien Bus riders were between the ages of 25 and 64, while another 37 percent were age 65 or older. Only one Berrien Bus rider was under age 25.

Five (or 63 percent) Buchanan Dial-A-Ride passengers that participated in the survey were age 65 or older, while the remaining three (38 percent) were between the ages of 25 and 64. One survey respondent selected Cass County Transportation (not shown in the chart).

Approximately 44 percent of respondents who indicated using "none" of the transportation providers were age 65 or older; 51 percent of the "none" responses were from individuals between ages 25 and 64. Another five percent were under age 25.

Exhibit IV.10: Age of Rider, by Transportation System

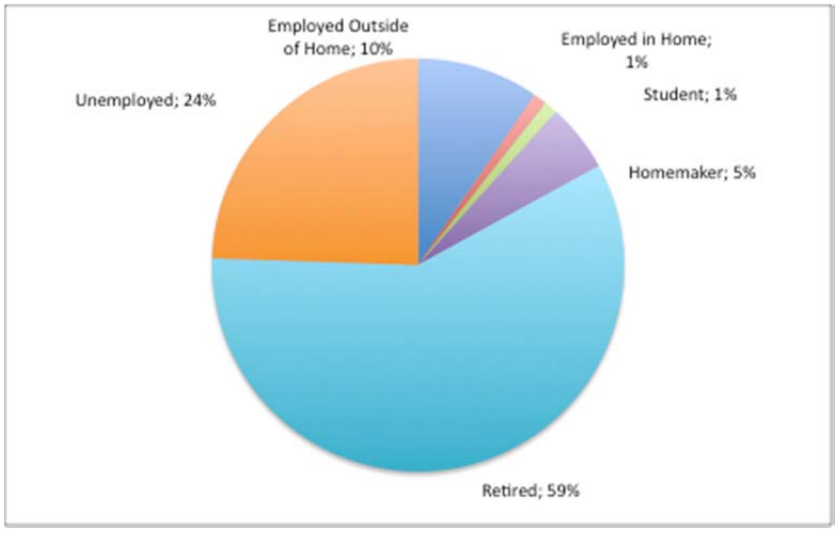


Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

Place of Employment

As illustrated in the following chart, nearly 60 percent of survey respondents were retired and another 24 percent were unemployed. Ten percent of respondents were employed in a profession that is outside of their home, while only one percent worked from home. The remaining responses were homemakers and students.

Exhibit IV.11: Employment Status

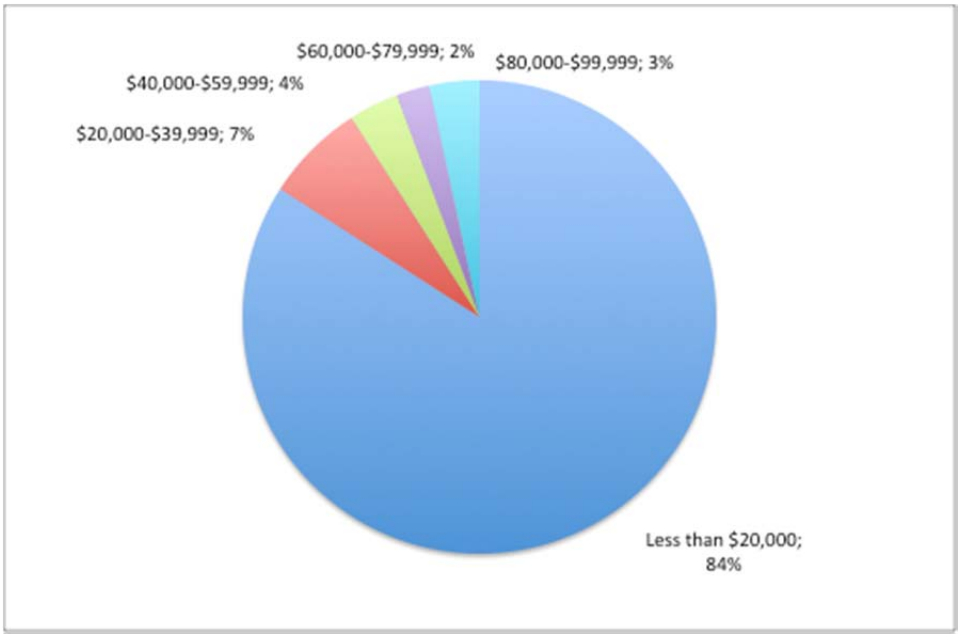


Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

Income

The median household income for Niles was $31,829. Niles Charter Township had a median of $43,961, according to the 2009 American Community Survey. As illustrated in the Exhibit IV.12, 84 percent of survey respondents had an annual household income of less than $20,000, which is well below the median for most of the survey participants. It is not unusual for individuals with lower incomes to have a higher propensity for using public transportation than those earning more money.

Exhibit IV.12: Annual Household Income

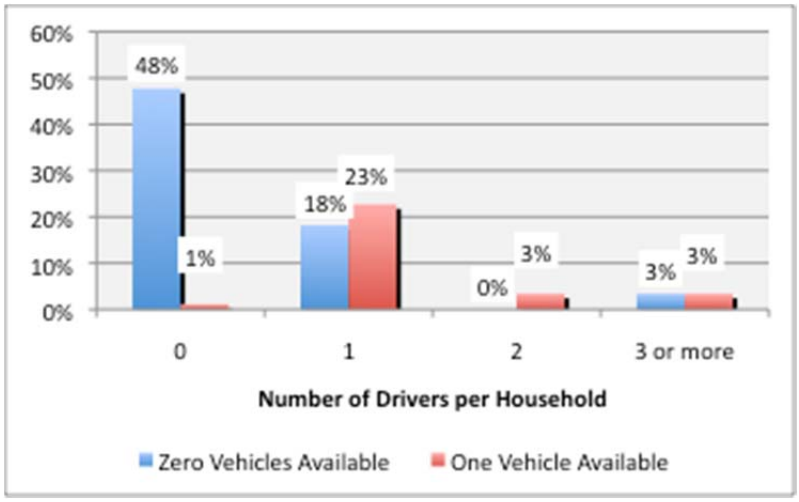


Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

Drivers and Available Vehicles per Household

Households with no drivers and/or more drivers than available vehicles represent individuals with the highest likelihood to use public transportation. As illustrated below, most survey respondents (48 percent) had no available vehicles and no drivers in the household. Another 18 percent had no available vehicles and one driver.

Exhibit IV.13: Number of Vehicles by Number of Drivers per Household



Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

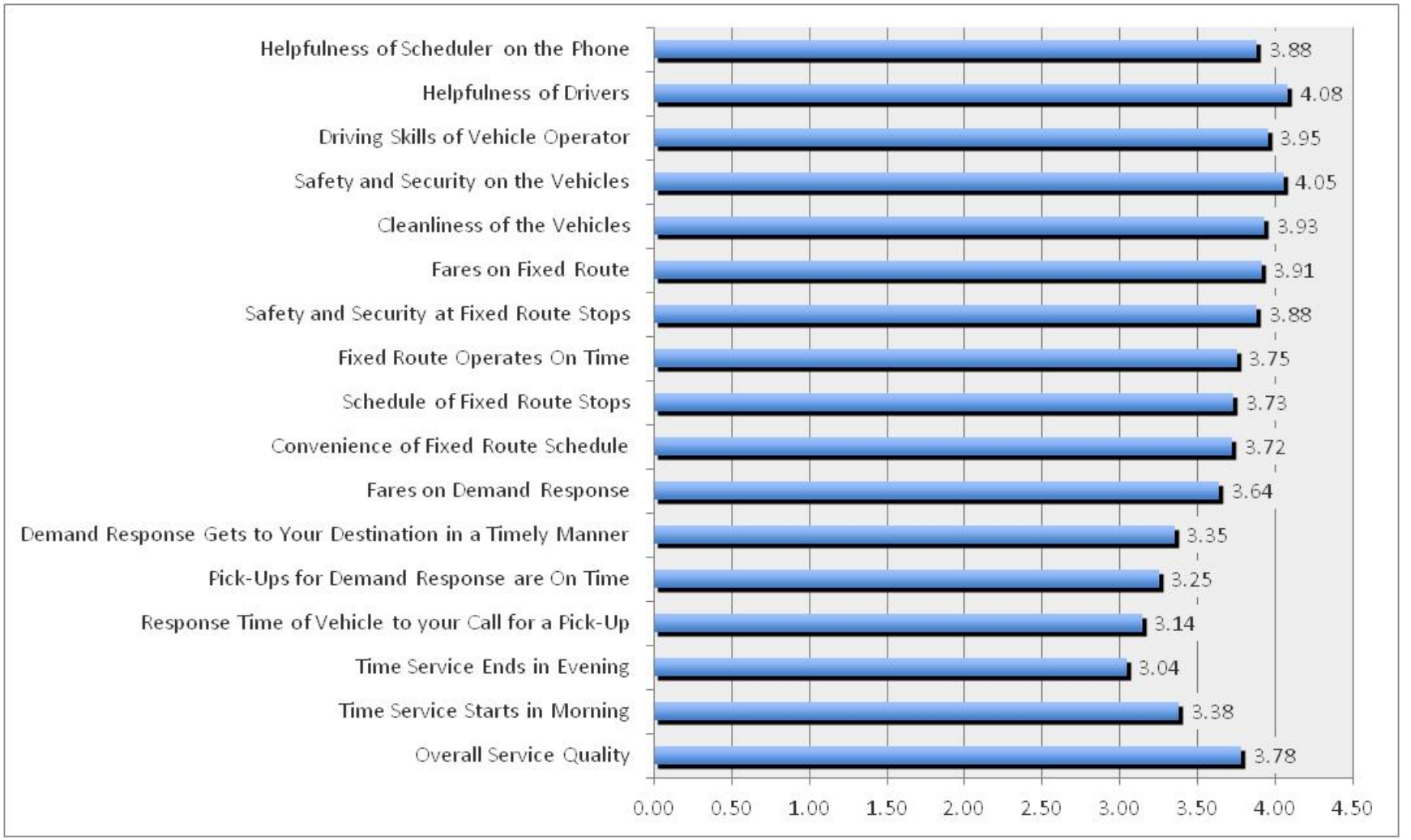
NILES DART SERVICE RATING

The following chart illustrates the average rating given to Niles DART in 16 areas of service plus an overall service quality rating. Survey respondents were invited to rate each area of service on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest.

The overall service rating average score was 3.78. "Helpfulness of Drivers" and "Safety and Security on the Vehicle" received the highest average scores of 4.08 and 4.05.

"Time the Service Ends in the Evening" and "Response Time of Vehicles to Your Call for Pick-Up" respectively received the lowest average scores of 3.04 and 3.14.

Exhibit IV.14: Niles Dart Average Scores on Service Quality



Source: Niles DART Public Survey, April 2011

PUBLIC SURVEY SUMMARY

Overall, the community is very supportive of the service offered by Niles DART. The transportation program improves the quality of life for its passengers. Niles DART offers a reliable transportation option for the community that is beneficial to economic and community development for the service area as well as the surrounding region. Niles DART offers connections to transit systems in neighboring areas and provides an important link in the network of mobility options in Southwest Michigan. Stakeholders want to preserve the quality of service that is offered by Niles DART throughout the transitions in management. While there is room for improvement, community stakeholders want Niles DART to continue to play a significant role in local transportation as well as county and regional transportation.

Approximately 50 percent of the survey responses were from individuals age 65 and older and another 45 percent were from individuals between ages 25 and 64 (working age group). The age cohorts of the respondents were similar to the ridership distribution of Niles DART. However, additional input from younger ages would be useful in balancing the results.

Eighty four percent of the survey respondents earned $20,000 per year or less and more than 50 percent were retired. Most respondents had no available vehicle and/or no driver in the household. These characteristics represent the population with the highest likelihood for using public transportation.

About 42 percent stated that they ride public transportation to save money and about eight percent would ride to preserve the environment. Fewer responses were received from Niles Charter Township, but it is noteworthy that 73 percent of those respondents did not ride any of the public transportation providers serving the area. These percentages indicate a potential need to emphasize public outreach and advertising about the public transportation services that are available in the area.

The survey participants indicated that when they travel out of the local area for shopping, medical appointments, or entertainment, the most popular destinations are South Bend, Buchanan, Benton Harbor, Michiana, and St. Joseph. Niles DART offers connections to transit systems that serve all of the most popular destinations that are outside of the local service area.

Within the Niles service area, Walmart, Martin's and Harding's were the most popular destinations for shopping. Niles DART serves all of the most popular shopping destinations within the local area.

Niles DART service received an average rating of 3.78 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best. "Helpfulness of Drivers" and "Safety and Security on the Vehicle" received the highest average scores. "Time the Service Ends in the Evening" and "Response Time of Vehicles to Your Call for Pick-Up" respectively received the lowest average scores. The lower ratings for hours of service and return trips correspond to feedback received during public meetings and may also reflect the system's reduction in ridership productivity after service hours were reduced.

SUMMARY OF INPUT FROM PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Many points of interest were discussed at the public and LAC meetings. These points will be considered during the development of transportation alternatives. The following bullet point lists are arranged in terms of aspects of Niles DART service that should be preserved or improved through the transportation development plan. Overall, the input received from the general public and other stakeholders was very positive.

Aspects of Niles DART Service to be Preserved:

- The deviated fixed route and the convenience of not needing to call in advance for a trip.
- DART service should continue to be convenient for shopping.
- All vehicles are lift equipped, making it easy for individuals with disabilities to access the service. Existing passengers prefer that Niles DART continue to operate a 100 percent accessible fleet of vehicles.
- Passengers want to continue to have the option to schedule trips several days in advance, to ensure a ride.
- Drivers have the ability to schedule a return trip after dropping off a passenger.
- The fare should continue to be affordable.
- Communication with passengers about the service should be preserved and improved.
- The connection to TRANSPO has opened up new transportation opportunities and access to needed services.
- Niles DART should continue to hire drivers who are friendly and caring.
- Door-to-door service is available for individuals who require additional assistance. Passengers want to have an option for door-to-door service in the future.
- Half-fares for qualified individuals is an advantage that passengers wish to preserve.
- Summer passes for youth is a program that the community appreciates and wants to preserve. Stakeholders want Niles DART to continue to encourage young people to use public transportation.

Aspects of Niles DART Service to be Improved:

- Efficient and cost effective service is a must in the current economic environment. Niles DART must improve cost effectiveness of operations, administration, and maintenance.
- The policy for driver assistance to passengers should be defined and enforced. Currently, passengers report that some drivers offer more assistance than other drivers. Standardization will reduce customer complaints and improve satisfaction.
- Passengers report that they do not know when the vehicle has arrived at their house. A phone call or honking the horn to notify the passenger that his or her ride has arrived was suggested.
- Passengers want to have less wait-time for their return trip.
- Buses need wider aisles to accommodate large wheelchairs.
- Longer services hours, 6:00 AM to 7:00 PM, were requested to accommodate employment opportunities. Longer service hours would also give passengers an opportunity to complete errands and social activities before or after work.
- Transportation is needed to medical locations, including dental and eye care that are outside of the current service area.

- The fixed route sometimes runs behind schedule. On-time performance should be monitored and improved.
- Stakeholders suggested implementation of transportation services that are specifically targeted at individuals who could use the service for work commutes.
- Advertisement of services and education on how to use route services should be enhanced.
- The fixed route should start earlier in the morning.
- All service hours should be extended on Saturday afternoons.
- Transportation service should be available to special events including city council meetings, football games, festivals, and other local activities.
- A senior companion to assist new riders may help to reduce fears about riding Niles DART and encourage seniors to be more active.
- The City of Dowagiac and Cass County should be added to the service area so that passengers can travel to and from that area for shopping, entertainment, medical appointments and other purposes.

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW RESULTS

In addition to group meetings and the public survey, the consulting team also met one-on-one with various community stakeholders. The following paragraphs outline the results of face-to-face interviews conducted with local human service agencies, Lakeland Community Hospital, representatives from the school, and Niles DART staff.

Area Agency on Aging

The Area Agency on Aging serves approximately 50 Medicaid eligible individuals through the in-home Care Management program who live in the Niles DART service area. Care managers were unable to estimate the number of clients who currently use or would be likely to use Niles DART service. Therefore, the agency coordinated with the consulting team and delivered a survey to each of the consumers who live within the Niles DART service area along with a cover letter requesting that the consumer take the time to complete the survey. Each survey included a postage paid return envelope. Returned surveys were included in the Public Survey results.

Gateway Services

According to the Executive Director, Gateway Services clients from Niles have expressed concerns with Niles DART. Many clients have avoided using Niles DART for appointments because of the long wait time for the return trip home after a medical appointment.

Lakeland Community Hospital

The Hospital Administrator at Lakeland Community Hospital met with the consulting team to discuss transportation for hospital employees and non-emergency transportation for patients. Lakeland Hospital is a major employer and medical provider in Niles.

The hospital employees 505 people and several volunteers. The majority of employees live in Niles. Transportation is not an issue for recruiting, and is not seen as an overall issue for retaining employees. Employees use their own personal automobile to commute to work. Parking is free and readily available. It was noted that occasionally people have used Niles DART to commute and the

service was adequate. The major limiting factor for using Niles DART for work is that the current hours of service do not meet the needs of employees. Evening hours would help to accommodate employees who do not otherwise have transportation.

Lakeland Community Hospital does not provide its own transportation services. It currently purchases tokens from Niles DART, which are mainly used by emergency room patients who have no other access to transportation. Case managers to assist clients in need, especially dialysis clients, also use tokens. The tokens have been popular and the hospital plans to continue to use them.

Niles Community Schools

The Niles Community School Superintendent, Richard Weigel, and the Director of the Adult Basic Education Program volunteered to provide input for the Transportation Development Plan. The school Superintendent believes that public transportation is an asset to the community and it is important to encourage youth to use the services that are available. Many times, however, kids in Niles need transportation to afterschool activities but the current hours of operation for Niles DART will not allow kids to use the bus to go home from activities. Thus, transit is not an option.

The school strongly supports the Summer Youth Pass offered by Niles DART and stated that if the pass were more widely advertised, more parents would take advantage of it. Niles Community Schools will assist Niles DART with public relations and outreach, as necessary.

Niles Community Schools intends to open a new elementary school during the summer of 2011 with enrollment of 100 to 125 students. The families of school students will be responsible for their own transportation to and from school. The superintendent is interested in working with Niles DART to implement a student pass so that the students and their families have the option to utilize Niles DART as an alternative for school transportation. If the student pass is implemented, it will permit students to schedule a trip on the existing Niles DART service and ride with the general public. Service will not be specialized for the school, but rather, it will be open to the public.

Also, the students participating in the Adult Basic Education classes need transportation to and from the high school during afternoons and early evenings so that they can receive the required computer lab credits. It was difficult for the school to estimate the number of individuals in the Adult Basic Education course who would utilize transportation if it were available because there is no measure of the number of people who are unable to participate in the classes due to lack of transportation.

The school superintendent is supportive of Niles DART and would consider subsidizing student passes to encourage youth and Adult Basic Education students to use the service.

Salvation Army, Niles

The Salvation Army in Niles refers clients to Niles DART on a regular basis. The program does not directly provide transportation. Captain Tracy agreed to distribute surveys to Salvation Army patrons to gather their input about the transportation service. Results of completed surveys were included in the public survey results.

Niles DART Staff Interviews

During an on-site visit, Niles DART staff agreed to participate in one-on-one interviews with the consulting team to express their impression of the current operations and offer suggestions for the future of the program. Overall, staff enjoy their work and find that passengers are the most rewarding part of their job. In fact, several staff members have been working for Niles DART for 20 years or more.

Drivers and dispatchers are the eyes, ears, and face of the transportation program. They hear and see passenger needs on a daily basis. Comments that drivers and dispatchers hear from passengers on a daily basis reflect the same input received through public meetings and stakeholder interviews. Key issues are listed below:

- The most common complaint from passengers pertains to hours of operation. Generally, passengers want the service to operate later in the evening and earlier in the morning on weekdays. Some of these passengers rode the service to/from work and since the hours have been reduced, they are no longer able to get to work or home from work using Niles DART. Extended weekend hours of operation are also suggested by passengers.
- Passengers request service into Cass County because they live there and/or want to come and go between Cass County and Niles.
- Passengers enjoy the assistance that drivers offer them when boarding and alighting vehicles.
- Passengers approve of Route 2 because it is a low-cost option and they do not have to make a reservation.
- Passengers have requested that Route 2 operate at a higher frequency.
- Passengers would like to carry-on more grocery bags and they complain about the policy.
- Passengers are excited about the new shelter planned for the Senior Center.

V. PEER ANALYSIS

OVERVIEW

This chapter includes an analysis of peer transit systems that are similar in service area or operating characteristics to the Niles DART system.

Researching transportation programs from other areas of the nation that have similar community characteristics will provide additional information with which to make decisions about the provision of transportation services in and around Niles. The first phase of the analysis was to gather a comprehensive list of public transportation providers in Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana because systems in these States are most likely to operate in similar geographical and local economic conditions to Niles. Then, the pool was narrowed to just the systems that operate public transportation in a service area of similar total population size to Niles. The population ranged from 4,969 (Buchanan, MI) to 160,000 (Delaware, OH).

The peer comparison includes systems that provide demand responsive, fixed route, and/or point deviation service and offers a side-by-side comparison of staff, annual expenses, and operating productivity (i.e., number of passenger boardings, total miles, and total hours). A summary of peer group statistics is provided in the following tables. The tables are organized by Staffing Levels (Table V.1), Expenses (Table V.2), and Service Productivity (Table V.3).

PEER ANALYSIS RESULTS

The peer comparison tables include statistics about transportation systems with similar service characteristics, budgets, and/or staffing levels. As noted in the paragraphs following the tables, the operating characteristics and productivity levels are different, even for the systems that serve areas with a population size and density similar to Niles DART. System productivity for peers, in terms of cost per trip, ranges from $6.00 per trip to nearly $35.00 per trip. Likewise, even though each provider operates a variation of curb-to-curb demand response service, productivity in terms of passenger trips provided per hour of revenue vehicle service ranges from as few as one and as many as seven. Transportation providers that serve more passengers per vehicle hour are most likely grouping passenger trips through effective scheduling.

In terms of cost per capita, Niles DART has the second lowest cost ($18.76) of its peers in Michigan. Niles is the second lowest cost per passenger trip, compared to the selected peer systems in Michigan.

Table V.1: Peer Analysis: Staffing Levels

System Name	Type of Service	Service Area	POP 2000	Operations: Full-Time	Operations: Part-Time	Maintenance: Full-Time	Maintenance: Part-Time	Administration: Full-Time	Administration: Part-time
MICHIGAN RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS									
Buchanan	Demand Response	Buchanan area and shuttle to Niles	4,969	0	3	0	0	0	1
Alma	Demand Response	Alma,St Louis,Gratiot County, Pine River Twnshp	13,600	0	9	1	0	2	1
Niles	**Demand Response and Fixed Route**	**City of Niles, Twnshp Niles Proper**	**27,909**	**1**	**12**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**1**
Adrian	Demand Response	City of Adrian	22,580	0	12	0		2	0
Harbor	Demand Response	City of Grand Haven, Village of Spring Lake,City of Ferrysburg, Grand Haven Charter Twnshp, Spring Lake Twnshp	28,902	18	4	1	0	2	4
Twin Cities	Demand Response and Fixed Route	Benton Harbor, St. Joseph,Benton Twnshp,St Joseph Twnshp, Rolyalton Twnshp	62,215	10	16	3	0	4	0
Macatawa	Fixed Route	Holland/Zeeland areas	71,572	35	10	2 bus washing	1 bus washing	8	0
INDIANA RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS									
Bedford	Point Deviation	City of Bedford	13,768	6	0	0	0	1	0
Seymour	Demand Response	City of Seymour	18,101	0	11	0	0	1	0
New Castle	Demand Response	City of New Castle	18,339	5	0	1	0	1	0
Columbus	Fixed Route and Demand Response	City Limits	39,059	13	7	1	0	2	0
Cass County Council on Aging, Inc.	Demand Response	Cass County	40,930	12	20	0	3	4	4
West Central Indiana Economic Development District, Inc	Demand Response	Vigo County	46,234	6	2	0	0	1	2
OHIO RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS									
Harrison County	Demand Response	Harrison County	15,856	2	11	1	0	2	1
Athens	Point Deviation and Demand Response	City of Athens	40,500	5	0	0	0	2	
Ottawa- OCTA	Demand Response	Ottawa County	40,985	21	1	1	0	0	7
Crawford County	Demand Response	Crawford County	46,966	8	1	0	0	0	4
Mid-Ohio Transit	Point Deviation and Demand Response	Knox County	54,500	17	18	1	1	2	0
Geauga County	Demand Response	Geauga County	90,895	8	10	2	1	2	3
Medina	Demand Response	Medina County	151,095	24	20	0	0	4	2
Delaware	Fixed Route	Delaware County	160,000	12	11	3	1	0	7

Table V.2: Peer Analysis: Program Expenses

System Name	Type of Service	Demand Response Total Expenses	Fixed Route Total Expenses	Total Total Expenses	Maintenance Wages	Other Salaries & Wages	Contract Maintenance Service	Tires & Tubes	Other Materials & Supplies	Purchased Transportation
MICHIGAN RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS										
Buchanan	Demand Response	$43,084	N/A	$43,084						
Alma	Demand Response	$475-$550,000	N/A	$475-$550,000	$18,000		City: Equipment Rental - Charged a per use fee of $600. Other garage services like using equipment or their staff assisting transit runs about $9,500/year	Fuel, Tires, Tubes: $4,000 on tires and $33,000 to $43,000 on fuel	$9,500	None
Niles	**Demand Response and Fixed Route**	**$533,048**	**N/A**	**$533,048**	**$6,453**	**$53,496**		**$22,646**	**$104**	**$426,225**
Adrian	Demand Response	$436,142	N/A	$436,142	0	$53,456	$20,734	$0	$0	
Harbor	Demand Response	$1,496,912	N/A	$1,496,912	$54,285		$9,000	$15,000	$50,000	
Twin Cities	Demand Response and Fixed Route	$1,713,157	N/A	$1,713,157	$74,000		$162,000 (Contact with a local garage to do all of the PM's and other maintenance issues)	$25,000		
Macatawa	Fixed Route		3,641,371	$3,641,371	$50,000		$533,556			
INDIANA RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS										
Bedford	Point Deviation	$402,391	N/A	$402,391	N/A	$41,299	$0	$3,006	$8,673	$0
Seymour	Demand Response	$238,298	N/A	$238,298	N/A	$125,917	$19,082	$4,175	$1,245	$0
New Castle	Demand Response	$429,786	N/A	$429,786	N/A	$101,973	$1,584	$2,920	$6,337	$0
Columbus	Fixed Route and Demand Response	$389,922	939,552	$1,329,474	N/A	$72,813	$31,352	$10,225	$169,901	$0
Cass County Council on Aging, Inc.	Demand Response	$1,281,034	N/A	$1,281,034	N/A	$0	$132,116	$7,689	$0	$0
West Central Indiana Economic Development District, Inc	Demand Response	$249,658	N/A	$249,658	N/A	$0	$0	$20,580	$5,081	$0
OHIO RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS										
Harrison County	Demand Response	$466,086	N/A	$466,086	$28,640	$74,165	$0	$4,296	$25,230	
Athens	Point Deviation and Demand Response	$541,772	N/A	$541,772	N/A	$41,821	$0	$0	$0	$499,951
Ottawa- OCTA	Demand Response	$1,470,090	N/A	$1,470,090	$55,203	$356,262	$7,000	$12,180	$80,000	
Crawford County	Demand Response	$416,744	N/A	$416,744	N/A	$92,560	$33,732	$1,712	$0	$0
Mid-Ohio Transit	Point Deviation and Demand Response	$1,392,236	N/A	$1,392,236	$44,919	$107,176	$4,700	$6,000	$22,600	
Geauga County	Demand Response	$1,189,899	N/A	$1,189,899	$68,355	$153,012	$0	$13,000	$25,000	
Medina	Demand Response	$1,727,042	N/A	$1,727,042	N/A		$185,000	$15,000		$0
Delaware	Fixed Route	N/A	1,128,549	$1,128,549	$182,753	$298,075	$35,239	$9,000	$40,077	

Table V.3: Peer Analysis: Service Productivity Measures

System Name	Type of Service	Fixed Route Passenger Boardings	Demand Response Passenger Boardings	Total Passenger Boardings	Fixed Route Total Vehicle Miles	Demand Response Total Vehicle Miles	Total Total Vehicle Miles	Total Revenue Vehicle Hours	Fixed Route Peak Hour Fleet	Fixed Route Base Hour Fleet	Demand Response Peak Hour Fleet	Demand Response Base Hour Fleet	Total Peak Hour Fleet	Total Base Hour Fleet
MICHIGAN RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS														
Buchanan	Demand Response	N/A	2,040	2,040	N/A	10,394	10394	891	N/A	N/A	1	1	1	1
Alma	Demand Response	N/A	50,000	50,000	N/A	95,000	95,000	Pending	N/A	N/A	7	3	7	3
Niles	**emand Response and Fixed Rout**	**N/A**	**31,858**	**31,858**	**N/A**	**81,571**	**81,571**	**6,514**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**4**	**3**	**4**	**3**
Adrian	Demand Response	N/A	73,574	73,574	N/A	129,078	129,078	12,574	N/A	N/A	5	4	5	4
Harbor	Demand Response	N/A	115,345	115,345	N/A	260,115	260,115	19,955	N/A	N/A	16	13	16	14
Twin Cities	Demand Response and Fixed Route	N/A	161,728	161,728	N/A	482,675	482,675	43,226	2	2	23	21	25	23
Macatawa	Fixed Route	336,481	N/A	336,481	815,640	N/A	815,640	43,226	26	Pending	N/A	N/A	26	Pending
INDIANA RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS														
Bedford	Point Deviation	N/A	60,884	60,884	N/A	79,088	79,088	5,928	N/A	N/A	5	0	5	2
Seymour	Demand Response	N/A	34,835	34,835	N/A	92,182	92,182	8,342	N/A	N/A	4	2	4	2
New Castle	Demand Response	N/A	46,395	46,395	N/A	57,718	57,718	7,370	N/A	N/A	4	3	4	3
Columbus	Fixed Route and Demand Response	204,819	15,182	220,001	198,731	82,475	281,206	24,800	4	4	3	1	7	5
Cass County Council on Aging, Inc.	Demand Response	N/A	194,626	194,626	N/A	772,056	772,056	50,123	N/A	N/A	22	12	22	12
est Central Indiana Economic Development District, I	Demand Response	N/A	11,344	11,344	N/A	95,087	95,087	13,264	N/A	N/A	7	7	7	7
OHIO RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS														
Harrison County	Demand Response	N/A	13,492	13,492.00	N/A	255,014	255,014	14,893	N/A	N/A	7	5	7	5
Athens	oint Deviation and Demand Respons	N/A	141,948	141,948	N/A	141,438	141,438	10,389	N/A	N/A	4	3	4	3
Ottawa- OCTA	Demand Response	N/A	85,972	85,972	N/A	529,598	529,598	24,504	N/A	N/A	17	14	17	14
Crawford County	Demand Response	N/A	32,989	32,989	N/A	164,555	164,555	13,835	N/A	N/A	8	6	8	6
Mid-Ohio Transit	oint Deviation and Demand Respons	N/A	153,783	153,783	N/A	674,403	674,403	49,391	N/A	N/A	18	15	18	15
Geauga County	Demand Response	N/A	66,884	66,884	N/A	350,968	350,968	18,870	N/A	N/A	14	11	14	11
Medina	Demand Response	N/A	104,789	104,789	N/A	592,775	592,775	42,172	N/A	N/A	18	16	18	16
Delaware	Fixed Route	42,125	N/A	42,125	359,245	N/A	1,128,549	17,851	12	8	N/A	N/A	12	8

PEER SYSTEM SUMMARIES

Michigan Peer Systems

The Michigan peer systems outlined in the following paragraphs include demand response transportation systems serving a population size of less than 30,000.

Buchanan Dial-A-Ride

Buchanan Dial-A-Ride is a curb-to-curb shared ride transportation service that provides services to the City of Buchanan and Buchanan Township and shuttle service to and from Niles. The service is operated by a private operator, Transportation Management, Inc.

Passengers can schedule curb-to-curb service on the day of their trip for travel anywhere within the City of Buchanan and Buchanan Township. Hours of operation are 7:00 AM to 5:30 PM on weekdays, and 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM on Saturdays. No service is provided on Sundays.

The shuttle service between Buchanan and Niles operates on the following schedule:

Route	Weekdays	Saturdays
Buchanan to Niles	7:00 AM, 11:30 AM, 2:00 PM, 4:30 PM	11:00 AM, 2:00 PM, 3:00 PM
Niles to Buchanan	7:30 AM, 12:00 PM, 2:30 PM 4:45 PM	9:00 AM, 11:30 AM, 2:30 PM

Fare Structure

The passenger fare structure includes half-price fares for adults age 60 and older, individuals with disabilities, and children 2-12, and students. A summary of the fare structure is provided below:

Within Buchanan City Limits: $1.50
Outside Buchanan City Limits: $4.00
City of Buchanan Student Activity Travel: $1.00

Staff

Buchanan Dial-A-Ride employs a staff of three operators and one administrator. All staff members are part-time employees.

Operating Characteristics and Productivity

Buchanan Dial-A-Ride reported 2,040 passenger boardings in 2010. During the same year, the system operated a total of 10,394 miles and 891 revenue vehicle hours using one vehicle. Therefore, the system provided 0.19 passenger trips per mile and 2.29 passenger trips per hour. The productivity level in terms of passengers per hour is good for a demand response system. A range of 2.0 to 2.5 passengers per hour is considered good for a demand response transportation service.

Transportation Expenses

The operating budget for 2010 was reported to be $43,084. The average cost per trip was $21.12.

Funding Sources
Buchanan Dial-A-Ride receives 56 percent of its operating budget from local sources, 36 percent from the State of Michigan, and 21 percent from the Federal Government (Source: Michigan DOT – Public Transportation Management System Revenue/Expense Report 2010).

Local funding sources include fares and a 1 mill levy applied to residents of the City of Buchanan. Buchanan's state funding is based on a formula the State of Michigan has in place based on population and performance measures. Federal funding is provided though the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Section 5311 Program for the nonurban portion of Buchanan Dial-A-Ride's service area.

Scheduling Software
Buchanan Dial-A-Ride has "Dial-A-Ride Online" as its scheduling software. It was software purchased through the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) for Buchanan Dial-A-Ride, Cass County, and Berrien County Bus. The software is currently not used because the operations manager does not think the software is cost effective for their system.

City of Alma Dial-A-Ride
Alma Dial-A-Ride provides curb-to-curb, demand response transportation for the City of Alma, St. Louis, Gratiot County, Pine River Township, Gratiot Community, and other locations through intergovernmental agreements. The City's Transportation Center is also a sales agency for intercity tickets and information.

Transportation is provided on weekdays between 7:30 AM and 8:00 PM within the City of Alma. Daytime bus service operates from 7:30 AM to 5:30 PM. Evening bus service begins at 5:30 PM and ends at 8:00 PM.

Advance reservations are required for trips between 6:30 AM and 7:30 AM or 4:30 PM and 5:00 PM. During all other hours, passengers must call at least 30 to 60 minutes in advance. Standing orders are acceptable for service anytime.

Passengers who request a standing order must call to cancel if they will not be riding on a scheduled day. All standing orders must be prepaid or paid at the time the passenger boards the bus. Prepaid standing order customers are issued a pass. The prepayment and balance on the account may be forwarded for two consecutive months. Any prepaid order that is not used for one calendar month will be considered inactive and abandoned; there is no refund for the balance of rides on file. If a prepaid passenger does not show up for a scheduled pick-up, he or she will be charged for the ride. If a passenger is a no show two times in a row or four times in a ten-day period, the standing order or prepaid standing order will be cancelled and the passenger will be required to contact the DART Supervisor to have the order reinstated.

Fare Structure
The fare structure is based on the time of day and the service area (zones). Adults age 65 and older and individuals with disabilities are eligible for half-priced fares. The fare structure is outlined in the following table:

Service	Times	Adults & Juniors	Older Adults & Individuals with Disabilities
Daytime one-way in Alma	7:30 AM – 5:30 PM	$2.00 ($1.75 Juniors)	$1.00
Evening one-way in Alma	5:30 PM – 8:00 PM	$4.00 ($3.50 Juniors)	$2.00
Zone 1N (north of Alma to M-46)	7:30 AM – 8:00 PM	$7.00	$3.50
Gratiot Community Airport	7:30 AM – 8:00 PM	$4.00 ($3.50 Juniors)	$2.00
Service w/in St. Louis	M, W, F: 9:00 AM, Noon, & 3:00 PM Tue, Thur: 9:00 AM, 3:00 PM	$2.00	$1.00
Service between Alma and St. Louis	M, W, F: 9:00 AM, Noon, & 3:00 PM Tue, Thur: 9:00 AM, 3:00 PM	$4.00	$2.00

Source: City of Alma

Alma Dial-A-Ride offers several Pass options.

- DART Ticket Books: $11.00
- Group Rate Pass: $12.50
- Gold Card (Adults age 75 and older): Free with approval and photo ID card
- Prepaid Fares: If purchased up to 60 days in advance, the passenger receives a discount
- Student Pass: Purchased by month for a 25% discount

Staff

Alma Dial-A-Ride employs nine part-time drivers, one full-time mechanic, a full-time supervisor, a full-time Department Head, and a full-time clerk. The Supervisor is responsible for oversight of operations and also dispatches trips. The clerk is responsible for paperwork, serves as the agent for intercity service reports, drives, and dispatches trips. The Department Head is responsible for budgets and any other tasks as needed. The Supervisor and Department Head assist with maintenance.

Operating Characteristics and Productivity

In 2010, the system reported 44,595 passenger boardings. It traveled 84,391 miles and operated 6,090 hours. On average, the system provided 0.53 passenger trips per mile and 7.32 passenger trips per hour. This service has excellent productivity for a demand response program.

Transportation Expenses

Alma Dial-A-Ride reported that the total expenses were $552,985 in 2010. Wages for maintenance were approximately $18,000. Tires and tubes cost approximately $4,000 and fuel expenses were $43,000. Other materials and supplies were approximately $9,500. The average cost per trip was $12.40.

The transportation program shares a garage with other City departments. Equipment purchased for use by the transit program is available to other City departments for a per use fee of $600.00. In total, the City pays an average of $9,500 annually for the use of transit department equipment and use of transit maintenance staff expertise for other City departments.

Funding Sources
Alma Dial-A-Ride receives 49 percent of its operating budget from local sources, 38 percent from the State of Michigan, and 15 percent from the Federal Government (Source: Michigan DOT – Public Transportation Management System Revenue/Expense Report 2010).

Local funding sources include contract revenues, fares, advertising on buses, and a 0.96 mill levy applied to residents of the City of Alma. Alma's state funding is based on a formula the State of Michigan has in place based on population and performance measures. Federal funding is provided though the Federal Transit Administrations (FTA) Section 5311.

Scheduling Software
Alma Dial-A-Ride currently does not have scheduling software.

Adrian Dial-A-Ride
Adrian Dial-A-Ride is a demand response, curb-to-curb service for the City of Adrian. A private operator, Quick Service, Inc., operates the Adrian Dial-A-Ride and the Lenawee County transportation service. The two systems share a common dispatch and maintenance, and management ensures optimum coordination of services.

Transportation is provided on weekdays from 6:00 AM to 5:30 PM.

Passengers are asked to call at least 30 to 45 minutes in advance. "Hail stops" and "walk on" customers will also be accommodated.

Fare Structure
The fare structure within the city limits of Adrian is $2.00 per one-way trip. Older adults, individuals with disabilities, and children between the ages of one and five years pay half-price. Children less than one year old ride for free.

Ticket books may be purchased for $20.00. There are 20 $1.00 tickets in each book.

Staff
Adrian Dial-A-Ride employs 12 part-time operators and two full-time administrators of the program (shared with Lenawee County). Maintenance is contracted to another entity.

Operating Characteristics and Productivity
The system reported 73,574 passenger boardings in 2010. Adrian Dial-A-Ride operated 129,078 total vehicle miles and 12,574 revenue vehicle hours. Therefore, the system provided an average of 0.75 trips per mile and 5.85 trips per revenue hour.

Transportation Expenses
The program reported $436,142 in total annual expenses for 2010. Maintenance is contracted out and it accounted for $20,734 of the annual budget. The average cost per passenger trip was $5.92.

Funding Sources
Adrian Dial-A-Ride receives 48 percent of its operating budget from local sources, 36 percent from the State of Michigan, and 19 percent from the Federal Government (Source: Michigan DOT – Public Transportation Management System Revenue/Expense Report 2010).

Local funding sources include fares and funds from the City of Adrian general fund. The City determines the amount of funding based on its annual budget. The amount of local funding from the City determines the level of service Adrian Dial-A-Ride will be able to provide in the upcoming year. Adrian's State funding is based on a formula the State of Michigan has in place based on population and performance measures. Federal funding is provided though the Federal Transit Administrations (FTA) Section 5311.

Scheduling Software
Adrian Dial-A-Ride currently does not have scheduling software.

Harbor Transit
Harbor Transit operates in a 10.6 square mile service area including the City of Grand Haven, the Village of Spring Lake, and the City of Ferrysburg. It is also contracted to serve portions of Grand Haven Charter Township and Spring Lake Township. Services include demand response public transit, contracted services, and trolley transportation.

Harbor Transit recently became a transit authority and is no longer a department of the City of Grand Haven. The local Advisory Committee is composed of representatives from each of the participating units of government.

Days and hours of operation are as follows:

Weekdays: 6:00 AM – 6:00 PM
Saturdays: 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Sundays: 8:00 AM – 1:00 PM (24-hour advance reservation required)

Also, trolley service operates daily from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day, 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM.

Fare Structure
Passengers between the ages of 19 and 59 pay $1.50 per one-way trip. Half-price fares are set for passengers between age 5 and 18, age 60 and older, Medicare Card holders, and individuals with disabilities. Children under 5 ride free with a paying adult. The fare structure applies to demand response and trolley service.

Staff
Harbor employs 18 full-time and four part-time operators. The staff also includes a maintenance employee, and two full-time and four part-time administrative staff.

Operating Characteristics and Productivity
During 2010, the system provided 115,345 one-way passenger trips. It operated a total of 260,115 revenue vehicle miles and 19,955 revenue vehicle hours. Therefore, the system provided 0.44 passenger trips per mile and 5.78 trips per hour.

Transportation Expenses
The system reported an annual transportation expense budget of $1,496,912 in 2010. The average cost per passenger trip was $12.98.

Funding Sources
Harbor Transit receives 40 percent of its operating budget from local sources, 36 percent from the State of Michigan, and 27 percent from the Federal Government (Source: Michigan DOT – Public Transportation Management System Revenue/Expense Report 2010).

Local funding sources include fares, a contract with Spring Lake Township, and millages in the City of Ferrysburg (1 mil), City of Grand Haven (1 mill), Village of Spring Lake (1 mile), and Grand Haven Charter Township (0.95 mil). Only including the millages, Grand Haven Charter Township contributes 43%, the City of Grand Haven contributes 38%, the City of Ferrysburg contributes 11% and the Village of Spring Lake contributes 8%. Harbor Transit's state funding is based on a formula the State of Michigan has in place based on population and performance measures. Federal funding is provided though the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Section 5307 Program.

Scheduling Software
Harbor Transit currently does not have scheduling software.

Indiana Peer Systems

The Indiana peer systems outlined below include systems that provide demand response and point deviation service for a population of less than 30,000. In Indiana, the State Public Mass Transportation Fund (PMTF) is a program that receives 0.67 percent of the State Sales and Use Tax. All public transit systems in Indiana receive revenue from PMTF.

Bedford
The City of Bedford, Indiana operates a public transportation system known as the Transit Authority of Stone City (TASC). The system operates a point deviation route that provides curb-to-curb transportation anywhere in the City from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

Fare Structure
The regular passenger fare is $0.75. Older adults pay a discounted fare of $0.50 and children under the age of 10 pay $0.25 when riding with a paying adult. Tokens are available at 10 for $6.00 (or 10 for $4.00 for older adults). Monthly passes are sold for $15.00 per month.

Staff
TASC employs six part-time operators and one full-time Transportation Director. A local vendor provides vehicle maintenance services, and drivers are responsible for reporting any maintenance issues to the Transportation Director.

Operating Characteristics and Productivity
The TASC point deviation service had 60,884 passenger boardings in 2010. It reported 79,088 annual revenue miles and 5,928 revenue hours of service. Therefore, the system provided 0.77 trips per mile and 10.27 trips per hour. The system has strong productivity when compared to the nationally accepted standard of at least five to seven passengers per hour for a point deviation route serving a small urban area.

Transportation Expenses
The TASC system reported annual operating expenses of $402,391 in 2010. Therefore, the cost per passenger trip was $6.61.

Funding Sources
TASC receives 27 percent of its operating budget from local sources, 27 percent from the State of Indiana (Public Mass Transportation Fund (PMTF)), and 46 percent from the Federal Government (Source: Indiana Annual Report 2010).

Local funding sources include fares and local appropriations from the City of Bedford. TASC's State funding is based on a formula the State of Indiana has in place based on performance measures. The Federal funding is provided though the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Section 5311 Program.

Seymour
Seymour Transit, also called Recycle to Ride, operates on weekdays from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM, within the city limits of Seymour. Vehicles travel across the city on a route and will deviate to pick up passengers at the curb. Regular stops are made at the local Walmart Super Center and the Jay C Grocery Store.

Fare Structure
Passengers pay a fare of $2.00 per one-way ride. Or, passengers can pay the fare with 15 aluminum cans. Tokens are also available in rolls of 10 for $16.00.

Trips are scheduled at least 24 hours in advance. Standing order reservations are accepted for passengers who ride daily or once a week.

Staff
Seymour Transit employs 11 part-time drivers and one full-time Transportation Director. Maintenance services are contracted to a local vendor.

Operating Characteristics and Productivity
In 2010, the system reported 34,835 passenger boardings. It operated 92,182 miles and 8,342 revenue vehicle hours. Therefore, the system provided an average of 0.38 trips per mile and 4.17 trips per hour.

Transportation Expenses
Annual transportation expenses in 2010 were reported at $238,298. Vehicle maintenance was about $20,000 plus $4,000 for tires and tubes. On average, the cost per passenger trip in 2010 was $6.84.

Funding Sources
Seymour Transit receives 34 percent of its operating budget from local sources, 22 percent from the State of Indiana (Public Mass Transportation Fund (PMTF)), and 44 percent from the Federal Government (Source: Indiana Annual Report 2010).

Local funding sources include fares and local appropriations from the City of Seymour. Seymour Transit's state funding is based on a formula the State of Indiana has in place based on performance measures for Rural Transit providers.

New Castle
New Castle Community Transit operates curb-to-curb service within the city limits of New Castle. There are fixed points at major shopping, medical, and residential areas.

Fare Structure
The regular fare for a one-way trip is $1.00. Older adults, individuals with disabilities, children, and students pay half-fare. A 25-Ride Punch Pass is available for $20 (or half-price for eligible individuals).

Staff
New Castle Community Transit employs five full-time drivers, one full-time mechanic, and one full-time Transportation Director.

Operating Characteristics and Productivity
In 2010, the system reported 46,395 passenger boardings. It operated 57,718 miles and 7,370 revenue vehicle hours. Therefore, the system provided an average of 0.80 trips per mile and 6.30 trips per hour.

Transportation Expenses
Annual transportation expenses in 2010 were reported at $429,786. Total salaries and wages were approximately $101,000 of the total budget. On average, the cost per passenger trip in 2010 was $9.26.

Funding Sources
New Castle Community Transit receives 33 percent of its operating budget from local sources, 20 percent from the State of Indiana (Public Mass Transportation Fund (PMTF)), and 47 percent from the Federal Government (Source: Indiana Annual Report 2010).

Local funding sources include fares, FIT & Excise Tax, and local appropriations from the City of New Castle. New Castle's state funding is based on a formula the State of Indiana has in place based on performance measures. New Castle also receives FTA Section 5311 as a rural transit provider.

Ohio Peer Systems

The Ohio peer systems outlined below include systems that provide demand response and point deviation service for a population of less than 30,000. Other Ohio peer transit systems are included in the summary tables at the beginning of this chapter.

Harrison County
Harrison County Rural Transit provides a dial-a-ride, demand response public transportation service within the county boundaries.

Fare Structure
The regular fare for a one-way trip is $4.00. Older adults, individuals with disabilities, children, and students pay half-fare.

Staff
Harrison County Rural Transit employs two full-time and 11 part-time drivers, one full-time mechanic, and two full-time program administrators.

Operating Characteristics and Productivity
In 2010, the system reported 13,492 passenger boardings. It operated 255,014 miles and 14,893 revenue vehicle hours. Therefore, the system provided an average of 0.05 trips per mile and 0.91 trips per hour.

Transportation Expenses
Annual transportation expenses in 2010 were reported at $466,086. Maintenance wages were $28,640 while other salaries and wages totaled $74,165. On average, the cost per passenger trip in 2010 was $34.54. The high cost per trip is in large part due to the size and rural conditions of the service area and the long distances between trip origins and destinations.

Funding Sources
Harrison County Rural Transit receives 52 percent of their operating budget from local sources, 2 percent from the State of Ohio, and 46 percent from the Federal Government (Source: Ohio Status of Transit 2010). Local funding sources include fares, contract fares, and local appropriations from Harrison County. Harrison County Rural Transit's state funding is based on a formula the State of Ohio has in place based on performance measures. Federal funding is provided though the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Section 5311 Program.

VI. SERVICE ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

This chapter presents an overview of seven alternatives to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Niles Dial-A-Ride Transportation (DART). The alternatives in this chapter reflect the existing and projected demographics of the service area, and the unmet needs expressed by local stakeholders including, various agencies, schools, the project steering committee, passengers, employers, and the general public. The service design options are constructed so that they may be applied individually or combined to create a different service design. The range of options involves various levels of implementation ranging from lowest-cost and easy to implement, to highest cost and/or complexity.

The mixture of services provided by the various transportation providers in the region is also essential to the mobility beyond the Niles DART service area. The alternatives offered here are intended to build upon the existing connections between neighboring providers by providing suggestions to formally structure the use of resources through a cooperative and strategically planned approach.

ALTERNATIVE 1: FOCUS ON IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICE AND OPERATING EFFICIENCY

The Niles DART organizational structure recently experienced a transition. In 2011, the City discontinued its contract with McDonald Transit, a private transit management firm. During the transition, all employees of McDonald Transit were given the opportunity to continue in their current position, except as City employees instead of McDonald Transit employees. As a result, drivers, schedulers, and maintenance staff accepted the City's offer for continued employment in their existing capacities. A new Operations Manager was hired in July 2011. All of the staff at Niles DART are now City employees.

Through the transition from a privately operated program to a City operated program, Niles DART has maintained many of its policies and procedures and the service structure has been unchanged from the perspective of the passenger. Motivation and dedication to quality service are exhibited at all levels of the DART program.

Niles DART has a proud history of retaining quality staff, and there is a very low turnover rate. The DART staff is seasoned and very knowledgeable of the service area and limitations of the schedule. The system is to be commended for its long-standing service to the community. Alternative One is intended to build upon the current status of operations by providing some suggestions for strengthening the policies and procedures through training, communication, and management.

Based on discussions with individual staff members, the system's policies and procedures have remained consistent and, even though everyone is aware of them, some habits have developed over time that may deviate from the written policies. Therefore, the first alternative is to strengthen awareness, understanding, and enforcement of Niles DART policies and procedures.

Trip Denials. Public transit systems are required to record every trip denial and are encouraged to also record the reason for the denial. Trip denials are an indicator that the public is utilizing resources, but that capacity, hours of service, and/or service area are not sufficient to meet demand. Recording the reason for a trip denial is a planning tool for developing the service to the requirements of the area or population.

In the DART demand response mode of service, a trip denial occurs when a passenger's trip request for service within the Niles DART service area cannot be accommodated during operating hours. When calls are received, the DART scheduler makes every attempt to accommodate the passenger's request. When a request cannot be accommodated, the scheduler negotiates another option with the passenger. If the alternative trip option can be scheduled one-hour prior or one-hour past the requested time, it is not a trip denial. Trip requests that fall outside of the service hours, or service area of the transit system also are not considered to be trip denials.

According to trip denial logs for the month of February 2011, Niles DART schedulers recorded a total of seven trip denials. However, only one of the trips recorded was actually a trip denial for a request within the normal operating hours and service area. In fact, most of the requests that were recorded as denials were for trips to or from locations that are outside of the Niles DART service area (i.e., Lansing). Or, the requests were for trips at times before or after normal operating hours. While it is good practice for future planning purposes to track the trip requests that are outside of the service area or hours, such trips are not considered denials, and therefore, should be recorded separately from the trip denial log.

To ensure consistency, the definition of a trip denial should be clarified with responsible staff. Trip denial examples are provided below:

Trip Denial: A caller requests a trip from Four Flags Plaza to the YMCA in Niles at 10:00 AM but DART cannot provide the trip until 2:00 PM (more than one hour before or after the requested trip). The trip should be considered a trip denial at 10:00 AM. The reason for the denial should be noted (i.e., no capacity to provide the trip). If the passenger is willing to take the trip at 2:00 PM, that solution should also be noted, but it does not erase the denial.

Not a Trip Denial but Good for Planning: A caller requests a trip from Four Flags Plaza to the YMCA in Niles at 6:00 PM. DART cannot provide the trip because it is not within the normal operating hours. Therefore, the trip should not be considered a denial. However, it should be recorded for planning purposes. If DART begins to see a pattern of trip requests at 6:00 PM, it can begin to consider changing its hours of operation to meet the latent demand.

Vehicle Inspections. Pre-trip inspections of vehicles are the driver's responsibility at Niles DART. Drivers complete a standard form that requires verification that the vehicle is in good working order, including the wheelchair lifts, before pulling out of the garage. The Mechanic reviews the inspection sheets, ensures fluid changes are performed in a timely manner, and addresses any notes from the drivers.

The Niles DART policy and procedure for vehicle pre-trip inspections is sufficient. Nonetheless, drivers should participate in refresher training on how to complete the inspection and the form. Niles DART management should conduct periodic checks of the pre-trip documentation to ensure that inspections are consistently performed and that drivers document all issues. Management should also verify that that maintenance staff addresses issues documented on the pre-trip inspection forms in a timely manner.

Passenger Policies:

A. Carry-on Bags. The policy for the number of bags that a passenger can carry-on to the vehicle should be clearly published in system brochures and consistently enforced by drivers. The policy should be developed with the understanding that passengers may be shopping for groceries and will need to carry multiple bags. However, space on the vehicle for other passengers is also a primary consideration. Drivers have good intentions by letting passengers carry-on multiple bags, but when the vehicle is full, there is not adequate space for multiple passenger bags. Repeat passengers learn which drivers will let them carry-on multiple bags, and which drivers will not. Consistency among the drivers is important for customer service and will reduce frustration experienced by drivers who limit the number of bags that can be carried on the vehicle.

B. One-Way Trips. Niles DART should define a one-way passenger trip as travel from Point A to Point B. Each time the passenger exits the vehicle he or she is ending a one-way trip. This includes exiting the vehicle to make change, go to the ATM, or pick-up a prescription, for example. While the drivers may have time to wait for passengers to complete 'quick errands' during off-peak hours, such accommodations are not feasible during peak-hours of service. Clarification of the one-way trip and the associated passenger fare will help to increase the number of trips that are provided per hour and reduce the response time for passengers who have called in advance to schedule a trip.

Benefits and Consequences

There are many benefits and few consequences to implementing the strategies in Alternative 1. The most important benefit is that accurately tracking trip denials will provide a useful planning tool for the Operations Manager when considering the most impactful service changes in the future.

The benefits of ensuring that all employees consistently and appropriately carry out policies and procedures will improve customer service. Consistent enforcement of policies will also reduce the pressure that some drivers feel when justifying policies to questioning passengers.

Potential Challenges

Some passengers may resist changes to policies involving one-way trip definitions and carry-on bags. Open and proactive communication with passengers will help to reduce confusion and frustration.

Potential Budget and Staffing

There are no additional financial or staffing implications associated with Alternative 1.

ALTERNATIVE 2: IMPROVE MARKETING AND PUBLIC AWARNESS

During this planning process, a driver stated, "all we sell is transportation." He went on to discuss the importance of providing safe, dependable, and comfortable transportation service. This is just one example that reinforces the fact that drivers are the front-line of the image of public transit. For Niles DART, the majority of passengers like the drivers and, therefore, enjoy the service. *What about the people who are not yet riders on Niles DART?* Alternative Two offers some potential strategies to educating the public about the service provided by Niles DART through marketing and public awareness strategies.

Distribute Brochures and Schedules. The low-cost approach to improving public awareness is to post Niles DART brochures and schedules at commonly visited locations including human service agencies, senior centers, shopping stores, pharmacies, medical offices, government buildings, and schools. Niles DART has already demonstrated progress with this alternative; however, public input responses indicate that many people are not aware of the service provided by Niles DART. Along with service improvements, Niles DART should participate in school events and distribute information for students to take home to parents to ensure that parents are aware of the option of the service.

In addition to distribution of brochures, Niles DART should consider periodically publishing a schedule of the Route in the local newspapers and links to websites. It will be important for the system to advertise that the service is available to the general public, and is not limited to older adults and individuals with disabilities. Niles DART service should continue to be advertised on the regional Mobility Management resources and Facebook page, as well.

Utilize Vehicles for Marketing. The best marketing opportunity for Niles DART is its vehicles that travel through the area as well as its drivers and staff who greet the public with a smile every day. Niles DART drivers should continue to be active in the community and make good use of opportunities to distribute information at local fairs and events. It is recommended that Niles DART continue to improve the visibility of its vehicles, perhaps by adding a larger logo and utilizing unused advertising space on the outside of the vehicle to promote itself. Utilization of the Niles DART logo and placing the words "Public Transit" on the outside of the vehicles will differentiate Niles DART from other passenger vehicles in the region.

Passenger Testimonials. Based on public outreach results, Niles DART is somewhat perceived as a service for older adults and individuals with disabilities. This is a common misperception in small urban and rural communities. Alternative Two suggests using passenger testimonials from people who represent a range of ages and abilities in brochures and promotional materials to demonstrate to the public that Niles DART is service for everyone.

Promotional Items. Nearly every website today involves a video. But, videos can be expensive and time consuming. Alternative Two recommends that Niles DART consider a low-cost approach to developing a short video advertisement to promote public transit service. Niles DART will offer a contest at a local school for students to develop an educational public transit video. The winning video can be posted on the Niles DART website and used by transit staff at local meetings and outreach opportunities. The video is a great opportunity to teach youth about the benefits of public transit and the result is a memorable promotional item for the system.

Benefits and Consequences

Similar to Alternative One, there are many benefits and few consequences to implementing the strategies in Alternative Two. The benefits of effective marketing are, (1) increased ridership and (2) improved recognition in the community. The potentially negative consequence is that demand for service will increase beyond capacity and the system will begin to deny service to some passengers. It is important that Niles DART is prepared for increases in ridership that are likely to follow a concerted marketing effort. A first impression is a lasting impression. If a passenger calls Niles DART for the first time and his or her trip request cannot be accommodated, he or she is not likely to call back. Conversely, if a passenger calls and has a good experience, he or she is likely not only to call back, but also to recommend Niles DART to a friend.

Potential Challenges

Marketing efforts require time and commitment from staff. Niles DART staff may be challenged to dedicate the necessary time for community outreach. Such a challenge can be overcome by utilizing volunteers from the Local Advisory Committee or other qualified passengers.

Potential Budget and Staffing

Alternative Two involves low-cost marketing and outreach activities. Additional costs could be incurred if Niles DART intends to make the system logo larger or increase the distribution of printed advertisements in the community. Also, additional staff time will be required to kick-off and maintain the additional community outreach and marketing activities.

If the system sells advertisements to local businesses and organizations and posts them in designated empty spaces on the inside or outside of the vehicles, advertising revenue could be generated and applied to the operating budget.

ALTERNATIVE 3: EXPAND CAPACITY AND EXPAND THE SERVICE AREA TO INCLUDE PORTIONS OF CASS COUNTY

Alternative Three explores options for expanding service capacity to meet demand in the existing service area, as well as increasing the service area to include designated areas of Cass County. Alternative Three includes a service structure with multiple layers.

Scheduled Shuttles for Transfers to Berrien Bus, Cassopolis, and Buchanan. Currently, Niles DART provides trips, as needed, for passengers to transfer to Buchanan and Berrien Bus. Regional transfers are critical to mobility for area residents, and should be encouraged. However, these long distance trips take the vehicle out of service in the local area for up to 45 minutes with only a few passengers on board. Many times, one leg of the trip is empty. Scheduled shuttles for regional connections are recommended because a schedule would allow passengers to plan their trips around the shuttle service, and Niles DART to effectively group trips with multiple passengers sharing the ride.

Scheduled shuttles will improve efficiency on the regional connection trips by allowing the scheduler to group multiple riders on each trip rather than sending a vehicle whenever a single trip is requested throughout the day. Successful implementation will depend, to a large degree, upon the possibility of grouping passenger trips so that shuttles carry as many passengers as possible, per trip. Opportunities to group trips will be encouraged if Niles DART creates and publicizes a trip schedule for trips outside of the core area (i.e., to/from Cassopolis at 10:00 AM on Tuesdays, or to/from Berrien Springs at 10:00 AM and 3:00 PM, daily). The schedule must be published and made available to the public through multiple venues such as shopping areas, medical offices, human service agencies, apartment buildings, churches, the YMCA, and the senior center.

The shuttle schedule should be driven by existing demand, to the largest extent possible. To develop a schedule based on demand, Niles DART staff will look at the current ridership patterns, and offer the schedule shuttles at times of the day when most people request the trips. In order to reduce duplications, shuttles to Buchannan also should be scheduled in coordination with the Buchannan Shuttle schedule, or coordinated through a formal agreement between Niles DART and Buchannan.

When the schedule has been created, publish it and distribute it to all passengers as well as the general public in all communities that benefit from the service. Posting a schedule will give passengers the opportunity to schedule appointments and other activities around the transit schedule, and should result in higher productivity in terms of the number of passengers per one-way trip. Any changes that must occur to the route must be published for the general public and current riders. This strategy also may have a positive impact on passenger wait times and productivity of the demand response service because the vehicles will spend more time in the local area and less time traveling to out-of-town destinations.[2]

Shuttles should be scheduled to operate only if at least one passenger requests the trip. Reservations should be made 24-hours in advance, at minimum, to ensure that the driver's schedule can be prepared and that the vehicle has seating capacity for all ambulatory and wheelchair passengers.

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[2] During the public outreach process, some passengers complained about long wait times after they schedule a demand response trip.

Build Partnerships with Local Agencies and Other Transportation Providers in the Region. It is recommended that Niles DART approach area transportation providers and the human service agencies in the region to discuss the possibility of a partnership that would benefit both entities. As Niles DART establishes the shuttle schedule, it will seek to work with public transportation providers in the region as well as human service agencies to design the most appropriate schedule to accommodate demand and meet needs for regional service. For example, if Berrien Bus understands that Niles DART will have a shuttle stop at a designated time and place, it can encourage passengers wishing to go to Niles to schedule their appointments around the Niles DART shuttle service.

Out-of-County Demand Response Service. Interviews and focus group discussions indicated that there was a need for transportation to locations in Cass County that are just beyond the county line to the road behind Oak Manor. Niles DART should explore opportunities to expand the service area through contract agreements with the employers, medical offices, residential facilities, and/or local government in the neighboring portion of Cass County. Potential partnerships could include service under the New Freedom Program (Section 5317) to improve service for individuals with disabilities, especially to improve access to employment opportunities. Section 5317 requires a 50 percent local match for operating and 20 percent local match for capital. Local match may be derived from any non-U.S. Department of Transportation program or other local contributions and grants.

Advance Reservations for Demand Response Service. Currently, passengers are asked to call at least one-hour in advance to request a trip. This short notice policy is a convenience to the passengers. On the operations side, however, one-hour advance notice may not provide enough time for the scheduler to effectively group passenger trips; resulting in longer ride-times or wait-times for the passengers. Ultimately, if a passenger waits 45 minutes for a pick-up on a return trip, or rides the vehicle for more than 20 minutes, his or her satisfaction in terms of convenience declines. Transit industry research has demonstrated that convenience is one of the most significant driving factors for an individual to choose public transit over another mode of transportation.

Alternative Three recommends changing the policy for scheduling demand response trips to a minimum of 24-hours advance notice. Last minute requests can be accommodated if space is available. Furthermore, passengers will be encouraged to schedule their tentative return-trip time at the time of the original phone call. Passengers can then refine the estimated return-trip pick-up on the day of the trip. While return trips are always a challenge, an estimated time will help the scheduler and driver to build the afternoon trip manifest and attempt to reduce the wait-time for the passenger. Ultimately, the 24-hour advance notice will improve the convenience of public transit by reducing wait time and improving on-time passenger pick-up and drop-off performance.

Alternatively, Niles DART could consider implementing the 24-hour advance reservation policy for specific times of the day when the vehicles are busiest, and offer the one-hour advance reservation options for off-peak hours of operation. If the split option is selected, Niles DART must carefully and clearly advertise the policy to passengers to avoid confusion.

Benefits and Consequences

Alternative Three builds partnerships with neighboring transit systems and communities and improves the regional mobility for the area. With the implementation of shuttles and advance reservations for demand response service, Niles DART is likely to improve productivity in terms of the number of passengers that are served per hour and mile of operation.

A potential negative consequence is the difficult transition for passengers who are accustomed to scheduling a trip with one-hour notice. The advance reservation requirement may be difficult for passengers to understand. Careful and open communication with the passengers before the policy is implemented will reduce negative consequences.

Potential Challenges

Alternative Three requires coordination with neighboring transportation providers. Also, additional funding through contract agreements and Federal grants will be necessary before service can be expanded into Cass County. It is advised that Niles DART discuss any planned cross-county service with Cass County Transit prior to initiation of any agreements to operate there.

Also, some passengers may be hesitant to use the shuttle service because they prefer the normal demand response service. Passenger training sessions and/or printed training materials should be offered to reduce resistance to the policy change. Printed materials should, at minimum, include the following topics:

- A description of the shuttle services.
- Contact information for questions about shuttles.
- Step-by-step instructions on how to schedule a trip.
- Passenger conduct policies.
- Fare structure.
- Benefits of using the shuttles (i.e., saving money, convenience, and fun).

Potential Budget and Staff Time

Additional costs associated with service area expansion will depend upon the scope of services provided into Cass County. Contract agreements with medical offices, agencies, or other facilities for trips that originate or end in the Niles DART service area and also involve a pick-up or drop-off in Cass County should be negotiated at the fully allocated cost for Niles DART to provide the trip. Revenue generated from contract agreements may be used as the necessary local match for Federal Transit Administration grants.

Operating Parameters

If shuttle service is implemented, detailed projections will be developed based on the operating area and hours of operation. For example, if one vehicle operates one round trip per week and carries

three passengers per hour, it will provide 156 passenger trips annually. If it travels an average of 18 miles per hour it will provide 52 hours of service and travel 936 miles annually.

Exhibit VI.1: Alternative Three Operating Parameters

Service Component	Trips/Hour	Miles/Hour	Hours	Miles	Pass. Trips/Year
Shuttle	3.0	18	52	936	156

ALTERNATIVE 4: ENHANCE REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Alternative 4 focuses on enhanced connectivity between Niles and the surrounding communities. Regional connectivity is part of a larger, region-wide effort and there are several activities that could be pursued by Niles to lay the groundwork for its place in the regional effort. The following activities can be implemented individually or collectively, to meet the needs of the area.

Coordinated Transit Pass. A regional Coordinated Transit Pass (hereafter referred to as "Pass") is a simple and effective way for public transit providers to work together to get people where they need to go. A Pass is a benefit to the rider because it improves convenience and reduces fear associated with understanding different fare structures offered by each system. Niles DART is the core of regional connectivity in the area, providing connections to all of the neighboring transit systems. Similar to the new Regional Reduced Fare Card that was recently implemented for qualified passengers, a Pass for the general public would simplify the passenger's experience, and encourage current and future passengers to utilize public transit for their regional travel needs.

Generally, eligibility for a Pass is based on ridership of the participating systems. There are an unlimited amount of eligibility scenarios. Eligibility can be aligned with the overall general public ridership of the participating systems, or based on eligibility for specific human service agencies. If the Pass is based on certain eligibility criteria, an application form and process must be established. The application process should be standardized between all participating providers.

The next step in the process is price setting. The price of the Pass should be based on the following factors:

(1) Estimated pass utilization;
(2) Projected revenue generated by the pass; and,
(3) Projected administrative, management, and accounting expenses.

Participating transportation providers in the region should meet to discuss the potential benefits of implementing a Pass, based upon the three factors listed above.

If transportation providers seek to implement the Pass, the third important step is distribution. There is an array of choices about how and where to distribute passes, and the type of fare media to be used plays a large role in selecting the distribution methods. There are examples across the country ranging from low-tech paper transit passes that are printed at the transit office or at home by the consumer, to contactless bankcards used as passengers board vehicles. Given the current fare

collection methodology of Niles DART, it is recommended that the system use printed passes or punch cards that are accepted and tracked by each of the participating transportation providers. As previously noted, the administrative and accounting procedures associated with distribution and collection of the printed passes should be negotiated among the providers.

Benefits and Consequences

A Pass for passengers to use when transferring between transportation providers, simplifies the passenger's experience when completing a regional trip. The Pass removes the intimidation of understanding different bus fares required by different operators and carrying correct change. It also simplifies the boarding and recordkeeping process for drivers.

Furthermore, Passes can aid the transit systems in accounting for transfers made by passengers. As a result, proper recording of travel patterns will improve the accuracy of future service planning activities.

Potential Challenges

Some passengers may be hesitant to use the Pass. Therefore, passenger training sessions and printed materials should be offered to reduce resistance. Materials should at minimum include the following topics:

- A description of the Pass, how to use it, and where to purchase it.
- Contact information for questions about the Pass.
- How to use the Pass when boarding the vehicle.
- Fare structure.
- Benefits of using the Pass (i.e., saving money, convenience, and fun).

Potential Budget and Staff Time

Additional costs associated with implementing the pass will vary depending on the type of fare media and the agreements for accounting and recordkeeping responsibilities. Potential expenses for the organization responsible for accounting and recordkeeping are outlined in the following exhibit. The cost of printing new fare media is a rough estimate for paper and printing based on typical expenses for a rural transit system.

Exhibit VI.2: Estimated Budget for Alternative Four

Expense Category	Estimated Cost
Labor (accounting)	$2,000
Fringe (26% of Labor)	$520
Marketing	$2,000
Printing new Fare Media	$5,000
ESTIMATED TOTAL:	**$9,520**

ALTERNATIVE 5: ROUTE 2 CHANGES FROM FIXED ROUTE TO A TRUE DEVIATED FIXED ROUTE SERVICE.

Currently Route 2 travels between the DART main office on 2nd Street to points along South 11th Street/M-51, and also connects to South Bend TRANSPO. The route stops at major businesses, including Harding's, Rite Aid, Walmart, Big Lots, and Martin's. The Route is advertised so that it will deviate upon request to access destinations along the route that are not officially designated stops. Riders wishing the deviated service must call in advance. Otherwise, passengers may board at designated stops along the route with no advance reservation.

According to drivers and passengers, the vehicle rarely has time to deviate and typically operates as a fixed route service. A review of a sample of trip origins and destinations in the vicinity of the Route 2 service confirms driver and passenger impressions. Analysis revealed that several trips within ¾ of a mile of the route are provided with demand response service, even when the destination is also a stop along Route 2.

Alternative Five has two phases. First, is a proposal to reduce the number of designated stops for Route 2 by eliminating the stops that have the lowest boarding and alighting. The elimination of low-productivity stops will improve the on-time performance of the vehicle. Passengers and drivers reported that the Route 2 vehicle runs late during the busiest portions of the day.

Next, Alternative Five involves using the deviated fixed route service to schedule all trip requests that have an origin or destination within ¾ of a mile radius from a Route 2 stop and a destination on the Route. Several of the demand response trips sampled by the consulting team are within ¾ mile of Route 2, but they were provided by another vehicle because the Route 2 vehicle did not have the time or capacity to provide the trip. Grouping trips around the Route 2 schedule can eliminate at least some of the unnecessary duplication.

For example, if a trip request is received that originates within ½ mile of Harding's at 10:30 AM and the Route 2 vehicle will be at Harding's at 10:30 AM, the passenger would be picked up by the Route 2 vehicle as requested. However, if the passenger wanted a pick-up at 10:00 AM, he or she would be asked to wait until closer to 10:30 so that the Route 2 vehicle could deviate and maintain its schedule. Requesting a little flexibility from the passengers (within one-hour of the desired pick-up time), will allow Niles DART to more effectively group trips and reduce unproductive vehicle hours and miles without a great inconvenience to the passenger.

As demand for service in this area increases and exceeds the capacity of one vehicle, a second vehicle could be added to the Route 2 deviated route service to meet demand. If added, the two vehicles would operate in opposite directions, which would increase the frequency of service at each bus stop.

Deviated Route Fare Structure. Similar to the existing fare structure, the passenger fare for boarding at a designated stop ($2.00 regular or $1.00 reduced fare) would not change. The passenger fare for a deviation would be an additional $0.50. For example, if a passenger scheduled a

pick-up at his or her home on South 13th Street (within ½ mile of the Route 2 regular route) and was dropped off at a designated stop for the Route 2 bus, the passenger fare would be $2.50. This fare is $0.50 less expensive than a demand response trip and still provides the passenger with a curb-to-curb service.

Benefits and Consequences

Alternative Five will enable Niles DART to improve the productivity of Route 2 while continuing to provide curb-to-curb service to passengers.

Potential Challenges

Similar to other alternatives that directly impact the passengers, Niles DART will need to deploy a public outreach and passenger education campaign.

Potential Budget and Staff Time

There are no additional expenses or staff time associated with Alternative Five. However, if a second vehicle is added to the route, an additional driver and vehicle will be required.

Operating Parameters

The point deviation route should provide five to seven one-way passenger trips per hour. When operated with one vehicle, the productivity is 10,710 passengers per year during weekdays and 1,250 passengers per year on Saturdays; in total, the route would provide 11,960 passenger trips per year. Currently, ridership on the route is approximately 7,613 trips per year. Therefore, when fully realized, Alternative Five would represent a 40 percent increase in ridership for Route 2. A portion of the increase in ridership will be transferred from the demand response service.

Exhibit VI.3: Alternative Five Operating Parameters

Service Component	Pass. Trips/Hour	Miles/Hour	Hours	Miles	Pass. Trips/Year
Route 2 Point Deviation Service - Weekdays	6.0	15	1,785	26,775	10,710
Route 2 Point Deviation Service - Saturdays	5.0	15	250	3,750	1,250
TOTAL:			**2,035**	**30,525**	**11,960**

ALTERNATIVE 6: EXPANDED HOURS OF OPERATION.

As indicated in Chapter II, service hours were reduced in April and December 2008. Analysis of ridership trends indicates that ridership declined by 18 percent between FY 2007 and FY 2008. The trend was significantly more severe between FY 2008 and FY 2009 when ridership declined by more than 46 percent. The demand response mode of service absorbed the majority of the loss; it is estimated that the reason for the decline in ridership directly correlated to the service hour reduction.

During the public input process, Niles DART staff and passengers indicated that additional service hours are still needed for earlier morning and later evening service. The morning and evening hours would serve the needs of individuals using Niles DART for employment transportation, as well as those who use the service for after-work and after-school activities. However, expanding service would require additional operating dollars.

Alternative Six increases weekday demand response service hours but does not change the hours of operation for Route 2. New demand response hours of operation would be as follows:

Weekdays: 6:00 AM to 5:30 PM
Saturdays: 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

A slightly less intensive option would be to increase Saturday hours only on the first and second Saturdays of each month, which are the busiest weekends for Niles DART. Implications of the service expansions are described in the following paragraphs.

Benefits and Consequences

Alternative Six increases the hours of transportation service for the general public. The alternative is especially beneficial to individuals who use Niles DART for transportation to work and those who rely on Niles DART as their primary or only mode of transportation. Also, extending weekday hours of operation until 5:30 PM would make Niles DART hours of operation the same as Berrien Bus, thereby reducing confusion for passengers that use both systems.

Potential Challenges

The primary challenge associated with expanding hours of operation is the shortfall of operating dollars that would be needed. Currently, Niles DART does not have the necessary operating budget to expand service.

Potential Budget and Staff Time

Potential expenses for expanded hours of service include driver salaries and wages, fuel, and vehicle maintenance. The table in Exhibit VI.4 below illustrates the estimated associated costs for expanded service. Labor expenses are based on an average hourly rate of $12 for the driver(s) and the scheduler. Fuel expenses are based on an estimate of $0.46 per mile.

Exhibit VI.4: Potential Operating Budget for Alternative Six

Expense Category	Costs (estimated)
Labor (Driver)	$5,280
Labor (Scheduler)	$5,280
Fringe (26% of Labor)	$2,746
Fuel	$7,976
Materials and Insurance	$3,000
Utilities	$500
TOTAL:	**$24,782**

Operating Parameters

The expanded service should be expected to provide 2.5 passenger trips per hour. Therefore, when operated with one vehicle, the service should provide 956 one-way passenger trips per year during weekdays and 128 passenger trips per year on Saturdays (assuming operation on 50 Saturdays per year). In total, the additional hours of service should provide up to 1,084 one-way passenger trips per year.

Exhibit VI.5: Alternative Six Operating Parameters

Service Component	Trips/Hour	Miles/Hour	Hours/Year	Miles/Year	Trips/Year
Weekday Service Expansion	2.5	40	382.5	15300	956.25
Saturday Service Expansion	2.5	40	51	2040	127.5
TOTAL:			**434**	**17,340**	**1,084**

ALTERNATIVE 7: EXPAND ROUTE 2 TO SOUTH BEND.

Alternative Seven proposes redefining the corridor for the deviated fixed route by extending the route beyond Auten Road. The proposed new route would extend to TRANSPO's South Street Station. The extension would be operated every two hours during the middle of the day when TRANSPO Route 5 is not operating. This alternative would be implemented if TRANSPO changes its existing Route 5, as is currently proposed.

Alternative Seven is feasible only with additional operating funds. Additional discussions with TRANSPO will be necessary to explore the potential for the route extension. A potential Federal funding source for the route extension could include Job Access/Reverse Commute (Section 5316) if a 50 percent local match is available. Local match may be derived from any local, State, or non-U.S. Department of Transportation grant.

Extension of Niles DART Route 2 would serve regional connectivity, if TRANSPO's Route 5 were eliminated during the middle of the day. It would also provide transportation to the local hotels,

hospitals, universities, and other local employers and residential areas. Additional information regarding the expansion of Route 2 is provided in the Implementation Plan (Chapter VII).

VII. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

OVERVIEW

The project steering committee considered Alternatives One through Seven that were presented in Chapter VI. This chapter details the steering committee's recommended implementation program to be carried out through 2016. The representatives of the Niles Dial-A-Ride (DART) project steering committee indicated a preference for the project to result in a fiscally feasible range of recommended short- and long-term transportation implementation strategies that will improve efficiency and ensure sustainability of the valuable public transportation resources in the Niles area.

The recommended implementation plan involves changes to Route 2 and the demand response service as well as suggestions for a new fare structure and some policy changes. Niles DART would like to expand service in the near term but expansion will not be possible without additional local funding. It is uncertain if additional funding will be available during the initial years of the planning horizon. Therefore, the recommended service changes that involve expansion of the service area or a significant increase in hours of operation are recommended for years three through five of the implementation plan.

Additional revenue and/or negotiations with other area transportation systems will be necessary to achieve the plans for a regional transportation network. A countywide coordinated transportation plan, lead by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission took place concurrent with this Niles DART TDP plan. That plan is expected to be finalized by 2013.

The description of the implementation steps is followed by a recommended timetable for implementation. The final section of the chapter is a projection of associated costs and revenues through 2016.

NILES DART ADMINISTRATIVE AND CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICIES

The implementation steps described in the following paragraphs relate to developing new or strengthening the existing administrative and customer service policies. The suggested new and revised policies are recommended in response to concerns expressed by Niles DART managers and drivers. Policy changes pertaining to vehicle inspections and vehicle documentation also pertain to suggestions and recommendations received during the Niles DART's most recent Triennial Review by the Federal Transit Administration.

Year 1 (2012-2013):

1. Passenger Service Policies

Policies that outline passenger conduct and use of the system will be strengthened and clarified. During the planning process, several passengers indicated that drivers are inconsistent in how they

provide assistance when passengers are boarding or alighting the vehicles. Furthermore, it was reported that some drivers will permit passengers to bring multiple shopping bags onto the vehicle and other drivers limit the number of shopping bags per person.

Passenger Assistance Policy

Niles DART will define with drivers and passengers, the level of passenger assistance that drivers will provide when passengers are boarding and alighting the vehicle. While passenger feedback indicated that the drivers are very friendly in general, it also revealed that some drivers offer to assist passengers while other drivers do not offer. Passengers interpret the disparity between drivers as poor customer service. Therefore, Niles DART will review its passenger assistance policies and procedures for consistency and to reaffirm the level of assistance to be provided.

The level of assistance that drivers are required to provided will be clearly stated in Niles DART materials and used as part of driver training sessions as well as in all system brochures and information. Niles DART staff responsible for conducting the driver training sessions will be thoroughly versed in the policies and procedures to ensure that the information is consistently conveyed to all drivers.

Passenger assistance policy changes will be reviewed with all drivers during an initial training session and additional training will be provided annually and when a new driver is hired. The Niles DART Operations Manager, or another designated supervisor will observe drivers randomly to ensure compliance. Furthermore, passengers will be notified through a posting on the vehicle as well as a summary in the system brochure about the level of passenger assistance that drivers will provide to them when boarding or alighting the vehicle.

No-Show Policy

The Niles DART No-Show Policy reads as follows:

> *"If you no longer need a scheduled ride, please be courteous and cancel your reservation by calling DART Dispatch at 269.684.5150. If a passenger fails to show for a scheduled ride, a no-show infraction is issued and a $1 fee is assessed at the time of the next ride. Riders are verbally notified of each no-show infraction."*

Because of a significantly high occurrence of no-shows, Niles DART will review the No-Show Policy and strengthen it. Once the policy is revised, Niles DART will notify passengers with a posting on-board vehicles, edits to the system brochure, and update the website information. Niles DART staff will be responsible for strictly enforcing the policy.

A sample No-Show Policy is included in Appendix B. Suggestions for revisions that strengthen the No-Show Policy are provided below:

- Clearly define a minimum length of time allowed to cancel prior to the scheduled trip. For example, the policy could instruct passengers to call as soon as they know that a trip will be cancelled, and encourage them to call one day prior to the trip.

- The fee for violating the No-Show Policy will be equal to the amount of fare that would have been paid for the requested trip.
- Define the number of no-shows that a passenger can commit before service is suspended. For example, 10 no-shows in 60-days will result in a two week suspension of service for that individual. Letters of suspension will include instructions and materials necessary to challenge or appeal the suspension decision. Any fares owed due to no-show trip results must be paid prior to resuming transportation.

Please note that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires an opportunity for public input into the development or revision of a No-Show Policy. The public input process could be satisfied by presentation to the transportation advisory committee or a local organization that has significant representation from individuals with disabilities or disability advocates. The ADA does not mandate that the public input process take place as a formal public hearing.

Defining a One-Way Trip

Niles DART's excellent customer service is commendable. To continue such a high standard of service, Niles DART must take measures to ensure on-time performance. Changing the definition of a one-way passenger trip to "travel from Point A to Point B" will reduce the extra, unscheduled stops that are currently causing vehicles to operate behind schedule. Under the new policy, any exit from the vehicle marks the end of a one-way trip.

This policy is different from the current practice of allowing passengers to make an extra stop so that they can make change for the bus fare. The new policy will require a new fare to be charged each time the passenger boards the vehicle. While the vehicle can wait for the person who requests an additional stop, it is likely that the extra stops will be less frequent if passengers understand that they will be required to pay the full fare to re-board the vehicle.

It is possible that this change in policy may not be positively received from passengers. To minimize negative feedback, it is recommended that Niles DART provide several weeks notice to passenger before implementing the policy. An opportunity for passenger and driver comment on the new policy is also recommended.

Passengers should be notified of the new policy in writing through brochures, the website, and printed materials posted on vehicles and at common pick-up and drop-off locations such as the senior center and Four Flags Plaza.

2. Operations Policies

Operations policies refer to new or strengthened policies and procedures for use of vehicles and scheduling passenger trips. The following paragraphs outline changes in operations policies that will be implemented during the first year.

3. Vehicle Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Inspections

While the policy and procedure for vehicle pre-trip inspections is sufficient, it is not consistently applied and enforced. The Niles DART Operations Manager will provide refresher training for drivers, explaining how to perform a pre-trip and post-trip inspection. The Operations Manager will randomly observe inspections to ensure consistency and accuracy among all drivers. Management will also conduct periodic comparison of pre-trip inspection forms and maintenance records to verify that maintenance staff is taking the appropriate and timely measures to track and address mechanical problems that are indicated on the pre-trip and post-trip inspections forms.

Scheduling

A new policy will encourage passengers to schedule Niles DART trips at least 24-hours in advance. Same-day reservations will be accepted only if space is available. The advance reservation policy does not apply to Route 2.

The system risks a reduction in ridership by implementing the advance reservation policy. However, the policy will discourage same-day trip requests and enable Niles DART to more efficiently and effectively schedule trips. The scheduling of drivers and vehicles will be improved because advanced scheduling will help Niles DART to plan driver schedules and vehicle utilization in a way that controls operating costs while still meeting the needs of the public.

Customers benefit from the advance reservations policy because wait times and delays that often result from same-day service will be significantly reduced. Passengers who need to make same-day trip requests may be denied service if the vehicles are already full with advance reservation riders. However, if the last minute trip is necessary, and the passenger can be flexible with his or her schedule, the same-day reservations will most likely be accommodated during off-peak hours when vehicles are less busy.

Before implementing the new policy, Niles DART must notify passengers and the general public about the policy recommendations and provide a comment period to receive comments regarding service or fare policy changes. A public hearing must be held to explain the new policy and provide opportunity for public input.

Following the public hearing, Niles DART should phase-in this policy change over a period of at least one month to ensure passengers that do not ride on a daily basis are aware of the change. The scheduler should remind the passengers of the new policy and when it will take effect whenever he or she receives a trip request.

Recording Trip Denials

Although demand for Niles DART service is rarely higher than capacity, the system would benefit from an improved process of recording trip denials and other requested trips that are not provided. Trip denials are a good source of data to support future requests for additional vehicles. To ensure consistency in recordkeeping, the definition of a trip denial should be clarified with responsible staff.

Tracking service denials can benefit Niles DART because the Operations Manager will have historical data for reference when making the following determinations:

- Adequacy of current system operating hours to meet demand.
- Determining if riders are calling in advance as requested.
- Determining if system destinations/service area is meeting demand.
- Adequacy of system capacity.
- Number of trips that are not being provided.
- Disability status of caller.

4. Niles DART Marketing Plan and Strategies

Niles Dial-A-Ride Transportation (DART) management along with the Project Steering Committee recognizes the importance of the Niles DART image to the community. Public outreach efforts involved in the planning effort reveal that a significant number of Niles DART passengers are age 65 and older. The DART management staff and Steering Committee realize that there are other segments of the local population that would benefit from public transportation (i.e., students and working adults), but it would appear that those individuals are not riding the service as often as older adults. Marketing strategies will be focused on attracting new rider groups.

In an effort to expand its appeal to the community and attract more riders from across all segments of the local population, Niles DART will initiate a marketing plan during 2012. Some recommendations for no-cost and low-cost marketing strategies are outlined in Appendix A. The steering committee also has recommended changes to the Niles DART logo and brand that may require some additional expense. As funding becomes available, the future Niles DART marketing plan will involve the following areas of focus:

- Re-design of the logo for vehicles, signs, websites, and printed materials;
- Re-design of the brand (or symbol) on all vehicles, signs, websites, and printed materials associated with Niles DART; and
- Design and distribution of a brochure and other schedules and printed materials.

Potential Funding Sources

There are various sources of planning funds available to Niles DART that could be applied to a marketing plan. While the Federal Transit Administration's Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Program permits "planning activities," the program primarily relates to the planning leading up to a capital project. Therefore, Niles DART could consider an application to Section 5307, but a more appropriate avenue for planning funding would be through the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, by adding it to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Other potential funding sources for the plan include local grants and foundations.

OPERATING AND SERVICE STRUCTURE

Year 1 (2012-2013):

1. Revise the Bus Stop Schedule for Route 2

Currently, Niles DART Route 2 operates a very tight schedule of stops that do not allow sufficient time for the vehicle to deviate and pick-up passengers. As a result of the schedule, demand response vehicles are duplicating service around Route 2 by picking up passengers that live near the bus route and are traveling to a destination on the route.

Niles DART will revise the existing Route 2 schedule to allow for time between scheduled stops to deviate and pick-up or drop-off passengers at their homes or desired destinations located within ½ of a mile of the route. Exhibit VI.1 on the following page illustrates the proposed schedule revision. Stops and times listed in red font will be eliminated from the schedule. Instead, Route 2 will only serve these locations if a passenger requests the stop. The bus will continue to stop at the destinations and times listed in black font.

The stops that are suggested for elimination have the lowest productivity; eliminating low productivity stops will improve on-time performance for the vehicle. Passengers noted that on-time performance was a weakness of Route 2. Reducing the number of unproductive stops should result in improved on-time performance, thereby improving customer satisfaction without increasing the operating costs for the route.

Exhibit VII.1: Route 2 Revised Schedule

Destination	Time						
DART Office (623 N. Second St.)	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	2:00 PM	3:00 PM	4:00 PM
Hi Rise	10:01 AM	11:01 AM	12:01 PM	1:01 PM	2:01 PM	3:01 PM	4:01 PM
Harding's	10:04 AM	11:04 AM	12:04 PM	1:04 PM	2:04 PM	3:04 PM	4:04 PM
Four Flags Plaza	10:06 AM	11:06 AM	12:06 PM	1:06 PM	2:06 PM	3:06 PM	4:06 PM
Rite Aid	10:08 AM	11:08 AM	12:08 PM	1:08 PM	2:08 PM	3:08 PM	4:08 PM
Martin's	10:12 AM	11:12 AM	12:12 PM	1:12 PM	2:12 PM	3:12 PM	4:12 PM
Big Lots	10:17 AM	11:17 AM	12:17 PM	1:17 PM	2:17 PM	3:17 PM	4:17 PM
Senior Center	10:18 AM	11:18 AM	12:18 PM	1:18 PM	2:18 PM	3:18 PM	4:18 PM
Niles Township Office	10:19 AM	11:19 AM	12:19 PM	1:19 PM	2:19 PM	3:19 PM	4:19 PM
Belle Plaza	10:21 AM	11:21 AM	12:21 PM	1:21 PM	2:21 PM	3:21 PM	4:21 PM
Niles Plaza	10:22 AM	11:22 AM	12:22 PM	1:22 PM	2:22 PM	3:22 PM	4:22 PM
Tank Town (BP)	10:24 AM		12:24 PM		2:24 PM		4:24 PM
State Line	10:27 AM		12:27 PM		2:27 PM		4:27 PM
Auten Rd. & SR 933(IN)	10:31 AM		12:31 PM		2:31 PM		4:31 PM
Rural King	10:34 AM		12:34 PM		2:34 PM		4:34 PM
Wal-Mart	10:37 AM	11:27 AM	12:37 PM	1:27 PM	2:37 PM	3:27 PM	4:37 PM
Big Lots	10:40 AM	11:29 AM	12:40 PM	1:29 PM	2:40 PM	3:29 PM	4:40 PM
Senior Center	10:41 AM	11:30 AM	12:41 PM	1:30 PM	2:41 PM	3:30 PM	4:41 PM
McDonald's	10:43 AM	11:33 AM	12:43 PM	1:33 PM	2:43 PM	3:33 PM	4:43 PM
Martin's	10:47 AM	11:35 AM	12:47 PM	1:35 PM	2:47 PM	3:35 PM	4:47 PM
3rd & Huron	10:49 AM	11:36 AM	12:49 PM	1:36 PM	2:49 PM	3:36 PM	4:49 PM
3rd & Hickory	10:50 AM	11:36 AM	12:50 PM	1:36 PM	2:50 PM	3:36 PM	4:50 PM
3rd & Broadway	10:50 AM	11:37 AM	12:50 PM	1:37 PM	2:50 PM	3:37 PM	4:50 PM
Harding's	10:52 AM	11:38 AM	12:52 PM	1:38 PM	2:52 PM	3:38 PM	4:52 PM
Four Flags Plaza	10:54 AM	11:40 AM	12:54 PM	1:40 PM	2:54 PM	3:40 PM	4:54 PM
Library	10:55 AM	11:40 AM	12:55 PM	1:40 PM	2:55 PM	3:40 PM	4:55 PM
City Hall	10:55 AM	11:41 AM	12:55 PM	1:41 PM	2:55 PM	3:41 PM	4:55 PM
Hi Rise	10:57 AM	11:43 AM	12:57 PM	1:43 PM	2:57 PM	3:43 PM	4:57 PM
DART Office (623 N. Second St.)	10:58 AM	11:45 AM	12:58 PM	1:45 PM	2:58 PM	3:45 PM	4:58 PM

2. Implement A Route Deviation Policy

In coordination with a revised schedule of fixed stops for Route 2, Niles DART will implement a point deviation policy to schedule all trip requests that have an origin or destination within ¾ of a mile radius from a Route 2 stop and a destination on the Route. Nearly 20 percent of the demand response trips sampled for this Plan were within ¾ of a mile of the Route but they were provided by another vehicle. Grouping trips around the Route 2 schedule can eliminate at least some unnecessary duplication and make the demand response (dial-a-ride) vehicles available for more trips in other areas of town.

Increasing the frequency of route deviations instead of dispatching a demand response vehicle, as appropriate for meeting passenger requests, will require schedulers to assign trips with origins/destinations near Route 2 to the deviated route at the appropriate time to line up with the

fixed schedule of stops. Significant training of the schedulers and advance notice to passengers will be necessary prior to implementation.

As demand for service in this area increases and exceeds the capacity of one vehicle, a second vehicle should be added to the Route 2 deviated route schedule. If added, the two vehicles would operate in opposite directions, which would increase the frequency of service at each bus stop, improve service convenience, and reduce the amount of time a passenger rides on the Route 2 vehicle.

Deviated Route Fare Structure

The passenger fare for boarding at a designated stop ($2.00 regular or $1.00 reduced fare) would not change. The passenger fare for a deviation would be an additional $0.50. For example, if a passenger scheduled a pick-up at his or her home on South 13th Street (within ½ mile of the Route 2 route) and was dropped off at a designated stop for the Route 2 bus, the passenger fare would be $2.50. This fare is $0.50 less expensive than a demand response trip and still provides the passenger with a curb-to-curb service. If the same passenger was picked-up at his or her home and dropped off at a location near the Route 2 but not at a regularly scheduled stop, the fare would be $3.00, which is equal to the demand response service fare for trips within the city limits.

3. Implement a Connector Service with TRANSPO

Due to service changes for TRANSPO Route 5, the connections with Niles DART at Auten Road and SR 933 will no longer be possible between 9:42 AM and 1:42 PM. Information on TRANSPO's Route 5 can be found at http://www.sbtranspo.com/routes/new-rte/rte5new.pdf.

Niles DART will implement a pilot project connector service that operates between Niles Plaza in Michigan and the TRANSPO South Station in South Bend, Indiana. The connector service will have limited stops and will serve the public housing areas, hotels, hospital, and North Village Mall in Indiana, as well as providing connections between Niles DART's Route 2 and all TRANSPO routes.

The connector service will be provided with one vehicle and complete two round trips per day. The proposed schedule of stops is listed in the following table.

Exhibit VII.2: Pilot Project Connector Service

Destination	Time	
Niles Plaza	10:22 AM	2:22 PM
Tank Town (BP)	10:24 AM	2:24 PM
State Line	10:27 AM	2:27 PM
Laurel Woods Apartments (Auten Rd& Laurelwood Dr.)	10:31 AM	2:31 PM
Golden Oaks Village Apartments	10:36 AM	2:36 PM
North Village Mall (Darden Rd. & S.R. 933)	10:48 AM	2:48 PM
Saint Mary's College (Holy Cross Circle)	11:02 AM	3:02 PM
TRANSPO South Station	11:17 AM	3:17 PM
Saint Mary's College (Holy Cross Circle)	11:32 AM	3:32 PM
North Village Mall (Darden Rd. & S.R. 933)	11:46 AM	3:46 PM
Golden Oaks Village Apartments	11:58 AM	3:58 PM
Laurel Woods Apartments (Auten Rd& Laurelwood Dr.)	12:03 PM	4:03 PM
State Line	12:07 PM	4:07 PM
Tank Town (BP)	12:10 PM	4:10 PM
Niles Plaza	12:12 PM	4:12 PM

If possible, Niles DART should work to schedule one vehicle that is otherwise providing the dial-a-ride mode of transportation during the service day to operate the connector service during two hours. If the demand cannot be met within existing resources, an additional vehicle and part-time driver would be required.

Funding Requirements

Potential expenses for the service include driver labor and fringe, fuel, liability insurance, and marketing. Assuming the driver will dedicate four hours per day at an hourly rate of $12.00 per hour (plus 26% fringe), labor expenses will equate to approximately $15,422. With an average round trip of 38 miles provided two times per day, fuel expenses are projected to be approximately $4,457. An additional $1,000 is included for marketing the new service plus approximately $500 for liability insurance. Assuming the above noted parameters, operating expenses for the additional service would cost approximately $21,379 annually.

Niles DART should apply for the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) Job Access Reverse Commute Program (Section 5316/JARC). The JARC program is intended for new transportation services that relate to the "development and maintenance of transportation services designed to transport welfare recipients and eligible low-income individuals to and from jobs and activities related to their employment." The JARC program provides 50 percent of the operating budget for service and the remaining 50 percent should be derived from local resources. Negotiations with TRANSPO regarding potential local match should be initiated during 2012 to plan for implementation as soon as possible.

4. Performance Measurement

It is very important for Niles DART to have an effective means to determine the performance level of the various portions of the transit system. The system must verify that transportation benefits are consistent with capital and operating costs; and, management must know when services are performing poorly. The proper data will need to be collected and basic performance targets established. The following performance measures should be considered.

- Cost per passenger trip;
- Cost per vehicle mile;
- Cost per vehicle revenue mile;
- Cost per vehicle hour;
- Cost per vehicle revenue hour;
- Passenger trips per vehicle revenue hour;
- Passenger trips per vehicle revenue mile;
- Farebox recovery ratio;
- Net cost (expenses minus fares) per passenger trip; and
- Load factor (passengers/seating capacity).

A good performance measurement process provides objectivity to the decision making process. It is recommended that the number of measurements be limited to concentrate on the most useful measurements. Performance measurements should reveal problems that staff should consider opportunities for system improvement.

One of the most difficult challenges with performance measurements is how to measure the value of service to the community or to an individual, such as medical and employment trips. Nontraditional transit measures that incorporate social values and quality of life measurements will possibly need to be included. Regardless of the performance measurements used, the proper data must be collected.

Once the data to be collected is determined and performance measurements and goals are established, the ongoing performance measurement process should not be a major burden on staff time.

Year 2 (2013 – 2014):

1. Expand Hours of Operation for Demand Response Service

Approximately 10 percent of respondents to the general public survey indicated that they do not use Niles DART because it is not available when they need it. Furthermore, the respondents that currently ride Niles DART rated the hours of operation in afternoons/evenings as the area of service where they are least satisfied. The respondents stated that if service started earlier in the mornings, they could ride Niles DART to work on weekdays. If service hours were extended later into the weekday evenings, passengers could use Niles DART for the trip home from work. Passengers also indicated that the necessary operating hours to support employment would be 6:00 AM to at least

5:30 PM on weekdays. This represents an expansion of one hour in the morning and half an hour in the afternoon.

Furthermore, during discussions with passengers and drivers, it was frequently indicated that the existing hours of operation for the demand response vehicles on Saturdays are not sufficient for them to run errands. In response, Niles DART will also plan to implement a service expansion of one hour on Saturdays. The change in service hours is represented in the following table. Operating hours for Route 2 are not impacted.

Exhibit VII.3: Adjustments in Daily Service Hours

Current Operating Hours	Expanded Operating Hours
M-F: 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM	M-F: 6:00 AM to 5:30 PM
Sat: 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM	Sat: 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Potential expenses for expanded hours of service include driver salaries and wages, fuel, and vehicle maintenance. The table in Exhibit VII.4 below illustrates the estimated associated costs for expanded service. Labor expenses are based on an average hourly rate of $12 for the driver(s) and the scheduler. Fuel expenses are based on an estimate of $0.46 per mile.

Exhibit VII.4: Potential Operating Budget for Expanded Hours

Expense Category	Costs (estimated)
Labor (Driver)	$5,280
Labor (Scheduler)	$5,280
Fringe (26% of Labor)	$2,746
Fuel	$7,976
Materials and Insurance	$3,000
Utilities	$500
TOTAL:	**$24,782**

The expanded service should provide 2.5 passenger trips per hour. When operated with one vehicle, the service should provide 956 one-way passenger trips per year during weekdays and 128 passenger trips per year on Saturdays (assuming operation on 50 Saturdays per year). In total, the additional hours of service should provide up to 1,084 one-way passenger trips per year.

Exhibit VII.5: Expanded Demand Response Operating Hours

Service Component	Trips/Hour	Miles/Hour	Hours/Year	Miles/Year	Trips/Year
Weekday Service Expansion	2.5	40	382.5	15300	956.25
Saturday Service Expansion	2.5	40	51	2040	127.5
TOTAL:			**434**	**17,340**	**1,084**

Potential Funding Sources

Niles DART currently does not have the financial resources to expand the hours of operation. Additional operating dollars for the service expansion must be derived from local sources including property taxes, local businesses, contracted service agreements with human service agencies, grants, passenger fares, and other contributions.

2. Expand the Demand Response Service Area into Portions of Cass County

As funding becomes available, Niles DART will expand its demand response service area by approximately two miles into Cass County. Residents of the area frequently travel across the county line in both directions for a variety of reasons. Currently, Niles DART provides trips into Cass County through an informal agreement with Cass County Transit. Niles DART and Cass County Transit will work together to formalize the currently informal service agreement. Each provider (Cass County Transit and Niles DART) should be reimbursed for trips that it provides into the neighboring county.

Formalizing the agreement to provide services will provide a financial structure for Niles DART as well as Cass County Transit to ensure that they are spending local funding as intended. Agreements will also establish a foundation of information to be used when the providers apply for new funding sources pertaining to regional transportation and/or transit for older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Potential Funding Sources

The transportation providers should seek additional funding under the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) New Freedom Program (Section 5317). The purpose of Section 5317 is to improve service for individuals with disabilities, especially to improve access to employment opportunities. Section 5317 requires a 50 percent local match for operating and 20 percent local match for capital. Local match may be derived from any non-U.S. Department of Transportation program or other local contributions and grants. Local businesses should be contacted and asked to assist with the local match necessary for Federal transportation grants because of the benefit their residents or customers receive from transit.

3. Implement Shuttles to Cassopolis and Southwestern Michigan College, and Connections with Berrien Bus

Niles DART currently provides trips, as needed, for passengers to transfer to Berrien Bus or Cass County Transit. Regional transfers are critical to mobility for area residents and should be encouraged. However, these long distance trips take the Niles DART vehicle out of the local service area for up to 45 minutes with only a few passengers on board; many times, one leg of the trip is empty.

Scheduled shuttles to Southwestern Michigan College (SMC) should be coordinated with the course schedule offered at the college. The schedule for trips to and from SMC and the regional connections to Buchanan and Cassopolis would allow passengers to plan their trips in advance and Niles DART to effectively group trips. The shuttle schedule should be driven by existing demand, to the largest

extent possible. For example, shuttles to Buchanan should be scheduled only in coordination with the Buchanan Shuttle Schedule (see Exhibit VII.6 below), or coordinated through a formal agreement between Niles DART and Buchanan.

Exhibit VII.6: Buchanan-Niles Shuttle Schedule

Service Area	Monday-Friday	Saturday
Buchanan to Niles	7:00 AM, 11:30 AM, 2:00 PM, 4:30 PM	7:30 AM, 12:00 PM, 2:30 PM, 4:45 PM
Niles to Buchanan	11:00 AM, 2:00 PM, 3:00 PM	9:00 AM, 11:30 PM, 2:30 PM

In addition to the shuttles, Niles DART will investigate the possibility of initiating a park-and-ride at the Harding's Market in Niles. A stop at Harding's would encourage riders to utilize the scheduled shuttle services going to Cassopolis or to meet with Berrien Bus. The park-and-ride option may be of assistance to those riders that live beyond a practical walking distance to the originating point for the shuttle service.

The primary challenge will be to negotiate a practical and effective plan with Harding's Market that allows cars to be parked at their facility for much of the day. Harding's will have to be assured that the cars will not present a burden, but may actually increase business while serving the community.

Expenses associated with implementing the park-and-ride facility as proposed here are quite limited. Expenses will primarily be signage and marketing. Costs associated with printing brochures or other marketing materials will depend upon the number of printed materials produced.

Year 3 (2014 – 2015):

1. Implement a Regional Transit Pass

A thorough review will be undertaken of fare collections options that Niles DART can possibly implement. There are various options that should be considered, particularly in connection with future regional consolidation efforts. A transit pass utilized and accepted by all transportation providers in the region should be included in that discussion.

Apart from the potential countywide transit consolidation effort that is ongoing, there are various transit pass alternatives that could be implemented by Niles DART, including but not limited to, a day pass, weekly pass, monthly pass, student pass, family pass, and passes for different durations and for various passenger groups.

It is recommended that Niles DART develop a student transit pass for local school and Adult Education Course students. Negotiations with the local school districts should take place to request subsidy from the schools to reduce the price of the trip for students. For example, an agreement for the school to provide 50 percent of the cost of each student pass and the student will pay the remaining 50 percent. School student passes could be monthly, quarterly, or annual. Through this

agreement, schools will not receive specialized service, which avoids issues with charter regulations, but students will be encouraged to use public transit.

In the short-term, the transit pass could be either a student identification card with a picture that passengers can show to drivers, or a paper pass or punch card. No matter which type of pass is utilized, Niles DART drivers should be required to record ridership by the type of fare media that was used by the passenger. The Niles DART Operations Manager will use the data recorded by the driver to monitor utilization of the passes.

In the future, the use of transit passes could be facilitated by utilizing magnetic swipe passes via smart card technology. This technology is being implemented by a growing number of transit systems across the country and is especially useful for regions with multiple providers. Smart card technology is expensive but improves customer experience and record keeping ability of the system. It is recommended that smart card technology be included as an alternative in the future as regional consolidation evolves. Smart card technology equipment is typically sold based on the number of vehicles that will be equipped to use it. The cost of purchasing and using smart card technology outweighed the benefits for the Niles DART service area, at the time of this report.

Benefits and Consequences

Transit systems typically realize a decline in cash fares as passengers become aware of the pass availability and switch to the more customer friendly fare-paying alternative. Transit passes provide a convenient method for paying a fare when boarding a vehicle. It is particularly helpful in creating an easy method for transfers between transit systems in a regional consolidated format. Transit passes are also convenient for young riders, including school students.

Finally, with participation from local employers, the transit pass could also provide tax and income benefits for both employers and employees due to IRS regulations permitting employer-provided transit passes to be excluded as a taxable benefit to employees while serving as a tax deduction and savings in payroll tax for employers. Note that in 2012 the monthly tax exclusion for employer provided transit passes is $125.

Potential Challenges

Initiation of transit passes creates a challenge for the system to educate the public regarding the availability of the passes and how they can be purchased and used. Niles DART must deploy a focused marketing effort to inform the public, special population groups and employers of the transit pass program.

The decision must be made regarding how to price the pass in relation to the current cash fare structure. Also, for employees and employers to take advantage of the tax benefits, the Niles DART staff must partner with local businesses. Employers must be recruited to participate for the transit pass program to succeed.

Potential Budget and Staff Time

The major costs associated with implementation of a transit pass program are related to the design and printing of the passes. Typical annual costs associated for printing passes is about $5,000 for

approximately 2,500 passes (or about $2.00 per pass). Costs will depend on the number of passes to be printed. There would be substantial costs for the possible future utilization of smart card technology, and it is recommended only through partnerships with the other service providers in the region so that costs can be shared.

2. Add a Vehicle to Route 2

The transit industry standard for minimum ridership on a deviated fixed route is five passengers per vehicle hour. As of 2011, ridership on Route 2 had reached 4.25 passengers per hour. It is likely that changes to the scheduling policy (implemented in Year 1) will result in increased ridership on the route because of the added convenience of riding the route without an advance reservation. As ridership increases, Niles DART will prepare to expand the frequency of service on Route 2 by adding one additional vehicle. The vehicles will travel in the opposite directions and provide a 30-minute frequency at each stop.

Based on a projection that each vehicle would travel an average of 15 miles per hour and operate seven hours per day, 255 days per year, two vehicles on Route 2 would travel approximately 53,550 miles annually and operate 3,570 hours of service. An average combined ridership of eight one-way passenger trips per hour (four on each vehicle) would provide a total annual ridership of 28,560. By comparison, during FY 2011, Route 2 provided approximately 7,613 one-way passenger trips with one vehicle. The increase in ridership is projected to be more than double the level of 2011 because of improved scheduling of route deviations and enhanced public outreach. Exhibit VII.7 outlines potential productivity of the route with two vehicles operating in opposite directions on Route 2.

Exhibit VII.7: Estimated Productivity of Two Vehicles on Route 2

Service Component	Pass. Trips/Hour	Miles/Hour	Hours	Miles	Pass. Trips/Year
Route 2 with Two Vehicles - Weekdays	8.0	15	3,570	53,550	28,560
TOTAL:			**3,570**	**53,550**	**28,560**

Expansion of service for Route 2 will require Niles DART to hire an additional driver and procure one additional wheelchair accessible vehicle. A significant promotion effort should accompany the service expansion so that passengers and the entire community are aware of the improved frequency of service on Route 2. Estimated expenses associated with the expansion are outlined in the following table. Annual labor expenses are based on an hourly rate of $12.00 for the driver. Fuel expenses are estimated at $0.46 per vehicle mile. Utilities include a portion of the fixed expenses to operate the Niles DART facility.

Exhibit VII.8: Projected Operating Expenses for One Additional Vehicle on Route 2

Expense Category	Costs (estimated)
Labor (Driver)	$21,420
Fringe (26% of Labor)	$5,569
Fuel	$24,633
Materials and Insurance	$2,000
Marketing	$2,000
Utilities	$500
TOTAL:	**$56,122**

Based on the 2012 passenger fares of $2.00 general public and $1.00 for individuals with disabilities and older adults, potential additional fare revenue from the vehicle could total as much as $51,480. Additional revenue for the service would be derived from Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 and the required local match.

Full Fare:	22,848 x $2.00	=	$45,696
Discounted Fare:	5,712 x $1.00	=	$5,712
	Total	=	$51,480

Capital revenue for purchase of the additional vehicle would be requested from a Section 5307 Capital Grant and necessary local match.

3. Install Bus Stop Signs and Benches or Shelters

Niles DART will install Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant bus stop signs and bus benches/shelters as appropriate throughout the Route 2 service area. Shelters would be utilized at the bus stops with higher boarding volume. It is possible that local businesses could provide the benches through an agreement with Niles DART. Bicycle racks should be added to the benches or shelters, as applicable. If not located near a streetlight, it should be determined if illumination of the bench or shelter is needed. Bus stop signs will be needed to mark all bus stops regardless of whether a bench or shelter is installed at the site. Niles DART will evaluate the location of existing bus stop signs and relocate them as appropriate to improve accessibility and visibility.

Benefits and Consequences

The benches and shelters will provide more comfort and convenience for riders at bus stops. The riding experience will be enhanced, which should lead to higher ridership. Staff will need to determine the guidelines for these amenities, such as size, design and placement. ADA regulations must be properly addressed.

Advertising on benches and shelters is common in the transit industry to raise revenue and it must be determined if advertising revenue will be allowed in Niles.

Bus stop signs will need to be designed and erected in a manner to meet applicable local codes and guidelines. Lighting of bus stops is important for passenger safety and related standards must be established.

Potential Challenges

Challenges should be expected from the business community, with some business owners desiring bus shelters or benches near their business and others with an opposite opinion. The appearance of shelters and benches should be maintained by quickly repairing any noticeable damage. Graffiti, which can be a problem for shelters and benches, should be discouraged and promptly removed.

Potential Budget and Staff Time

The budget to purchase transit amenities will depend on the design and number desired. Considerable staff time will be needed to facilitate the design and purchase of these enhancements.

Years 4 and 5 (2015 – 2017):

1. Expand Hours of Operation to 7:00 PM on Weekdays

During the second year of the implementation plan, Niles DART expanded its daily hours of operation for Demand Response service to begin at 6:00 AM and end at 5:30 PM on weekdays. Saturday demand response service was expanded by one hour in the afternoon.

During the fourth year, Niles DART will plan to conduct a needs assessment for the potential to expand hours of operation on weekdays to 7:00 PM. The needs assessment should include a quantifiable measure of need (based on surveys and public meetings) and demand (based on transit propensity demand models, and the trend of trip requests to Niles DART for service later in the evenings).

If it is determined that the level of demand would support a service expansion, Niles DART will seek additional operating funds through Section 5307, primarily, to expand weekday hours of operation. Potential operating expenses associated with the service expansion are outlined in Exhibit VII.9 below. Labor is based on an hourly rate of $12.00. Fuel expenses are based on an average of $0.46 per mile.

Exhibit VII.9: Operating Expenses for Service Hour Expansion

Expense Category	Costs (estimated)
Labor (Driver)	$6,120
Fringe (26% of Labor)	$1,591
Fuel	$14,352
Materials and Insurance	$3,000
Utilities	$500
TOTAL:	**$25,563**

The expanded service should provide 2.5 passenger trips per hour. When operated with one vehicle, the service should provide 1,950 passenger trips per year during weekdays. The vehicle will travel an additional 31,200 miles and provide 780 additional hours of service each year.

Revenue for the service expansion would include passenger fares, local government appropriations, income from local taxes, and contracts for service. Passenger fare revenue could be as much as $4,388, based on the 2012 fare structure for trips within the City.

Full Fare: 975 x $3.00 = $2,925
Discounted Fare: 975 x $1.50 = $1,463
Total = $4,388

2. Service Consolidation with Other Southwest Michigan Transportation Providers

Transitioning to a regional consolidated system may be the final recommendation for the Berrien County transportation consolidation plan that was ongoing at the time of this Plan. A consolidated system will require a significant effort and preparation on the part of Niles Dial-A-Ride (DART) because the City of Niles may be invited to join a consolidated network of transportation providers that operates under a new organizational structure.

Negotiations between the City of Niles and the lead entity for the regional transportation consolidation effort will need to occur over several key topics. First and foremost, the terms and conditions of the service that Niles DART will provide need to be determined. Quality standards, service specifications, and performance monitoring will be founding components of the agreement. These and other requirements of the City will form the basis of the day-to-day relationship between Niles DART and the lead organization, as well as ensuring that residents have access to transportation that is equal to or better than the existing services.

The second item for negotiation will be the cost for the service. Since labor rates usually change annually, cost reimbursement will also typically change annually. The basis for reimbursement of the fully allocated cost of operating Niles DART service as part of the regional transportation network will be revisited at designated intervals as agreed upon by the partnering organizations and

adjusted, as necessary. The basis for reimbursement of the fully allocated cost can be in several different forms, which should be decided during the initial agreements. For example, reimbursement can be based on a revenue hour, vehicle mile, or an annual total based on a pre-determined set of routes, passenger trips, schedules, and operating days.

The previously noted performance monitoring system will be modified to include the coordinated or consolidated trips to provide assurance that transportation services operated by Niles DART are being provided as expected. The Niles DART will continue to be part of the Advisory Committee for the regional consolidation effort.

SUMMARY AND MULTI-YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN

Exhibit VII.10 outlines the five-year projection of costs and revenues. The costs and fare revenues for the proposed service improvements were added in Years One, Two, and Three. With these service improvements, Niles DART operating cost increases from $553,413 in FY2011 to $706,791 in FY2017. This will require an additional $153,378 in operating revenues by FY2017. Exhibit VII.11 outlines the projected revenue shortfall for each fiscal year.

Additional operating revenue will be necessary for the projected shortfall in 2013 and for additional or increased levels of service during 2013 and later years. Revenue may be derived from Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307, which under MAP-21 now includes the program for Job Access Reverse Commute, FTA Section 5310, which under MAP-21 permits operating and capital funds to be used for transportation, additional fare revenue from increased ridership, and local match contributions from the millage, government appropriations, and formal agreements with local businesses, schools, and agencies.

Future projected capital costs will be limited to ongoing bus stop improvements and one additional vehicle if service is expanded to include two vehicles on Route 2 and/or the shuttle service to the TRANSPO South Station.

Exhibit VII.10: Summary of Expenses

	2013 Budgeted	2014 Proj.	2015 Proj.	2016 Proj.	2017 Proj.
Vehicle Operations Expense					
Uniforms	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500
General Medical Expenses	$500	$500	$500	$500	$500
Gas & Oil	$40,000	$41,200	$42,436	$43,709	$45,020
Office Supplies	$600	$600	$600	$600	$600
Training	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000
Travel & Meetings	$500	$500	$500	$500	$500
Salaries & Wages FT Dispatch	$26,500	$27,030	$27,571	$28,122	$28,684
Salaries & Wages PT Drivers	$95,570	$97,481	$99,431	$101,420	$103,448
Salaries & Wages PT Dispatch	$12,480	$12,730	$12,984	$13,244	$13,509
Fringes - FICA	$8,266	$8,431	$8,600	$8,772	$8,947
Fringes - Group Medical Ins.	$26,000	$26,520	$27,050	$27,591	$28,143
Fringes -WC	$3,062	$3,123	$3,186	$3,249	$3,314
Subtotal	**$218,978**	**$223,616**	**$228,358**	**$233,207**	**$238,167**
Vehicle Maintenance Expense					
Towing	$500	$500	$500	$500	$500
Uniforms	$250	$250	$250	$250	$250
General Medical Expense	$50	$50	$50	$50	$50
Gas & Oil	$450	$464	$477	$492	$506
Tires & Tubes	$800	$824	$849	$874	$900
Vehicle Parts & Supplies	$13,500	$13,905	$14,322	$14,752	$15,194
Vehicle Repairs & Maintenance	$8,800	$9,064	$9,336	$9,616	$9,904
Vehicle Washing	$350	$350	$350	$350	$350
Equipment Maintenance	$600	$600	$600	$600	$600
Office Supplies	$200	$200	$200	$200	$200
Telephone & Internet	$1,100	$1,133	$1,167	$1,202	$1,238
Utilities	$4,300	$4,429	$4,562	$4,699	$4,840
Vehicle Damage Ins.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Vehicle License Fees	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Purchased Service	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Training	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000
Salaries & Wages - FT Maint.	$41,652	$42,485	$43,335	$44,201	$45,085
Fringes - FICA	$3,186	$3,250	$3,315	$3,381	$3,449
Fringes - Group Medical Ins.	$13,000	$13,260	$13,525	$13,796	$14,072
Fringes - WC	$1,250	$1,275	$1,301	$1,327	$1,353
Subtotal	**$90,988**	**$93,038**	**$95,138**	**$97,289**	**$99,492**
Non-Vehicle Maintenance Expenses					
Uniforms	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Radio Repairs & Maint.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Building Repairs & Maint.	$7,500	$7,650	$7,803	$7,959	$8,118
Equip. Maint.	$2,500	$2,550	$2,601	$2,653	$2,706
Office Supplies	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100
Building Damage Ins.	$600	$600	$600	$600	$600
Purchased Services	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Salaries & Wages - PT Maint	$8,190	$8,354	$8,521	$8,691	$8,865
Fringes FICA	$627	$640	$652	$665	$679
Fringes WC	$246	$251	$256	$261	$266
Subtotal	**$19,763**	**$20,144**	**$20,533**	**$20,930**	**$21,334**

Exhibit VII.10: Summary of Expenses (continued)

Administrative Expenses					
Armored Car Services	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Professional Services	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Audit Fees	$1,900	$1,900	$1,900	$1,900	$1,900
Grant Administration Services	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Office Supplies	$1,650	$1,700	$1,750	$1,803	$1,857
Telephone & Internet	$3,800	$3,914	$4,031	$4,152	$4,277
Utilities	$8,700	$8,961	$9,230	$9,507	$9,792
Vehicle Liability Insurance	$3,700	$3,811	$3,925	$4,043	$4,164
Bldg/Property Liability Ins.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Purchased Service	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Training	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500
Travel & Meetings	$1,500	$1,500	$1,500	$1,500	$1,500
Advertising & Marketing	$500	$500	$500	$500	$500
Entertainment	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Dues & Subscriptions	$1,250	$1,250	$1,250	$1,250	$1,250
Permit Expense	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100
Salary & Wages - FT	$40,000	$40,800	$41,616	$42,448	$43,297
Salary & Wages PT	$30,000	$30,600	$31,212	$31,836	$32,473
Fringes -FICA	$5,355	$5,462	$5,571	$5,683	$5,796
Fringes WC Ins. Premiums	$350	$357	$364	$371	$379
Marketing					
Subtotal	**$101,305**	**$103,355**	**$105,451**	**$107,594**	**$109,786**
Capital Outlay Expense					
UST Expense	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Building Improvement Capital Outlay	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Office Equipment Capital Outlay	$15,000	$15,000	$15,000	$15,000	$15,000
Other Equipment Capital Outlay	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Vehicle Capital Outlay	$83,500	$83,500	$83,500	$83,500	$83,500
Misc. Fed Grant Expenditures	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500
Subtotal	**$101,000**	**$101,000**	**$101,000**	**$101,000**	**$101,000**
Total Operating Expenses	**$532,034**	**$541,153**	**$550,480**	**$560,020**	**$569,779**
Increased Services			$104,328	$133,021	$137,012
Expanded Hours for Demand Response (5:30 and 4:00)		$24,782	$25,525	$26,291	$27,080
Add a Bus to Route 2			$56,122	$57,806	$59,540
Connector or Feeder Service to TRANSPO	$21,379	$22,020	$22,681	$23,361	$24,062
Expand Hours of Operation to 7:00 PM on Weekdays				$25,563	$26,330
Total Costs of Increased Services	**$21,379**	**$46,802**	**$104,328**	**$133,021**	**$137,012**
Total Expenses with Increased Services	**$553,413**	**$587,955**	**$654,808**	**$693,042**	**$706,791**

Exhibit VII.11: Summary of Revenue

	2013 Budgeted	2014 Proj.	2015 Proj.	2016 Proj.	2017 Proj.
Real Property Taxes-Current	$100,000	$103,000	$106,090	$109,273	$112,551
Real Property Taxes-Cass Co.	$500	$515	$530	$546	$563
Delinquent Real Taxes-DART Share	$6,000	$6,180	$6,365	$6,556	$6,753
Delinquent Personal Property	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
IFT/CFT	$1,400	$1,442	$1,485	$1,530	$1,576
Pmts in Lieu of Taxes-PILOT	$800	$824	$849	$874	$900
Federal Grants-PM	$88,601	$91,259	$93,997	$96,817	$99,721
Federal Grants-Operating	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Federal Grants-Capital	$80,800	$83,224	$85,721	$88,292	$90,941
State Grants-Operating (5307)	$114,259	$114,259	$114,259	$114,259	$114,259
State Grants-Capital	$20,200	$20,806	$21,430	$22,073	$22,735
State Grants-PM	$22,150	$22,815	$23,499	$24,204	$24,930
Planning Pass-Thru Grant	$5,000	$5,150	$5,305	$5,464	$5,628
Sales & Use	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Passenger Fares	$60,000	$61,800	$89,358	$96,427	$99,320
Total Operating Revenue	**$499,710**	**$511,274**	**$548,888**	**$566,315**	**$579,877**
Total Operating Expenses	**$532,034**	**$587,955**	**$654,808**	**$693,042**	**$706,791**
Shortfall	**-$32,324**	**-$76,682**	**-$105,920**	**-$126,727**	**-$126,915**