

Transportation Survey and Focus Groups
Results and Implications
2008 – 2009 NCST Grant

2800 surveys were mailed to a random list of persons age 60 and over residing in Van Buren County. 225 responses were returned, an 8% return rate for the survey. Another 50 seniors participated in 3 different focus groups held in South Haven, Hartford and Paw Paw, all cities located in Van Buren County.

Respondents reported that 48% lived in single family homes, 28% in multiunit buildings, leaving another 24% in mobile homes, assisted living, foster care or nursing home facilities.

37% of the respondents live within ½ mile of a grocery store, drug store or doctor's office. 14% indicated they live within ½ mile from a public transportation stop. Near 50% indicated that they do not live within a half mile of any of these.

When asked how often you go out in a week, 23% do not go out in a typical week. 32% responded they go out 1 -2 times if a week, 21% said 3 -5 times and 16% indicated more than 5 times per week. In even greater detail, the survey asked how many times the respondent went out yesterday (leaving and going some place else), 24% said none at all. The majority, 55% said two times and 14% said 3 or more times.

When asked if they had a driver's license, 57% said yes but 43% said no. This seems like a large amount of seniors without a license and should impact in greater usage of VB Transit. Furthermore, 74% said they live with someone in their household who drives and only 24% said they did not live with someone who drove.

When drivers were asked about issues with current driving, the answers were as follows: 49% indicated their problems were with parking, a6% was driving at night and 17% had problems with the cost of operating a car.

The question was asked how often you got a ride with someone in the past two months. 14% responded every day, 10% got a ride 2 or more times per week. 4% said one time per week, 6 % said once of less each

month, 57% indicated never and 8% did not answer this question. This actually coincides with the fact that 57% said yes they had a driver's license and they get out of the house at least 2 times per week.

Seniors were asked to indicate problems when they were thinking about getting a ride from someone they knew. Of the answers, 19% worry about imposing on others. 18% said they felt embarrassed asking for a ride. 30% of the respondents indicated they did not like to be dependent on others. Another 21% gave a variety of answers including fitting into the driver's schedule, feeling obliged or the need to reciprocate, concern about the driving ability of the driver and don't know people who can help.

Given that 24% of the respondents do not have anyone in their household that drives and overall 43% do not have driver's licenses that the answers to the next question would be higher. However, when seniors were asked how often they used Van Buren Transit in the last two months, 5% indicated only 3 or more times per week, 4 % said about once a week and 84% said never.

When asked about problems with VB Transit, 29% said accessibility (getting to the bus from their home) was an issue. 8 % had difficulty boarding the bus and 14% were late for scheduled appointments. Another 22% of the respondents indicated that VB Transit does not go where they need to go.

70% of the respondents indicated they have not walked to get some place and with 84% not using VB Transit, it could be assumed that most people either have the necessary rides they need, are jus not going places (23% do not leave their home in a typical week) or a combination of the two. When asked if transportation problems interfered with their ability to get to a doctor's appointment, 27% said this happened often and 18% said it sometimes happened. When asked if transportation problems interfered with visiting family, 40% indicated it often did and 24% indicated it sometimes did. When asked in transportation problems interfered with getting to a place of worship, 24% indicated in happed often and 19% said it did sometimes. When asked if transportation problems interfered with getting to the grocery store or the drug store, 32% said this happened often and 37% indicated that sometimes it interfered getting to the stores.

The question was asked if you could go wherever you wanted and transportation was not a problem, what would be done as part of a weekly routine that was not being done now. 32% of the respondents said they would visit family and friends more often. 25% of those responding would do more travel for pleasure. And 18% would shop more. Another 11% would do more recreational activities, 6% would volunteer and 6% would participate in more community events.

When asked about general health, 10% self-rated their health as excellent. Another 54% indicated that they were in very good health and 12% said they were in good health. 16% rated their health as fair of poor. 69% indicated they did not use a type of aide such as canes, walkers, electric scooters or wheelchairs to get around. 31% indicated they do use some type of aide and is as follows: 5% do use a cane, 13% utilizes a walker, 4 % use a scooter and 8% use a wheelchair.

Focus Groups were held in the cities of South Haven and Hartford and the Village of Paw Paw. Over 50 people participated in the 3 focus groups, the largest group in Paw Paw.

All groups were aware of the following transportation options: VB Transit, Neighbors, Family, medical transportation (VBEMS and Care-A-Van). The Hartford area had vague knowledge about the services actually offered by VB Transit. South Haven participants also had knowledge about the Senior Van, Ride Easy and local taxi service. Paw Paw area and Hartford area did not know about Ride Easy or the Senior Van.

Participants were asked what would help residents know more about transportation options. It was the consensus of all the groups that the problem is more pronounced in rural areas and that one does not really know or realize what is or is not available until it is needed. The following is a list of methods/locations that could help make residents more aware and knowledgeable about their transportation options:

Radio	Utility Bill Stuffer	Paw Paw Flashes
RAM/Cable	Word of Mouth	Kalamazoo Gazette
Direct Mail	Flyers	Courier
Coupons	Posters	Senior Times
Print Media	Shoppers Guide	Cozy 98 Radio

A wide array of barriers to using VB Transit was cited by all three groups and they were similar in nature in the 3 different areas. The following barriers were indicated by the Hartford focus group participants:

- **do not have adequate knowledge about the service**
- **long waits, lack of coordination with doctors offices/Watervliet Hospital**
- **fear of the cost for rides.**

The barriers identified in the Paw Paw area are as follows:

- **fares/cost**
- **lack of Saturday and Sunday service**
- **long waits are not convenient**
- **lack of late afternoon service**
- **no affordable out-of-county services such as to hospitals**
- **high cost to get to doctors/hospitals in Kalamazoo**
- **unavailable Transit contact during lunch hours**
- **lack of room for walkers on buses**
- **lack of help with grocery bags**
- **lack of knowledge of service**
- **lack of coordination with doctors/organizations**
- **no regular stops.**

The barriers in the South Haven Area are quite similar to Paw Paw but since service levels may be different in each area, the results for South Haven are as follows:

- **can not get early morning appointments**
- **can not get late afternoon appointments**
- **no weekend service**
- **lack of evening service**
- **lack of understanding of what is permissible or what the service can or cannot do**
- **loop bus not always on schedule**
- **city should provide signed bus stops and shelters**
- **lack of public service from a vision standpoint.**

The participants in the focus groups were asked to identify ways to get seniors to take advantage of transportation services. The following is a list of the methods identified:

- **marketing**
- **reducing cost**
- **offering driver assistance**
- **educating seniors about services and how to ask for assistance**
- **pilot test an escort system**
- **try a buddy system**
- **appeal to the younger generation**
- **capitalize on merchant discounts**
- **word of mouth**
- **passes with punches.**

Overall, it appears that there is not enough information in the communities about exactly what services are offered by VB Transit and the parameters of the service provision. It is important for seniors and persons with disabilities to know whether they can expect assistance, if they drive out of the county, the costs and other pick up considerations. The service has gone through several changes over the past several years. How much this has been communicated to the public is hard to measure at this point. More rural areas tend to know less about the services than the city areas. Previous experience and reputation also affect the usage of the service. The focus groups do show that more marketing (of all forms) and advertising is needed to overcome the myths, old reputation, incorrect and/or lack of information in the community.