

It's in our power to change.

THE INITIATOR

MARCH 2010

Moving the Needle on Public Transportation

“Keep gathering more and more people like you have today and continue to work for increased public transportation,” were the words of Congressman Vern Ehlers at the Annual Kent County Legislative Lunch on Transit on February 22nd. Disability Advocates has been about just that and, along with our many partners, we continue to work for expanded public transportation services for everyone.

Much is happening in our community concerning the future of our transit infrastructure. First, The Rapid has been working on a new long range plan (<http://rapidtmp.org>). Early last Fall, two persons with disabilities, Casey Dutmer and Rae Bower, were appointed by The Rapid to serve on the citizen committee overseeing the re-write, with Casey being elected vice chair. Last November, The Rapid then held six community workshops to get input on what residents of its six member communities felt is important about our current transit system and what they would like to see in the future. Just last week, The Rapid launched the next phase of public input via a survey to rank the priorities that were identified.

Second, the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council is getting ready to launch the Kent County Transit Needs Assessment. DAKC and our partners have been working many years to get to this point in the process. The Kent County Board of Commissioners first looked at the issue and then sent it along to the Metro Council who has taken up the charge. Funds have been secured and a consultant selected—this spring, once again the public will be asked to discuss our transit needs. The difference between these two studies is that The Rapid's long range plan is focused on the six, central cities of Kent County whereas the Metro Council's work will focus on county-wide

service. Of course, these two studies have been and will continue to be well coordinated. You can bet that DAKC volunteers will be there making sure of that!

Since everything we do locally to increase public transit services is greatly impacted by state and federal decisions, we knew it was time to gather our elected officials to hear their thoughts on and support for public transportation. DAKC with Concerned Citizens for Improved Transportation, Faith In Motion and The Essential Needs Task Force Transportation Subcommittee hosted this year's Legislative Lunch on Transit. Not only did we get into the transit issue with our elected officials, this was also the community's first opportunity to thank Congressman Ehlers for his tremendous efforts and support of public transportation throughout his career. For instance, while in office Congressman Ehlers has helped secure over \$100 million in federal investment in The Rapid. As for our state officials, Senator Bill Hardiman and Representatives Bob Dean, Dave Hildenbrand, Tom Pearce and Roy Schmidt were in attendance.

At the end of his comments, when asked what the most important thing citizens could do to support transit in Washington, Congressman Ehlers did not hesitate to offer, “Make sure my replacement is a transit supporter!” DAKC plans to help in that effort, too. We plan to co-host candidate forums on transit and other issues critical to the independence of persons with disabilities in our community, such as housing, Medicaid, Medicare and employment supports. As DAKC's work in the arena of public transportation has shown, we have been involved in improving our community supports for a long time. Our plan is to remain active and vigilant as we work to build on our success to make a more inclusive community for all persons with disabilities in Kent County.



“Make sure my replacement is a transit supporter!”

-Congressman Vern Ehlers

CHECK OUT these TRANSIT WEBSITES!!!

Disability Advocates of Kent County,
www.dakc.us/transit.php

The Rapid, <http://rapidtmp.org>

Drive MI Campaign, <http://www.drivemi.org/>

Transportation for America,
<http://t4america.org/>

To “Get Involved”, go to:
<http://www.dakc.us/getinvolved.php>



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www.dakc.us

Who we are

Most people equate disability with limitations. But it's our job to change the perceptions and realities that prevent people with disabilities from sharing in the community. Every year, we provide training, mentoring, and referrals to help people with disabilities and their families live productive lives. Because disability touches so many people, we also work on a larger scale, helping governments and businesses make changes that benefit not just those with disabilities, but everyone in the community.

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Volunteers

We rely on our wonderful volunteers for so much of what we accomplish. To find an opportunity that fits your skills, interests, and schedule, please contact:

The Volunteer Coordinator
616 949 1100 Ext. 247

Donations

As a non-profit organization, we welcome gifts of all sizes. You may make a tax-deductible contribution by visiting www.dakc.us or mailing your contribution to:

DAKC (Disability Advocates of Kent County)
3600 Camelot Drive SE
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Join Us

Your gifts of time and resources can help us change everything for the better.