



The Rapid Reporter

News and Updates from The Rapid

THE RAPID

The Rapid serves Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, and Wyoming

Winter 2009

Rapid Stories

Silver Line

Rapid transit service is proposed for Greater Grand Rapids!

Ride Along

An interview with two dedicated Rapid commuters.

Grand Valley

Learning the value of public transportation.

On Board

A report from Rapid CEO Peter Varga.

Amway Takes The GreenRide

How carpooling saves employees money while supporting the environment.



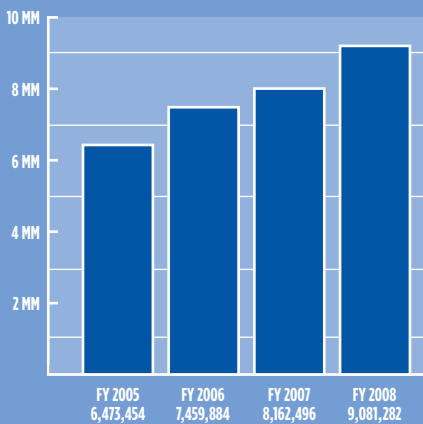
The Rapid is one of 10 Finalists for the Grand Rapids Business Journal's Newsmaker of the Year

Bus rapid transit seen as economic catalyst

"Local civic and business leaders and developers anticipate that the bus rapid transit line scheduled to open in summer 2012 will be a catalyst for new jobs in the three-city area it serves and that its 19 station stops will be sweet spots for development."

- Anne Bond Emrich, January 2009

Ridership Continues to Break Records



The Rapid provided more than 9 million rides in the last year — an increase of over 11% from the previous year. Our fourth year in a row of record-breaking ridership. West Michigan continues to far exceed the national rate of transit ridership growth.



The Rapid Wins National Transit Advertising Award For Radio Campaign

The Rapid earned a First Place Award in the 29th Annual AdWheel Awards competition for Electronic Media - Radio Advertisement.

The Rapid competes with transit systems that provide between 4 and 30 million passenger trips annually including cities such as Indianapolis and Richmond. Submissions were evaluated on clarity of message, production quality, attention-getting qualities, overall impact and impression, and effectiveness.

The winning :60 spot, titled "Honked Off" playfully communicates how public transportation offers an alternative to soaring gas prices in metro Grand Rapids.



SILVER LINE RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM PROPOSED

After nearly five years of research and planning, the Grand Rapids metropolitan area is poised to introduce a system that will change the way residents move in the region.

The proposed line would run from 60th Street north through downtown, linking existing development at both ends of the 10-mile corridor. It will serve the Medical Mile on Michigan Street, including the Van Andel Institute, Spectrum Health Downtown Campus, the Meijer Heart Center, Helen DeVos Children's Hospital, Grand Valley State University's medical campus, the recently opened Lack's Cancer Center, the soon to open MSU Medical School. Overall, the proposed line would include hospitals, research facilities, five college campuses, downtown business and entertainment venues as well as businesses in Kentwood and Wyoming. Studies have shown that the Silver Line would reduce the need for parking downtown and would reduce congestion during rush on US-131.

While serving the growing Grand Rapids downtown area at the north end of the route, the Silver Line has equal capacity for expanding economic potential in Kentwood. The proposed route includes Silver Line stations at key Division Avenue intersections - 28th, 36th, 44th and 54th streets.

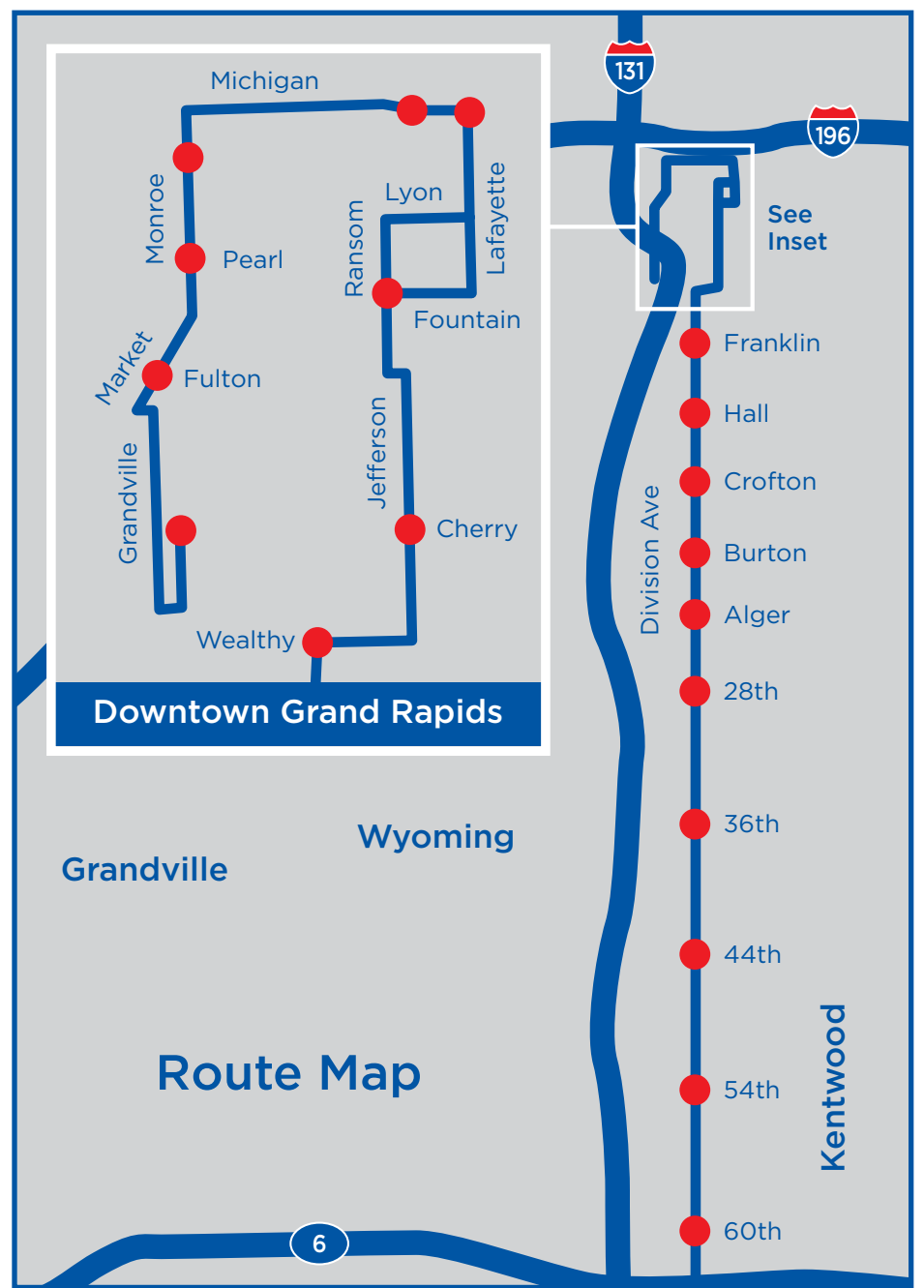
Voters will vote May 5 on a millage increase to provide a portion of the operating funds for the new system.

The Rapid transit board voted 15 to 0 to place the 0.16-mil increase on a May 5 ballot for voters in Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker and Wyoming. The increase would raise approximately \$1.7 million in the first year for operating costs. Fares and state operating funds would pay for the rest of the operating costs.

The federal government has set aside \$32 million for the project and the state has pledged an additional \$8 million. However, the federal monies are only available at this time and, therefore, this presents the only opportunity to capture these monies.

Based on comparable projects throughout the country, BRT installations like the Silver Line can be catalysts for new jobs and investments along the corridor. Studies have shown that the stations like those that The Rapid is proposing have potential to spur further development. This means that each of the 19 planned stations is fertile ground for future development - many in areas in need of revitalization.

Over 400 new and permanent jobs (direct and indirect) may be created, with average annual wages of \$37,000. The 0.16-mil tax increase would cost the owner of a \$150,000 home approximately \$12 a year starting 2012, the first year of the increase. The total annual wage creation of the Silver Line is estimated to be \$14,985,000. Overall, the economic return on investment is estimated at 400%.



MAY 5 TRANSIT MILLAGE BALLOT QUESTION

The ballot proposal for approval of this millage will read as follows:

Shall *The Rapid* (Interurban Transit Partnership) levy a tax for public transportation purposes of up to 1.28 mills beginning in 2012? This millage would be a renewal of the 1.12 mills approved by the voters in 2007 and an addition of 0.16 mills. The 1.28 mills would replace the last year of the current millage for the year 2012. At least 0.16 mills would be used only for the Bus Rapid Transit ("BRT") project currently being planned by *The Rapid* for implementation in 2012. This millage would cover a period of five (5) years, beginning in the year 2012 and continuing through 2016. It would be levied on the taxable value of all taxable property in *The Rapid's* district (the six cities of East Grand Rapids, Grandville, Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Walker and Wyoming). This millage is estimated to raise \$13,967,446 in its first year.

Tax increment revenues from this millage will be disbursed to each of the following tax increment authorities:

City of Grand Rapids:
Downtown Development Authority, Monroe North Tax Increment Finance Authority, Smartzone Local Development Finance Authority and Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

City of Grandville:
Downtown Development Authority

City of Walker:
Downtown Development Authority and Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

City of Wyoming:
Downtown Development Authority and Local Development Finance Authority



ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SILVER LINE

Q: What is BRT?

A: Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) provides fast, frequent, and direct service within a well-defined corridor. The Silver Line will be like a light rail system on wheels, speeding commuters north and south on Division Avenue from 60th Street to Michigan Avenue, looping through the busiest part of Downtown Grand Rapids, stopping at 19 designated stations. In addition, it will connect with key routes of the current Rapid bus system.

Q: What could I expect when I step onboard a Silver Line bus?

A: Expect faster travel times, reduced transfers, improved vehicle and system comforts, along with precise arrival times and more frequent service. Silver Line buses will feature new suspension technology that reduces sway to increase riding comfort. Electronic payment systems ease rider flow on and off the bus. The entire system and riding experience is designed around your comfort, convenience, and safe and timely arrival.

Q: What other U.S. cities have a system like this?

A: There are BRT systems either in full operation or in test programs in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Miami, Kansas City, Chicago, Cleveland, and Las Vegas. And more cities are exploring BRT as the demand for more efficient and economical transportation alternatives grows. The economic viability of the systems has already been verified. The impact and value of BRT in revitalizing American cities is something that is making them very popular in stimulating growth and local economies.

Q: How can BRT impact the growth of a business corridor?

A: First, the buses maintain and even

increase people flowing through a business corridor without increasing vehicle traffic. Second, each BRT station is a potential hub of development and revitalization, as other cities have quickly learned. Third, traditional businesses such as retailers count on smooth efficient traffic flow to attract customers. Again, as other cities have found, a BRT system such as the Silver Line provides a steady, dependable flow of potential customers throughout the corridor, particularly near stations.

Q: Is our BRT a better choice than a light rail system?

A: We studied the success of similar BRT systems in cities that had explored light rail options. In Cleveland the light rail system was estimated to cost \$900 million. The BRT system came in at \$200 million. Other cities like New York, and now Chicago, that already have extensive mass transit rail system infrastructures in place have added BRT to their mix of mass transit options. Chicago will start running a pilot BRT program early next year to test the system before rolling out a full BRT program in four designated high-traffic corridors by 2010.

Q: Why choose Division Avenue for the Silver Line?

A: The Division Avenue corridor was chosen after a very intense analysis — it represents the best combination of current ridership, economic development potential, public input, travel time savings, and population and job growth projections among other factors. Located parallel to US-131 as it weaves through the metropolitan area, the Division Avenue Silver Line draws on high volume traffic, with the potential of reducing vehicle counts on the expressway during morning and evening rush hours. And the Division Avenue corridor is ideally placed to tie communities such as Wyoming and South

Kentwood to the growth of Downtown Grand Rapids, while making the most of an area that is ripe for reinvestment and economic development.

Q: How is the Silver Line different than the buses now traveling on Division Avenue?

A: Silver Line buses will operate primarily in dedicated bus-only lanes during peak hours, resulting in higher speeds and much shorter travel times between stations. The Silver Line uses intelligent transportation system (ITS) applications such as transit signal priority, which allows BRT to travel through intersections more quickly than general traffic. State-of-the-art technology reigns, with electronic payment to speed fare collection, real-time arrival travel information, and advanced communication systems for faster and more convenient trips. Silver Line buses are modern, clean, quiet, high-efficiency vehicles that use hybrid propulsion drive systems to reduce fuel consumption and emissions.

Q: Where will the Silver Line pick up and drop off passengers?

A: The Silver Line will use stations rather than stops, 19 of them as the route is now planned. Stations are spaced from 1/2 mile to 1 mile apart and will feature roofs, lighting, and electronic fare collection for quick, easy, level boarding on the low-floor buses. This, in conjunction with wide entry and exit doors, allows Silver Line buses to enter and exit stations quickly.

Q: How many Silver Line buses will be in service each day?

A: There will be 8 hybrid electric buses serving 19 stops on the 9.87-mile route, with a service frequency of 10 minutes during peak hours and 15 minutes off-peak.

Q: How much of the community can be served by the Silver Line?

A: Located parallel to US-131, the Silver Line is strategically placed to serve the growing needs of the region, directly linking communities such as Kentwood and Wyoming south to Downtown Grand Rapids and serving Grandville, Walker and East Grand Rapids with traditional bus routes that connect to the new line. The Silver Line puts medical centers in and around downtown, research facilities on “Medical Mile,” five college campuses, and downtown venues such as DeVos Place, Van Andel Arena and Rapid Central Station within reach of thousands of area residents — without the requirement of private vehicles.

Q: What value will the Silver Line add to the community at large?

A: Beyond easing traffic, reducing air pollution, and enhancing the ability to move about in the metro area, the Silver Line will have a tremendous economic impact on the region. First, it will create both temporary and permanent construction, technical, and professional jobs. Roadway and station construction will add significant employment opportunities, as will the service jobs needed to run the line. Using an estimate of 405 permanent jobs and an average annual wage of \$37,000 per job, the total annual wage creation will be almost \$15 million. Second, as development kicks in along the corridor, we estimate that return on Silver Line investment could be as high as 400%. According to a University of Michigan study the return on investment of the BRT in Cleveland has been estimated at a 1000%. In cities like Kansas City and York, Ontario, the return on investment was somewhere between 300% and 400%.

ALONG FOR THE RIDE

A better way to work on 28th Street

The hustle and bustle of 28th Street extends from Cascade to Grandville with thousands of vehicles flowing like a river of steel and light. They pass or pull into hundreds of retail stores, a few malls, auto dealerships, movie theaters, grocery stores, and home improvement centers — and an endless collection of restaurants.

Those hundreds of stores demand thousands of employees to operate them. And for a growing number of workers on 28th Street, and around the area, *The Rapid* has become the preferred transportation solution to get to and from work. They do it to avoid some of the area’s most heavily traveled streets, save money, but also connect with the community around them.

Heather Barnes and Denise Taylor work at Schuler Books located on 28th Street, just east of Breton Street. Both depend on *The Rapid* to get to them to work and home again, on a regular basis.

Heather sold her car after moving back to Michigan from living in Los Angeles and Denver. While living in Denver she used the RTD (Regional Transportation District) bus and light rail system to commute to work and move around the city. “That was a very, very good system,” Heather remembers. It was also an experience that contributed to her decision to forego car ownership and opt for public transportation when she returned to Michigan.

For Denise Taylor, her discovery of the convenience and cost savings of riding *The Rapid* came by a less calculated decision.

“I started riding the bus when my car suddenly died. After the car was fixed I started thinking, ‘What do I really need a car for?’ I had gotten used to riding *The Rapid* pretty quickly. I learned the routes and started using it to commute to work and go places all over town.”

Denise has found the system continues to

show improvements. New scheduling and routes continue to give her the reliability and convenience that suit her lifestyle. It’s changed her attitude about using public transportation and opened her eyes to the many advantages of riding *The Rapid*.

“The new schedule has helped me out a lot. Not just getting to and from work, but going other places as well. When I have time, I take the bus to Celebration Cinema and catch a movie before going to work. It’s fun.”

“Since I’ve been riding, I’ve talked all sorts of people into using the bus,” says Denise. “I’ve also noticed that younger professionals are using the bus to commute to work.” For Heather, riding *The Rapid* not only provides a great way to get around town it also gives her a personal time-out from the demands and grind of everyday life. “I really like riding the bus,” says Heather. “It’s great ‘alone’ time for me. I download podcasts and listen to them on the way to work. It’s my way of getting the news.”

Improved scheduling, new buses, and her own investment in personal entertainment technology all may have improved the convenience and comfort of the ride, but the sense of community experienced on *The Rapid* is something extra she experiences

every time she steps on a bus.

“The drivers get to know you,” says Heather. “They’ve gotten to know me, that’s for sure. The driver on the #5 Route even knows what kind of a job I’m going to do that day based on the time I ride the bus. I even had a driver stop and pick me up one day when I was running late.”

“I’m very pleased with *The Rapid* and how I’m treated,” says Denise. “I’ve ridden the systems in New York, Chicago, and even in Paris. Nobody on any of those buses or trains ever says ‘thank you’ or even ‘hello’ like they do here.”

In addition to the sense of community on *The Rapid*, both Heather and Denise feel like they’re making a statement and doing something for the environment, and their community by riding *The Rapid*.

“We feel like we’re doing our part,” says Denise.

Heather feels that riding *The Rapid* is something she can do to personally to protect the environment by having one less car on the road. “I work at the Blandford Nature Center and a book store. Of course I’m concerned with the environment! Even if I had a car I’d still ride the bus.”



Grand Valley State University student and Rapid rider SaSha Jones

GVSU LEARNS THE VALUE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Students learn some of their most valuable lessons outside of the classroom. That's never been more true than it is today at Grand Valley State University, where every day thousands of students are learning first-hand about the benefits of mass transit.

"Even with the price of gas going down it (*The Rapid*) has become habitual," says GVSU Senior Selma Tucker. "I really have enjoyed it. Right now I think it would be difficult to go somewhere if I couldn't use the bus."

Statistics are showing that more students than ever before are taking advantage of *The Rapid* services. They cite the convenience and cost savings, as well as the opportunity of dramatically reduce their carbon footprint by using public transportation. In 2007-2008, nearly two million rides were completed by GVSU students and staff.

Jim Bachmeier, Associate Vice President for Business and Finance, and Lisa Haynes, Assistant Vice President of Operations for the Pew Campus and Regional Centers, are two key leadership forces at the University who helped make the GVSU bus system such a success with students — and the surrounding community.

Bachmeier confirms there is a unique partnership with *The Rapid* that has resulted in the growth of the GVSU program in recent years.

"If buses were a color, that's the color I'd bleed," says Bachmeier when asked for his feelings about public transportation. "First and foremost I'm an advocate of mass transit."

"I think we're seeing a new generation of bus riders with the GVSU bus system. When I was younger I never even thought about riding the bus. But times have changed. More and more they're hopping on a bus to ride between campuses. We now have 12,000 to 17,000 student rides taken every day. They are learning that it's the way to get everywhere today."

While the numbers of rides being tabulated today are impressive, it wasn't always this way. In fact getting GVSU up to speed took dedication, and some hope and faith.

"For six or seven years we had about 100,000 rides a year on the system," recalls Bachmeier. "One bus ran between the campus and city, once an hour. Since ridership was low, it was hard to get a virtuous cycle going (referring to the sustainability of the system — more buses and improved frequency of ride times draws more riders into the system creating a demand for more buses and even greater frequency of rides and stops).

"It took a while to get the cycle going, but we believed that if we built the system 'they will come' — and they did. There are a lot of people responsible for its success."

Back in 2000 Lisa Haynes played a central role in creating a partnership with *The Rapid* that eventually led to the development of the model.

"We sat down with *The Rapid* and began working on a plan that would meet all of our needs," said Haynes. "We knew we were going to need a more comprehensive transportation system to

serve our students once we opened the DeVos Center downtown. We talked to students and analyzed what their needs and concerns were and worked with *The Rapid* to meet those needs. We wanted students to feel they were at a true University with a transportation system that reflected our status."

Providing two million rides, between the Allendale campus and downtown Grand Rapids is only part of the benefits provided by the system. The impact of the GVSU bus system reached beyond the obvious convenience benefits for GVSU students and spread to creating positive influences on the surrounding community, local traffic flow, the environment, fuel usage, infrastructure, and personal and public economies and budgets.

"When you think about it we're taking over 10,000 cars off the road with our system," says Bachmeier. "Can you imagine M-45 with 10,000 more cars on it every day?"

With students driving less there are not only fewer cars on the road, there's less fuel being consumed. And there's also significant savings through lower car maintenance and additional costs like insurance and parking permits.

GVSU has crunched the numbers on the money saved by students on auto and fuel costs to reveal some eye-popping statistics. Based on 2 million rides this year, students will save approximately \$11.6 million in auto costs. They will also be using 1.3 million fewer gallons of gasoline, which amounts to a total savings of over \$4 million dollars on gasoline alone. Students who would like to see what their personal savings will be by using *The Rapid* can visit the GVSU website and go to the Bus Ride section for a personal savings calculator.

GVSU students also enjoy free usage on *The Rapid* thanks to the school's investment in the system. For the school there's also a beneficial return on that investment by reducing the school's need to accommodate more cars with far-flung parking facilities that consume precious land and space — which can be better used for the University's growing on-campus housing.

"While the University spends a considerable amount on the system, it pays for itself," said Bachmeier. "For every dollar we spend on the system we

housing structure on campus. We built it on space previously used for parking. And we didn't need to build another parking lot to replace it. Every parking lot on campus right now is a potential building site. In the old model you'd have to keep building parking lots further and further away from classrooms and housing. As we consume parking spots it also minimizes pressure on tuition rates in addition to creating a more aesthetically pleasing campus. There's also a great convenience factor for our students. While you can't get 10,000 cars near your classroom, a bus can take you right to the front door."

Bachmeier admits that riding *The Rapid* isn't for everyone, and some people still need access to a car.

"I tell people who drive a car that they need to hug the bus riders. If it weren't for them they would have to park out in the south forty. I want them to understand that public transportation isn't just for the people riding the bus, but for everyone — even those driving a car."

Reducing the overall impact on the environment is another issue that has high-priority with today's college students. Bachmeier finds that the subject of sustainability is one that is continually on the table at the Student Senate meetings he attends.

Along with providing calculations on fuel savings and automobile costs, the GVSU website also offers students the ability to calculate the amount of greenhouse gas emissions they're creating, or eliminating, by the choices they make in their lifestyle. You can visit the GVSU website and try the calculation yourself.

Selma Tucker, the senior who rides *The Rapid* on a daily basis to and from school, as well as to his internship with the City of Grand Rapids, finds many good reasons for riding the bus. Becoming a dedicated user of public transportation for the GVSU senior has been a progressive experience.

"Before I moved here I was pretty good about riding the bus. If I was in a pinch I'd drive the car. But then it got to be a political statement about protecting the environment and saving gas."

After studying in London, England, Tucker had his eyes opened to a whole new perspective on the use of public transportation.



save the student three. We pay for *The Rapid* routes and the students pay us back through their tuition. In the end it saves us money. Even though we charge \$300 a year for a campus parking permit it still costs the school more than that to have all those cars on campus every day. In fact, we recently opened a new

"It was the longest time I had ever gone without driving," recalls Tucker. "I loved it! Not having to battle traffic, not having to park, not having to buy gasoline! I also got to see how the Europeans lived and how they used public transportation. It was such a part of their lives. I thought 'I can do that too.'"

ON BOARD THE RAPID

By Peter Varga, CEO

In 1998, *The Rapid* worked with The Grand Valley Metropolitan Council to tackle the development of a strategic public transportation plan. A task force called Mobile Metro 2020 was formed, leveraging a broad-based group of community leaders and volunteers dedicated to developing a strategy that would shape the long-term direction of the region's public transportation.

Our goal was to create a plan that would meet the immediate needs of the Grand Rapids metro area and also guide future expansion as the region grows. Essential to the development of the plan was intense public participation throughout the process. The community helped create a strategy that allowed for growth without jeopardizing the qualities that attracted growth in the first place.

Because the ability to move people and goods effectively in and through the region is critical to a thriving economy, resources were focused on employment-related transportation. We were also challenged to provide service to a diverse user base including senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and individuals without cars. It was also very clear that traffic in West Michigan would only become more congested over time, resulting in poorer air quality, increased travel times, and lower productivity.

Since the adoption of the plan, *The Rapid* has worked aggressively to implement it in the spirit in which it was envisioned. The groundwork has been laid for investments that will occur over the next few years. We continue to use the vision and input the community



first provided as our guide. Ten years later, we're happy to provide an update that shows our progress towards implementing the community's priorities. We're committed to operating a system that makes Greater Grand Rapids a better place to live and work. We're building a system that will continue to grow as vibrantly as the area itself.

Now we're on the cusp of imagining the next phase of public transportation for Grand Rapids. It will be done with the same spirit as the previous ten years — with a commitment to envisioning a community made better by a comprehensive public transportation system. We invite you to join us on the journey.



AMWAY TAKES THE GREENRIDE

As a global business giant and a major local employer, Amway always seeks to lead by example. Their efforts to integrate sustainability into their offerings extend to their local operations here in West Michigan where thousands of employees make their home throughout the region.

To provide a more cost effective and environmentally responsible way to commute to and from work, Amway sought to offer transportation assistance solutions to its employees during the past year.

It started with Eric Van Dellen, Sustainability Program Manager for Amway. Through his involvement with the West Michigan Sustainability Forum, Van Dellen and other Forum members began talking about ways they could reduce the number of cars on the road. They began thinking about alternative transportation options that might be offered as viable solutions.

GreenRide helps find carpooling partners by searching for others who live near one individual and have similar commute schedules. Companies can also choose to partner with *The Rapid* to offer a business-specific carpooling program to their employees.

Kevin Wisselink, coordinator of the GreenRide and RapidVan programs for *The Rapid*, looked at Amway's need to create an efficient ride sharing program that would best serve the needs of the company and its employees. Wisselink and *The Rapid* conducted a zip code analysis of Amway employees and designed a program that would fit their needs.

"We designed a GreenRide program so that everyone at Amway could get involved," said Wisselink. "It's a very low cost program to operate and essentially has no costs for the employees who use it."

program has grown. Between November and mid-January, the pool of participants has grown from 347 to nearly 400 people now carpooling to work every day — and even more are expected to join in the future.

“We designed a GreenRide program so that everyone at Amway could get involved. It's a very low cost program to operate and essentially has no costs for the employees who use it.”

— Kevin Wisselink, Coordinator, The Rapid

From Amway's standpoint, the program goes beyond just saving employees money on fuel and other associated commuting costs. The environmental impact of programs like GreenRide obviously rate high on the company's list of priorities today. Van Dellen says that the program has already had a dramatic effect on the local environment.

"Since we launched the GreenRide program on Earth Day last April we have seen a savings of up to 6,000 commuter miles made by our employees," says Van Dellen. "That translates into a reduction of 2.5 million pounds of CO₂ green house gases. We also think this is good for our reputation as a company that supports a real sustainability platform. Today, everybody says they are 'green' but we really practice what we preach. Plus it's an added benefit for our employees."

In addition to impacting the environment by reducing green house gases, the GreenRide program also comes down to common sense, and dollars and cents for the Amway employees who use the program on a day-to-day basis.

Cathy Baker, a software quality engineer at Amway, lives in North Muskegon and joined the GreenRide program to save money on a commute that was close to an hour drive each way.

"The biggest thing was saving money on gas," said Baker. "I started carpooling right after I saw the GreenRide advertised at work. Gas was \$4 dollars a gallon!"

While gas prices may have become more reasonable for the time being, the overwhelming benefits of using the GreenRide program have kept her involved.

"My drive to the carpool lot is only 20 minutes. The drive to work used to be 60 minutes each way," says Baker. "Now I don't have to drive every day. I can sit and read on the way to work. That's nice. I really like that."

Baker shares her ride to work with six

other Amway employees who she became connected with through the GreenRide program. By participating in the program Baker has reduced her need to drive to work only three times, every two weeks.

"I'll drive once one week, and then twice the next," she says. "The scheduling has been handled by one of the members of our group. It's really been enjoyable to drive with different people from our department. There were enough of us living on the west coast to fill our carpool group. It's really been a lot of fun."

In fact there have been enough Amway employees participating in the GreenRide program living on the west coast that Baker says there are two different groups leaving from the Muskegon carpool lot on a daily basis.

In addition to having some good company on the way to work, and a choice of driving times, plus saving a lot of money on gas — and being able to relax on the way to work with a good book — she finds there's one more significant advantage to carpooling to work.

"We have reserved parking for carpoolers at work," she says. "It's a designated spot that's closer than if you drove to work, where parking is usually first-come, first-serve."

"It's just another little perk of using GreenRide," says Baker.

Van Dellen also noted the GreenRide program provided something 'extra' for their employees. "We are a very employee-focused company," he said. "We're always looking for ways to make their lives more comfortable and more profitable — as well as supporting our environmental programs."

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— Cathy Baker

While the GreenRide carpooling program is off to a flying start at Amway, there may be even more opportunities and new alternatives in transportation coming down the road for the company.

"As we look at the acceptance and success of this program, we may move on to other programs as well," says Van Dellen. "Parking, traffic, and the younger people who are now using *The Rapid* are starting to shift our perspective on mass transportation. It is a cultural change, but it's coming."



"*The Rapid* had presented their programs at a Sustainability Forum meeting," recalls Van Dellen. "I called them and they came in and made a presentation. I wanted to know what they could offer other than buses. I was pleased to see all the other transportation programs they had. I really didn't know they had all those options. After the presentation I thought that the GreenRide® program could be a great option for our company."

The Rapid and GreenRide offer direct assistance, information, and planning support to companies to develop cost effective and efficient carpooling and vanpooling programs — programs very much like the one that Amway now has successfully put in place. *The Rapid* leverages GreenRide to connect potential carpoolers seeking ridesharing partners. GreenRide is a web-based application available via *The Rapid's* website that helps individuals find transportation alternatives in the Greater Grand Rapids metro area and surrounding counties including Allegan, Kent, and Ottawa.

Amway's Van Dellen saw the carpooling program outlined by *The Rapid* as the best way to respond to the company's desire for an alternative, 'greener' solution for commuting employees.

"Amway is one of the better employers in the area," said Van Dellen, "so we attract people from all over the West Michigan area who drive here to work. One of the first things that *The Rapid* did was construct a zip code map that showed us exactly where our employees lived. That really led us to the ridesharing option. We found a lot of our employees don't live in the City of Grand Rapids. They lived all over the place. So we really thought that ride sharing would be the most effective solution.

"We provide the direction, but they (Amway) were the ones that took the lead and made the program work," says Wisselink.

Since launching the GreenRide program, the number of employee participants has increased steadily as the awareness of the