



# The Rapid Reporter

News and Updates from The Rapid

THE RAPID

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

Spring 2011



## ARTPRIZE ROLLED WITH HELP FROM THE RAPID

Accommodating the hundreds of thousands of visitors drawn to ArtPrize is a hands-on lesson in logistics as many people learned the last two years.

The Rapid again partnered with Meijer Inc. to use several store lots as "park and ride" points. Wristband holders were able to ride for free throughout the two-and-a-half-week event. Others chose to pay regular fares to skip the traffic and parking congestion. At least 48,000 rides were provided to wristband holders. The ridership figure does not include people who paid regular fares.

For many riders their trip to ArtPrize was their first-ever Rapid experience. Drivers and rider "veterans" were able to provide assistance when necessary.

## BY THE NUMBERS

Ridership continues to grow, but The Rapid continues to maintain its budget.

The Rapid's ridership continues to grow as more area residents explore ways to shrink their weekly fuel bills, reduce the time they spend in traffic and avoid the hassle of finding a parking spot.

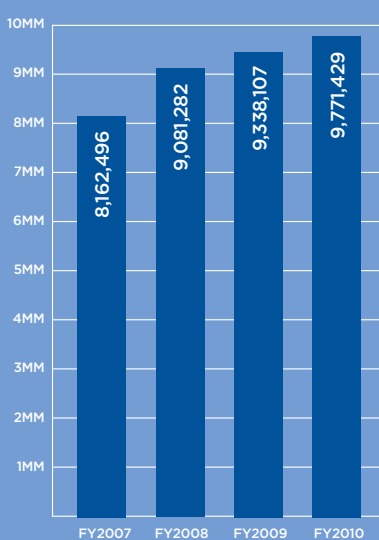
More than 9.7 million rides were taken on The Rapid last year. For the first time this fall, we had consecutive 1 million+ rides each month in September and October.

**"This service year was even busier; there were more people on all buses."**

"ArtPrize had a positive impact, and returning GVSU students certainly helped in September, but we had those same relationships last year as well," said Jennifer Kalczuk, manager of communications and external relations for The Rapid.

"This service year was even busier; there were more people on all buses. It's likely a combination of things: people catching a bus for ArtPrize may be converting once they see how easy it is to get around on The Rapid; higher gas prices are probably a factor; 'The Fix on 96' highway construction made it more difficult to get in and out of the city by car...all these things helped introduce more people to The Rapid."

### ANNUAL RIDERSHIP



## TRANSIT MASTER PLAN'S FIRST FOCUS IS IMPROVING RIDER CONVENIENCE

Longer service hours, better frequency, more weekend service, and new routes are proposed.

Last July, The Rapid Board of Directors unanimously adopted a new Transit Master Plan for The Rapid. "The People's Plan" represents a 20-year roadmap for public transportation in community areas served by The Rapid. It is a reflection of the Metro Mobile 2030 Task Force, community and business leaders, seniors, students, commuters, and riders and non-riders all working together to create a vision for public transportation.

The plan outlines an ambitious "Preferred Scenario" that includes service and frequency improvements, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in two corridors, a Regional Express Bus program, and a modern streetcar starter network that would connect the west side, downtown Grand Rapids and Medical Mile, thereby laying the foundation for future streetcar expansion projects (e.g., West Grand and East Grand Rapids). The Preferred Scenario also includes improvements to the GO!Bus system.

The first phase of implementation depends on the successful passage of a millage proposal, which is on the May 3rd ballot in East Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, and Wyoming. This would fund later weekday service hours, better frequency to shorten wait times and improve transfers, add more weekend service, and add new service by connecting Route 50/Campus Connector to Rapid Central Station; introducing Route 19 which would bridge multiple routes

via Fuller Avenue and provide new transfer opportunities between Route 2/ Kalamazoo, Route 5 /Wealthy, Route 6/ Eastown, Route 13/ Michigan, and Route 14/ East Fulton; and starting BRT service on the Division Corridor and through downtown that would directly serve downtown Grand Rapids, Medical Mile, and Grand Rapids Community College among other employment destinations.

The number of rides continues to climb each year and The Rapid is eager to expand service to meet demand while making the transit system even more attractive to potential riders. Enhancing service on existing routes is a logical first step toward meeting the objectives of the new Transit Master Plan, and these improvements also topped the list of "must-haves" compiled during community meetings and surveys.

### Shorter waits, longer hours.

Under the proposal, the number of routes with 15-minute peak service would double, welcome news for anyone on a tight schedule. It would also extend hours of operation and add more Saturday service, easing the lives of those who rely on it to get to weekend jobs, religious services, or shopping.

"When we asked the community what changes they most wanted to see, they gave us a list that boiled down to about 15 things," said Casey Dutmer, Transit Master Plan vice-chairman. "Number one

was increased service frequency and number two was extended service hours. That's why you see them first on the list for service improvements."

To read the entire plan, visit [www.rapidtmp.org](http://www.rapidtmp.org)

### The improvements proposed for Phase 1 of the 20-year plan are:

- Enhance weekday service so that all routes run at least every 30 minutes (5:00 a.m. - 7:15 p.m.).
- Connect Route 50, GVSU's main route on Lake Michigan Drive, to Rapid Central Station to increase access and reduce the need for transfers.
- Extend hours so that all routes run until 11:15 p.m. weekday evenings (17 out of 21 routes will run every 30 minutes).
- The seven busiest routes will have 30-minute service until 12:15 a.m.
- Double the number of routes with 15-minute service during morning and afternoon commute hours.
- Run all routes (except Route 17 - Woodland/Airport) until 10:00 p.m. on Saturday evenings.
- Operate BRT express service serving Division Avenue, Medical Mile, and downtown Grand Rapids.



## MAY 3 TRANSIT MILLAGE BALLOT QUESTION

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

May The Rapid (Interurban Transit Partnership) levy a tax of up to 1.47 mills beginning in 2011 for continuation of current services, service improvements based on the Transit Master Plan, and other public transportation purposes? This millage would replace the 1.12 mills

approved by the voters in 2007 and would add 0.35 mills. This millage would cover seven years, beginning in the year 2011 and continuing through 2017. 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). The Rapid estimates that this millage would raise \$15,596,497 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: Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, Downtown Development Authority, Madison Square Corridor Improvement District Authority, Monroe North Tax Increment

Finance Authority, Smartzone Local Development Finance Authority, Uptown Corridor Improvement District Authority

City of Grandville: Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, Downtown Development Authority

City of Kentwood: Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

City of Walker: Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, Downtown Development Authority

City of Wyoming: Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, Downtown Development Authority, Local Development Finance Authority



# FACTS & FIGURES

Efficiency and effectiveness to keep *The Rapid* — and the Grand Rapids metro area — moving.

- Ridership has more than doubled since 2000. In 2010, *The Rapid* provided over 9.7 million rides, and the system is on pace to top 10 million rides in 2011 (in 2000, 4.5 million rides were provided).
- Daily weekday ridership averages 40,000. During the blizzard on February 2, *The Rapid's* buses were on the road and gave over 29,000 rides, without the student ridership segment that is usually represented. Essential personnel, such as hospital workers, had options because of our service.
- In September and October of last year, area residents took over 1 million rides each month (in November, they took 992,000).
- Based on surveys of riders, 75% use public transportation to get to and from work. Lack of reliable, economical transportation is a barrier to many people trying to transition off public assistance. Giving people tools to be successful is essential to reducing welfare costs.
- Based on an economic model developed for MDOT, the current operating investment in *The Rapid* creates 754 jobs and returns more than \$88 million to the economy. If the millage increase passes, these numbers jump to 829 jobs and over \$97 million in economic output.
- *The Rapid's* cost per passenger is \$3.00. The average among peer systems (similar service area and population—400,000-500,000) is \$4.26. *The Rapid's* average revenue recovery from fares and contracts on regular routes is 33%.
- *The Rapid's* current property tax millage rate is 1.12 mills. A 0.35 increase brings that to 1.47 mills. The current rate in Lansing is 3.01 mills, Ann Arbor is 2.5 mills, and Saginaw is 3.00 mills.
- Local and municipal governments everywhere are considering consolidation and regionalization to become more efficient with the use of taxpayer dollars. *The Rapid* has been operating as a nationally recognized, efficient, regionalized system providing public transportation service across six different municipalities since the year 2000.
- Due to fiscally conservative budgeting, *The Rapid* has not had to raise fares or cut service as many transit systems across the country did over the last few years, focusing instead on internal cost savings.
- Major capital projects like Rapid Central Station and the Wealthy Operations Center renovation boost the return of federal dollars to our area and provide both temporary and permanent jobs. The Christman Company reports 350 jobs to date on the Wealthy Center Project. Without these projects, our federal tax dollars would benefit other areas around the country.
- Since *The Rapid* was created, we have had a balanced budget each year. Various cost cutting measures have been put into place over time, including:
  - Switching from a defined benefit to a defined contribution program for administrative employees over 10 years ago
  - Reducing the number of managerial positions
  - Aggressively managing overtime for bus operators
  - Limiting health insurance plans and passing on more costs to employees
  - Dramatically reducing workmans' comp claims
  - Contracting with private business to perform security, bus cleaning and fueling, and all of our demand response services

## 2010 BUDGET SUMMARY

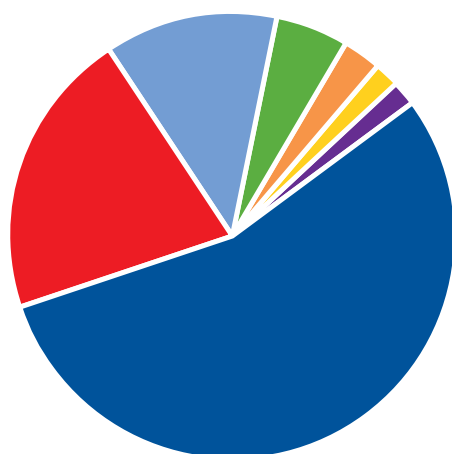
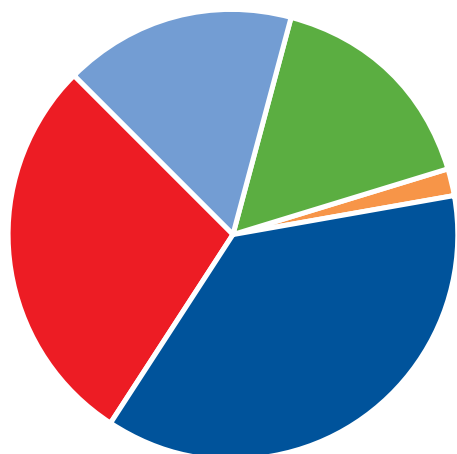
With projected reduced revenue for 2010, *The Rapid* developed—and lived within—a budget that continues to provide all services without service cuts or fare

increases. To that end, *The Rapid* will continue to critically examine every aspect of our operation in an effort to reduce costs within our control.

### FY 2010 Operating Budget Oct 2009-Sept 2010

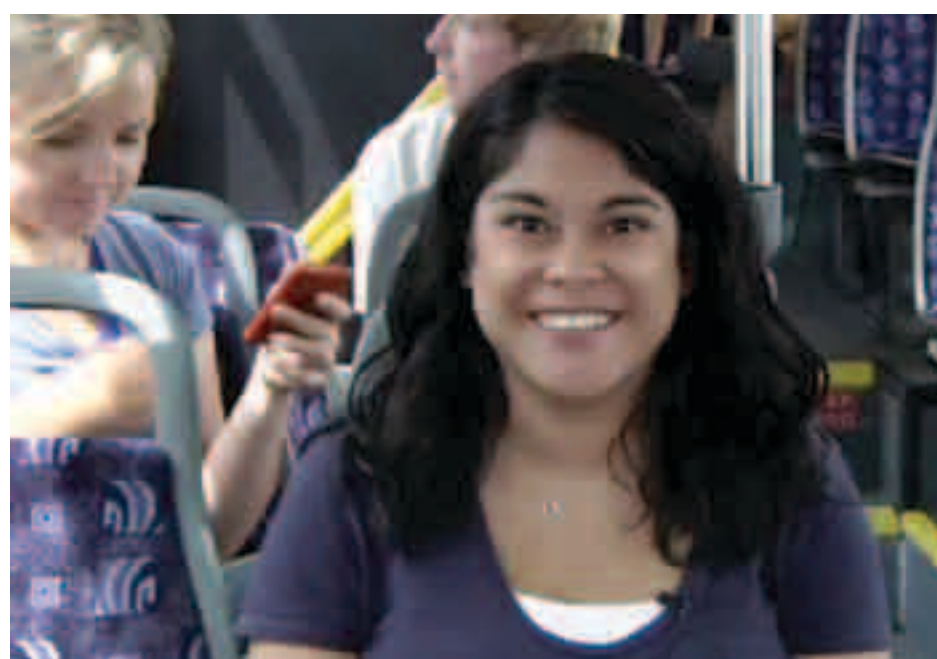
**Total Revenues**  
\$32,922,383

**Total Expenses**  
\$32,922,383



- Property Taxes – 37%
- State Operating Assistance – 28.5%
- Contracted Services – 16.5%
- Fares – 16.3%
- Other – 1.7%

- Labor & Fringes – 55.1%
- Contracted Services – 20.8%
- Materials & Supplies – 12.5%
- Services – 5.3%
- Casualty & Liability – 2.8%
- Utilities – 1.8%
- Other – 1.7%



## NO CAR. NO PROBLEM.

A young Grand Rapids professional demonstrates life without an automobile.

Put Amanda Chatel behind the wheel of a *Rapid* bus — any route, any time of day — and she could probably run it just fine using the map inside her head.

“When I first started riding *The Rapid*, I used my cell phone to take pictures of intersections and stops so that I’d remember them. Pretty soon I had my own visual grid of the system. The more routes I rode, the more I learned.”

She laughs as she says this, remarking that she probably sounds “like a real bus geek.” But while she may be more deeply engaged with public transportation

than some, she represents a growing population of riders who have discovered that they can easily get to work, school, church, the malls, restaurants, bars, movie theaters, anywhere they want or need to go — without a car.

That’s not to say that Amanda doesn’t own a car. She does. But a couple of years ago she realized that a traffic ticket was going to add significantly to her car insurance premiums.

“It opened my eyes,” she says. “I looked at where I lived and where I worked and thought, ‘It’s practically a straight shot

on the bus, it won’t take any longer, and I won’t have to pay for parking.’ Kind of a no-brainer.”

She was working as an intern in the City of Grand Rapids mayor’s office at the time, and she remembers her first day on a *Rapid* bus.

“I felt like a self-sufficient adult, like I was in the groove, going somewhere, a professional in the big city. A car would have seemed more like a hindrance.”

Amanda works in Information Technology at Grand Rapids Community College, takes classes there, and leads an active life with friends in the community. She’s constantly in motion, making plans, changing them, adjusting to her professional and personal schedules. That means strategizing, literally mapping out her day against the 26-route system. But it’s not a process that she finds at all constraining.

“Once you’re ridden *The Rapid* for a while you realize there’s a predictable sequence, things that happen on the hour, half hour and at 15-minute intervals. It’s like a rhythm; you don’t even have to think about it.”

There’s also a lot of confidence in the system; it’s not unusual for Amanda to receive a call from a friend, riding another bus, and arrange to meet at a location that requires both her and her friend to transfer to different buses on different routes. They do it with the same ease as someone driving a car.

“It’s really a very secure feeling — freedom, actually. I know *The Rapid* will get me there.”

Amanda’s smart phone is an integral part of her transit “survival kit,” a connection to the many social networking and application tools she uses to plan her day

and adjust her schedule, even while riding the bus. Some of those tools are provided by *The Rapid* to make trip planning as easy as possible.

“I know *The Rapid* will get me there.”

“I check *The Rapid* website only about five or six times a month now,” she says. “Their Facebook page is an easy way to get updates on schedule changes and route detours; I signed up for *Rapid* email updates for even faster notification on changes, but for pure speed, you can’t beat Twitter.”

Amanda has lived in the area for much of her life, but she has also spent time in other cities—Chicago and Minneapolis-St. Paul, for example,—and learned a lot by riding and observing their public transportation systems.

“There are always going to be people who think that riding the bus makes you a second-class citizen. But in larger cities, people from all walks of life share the bus — doctors, lawyers, construction workers, nurses. It’s just another way to get around a city, a more efficient way. And yes, you do see needy people on the bus, people who don’t have the luxury of choosing the bus instead of a car. It keeps you in touch with how lucky you are.”

Amanda says that the longer she rides public transportation, the more strongly she feels about its potential to bring new vitality to cities like Grand Rapids and the communities that surround them.

“Accessible public transportation is a critical part of the infrastructure, and the infrastructure is everything if we’re going to keep the jobs we have and attract new ones.”



## AREA EMPLOYERS ARE INVITED TO GET ON BOARD

While more and more area residents are becoming familiar with the wide range of transportation options offered by *The Rapid*, employers still tend to see it as a point-to-point, bus-only service. That's a perception Kevin Wisselink plans to change.

Wisselink is *The Rapid's* Business Transportation Coordinator; he's been surveying businesses in the region to learn how the state's second largest public transit system can help them grow while enhancing both their profitability and sustainability.

Wisselink is eager to show regional companies the complete menu of *Rapid* transit services — a 26-route bus system that serves six metropolitan communities and travels five million miles per year; a Downtown Area Shuttle (DASH) system that links key downtown office buildings, restaurants, and educational institutions with nine City of Grand Rapids parking lots; West Michigan Rideshare, offering Kent, Ottawa and Allegan Counties a program to connect riders looking for more efficient ways to commute and bringing new ideas to businesses seeking

solutions to improve travel for employees; a home-to-bus stop PASS service that brings distant riders to the route network; County Connection, a 24/7 curb-to-curb transit service to destinations throughout Kent County; and a two-route network that links Gerald R. Ford International Airport to any point served by the system.

"The primary goals of the survey are to place *The Rapid's* transportation resources in the hands of employers and gain information from area employers about transportation services they would like to see made available," says Wisselink.

*The Rapid* would like to create an association of employers interested in finding sustainable transportation solutions for their employees and sharing those ideas; a clearinghouse for up-to-the-minute information that employers could use to increase company-wide sustainability, provide more options to employees, and enhance profitability.

Other community transit systems have successfully partnered with businesses to the benefit of the system, the companies, and, most of all, the employees. Wisselink

pointed to the success of the Connector, a commuter bus system set up by Microsoft® in Redmond, Washington that carries more than 3,650 riders each day. Thousands more ride Metro and Sound Transit using Flex Passes paid for by Microsoft. Other employees carpool, bicycle, and telecommute. A survey indicates that 61% of Microsoft employees previously used a single occupancy vehicle for their commuting needs, which suggests that the Connector program results in a reduction of about 800 vehicle trips and 32,200 miles of travel each day.

Several area employers are ahead of the game. Farmers Insurance, Amway and Perrigo all offer employees ridesharing programs orchestrated by GreenRide, *The Rapid's* on-line carpool matching software. Spectrum also partners with *The Rapid* on a ride-share program that lets Spectrum Health employees/staff ride fixed-route buses to and from work at no cost. A special badge gives employees access to the service and also tracks the number of employees riding *The Rapid* each month.

Transportation is a significant piece of Spectrum's ambitious sustainability program, ranking with design and construction, facilities, environmental services, and sites management.

"Spectrum was quick to grasp two important realities of a comprehensive sustainability program," says Wisselink. "It's an excellent way to contain and reduce costs, and it's a very visible expression of the health system's commitment to a healthier environment for its employees and the community at large."

Amway attracted nearly 400 people to carpool to work every day and as gas prices inch up, more are expected to join. Participants are driving their cars less, saving money, enjoying some extra time as passengers, and taking advantage of a reserved parking area that's close to the offices.

"Amway implemented the GreenRide ridesharing program as a service to its employees and a commitment to a sustainable future," says Eric Van Dellen, Amway's Sustainability Program Manager. "*The Rapid* was very helpful and provided

all the tools needed to implement the program. It is a great service that other West Michigan companies should take advantage of."

While employee interest in public transit or ridesharing programs is likely driven by the rising cost of gasoline, the companies that employ them are looking at other advantages, including a reduced investment in land for parking and the increasingly important corporate goal of sustainability.

"There's no doubt that sustainability is becoming an important topic in the board rooms," says Wisselink. "It's an ideal way for companies to be more 'green' while making the changes that also make them more lean. It can be a win-win for everyone."

Maybe that should be "win-win-win," because companies, employees, and the community all come out ahead. Take the cost of commuting by car, for example — a single occupancy vehicle costs on average about \$9,000 a year to operate. By comparison, a bus pass costs about \$480 a year, and carpooling can cut those costs drastically by reducing fuel consumption and wear and tear on automobiles. Additionally, commuters can avoid driving stress, improve regional air quality, and reduce traffic congestion.

This program can help prospective employers access our region's transportation options and decide to locate here.

Reducing the cost of commuting overall frees money that can be spent on other things, and improves air quality while reducing traffic congestion by taking cars off the road.

"Combined with the substantial transit improvements that are part of the Transit Master Plan (TMP), the program should lead to a workforce that is far less reliant on the single occupancy vehicle but instead turns to alternate commuting options—fixed-route buses, carpooling, company-sponsored shuttles, even biking and telecommuting. These choices save money that can be invested in other parts of our economy while enhancing our region's sustainability."

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Local transportation manufacturers play key roles in region's economy.

Nationally, public transportation is a \$48.4 billion industry that employs more than 380,000 people. A great local example is American Seating and their suppliers, many of which are located in West Michigan. They produce seating products for buses, rail cars, and other vehicles across the country. Based in Grand Rapids, American Seating is an excellent example of how investing in public transportation benefits business and employees.

"Roughly 70% of the goods and services that we procure to make our products come from Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio," says Dave McLaughlin, American Seating's Vice-President of Transportation. "Over 50% of our total product procurement is from Michigan."

While the challenges faced by the automotive manufacturers have seemingly signaled the end of the era of manufacturing, West Michigan remains relatively strong in the sector.

"Nationally, about 14% of the jobs are in manufacturing; in West Michigan it's around 22%," says Mark Lindquist, President of Rapid-Line, one of American Seating's partner manufacturing firms. "Manufacturing is still Michigan's number one contributor to gross domestic product in the state. Here in the Grand Rapids



Learn more from a variety of West Michigan business and community leaders on how public transportation is a key component for creating a better community at [www.getonboard.org](http://www.getonboard.org). (From left to right) Dave McLaughlin, Vice President of Transportation, American Seating, Bob Roth, President, RoMan Manufacturing and Mike VanGessel, President, Rockford Construction.

area it's key to keeping our young people engaged in the community, helping them earn money for college. We need to have *The Rapid* continue to do things, American Seating to continue to do things, so we can be here to help them."

"An economic modeling study done by the Michigan Department of Transportation shows that for every 10 jobs created in the public transit sector, six additional jobs are created in the rest of the economy. When we're working, other people are working, too."

The study also shows *The Rapid* creates \$43 million in "social benefits"—the

money saved by riders that they then spend on clothing and food, movies and home appliances—in addition to the \$31 million spent to operate the system.

"There are a number of our employees who not only work making seats for public transportation, but also rely on it in order to get to work," says Ben Amann, Executive Vice-President of GRFT, another American Seating manufacturing partner. "If not for *The Rapid* they might not have jobs, which means they wouldn't be returning some of their earnings to the local economy."

A strong public transportation system provides benefits that are important unto

themselves—providing mobility to people of all ages, reducing traffic congestion and gas consumption, create jobs and strengthening the regional economy, says Jennifer Kalczuk, manager of communications and external relations for *The Rapid*.

"*The Rapid* plays a key role in the economic and social fabric of our community. It gives people a cost-effective way to get around, freeing up money for food, healthcare, education, entertainment, housing expenses—that money goes back into the local economy, where it's used to buy materials, make improvements, and pay workers."

**"For every 10 jobs created in the public transit sector, six additional jobs are created in the rest of the economy."**

What does public transportation mean to West Michigan? It means jobs that are contributing to our regional economy. It means being able to attract new employers and new jobs. It means opportunities to save, the freedom to travel, the choice to make a better community.

It means that a healthy transit system is a vital part of our region's economic present and future.

## RAPID DRIVER TERRON SMITH RECOGNIZED FOR EFFORTS

*Rapid* bus driver Terron Smith has gotten a lot of recognition lately for his work ethic, positive attitude, and commitment to customer service. The six-year employee of the area's public bus system is known for his congenial personality and likes meeting new people.

In November, Smith was awarded an Essential Service Award from the Kent and Allegan County Michigan Works! offices. The annual award recognizes West

Michigan people who work important but traditionally undervalued or overlooked jobs. Nominations were submitted by business management on the basis of attitude, work ethic, and work history.

In January, he was recognized by his colleagues at *The Rapid*, receiving the highly competitive Bus Operator of the Year Award. The award is based on a combination of rider input, safety and attendance records, and peer recognition.



Photo by Darren Breen, Copyright 2010, *The Grand Rapids Press*. All rights reserved; used with permission.



# TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Online tools and mobile apps make using *The Rapid* easier than ever.

Whether you are a veteran of *The Rapid* or exploring using the system for the first time, *The Rapid* offers a series of easy-to-use rider tools to help make your transit experience easier, predictable, and more efficient.

### How to Ride *The Rapid*

If you've never been on a *Rapid* bus before, watching this video is a good place to start learning the basics.

### Mobile Site

There's a streamlined version of the full site that allows you access to all the great tools and information in an environment designed for mobile devices.



### Trip Planning

*The Rapid's* Trip Planner offers step-by-step directions on how to reach your destination. Tell us where you're starting (Point A), where you're going (Point B) and we'll take care of the rest, including any transfers. If there is more than one option, you can compare the number of transfers and the amount of walking for each trip.



### Nearest Stops

Finding the nearest *Rapid* stop is now as simple as typing in a local address.

- Type your address and you'll be given the closest route and stop options.
- Using Google mapping functionality, your address will be shown along with the nine nearest stops to that location.
- You can zoom in/out on the map to visually identify stops and related routes.

### Routes and Maps

The main system map (as well as all route maps) are now utilizing Google's mapping system, allowing users the same viewing and zooming functionality available in Google Maps.

By clicking on a specific route on the system map, you will be provided with the option to link to one of four different parts of that route's information—overview, schedule, transfers, and maps/stops.

### Cost-to-Drive Calculator

Is riding *The Rapid* really less expensive than driving your car to the same location? Use the calculator on Greenride and find out how little it really costs—or how much it actually saves—to ride.

### Purchase Fares

*The Rapid* offers a number of different fare types and purchase options to best meet your needs. It's quick and easy with no extra charges for postage or shipping & handling.



### Real-Time Bus Information

Tracking the status of the next bus is easier than ever. Each route includes a stop and bus location page that provides current position of buses (by direction of the route) as well as next bus status for each stop.

- Status information is displayed for the current day for each route map.
- Status is shown for a specific direction of each route (north or south, east or west).
- Bus icons on the route show the current location of each bus. Click the bus to see a text description showing bus status (early, on-time, or late), last stop, and status of last update.
- Circles/dots along the route represent an active stop for the current day, time, and direction of the route. Click on a stop and a text display shows stop description, stop number, status of next bus (on-time or late), and estimated arrival time.

# UPDATED MAINTENANCE CENTER TO KEEP THE FLEET AT PEAK EFFICIENCY

LEED certification belies the Center's capabilities for preventive maintenance.

As *The Rapid's* Wealthy Street Maintenance Center moves closer to completion, there's little doubt that the facility intends to earn LEED certification. Natural light will illuminate much of the building, as it flows through the facility's transparent wall panels. Bus washes have water reclaim systems and the building will collect rainwater to further reduce water consumption. Solar collectors will help heat the water the facility uses, compact rooftop wind turbines will provide much of the energy needed to operate the center, and the building materials are primarily durable/recycled.

But look a little deeper and you'll also find a top-notch maintenance facility for buses, "one of the best of its kind in the state," according to Kirk Steudle, Director of the Michigan Department of Transportation.

The center, which will update and expand the current building now too small to meet the system's growing needs, will help *The Rapid* meet its own stringent standards for timeliness, dependability, rider experience, and enhanced service levels.

"A bus that breaks down mid-route due to lack of maintenance is more than just an inconvenience," said Brian Pouget. "People don't get to work on time or they miss important appointments. This new facility will have a big impact on the quality of our fleet maintenance."

Every service, every technician, every tool necessary to keep the system's buses running will be housed in the new facility. There will be space for 174 buses, enough to accommodate anticipated growth. Eighteen maintenance bays will keep buses moving through the facility; three body repair bays and two wash systems will keep them clean inside and out. Underneath the facility there will be parking for up to 200 employee vehicles.

"With a maintenance facility like this one, we can significantly increase reliability and reduce the things that keep our riders from having the best possible experience with *The Rapid*," said Pouget.

The Operations Center at 333 Wealthy is scheduled to be completed December 2011.



# RAPID WEBSITE WINS NATIONAL RECOGNITION

"Get On Board" blog recognized for a fresh perspective on public transportation.

To bring further perspective and discussion to the topic of public transportation in the Grand Rapids metropolitan region, *The Rapid* launched a communications effort in 2010 that features community leaders describing their perspective on the value of public transit in general, and, more specifically, the value of *The Rapid*.

A blog site, [www.getonboard.org](http://www.getonboard.org), served not only as a web portal for the interviews with various community leaders, it also continues to track ongoing local, regional, and national discussions on community, development, events, and opinion related to public transportation and transportation infrastructure.

The blog caught the attention of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), a national transportation organization representing

public transportation systems and suppliers of all sizes throughout the United States. Each year, APTA honors members' marketing and communications efforts with the AdWheel Awards. Awards are presented in five main media categories based on system size. GetonBoard first earned a Gold Award for best blog; then won a Grand Award in the social media at the APTA Annual Convention noting that the communications site "provided a fresh perspective on public transportation, an ambitious interface with the community about service, development and values."

"We were very pleased to receive this recognition because it's an acknowledgement not only of the hard work that goes into operating a successful transit system, but also of the ongoing efforts to communicate the immediate and longer-term benefits of public transit," said Peter Varga, CEO of *The Rapid*.