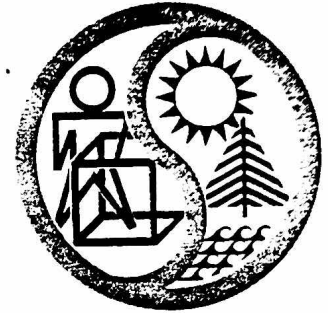


Ecology Center of ANN ARBOR

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To AATA Board members and the public:

The Ecology Center has long advocated a high quality mass transportation system for the Ann Arbor area. From an environmental perspective, expanded use of mass transit benefits the entire community (not just riders) in many ways, including conservation of energy resources, preservation of the aesthetic qualities of neighborhoods and commercial districts, diminished air and noise pollution, reduced long-term parking demand, less need for road widening and gradual reduction in automobile use and dependence.

Many of these positive impacts cannot be measured directly in terms of dollars, yet they are of obvious value. Others have money saving and quality of life implications which should not be ignored, especially in light of predictably high costs and the irreversible nature of "improvements" such as parking structures and six lane highways. Consequently, the decisions made by this board about service changes will have an important influence on the future development and desirability of the Ann Arbor community.

In this critical decision-making period, it is extremely important for the AATA to consider and fulfill the expectations set for it in the city's Circulation Plan for 1990 and in UATS plans for transportation in the larger urbanized area. The goal of 20-30% mass transit "capture rate" for all people trips is central to these plans. The question is: What is the best way to move in that direction?

There is considerable sentiment in some quarters to replace daytime dial-a-ride entirely with an all fixed-route system. On the other hand, defenders of the current design call for modest adjustments and expansion rather than sweeping changes.

It appears to the Ecology Center that some changes are required at this time. Recurring budget deficits, high cost per ride figures relative to other transit authorities, uncertainties around future state and federal operating subsidies, service reliability problems

and the inability to meet increasing capacity demands with the current design and fleet all point to the need for more than cosmetic adjustments.

However, the Ecology Center urges the Board to choose a middle-ground approach, incorporating necessary changes with useful elements of the present design, thereby implementing a transportation system which has much greater ridership capacity at rush hours, is more economical to run, and still provides high quality service during evenings, weekends and mid-day Monday through Friday.

Essentially, the Center proposes the elimination of peak-time dial-a-ride service Monday through Friday from 6:30 AM - 9:15 AM and 3:45 PM - 6:45 PM. Installed in its place would be an improved radial, fixed-route line service operating at 15 minute intervals, connecting all geographic areas of the city (including Pontiac Heights and the southwest area) with the campus and central business district. Additionally, this design would be supplemented by the use of neighborhood fixed-route buses connecting with either the radial line buses (in so called "outer" zones) or directly to the downtown area (for neighborhoods definable as "near" or "mid" zones). Line buses to handle cross town traffic (from Maple Village to Arborland) on the Stadium Blvd. artery would be included in this plan.

There are specific advantages to such a plan:

- (1) Due to the elimination of tour organizing time, discretionary routing, driver/dispatcher mistakes, tour variability (number of people varies per day) and driver hold time (waiting for passengers), neighborhood fixed-route collectors could carry more people in a shorter period of time. As an example, one bus could do three tours per hour rather than two (current design). Greater efficiency is a built-in prospect.
- (2) Fixed-route systems are more predictable and reliable from the user's perspective.
- (3) Cost per ride would be decreased by virtue of reduced dispatching costs (5 or 6 full time positions x \$14,000 = \$70,000 - \$84,000/year).
- (4) Ridership and revenue would increase through greater vehicle productivity (i.e. #1).
- (5) System capacity at peak time would increase markedly.

Mid-day service Monday through Friday serves riders who tend to need the point to point service dial-a-ride provides. This is a wholly different ridership spectrum from peak time riders, whose trips are primarily work and school oriented. It would be a mistake to assume that mid-day, exclusively fixed-route service would meet their point to point service needs, generate more ridership and revenue or necessarily save money.

Trips to and from locations such as shopping centers, social services, Social Security and medical centers frequently involve people with limited mobility, various illnesses, small children, bags of groceries, etc. These people ride almost exclusively during off-peak times, and the vast majority of them would not qualify for elderly/handicapped service even with expanded eligibility definitions. They need services similar to those provided by the current dial-a-ride system. Without it, cabs, fewer trips or long walks with heavy loads are their only alternatives, and their use of the AATA would likely decrease.

Rather than eliminate this part of the AATA service, the Board should consider methods of retaining it at reduced cost. Specifically, over \$100,000 could be saved on an annual basis if the following zones were consolidated:

	Reduction in number of vehicles mid-day
Miller and West Summit	1
Liberty/Pauline and West Madison	1
Burns Park and Devonshire	1
One less vehicle in far southeast	<u>1</u>
	4

The Center also encourages the Board to leave Saturday, Sunday and night portions of the system intact, recognizing the safety factors inherent in point-to-point service.

Implicit in this redesign proposal is a permanent shift in vehicle replacement priorities. The Dodge dial-a-ride vans are neither big enough nor is their current maintenance record sound enough to warrant their continued use. We recommend that the AATA purchase mid-sized vehicles (25-30 seats) that are suitable for both neighborhood fixed-route service and dial-a-ride functions. Furthermore, the high cost of purchasing, installing and maintaining the

high-technology, digital dispatch system could well be eliminated by returning to voice dispatch operations.

The Ecology Center welcomes questions by AATA Board members about our proposal and we hope you will give it careful consideration before changing the current system. Thank you.

Ecology Center staff