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## **Pilot Project to Improve Senior Transportation Holds Informational Meeting in Chelsea**

**Chelsea and Dexter Residents to Learn about Transportation, Test Travel Vouchers**

Ann Arbor, MI – The Blueprint for Aging Transportation Pilot Project will hold an informational meeting and orientation session on June 4, from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m., at the Chelsea Senior Center. Chelsea and Dexter area seniors interested in learning about a project to improve senior transportation are invited to attend. An informational meeting will give seniors details about the project and educate them on transportation options currently available in their communities. This will be followed by an initial training session for those interested in participating in the project. Participation is voluntary and free.

The Blueprint for Aging is a collaborative of seniors, family members, and government, non-profit, and for-profit organizations working together to build community and improve quality of life for older adults in Washtenaw County. The Blueprint is supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its Community Partnerships for Older Adults national initiative (CPFOA). CPFOA helps communities develop leadership, innovative solutions, and options to meet the needs of older adults over the long term.

The Chelsea/Dexter area transportation pilot will focus on the needs of rural seniors, who often face reduced travel options. "I used to go to Ann Arbor all the time," says Gert Pototzki, 89, of Chelsea. "Once I got there, the transportation was marvelous. They had a pass I could use that would take me everywhere I wanted to go." All this changed when AATA bus service to Chelsea was discontinued. Pototzki was forced to rely on family members who were unable to take her during the week. "If they had a bus again I would use it," says Pototzki. "I used to go every week. I really miss it."

The Transportation Pilot Project hopes to learn about the experiences of seniors like Pototzki, whose situation is common. "Transportation is noted consistently as one of the key unmet needs of older adults in our region, especially in more rural communities," says Amy Smyth of the Area Agency on Aging 1-B. According to Smyth, attention to transportation is especially important now as the senior population is growing rapidly and funding for specialized transportation services is failing to keep pace.

Organizers of the Transportation Pilot Project hope to learn about the travel habits of seniors when cost and availability of transportation become less of a barrier. Participants in the project will try out a new voucher, or coupon, system that will allow them to take

some of their trips at no cost. Vouchers may be used to pay for a bus, a cab, a specialized transportation provider, or even a ride from a friend or family member.

After studying where people want and need to go, how they get there, and the impact of the voucher system, organizers of the pilot aim to improve transportation options available to seniors in both rural and urban areas. In order to do so, however, they need seniors to get involved. "Participating in this pilot is a way to make a contribution to the community, as well as get short-term assistance with transportation needs," says Blueprint for Aging Pilot Project Coordinator Rachel Dewees. She hopes to see as many Chelsea/Dexter area seniors as possible at the informational meeting on June 4.

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