



Press Release

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New survey shows voters in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Twp would support 2014 millage hike for transit improvements

By 2-to-1 margin, residents say they'd likely approve plan to help connect workers to jobs, spur economic activity, support seniors and the disabled, ease parking congestion and promote environment

ANN ARBOR – Nearly 65 percent of voters in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township say they are likely to support a less than 1-mill property tax increase in 2014 that would pay for new and improved public transit services if the extra funding is tailored to meet the diverse and growing transportation needs of residents in the three communities.

Those are among the findings of a new survey conducted by CJI Research on behalf of the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (AAATA), which is discussing efforts to expand services prompted by requests from local government and civic leaders in the three municipalities.

Based on the survey results, AAATA officials say they are considering a recommendation that calls for the AAATA board to approve placing a 0.7-mill, five-year property tax increase proposal on the 2014 ballot for residents in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township. The date of the potential election is still to be determined pending the outcome of the AAATA board's decision.

“Going forward with transit development in the three urban core communities, you have a decidedly optimistic community that supports the goals of public transportation,” said Hugh Clark, president of CJI Research, who analyzed the survey results. “A really solid

consensus exists who appreciate public transit and understand it's a very important service to provide even if it means paying a little more in taxes.”

If approved, the millage for the new transit improvement plan; *TheRide Your Way*, would generate a total of \$4.3 million for new and expanded services annually through 2019. The owner of a typical home with a market value of \$100,000 in the millage area of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township would pay \$35 per year; the owner of a typical home with a market value of \$200,000 would pay approximately \$70 annually under the proposal, according to AAATA estimates.

The AAATA, also known as TheRide, will use the additional funding to fulfill residents' requests for enhanced services in the three communities, including:

- Expanded Dial-A-Ride/Paratransit services for seniors and people with disabilities
- More direct service through redesigned routes
- Extended hours on weekdays and nights
- Extended weekend service on fixed routes (earlier start times, much later end times)
- Improved bus stops
- Increased service frequency on many routes

The AAATA commissioned CJI Research to conduct a random survey of 841 registered voters in the three communities during October–December last year. The results reflect a combination of telephone interview responses and email surveys with online responses to ensure representation of cell-only households.

Voters in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township say they understand the importance of public transit, and 63 percent said they either probably would or definitely would pay a new tax to expand services. Less than one-third of voters in the three communities – 31 percent – say they probably would or definitely would vote no, while 6 percent were undecided.

The survey allowed respondents to answer “definitely yes,” “probably yes,” “probably no,” and “definitely no” on the millage question. About 57 percent said they or someone in their family in the past had used TheRide service, which Clark called a very high utilization rate compared with 25–30 percent rates in comparable communities. Clark also was impressed that 90 percent of the survey respondents in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township who were familiar with AAATA operations had a somewhat favorable or very favorable opinion of the TheRide.

Clark cited three main takeaways from the survey: The AAATA is highly regarded by voters in Washtenaw County's three urban core communities; residents in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township are supportive of transit service expansion even if it means a new tax; and the most compelling reasons to support a transit expansion are to

help retain and attract jobs, generate economic activity by taking customers and workers to area retailers and other employers, and to improve service for seniors and the disabled.

Among the reasons why some voters might oppose a countywide transit millage is general opposition to new taxes and concerns about the economy, Clark said. The margin of error for the survey is no more than 3.4 percent with a 95 percent confidence level, he added.

According to economic projection models developed by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), using AAATA data, the economic impact of improved public transit in the Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti urban core would increase from \$62.5 million today to at least \$96 million annually if voters approve the millage. MDOT-based projections and AAATA estimates also show the millage's economic impact from improved public transit in the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti urban core would create at least 250 additional jobs, ease traffic congestion and free up as many as 1,000 parking spaces daily in downtown Ann Arbor alone, which is the equivalent of building a new parking structure at a cost of \$40 million.

Public transportation growth remains popular at the local level. Every year, local and state public transportation ballot initiatives are voted on. In 2011, public transit ballot initiatives passed by a whopping 79 percent and since 2000, transit-oriented ballot measures have passed by a resounding 73 percent, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) reports. In 2012, 49 of 62 state and local ballot measures to raise taxes for transit initiatives were approved by voters, based on research conducted by Reconnecting America, a national nonprofit that advises civic and community leaders on how to overcome challenges associated with community development.

There is a significant economic benefit to high transit communities, as well as a high social value, according to Jed Smith, senior economist for the National Association of Realtors. Transit is important for building communities: it provides mobility, jobs, and walkability. High frequency public transportation also reduces congestion, fosters economic vitality, and mitigates local air pollution, Smith noted.

Shorter commutes, walkable neighborhoods and public transportation that is convenient and affordable are among the amenities being SOUGHT by a growing number of homebuyers, according to Bill Milliken, founder of Ann Arbor-based Milliken Realty Company and 2013 president of the Michigan Association of Realtors who also served as chair of the Washtenaw Development Council.

"Realtors recognize the increasingly important role that public transit plays in real estate and housing decisions, particularly in Washtenaw County's urban core neighborhoods," Milliken said. "I'm optimistic that voters will soon make their voices heard in this process."

Two of Washtenaw County's most prominent community-based nonprofit advocacy organizations – Washtenaw Regional Organizing Coalition (WeROC) and Partners For Transit – say they will launch grassroots campaigns in 2014 to promote awareness about the benefits the new millage will produce. The coalitions' members include business leaders, clergy, organized labor representatives, advocates for the elderly, local professionals, students and environmental activists.



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The Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (TheRide) was chartered in 1969 by the City of Ann Arbor, Michigan, as a not-for-profit unit of government. TheRide operates the local public transit system for the greater Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti areas, enabling residents to reach their destinations at a reasonable cost, and offers the region efficient, environmentally sound transportation alternatives. For more information, please visit TheRide.org.

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