

## Some AATA buses to be used as 'movable billboards'

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Incorrect fare stated

A story in Tuesday's paper incorrectly listed the fare for Grand Rapids' The Rapid bus system. The fare should have been \$1.30.

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Shortfall necessitated ads, director says

News Staff Reporter

Sandra Deline shook her head in dismay as a bus wrapped with an ad from Crispin Chevrolet pulled up to the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority downtown station.

"I am willing to see the ads if it supports the operation of a valuable service," said Deline, who uses the public transportation everyday. "But this is too much. I still want to see the **AATA** logo."

Bus riders and others around town will soon be seeing lots of other logos and slogans on **AATA** buses. For the first time in 10 years, the authority has decided to allow **advertising** on its 72 buses.

The change was necessary to cover a portion of a budget shortfall caused by state budget cuts and rising health insurance and fuel costs, Executive Director Greg Cook said.

"We are doing this because we need revenues from this," he said.

**AATA** expects the ad sales will generate about \$200,000 annually. It anticipates ending the 2005-2006 fiscal year with about a \$130,000 shortfall.

The authority's first clients are Ypsilanti Public Schools, Bill Crispin Chevrolet and the Detroit Football Classic. Ten buses with the ads have been running since July 20.

**AATA** reserves the right to review the ads to make sure they contain no sexual and/or violent content. Ads for tobacco and alcoholic drinks are also prohibited.

Advertisers can purchase the spaces on the sides, front, back and interiors of the buses. Bus stops and shelters are not available for ads.

Monthly rates to put an ad on one bus start at \$19 for the interior, and go up to \$5,000, which buys the whole exterior of a bus. The most popular option is putting a 30-by-144-inch rectangular ad on the side of a bus, the cost of which starts at \$360.

The authority has contracted with Transit **Advertising** Group from Southfield to manage the ad sales. The basic contract guarantees the authority \$98,000 this year. Above that amount, it receives half of additional sales.

Benjamin Weaver, general manager for the Transit **Advertising** Group, said an ad on a bus is a good option for advertisers because "people have no choice but to look at it."

He also said a bus provides a "movable billboard" that can bring ads into downtown Ann Arbor, where there is little **advertising** space available. He said local businesses and ad agencies that represent nationwide companies have already expressed interest in buying the spaces.

**AATA** ran 10 buses with ads a decade ago as an experiment because many companies had expressed an interest. However, the authority dropped the idea because the board of directors didn't like it. Also, the extra income wasn't needed at the time.

But times have changed.

" **AATA** has been doing whatever we can to generate

revenue and cut administrative costs," Cook said. "Right now, the budget is tight."

The authority raised its adult fare from 78 cents to \$1 in 2002. By comparison, Detroit's Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) charges \$1.50, Grand Rapids' The Rapid costs \$2.60 per ride and Lansing's Capital Area Transportation Authority has a \$1 fare.

State operating assistance has been decreasing since 1998, **AATA** said in a press release. In 1998, it covered half of the operational costs, but it declined to 32 percent for the 2004 fiscal year, **AATA** figures show.

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