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## Executive Summary

### Transportation Needs of Low Income Residents in the Green Bay Metro Area

By

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In 2007 the Bay Area Community Council (BACC) published a comprehensive report on *Poverty in Brown County*. A major finding on transportation was a lack of reliable information on the transportation needs of low-income residents. Over the year the BACC continued to monitor community transportation issues and became alarmed as unmet transportation demands soared to the top of basic community needs. While it had become evident that local transportation problems were on the up-swing, the Green Bay community did not have data on the contours and extent of the problems. At this point the BACC began to explore the possibility of doing a grassroots study on the transportation needs of low income residents.

In 2008 the BACC team of Harry Maier and David Littig teamed up with St. Norbert College Professor David Wegge, Director of The SNC Survey Center, and SNC student Jenna Heinrichs to develop a questionnaire and conduct a survey on the transportation needs of low income residents. Lacking financial resources to draw a random sample of low income residents, we decided to interview at sites which provide services to low income residents, such as area food pantries. With help from many volunteers and social service agencies, the survey was administered from October 2008 to March 2009. Survey responses from twenty-five sites provided 1,357 completed questionnaires for analysis.

#### Social Characteristics of Respondents

- *Gender:*

Male	35%
Female	65%
  
- *Race/Ethnicity:*

African-American	11%
Asian	2%

Hispanic	12%
White	69%
Native American	6%

- *Age:*

15-21	9%
22-30	25%
31-40	26%
41-50	21%
51-60	13%
+61	6%
  
- *Income*

\$15,000 or Less	65%
\$15,001 to \$20,000	16%
\$20,001 to \$35,000	13%
\$35,001 to \$50,000	4%
\$50,001 to \$75,000	2%
\$75,001 or Above	>1%

The principal reason for selecting sites was to obtain a substantial number of low income respondents. In our sample, 94% had annual household incomes of less than \$35,000 and sixty-five percent had incomes of \$15,000 or less. The 2009 federal poverty guidelines break down income by family size. A single person family with a gross yearly income of up to \$20,830 is classified as poor. As family size increases, the government also increases the income of those deemed poor. Thus, a family of four is poor with a gross yearly income of up to \$22,050. Clearly our sampling technique of targeting low income respondents was successful.

Another key finding was that 53% of the respondents indicated they were employed. Forty-five percent were not currently employed and only two percent were retired. The respondents in the study can be characterized as a sample of employed and unemployed working poor.

**Key Finding #1: The areas where many of the respondents live are not the same metro areas in which they work.**

- Over half (54%) live close to downtown Green Bay in neighborhoods on both sides of the Fox River, but only 28% work in that same geographical area.
- 21% work on the Far Northwest Side of Green Bay, but only 5% live in the same geographical area. Another 15% work in Ashwaubenon, but only 6% live in Ashwaubenon.

The analysis of zones of residence and zones of employment describe a work trip pattern that originates in central city residential neighborhoods and ends at work places that are highly dispersed and at the urban fringe. This work trip pattern is a reversal of a traditional public

transportation route structure, which was based on work trips beginning in residential neighborhoods surrounding and beyond the central city and terminating at a downtown terminal. The bottom line is that downtown Green Bay is no longer the major destination for work trips, especially for the working poor. The major places of employment growth are places like the I-43 Industrial Park on the far East side of the city and adjacent to an Interstate highway.

**Key Finding #2: Cars are the most common form of transportation, and the most owned form of transportation.**

- 63% of the respondents stated that cars are their most common form of transportation and 72% own motor vehicles.
- The bus with 25% is the second most commonly used form of transportation, followed by walking with 7%.
- Only 3% said bicycles were their most common form of transportation.

Transportation costs for the average household in the United States are not insignificant. After housing, the cost of owning and operating a car is the second largest household expenditure. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics the average cost of owning and operating an automobile in 2008 was \$8,095. AAA calculated that the annual cost of driving a small sedan is \$6,320.

While owning and driving a motor vehicle is the preferred means of transportation for our respondents, it comes at a great expense. If we compare the cost of owning and operating a small vehicle to purchasing adult monthly passes on Green Bay Metro, the price difference and savings are huge. The yearly bill for the small vehicle will exceed \$6,000 compared to \$420 for 12 monthly pass at \$35 a month. Based on these calculations, the savings gained by switching to public transportation would be an additional \$5,580 a year. For the 80% of our respondents with incomes of \$20,000 and under, a gain of over \$5,000 in annual income is truly significant.

A major reason why more low-income residents do not switch to public transportation is the service provided is simply not competitive!

**Key Finding #3: Over half (52%) of survey respondents said that they arrived at the survey sites by driving their own cars.**

**Key Finding #4: On average, respondents travel away from their homes about 3 times per day.**

- The largest percentage of people travel away 2 times a day (27%) and about 31% travel away from their homes 4 or more times daily.
- Those with cars travel more times a day (3.30) from their homes than those who travel by bus (3.09).

**Key Finding #5: Over half (53%) are employed outside the home, 45% are not employed outside the home and 2% are retired.**

- This grim finding reflects an incredibly high rate of unemployment during the winter months of 2008-2009 -- perhaps as high as 45% among this sample!

**Key Finding #6: Cars (62%) and Bus (26%) are the most common means respondents get to work each day.**

**Key Finding #7: Over half (59%) of those using the bus for transportation to work feel that transportation is a Significant Barrier (38%) or a Moderate Barrier (21%) to their being employed.**

- Only about a quarter (26%) of the Bus Only Sample state that transportation is not a barrier for them to be employed.
- But for over a third (38%) of the Bus Only Sample, transportation is a significant barrier to being employed.

Respondents who do not have vehicles are the most likely to state that transportation is the most significant barrier to being employed. Some stated that they won't even bother to apply for jobs that cannot be served by transit.

A frequently voice complaint is that Green Bay Metro does not serve the transportation needs of shift workers, especially 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> workers. An analysis of data from the 2007 American Community Survey on "Time Arriving at Work from Home for Workplace Geography" illustrates that starting times are a 24/7 phenomena. Only 16% of employees in Green Bay start work between 7:30 a.m. and 7:59 a.m., and 9% between 8:00 a.m. and 8:29 a.m. Work starting times are spread throughout every hour of the twenty-four hour cycle.

**Key Finding #8: Almost half (44%) of those who use the bus for their transportation needs say it meets most of their needs, while 56% say it meets only some to none of their needs.**

**Key Finding #9: Most respondents who rely on the transit system feel that making certain improvements to the Green Bay bus system are very important.**

- Among transit riders, over three-fourth (79%) state that it was very important to make changes to provide service to their places of employment.
- 76% of transit riders say it is very important to provide better weekend service.
- 67% say it is very important to provide more frequent service.
- 57% say it is very important to reduce the cost of fares.

The analysis suggests that transit riders may be willing to pay a higher fare for better service, especially for work trips. The importance of reliable transportation to work came up, again and again, underling the fact that without reliable transportation to work a person cannot hold a job.

Good and reliable work trip transportation is a necessary condition for a strong, productive workforce.

The lack of extended transit service on weekends is also a major complaint. The loss of full weekend service totally ignores the fact that the most transit dependent workers are those least likely to have 8 to 5, weekday jobs. Transit dependent workers are among those most likely to work seven days a week, especially on weekends and at odd hours in a 24 hour work cycle – the days and hours most poorly served or not at all by Green Bay Metro!

### **Recommendations**

- Our recommendations acknowledge that current levels of funding for Green Bay Metro will be coming to a crossroad with the 2010 census because federal funding will be lost if the official population of the area served exceeds 200,000.
- We are also cognizant that high gas prices are likely to return with economic recovery. The McKinsey Global Institute believes all the ingredients are in place for a spike of up to \$150 per barrel of oil as early as 2012.
- Our recommendations suggest that the future of public transportation for the Green Bay metropolitan area should consist of a mixture of public transportation innovations, such as establishing a Regional Transportation Authority, accompanied by more flexible, demand responsive systems to meet the transportation needs of a more complex land use patterns and 24/7 work schedules.

### **Car-Sharing**

One of the major challenges to improving urban transportation for all, especially for low income workers, is to provide improvements in transportation without having to incur the expense of owning and operating a car. Car-sharing is an innovative solution based on the concept that converts car use from a product to a service. With car-sharing it is possible to reduce transportation costs and still drive a car. Where car-sharing has been successful, a subtle shift in values occurs when the transportation services provided by car-sharing begin to exceed the value derived from owning a vehicle. Car-sharing originated in Switzerland in 1987 and spread to Portland, OR in 1998. Today there are two car-sharing operations in Madison, WI.

The essential features of car-sharing include:

- Short-term rental with charging by the hour and by the mile;
- Neighborhood-based, decentralized vehicles. Car-sharing operators place “pods” of cars in locations all around a city and within easy walking for as many people as possible;
- Members of the car-sharing club typically reserve a car online or by telephone and open the car doors with their own electronic key and return the car without dealing with anyone else;

- There are different vehicles for different uses. Members can reserve a big vehicle to go camping, a pick-up truck to move furniture, and small fuel-efficient cars for other trips;
- Car-sharing services include fuel, maintenance, insurance, and reserved parking at the pod;
- Zipcar, a U.S. car-sharing company on the east coast, already have 325,000 members. Most important, car-sharing significantly reduces transportation costs, the need for families and businesses to own multiple vehicles without any appreciable decline in the quality of their transportation service.

### **Ride-sharing**

Ride-sharing or carpooling has been around for many years. Despite being the lowest cost solution to providing transportation to work for carless employees, it has not become popular in Wisconsin. Wisconsin ranks near the bottom of the states at 46<sup>th</sup> with only 8.3% carpooling. The more successful ride-sharing operations have drivers and members who register with a ride-share network that pair drivers and riders that want to go from A to B at a specific time.

A major challenge to ride-sharing has been establishing a strong data base for people to use online to find a ride-match. Casual car-pooling, where there is no pre-arrangement and people do not know each other before they share a ride, is successful in San Francisco and Northern Virginia/Washington DC region. Communication by cell phones facilitates the “no waiting” for successful car pools.

One of the major advantages of rider-sharing is the low cost of getting it started, which can be done with community volunteers. Employers in the Green Bay area and neighborhood organizations could work together to get a process started by identifying solo drivers willing to car pool and neighborhood residents looking for rides to work.

### **Jitney**

The jitney or shared-taxi is a means of transportation that falls between the private vehicle and conventional bus transportation. In comparison with bus transportation, its advantages are the flexibility of semi-fixed routes, the convenience of stopping anywhere to pick up and drop off passengers, and not having fixed time schedules. Vehicles are smaller than buses and range from standard sedans with seats for 4 up to minibuses. While bus systems are typically publically owned and operated, jitneys are more likely to be privately owned and operated.

The most common form of shared-taxi services in the United States are shuttle services from airports to hotels, resorts and car rentals. While San Diego has jitney services, Washington, DC has shared-taxi service.

Jitney service can supplement conventional bus service in many ways:

- By enhancing the carry capacity on buses at peak hours by helping to relieve overcrowding and passenger overflow;
- As service extenders by providing service to low density areas where buses do not go;
- As transit feeders by connecting residential areas to cross-town bus routes;
- As community-based transit by connecting residents in low-income neighborhoods to medical centers, dental clinics, day care facilities, shopping stores, community centers, and to evening and weekend community events;
- As activity center connectors by circulating around employment and shopping centers, tourist attractions, and sport stadia.

### **Regional Transportation Authority**

While the threat of a loss of federal funding to the Green Bay Metro may be a principal force in putting a Regional Transportation Authority in the agenda:

- A more fundamental reason for an RTA is that the Green Bay metropolitan area has outgrown the capacity of the Green Bay Metro to serve its needs.
- A major benefit of a RTA is that there would be direct representation of all local units of government on the governing board. In contrast, the Green Bay Transit Commission consists of residents of the city of Green Bay and appointed by the mayor of Green Bay.
- State enabling legislation is giving RTAs both taxing and bonding authority.
- At bottom the economic benefits of an RTA, which deals effectively with the shortcoming reported in this study and others will strengthen the economy of the metropolitan area by developing a transportation infrastructure designed for employment and economic growth.