

## MAX bus system seeking tax renewal

Local millage pays 23 percent of operations

By **ANDREA GOODELL**

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Holland, MI -- In the past five years, the MAX bus system has evolved and expanded.

On May 3, voters will have to decide whether to continue funding that transit system with a 0.4 mill tax levy.

"It provides a transportation choice for the entire community," said Steve Bulthuis, MAX board member and Macatawa Area Coordinating Council executive director. "For some, it's possibly their only transportation choice."

Among the primary complaints of those who use that choice is how long it takes to get from Point A to Point B.

"As frequencies increase, ridership increases — that's well documented. ... But there's a cost with running greater frequency," Bulthuis said.

The bus system can't be built to handle only the lulls, Bulthuis said. MAX has to be designed to handle the weekday rush hours of 7-8 a.m. and 5-6 p.m. The system provided about 340,000 rides during the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30 — about a 7 percent increase over the year before.

"With gas reaching \$4 a gallon, most people are actively seeking alternatives for transportation," MAX Marketing Manager Sherri Cadeaux said.

It creates a conundrum, she said. People relying on public transit more are driving less. That means less gas tax, which partially funds public transit.

"The best, most thriving communities are communities that have excellent public transit systems," Bulthuis said. "If you look around the country at those urban areas that are held up as examples, to a one, they all have balanced transit systems."

Bulthuis included nonmotorized paths, rail, buses and cars in that balanced equation.

Although the Macatawa Area Express Transit Authority is requesting 0.4 mills, Cadeaux said, the authority has always levied 0.35 mills — comprising 23 percent of MAX's operating revenue.

If the MAX board levied the maximum 0.4 mill, the owner of a home with a taxable value of \$100,000 would pay \$40 a year. Without renewal, the millage would expire in November.

The state and federal governments supply 36 and 32 percent of MAX's operating budget, respectively. Passenger fares cover about 6 percent.

### By the numbers

- 0.4 mills — amount of tax levy
- \$890,000 a year raised by tax
- \$40 a year maximum cost for an owner of a home with a taxable value of \$100,000
- 23 percent of total operating revenue
- Renewal vote every five years
- Election May 3
- Find your polling place here: [michigan.gov/sos](http://michigan.gov/sos). Click on "election and voter information."

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