

# One Town's Transit Answer

## How Dial-A-Ride Is Moving People

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The writer is a Livonia resident, a graduate student at the University of Michigan and a member of the League of Women Voters, on whose transit project she worked. The views are her own.

By SHERRY KAHAN  
Special Writer

What is purple, has four wheels, works in Ann Arbor and currently holds interest for Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Ford Motor Co. and General Motors? The answer is Dial-A-Ride, a system of bus transportation now in experimental use in a section of Ann Arbor.

Mrs. Nancy McCann hates to drive to her job near the University of Michigan when the roads are slippery, and because she lives in Ann Arbor there is a solution to her problem. She steps to her phone and calls Dial-A-Ride. In about 10 minutes a mini-bus decked out in passionate purple picks her up at her door. "For only a 50-cent fare I am also saved the hassle of fighting traffic and finding a parking place," she says.

Like a number of other frequent users of Dial-A-Ride she often exchanges a few jokes and comments on the weather with Dave the driver who by now is almost an old friend.

MRS. MONA WALZ buys a monthly pass on Dial-A-Ride for \$15 and uses it to commute to her classes at the university where she is a graduate student. The pass can also be used for unlimited rides by her children or her husband. Every Saturday, for example, her daughters, 6 and 10, take Dial-A-Ride to the Y. The girls later drop in at the bakery and visit downtown stores before calling for a ride home.

Mrs. Walz also appreciates the friendly atmosphere of this neighborhood operation. Once when the children were overdue she phoned the dispatcher. "We're running a little late, Mrs. Walz, but they were just picked up on Main Street," he reassured her.

Mrs. Walz is aware that on a yearly basis her family's use of Dial-A-Ride costs \$100, not only considerably less than the price of a second car but even less than the insurance for such a car.

Meanwhile back in Redford a student stands in the cold on Five Mile Road with his thumb in the air hoping for a ride to Schoolcraft College. In Plymouth a retiree decides to stay home that day and eat less rather than attempt the five-block walk to the nearest grocery store in near-zero weather. In Farmington a young housewife reluctantly gives up her parttime job at a nursing home because of the difficulty of finding cheap, reliable transportation to work.

IN LIVONIA Norbert Topolewski, director of Community Youth Employment recently pointed out that an important element in successfully placing a youth in a job is transportation. "In some cases," he said, "employers will hire a candidate not because he is the best qualified, but because he has the best transportation. In other cases students must terminate their employment because, as soon as they lose their ride, they no longer can get to work."

Topolewski is also involved with the career exploration and training program at Franklin High School, which has made arrangements with local businesses to train young people. Lack of transportation usually eliminates a number of young people from this useful training program.

Franklin also offers credit to students who do volunteer work at the police department, nursing homes, Wayne

County General Hospital and Plymouth State Home. Frequently the desire to be useful on the part of these students is curtailed by lack of a means of travel.

A member of the Livonia police department has also decried the lack of local public transportation. She thought that a portion of juvenile crime might be lessened if young people had a way to get about and participate in more of the activities offered by the community.

In current years many residents of Observerland have found that the car, hailed so joyously a few decades ago as the answer to most transportation difficulties, has not only left a few problems unsolved but contributed a few of its own, principally pollution, traffic jams and the over-taking of fuel supplies.

**BUT IS PUBLIC transportation the answer?** Anyone who has accustomed himself to the luxury of stepping from his doorstep to his car is not about to opt for a three-block walk through the snow to catch a bus which may be late. Any housewife who draws a map of the zigzag route she drove on her daily errands knows that a bus line would be hard put to follow her.

The 20th century's middle-aged spread has created a car-oriented environment so decentralized that one wonders if public transportation will ever be able to help.

Does this mean that Observerland residents have to give up hope of decent public transportation within our experimental area of 2,100 homes in southwestern Ann Arbor, Dial-A-Ride successfully fulfilled the transportation needs of 200 persons a day. The following year ridership began to rise to more than 250 a day, indicating to the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority that more and more customers were beginning to rely on it. Peak hours of service are 7-9 a.m. and 3-6 p.m., proving that more than housewives on a shopping spree make use of it.

DIAL-A-RIDE was begun in the fall of 1971 as part of an attempt by the Transportation Authority to restructure a failing commercial bus system. The U.S. Department of Transportation had already decided to sink its test money into Haddonfield, N.J. So the Michigan Bureau of Transportation and the City of Ann

Arbor provided most of the funding, the state being interested in studying the plan for possible use elsewhere.

Ford's transportation research and planning office designed the dispatching system and service layout and provided a test vehicle. A headquarters was set up at 215 W. Huron, and two additional vans or mini-buses were acquired. Total yearly budget was \$100,000; almost one-third was later returned in fares.

It was not the intention of the authority to take passengers anywhere they wished to go. Rather, it worked out a route through the city that took in shops, banks, government offices and Greyhound bus line of the downtown area and added to it the campus of the university and the hospital - in other words, places where most people would wish to go.

THE AUTHORITY is hoping that this test may be only the beginning for Ann Arbor. Recently it pulled all its plans together and decided to go for broke, unveiling a new citywide transportation system that could make Ann Arbor one of the most envied cities of the country.

Prepared by a full-time consultant, the system combines a number of neighborhood Dial-A-Rides with an improved bus system. Using 36 vehicles in 11 different zones at peak periods, the buses will run seven days a week, their number tapering off in slack hours.

The plan was read to the city council Jan. 22. If approved by the council, the proposal will be on the ballot in April as a 2½-mill tax increase. If voters reject the proposal, not only will Ann Arbor turn down an improved bus system and the neighborhood Dial-A-Rides, but the present experiment will doubtless also slide down the drain.

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