



Memorandum

TO: Cascade Township Transportation Committee
FROM: Danielle Bouchard, AICP
Chris Khorey, AICP
SUBJECT: Recommendations on Transit Options
DATE: May 5, 2023

Over the last several months, Cascade Township Transportation Committee and DDA have been in the process of identifying alternative solutions to the current services with The Rapid. The DDA pays for a portion of The Rapid's Route 29, which provides access to several businesses (and municipal buildings) within the DDA boundary, primarily along 28th Street. The DDA's annual cost for the service is approximately \$218,000.

The contract Cascade Township DDA has with The Rapid expires in August 2023, but The Rapid has asked that the DDA take up a new contract at its June meeting, creating urgency for the Transportation Committee to make a recommendation. Therefore, McKenna is providing the Transportation Committee with a Recommended Preferred Alternative, to be discussed and revised as necessary at the May 8, 2023 meeting.

SUMMARY OF PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

McKenna recommends that the DDA take the following actions:

- Request the following alterations in Rapid fixed-route service:
 - Eliminate Route 29.
 - Extend Route 28 (currently known as West 28th Street) from its current terminus at Woodland Mall to the Cascade Meijer.
- Invest the cost savings from the fixed-route service alterations in a LyftPass program that would subsidize Lyft rides that start or end within the DDA boundary.

Additional details on these recommendations, as well as key background information, follow.

RAPID FIXED-ROUTE RECOMMENDATION

Route 29 currently runs from Woodland Mall to Cascade's Lower Village 177 times per week (30 on weekdays, 15 on Saturdays, and 12 on Sundays)

The Cascade DDA pays for the portion of the route from Patterson Avenue to the eastern terminus. The Rapid's cost for the service is **\$76.37 per revenue hour**, which adds up to approximately **\$218,000 per year**.

Rapid Route 29 began operating in September 2021. Prior to September 2021, Cascade Township was served by Rapid Route 28, which runs all the way to Grandville. Route 28 was truncated to Woodland Mall, and Route 29 was added to cover the rest of the corridor.



The service change in 2021 resulted in a drop in ridership. Weekday ridership is down 14%, Saturday ridership is down 27%, and Sunday ridership is down 24%. The decrease is not due to Covid. Ridership had recovered to about 75% of pre-Covid levels by September 2021, and was holding steady before the routing and headway changes.

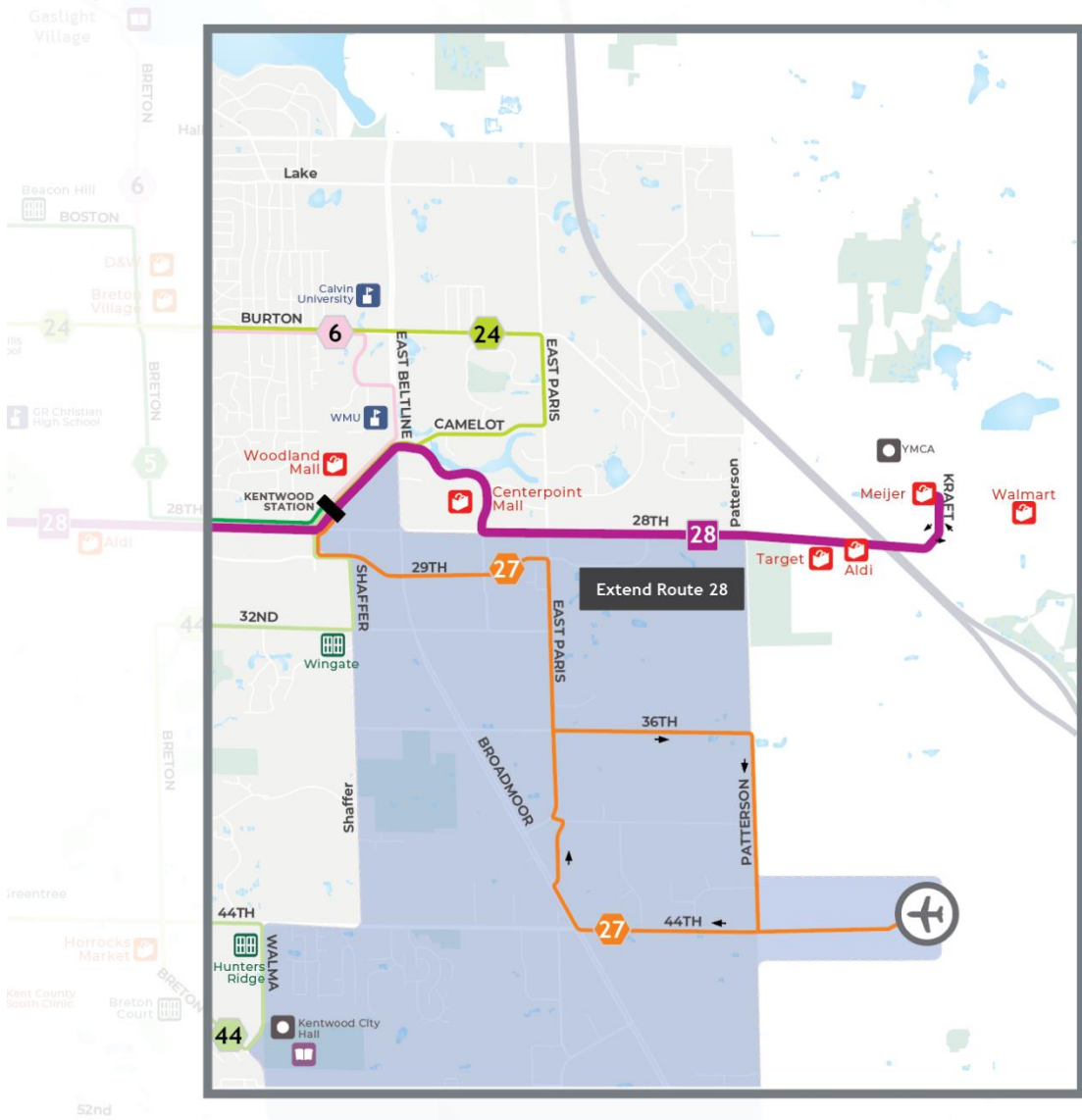
Data suggests that most riders on Route 29 are coming from outside Cascade Township, with destinations between Patterson Avenue and the Cascade Meijer:

- As of April 2023, 66% of boardings and alightings take place at Cascade Meijer or one of the stops to its west (Kraft Avenue, Hotel Avenue/Northern Drive, and Patterson Avenue).
- As of April 2023, the Cascade Meijer is the origin or destination for approximately 34% of all ridership on Route 29.
- As of April 2023, 79% of boardings are for westbound service.
- Only 4% of respondents to the Township resident survey indicated they ride Rapid fixed route service more than once per year, but 25% of employers (7 respondents) reported having employees that would have trouble getting to work without public transit.

Public input also supports the conclusion that Meijer and points west are the key areas for fixed route transit in the Township. While only 9 riders responded to the bus riders survey, most indicated that Meijer was a key reason they use the route.

Therefore, in order to serve the core constituency for fixed route service within Cascade, support businesses along in the I-96/28th Street area, and make more efficient use of DDA resources, we recommend the following:

- **Eliminate Route 29:** Data and input suggest that Route 29 is not serving the needs of riders and is cost inefficient in its current form. Eliminating excess revenue hours would free up DDA resources for the LyftPass program (or other alternatives) described below.
- **Extend Route 28 to the Cascade Meijer.** Extending Route 28 would eliminate the need for riders to transfer at Woodland Mall and would create a more efficient service for the core transit riders along the 28th Street corridor. A map of what that extension would look like is provided on the next page below.



THE RAPID

Legend

Transfer Point	Bus Rapid Transit Route
Medical Center	High Frequency Route
School/University	Local Frequency Route
Apartment	Select Frequency Route
Shopping Center	Peak-only service
Library	Peak-only service
Park and Ride	
Other Place of Interest	
Rapid Connect Zone	

Map design and illustration by Asher Lockwood





Financial Analysis

The specifics of the extended Route 28 service are important to ensure that the service alteration saves the DDA money while still providing quality service.

- Route 28 currently has 46 runs to Woodland Mall on weekdays, 23 on Saturday, and 12 on Sundays, for a total of **265 runs per week**.
- We estimate that a round trip from Patterson Avenue to the Cascade Meijer (and back) would take approximately 12 minutes (accounting for stops and end-of-route idling), which means each round trip would be 0.2 revenue hours. At \$76.37 per revenue hour, that means **one round trip from Patterson Avenue to Cascade Meijer would cost \$15.27**.
- **With 265 runs per week**, service from Patterson Avenue to the Cascade Meijer would cost \$4,046.55 per week, **or \$210,420.60 year, a slight savings to the DDA** while substantially improving service for the majority of riders that do not ride past Meijer.
- **With 177 runs per week (the current service level of Route 29)**, service from Patterson Avenue to the Cascade Meijer would cost \$2,702.79 per week, **or \$140,585.08, a savings of almost \$80,000 to the DDA**, while improving service for the majority of riders that do not ride past Meijer by eliminating the Woodland Mall transfer.
- The DDA could choose a service level in between one of the two scenarios above and realize different cost savings. The Rapid could choose what to do with Route 28 runs that will not enter Cascade. They could terminate at Woodland Mall, or they could run all the way to Patterson Avenue. That would be The Rapid's decision.

Please note that the above is an estimate and the actual Rapid service cost may differ. However, we are confident in our analysis that this service change will save DDA resources and provide better service to The Rapid's core ridership.

ON-DEMAND SERVICE RECOMMENDATION: LYFTPASS

With the cost savings from the Rapid Fixed-Route service alteration, we recommend that the Cascade DDA enter into a partnership with Lyft under the LyftPass program. LyftPass allows a public entity, like the DDA, to offer automatic subsidies to Lyft rides within a given geographic area. Lyft has indicated that there is no cost to public partners for the setup or maintenance to the program.

We recommend that the DDA subsidize rides that start or end within the DDA boundary. This would mean hotel guests, shoppers, diners, employees, and residents within the DDA would be able to travel to destinations anywhere in the region with a reduced fare. Importantly, this would subsidize the following trips:

- Ford Airport passengers going to and from hotels in the DDA area.
- Employees of DDA businesses to commuting to work.
- Shoppers and diners coming into the DDA to patronize businesses.
- Transit riders seeking destinations east of Meijer.

The DDA can allocate any amount of funding to Lyft subsidies as deemed appropriate. The DDA would set an annual budget, which would be drawn down every time a ride is subsidized. The budget would need to be sufficient to last for an entire year, but given that the projected Rapid savings, the DDA should be able to set a sufficient amount (even the small savings under the 256 run scenario would subsidize over 2,500 rides, if the DDA were to subsidize \$3 per ride, for example). The DDA should also allocate resources to marketing the



program. The budget could be right-sized on any annual basis. **We recommend that the DDA finalize its new agreement with The Rapid, and then determine the budget for LyftPass.**

Additional Details about LyftPass

- Lyft Pass is a program offered in other communities across the US. The premise of this is to offer subsidized services by using the Lyft app.
- Lyft Pass uses “geofencing” which offers subsidized rides anywhere within a specified boundary. The Township can setup any mechanism they want for subsidized rides. This can be a set monthly dollar amount, set number of rides, or a combination. Riders gain access to Lyft Pass through an “invite” process, often a QR code send to specific groups.
- Lyft ride availability is dependent on the availability of drivers in the area. As in, if the Township were to launch a Lyft Pass program, riders may face issues with obtaining a ride if there are not active drivers available to pick them up.
- Lyft data indicates that the average wait time for a Lyft driver in Cascade is comparable to the average wait time within the City of Grand Rapids.
- Government partners with Lyft do not pay any costs for the launching, implementation, or maintenance of the Lyft Pass program.

The following answers to Transportation Committee and McKenna questions were provided by Lyft:

- **Would someone be able to still use the Lyft Pass program if they do not have a credit card?**
 - Yes, riders without a major credit card or debit card tied to a checking account can still participate in a Lyft Pass program via their Lyft App. For these unbanked and cash-preferred riders, there are two options: prepaid debit cards and/or Lyft Cash. Prepaid debit cards can be purchased with cash at most grocery stores, convenience stores, and pharmacy chains. Riders can designate a prepaid debit card as their primary payment method within the Lyft app, instead of a credit or debit card. Or they could use Lyft Cash, which is a stored value payment method that allows riders to pre-load funds into a digital account and use those funds for future Lyft rides. Riders can visit one of Lyft's 35,000+ retail partners (i.e., Walgreens, Walmart, Kroger, Family Dollar, etc.) across the U.S. to refill their balances using cash.
- **If someone lived outside the geofencing area, but worked inside the geofencing area, would they still get a discounted ride to work from their home?**
 - The Township can set up the geofencing in a number of different ways, including geofencing corridors, larger zones, individual hubs, etc. Let's say the entire town is set up as a zone, the Township could allow travel only within the geofencing zone (i.e. all to and from locations are within the zone) or they could allow travel *to or from* the zone. To or from would allow for the scenario that you've described above -- the rider lives outside of the zone, but their job location is located in the zone.



- The partner is responsible for the full cost of all program rides that are taken and completed. In the example above, the partner has purposefully set the rides to be to or from the geofenced zone and in doing so has also agreed to continue to pay the full cost of the entire ride -- regardless of the geofencing. Please keep in mind that the Township can create an umbrella program and also bucket riders according to their needs and specific program parameters. For example, if there are a set of individuals that live outside of the Township, they could be added to a Lyft Pass program that allows them to go to or from the zone. And the remainder of the riders, who live and work within the zone, could be added to a Lyft Pass program that allows them to only travel within the geofence.
- **Is there any way that the Township could guarantee a Lyft driver at a specific “hub” location? For example, if a Lyft “hub” was setup at a mall, is there a way to dispatch drivers out to the mall to take passengers to destinations within the geofenced area?**
 - The dispatching of all rides within a Lyft Pass program is done the same way as all other rides outside of partner programs. Since drivers are able to choose when and where they drive on the platform and because this is a non-dedicated service, we are unable to station drivers at a 'hub'. The dispatching for any partner program will work exactly the same as any other Lyft ride that you or I would take -- once the rider calls for the ride, they will be dispatched the next available vehicle.
- **Are you able to send information on the Lyft Concierge Program?**
 - Concierge is a web-based platform that allows the Township to book rides on behalf of the rider. This tool is ideal for individuals that don't have smartphones or the Lyft app and those that prefer to call in and speak with someone. Concierge would be administered and run by Township staff, and if the Township doesn't have capacity to run this on their own we could connect them to some third party call centers that could step in and take on this role. Partners are able to use Lyft Pass, Concierge, or both tools, it just depends on how they'd like to administer their program.
 - Using those two tech tools, we've partnered on First/Last Mile programs, Late-Night and Paratransit programs, in addition to Jobs and Grocery Access programs, etc. The sky's the limit -- program structure all depends on what needs the partner has and how they would like to address them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: NON-MILLAGE COMMUNITIES

Non-Millage Community Partnerships with The Rapid

- The Rapid calculates costs for each community based on “revenue hour” rates, which currently is \$76.37 per hour. Billing is based on the number of revenue hours.
- Other non-milage communities appear to pay less than Cascade because they have less “revenue miles” and less frequent stops.
- Rapid Connect is funded through property tax revenue from properties within the 6 Cities. Policy states that any service beyond the 6 City limit requires funding through an outside entity.
- The Rapid connect zone does not extend to any non-ITP member communities. If it were to be expanded into an adjacent township, it would be expected the township receiving the service would be charged with funding it. The Rapid has considered potential expansions of Rapid Connect but only within the 6 cities since Rapid Connect is still its pilot phase.



- Rapid Connect costs about \$400k per year to operate.
- A comparison table between Cascade Township and all other non-millage communities is provided below.

Community	Amount Paid	Funding Source	Frequency	# of Stops/Key Destinations Served
Cascade Twp.	\$218,000	DDA Budget	<u>Weekday</u> : 30 minutes <u>Weekend</u> : 60 Minutes	6 (Target, Meijer, Wal-Mart, Library, Cascade Village, Ford Airport)
Byron Twp.	\$0 (discontinued) \$36,000 (prior to discontinue)	General Fund (prior to discontinue)	N/A (discontinued) Prior to discontinue: <u>Weekday</u> : 30 minutes <u>Saturday</u> : 60 minutes <u>Sunday</u> : None	0 (discontinued) Prior to discontinue: 2 (Tractor Supply, Special Olympics)
Plainfield Twp.	\$0	N/A	<u>Weekday</u> : 15 minutes <u>Weekend</u> : 60 minutes	1 (Meijer)
Gaines Twp.	\$55,000	General Fund	<u>Weekday</u> : 8-15 minutes (Routes 2 and 4), 30 minutes (Route 10) <u>Saturday</u> : 5-30 minutes (Routes 2 and 4), 60 minutes (Route 10) <u>Sunday</u> : 4-30 minutes (Routes 2 and 4)	5 (Meijer, Celebration Cinema, East Kentwood HS, Pine Rest, Apartments)
Alpine Twp.	\$98,000	General Fund	<u>Weekday</u> : 30 minutes <u>Saturday</u> : 30-60 minutes <u>Sunday</u> : 60 minutes	3 (Wal-Mart, Menards, Apartments)



BACKGROUND INFORMATION: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

- **Resident Survey: 359 responses**
 - 88% indicated they “never” ride The Rapid bus. 8% said “less than once per year”
 - 93% indicated they “never” ride The Rapid Go! Bus.
 - 84% prefer to use their own personal vehicle (when asked why they do not ride the bus).
 - 14% indicated The Rapid does not go where they need it to go.
 - 12% indicated the route schedule does not work with their personal schedule.
 - 10.5% indicated transfers take too long.
 - 71.5% said they so not need public transportation services in Cascade.
 - 16% said they would like to use public transportation services, but The Rapid does not provide a service that works for them.
 - Several folks noted that they do not use the bus but understand and support why the service is needed in the Township.
 - Other folks indicated they have someone in their family with disabilities or are aging themselves and would use the service in the future.
 - 56% said they would not use any suggested services (e.g., third party company shuttles to hotels, airport, etc., shuttles to get to fixed routes, or carpooling services).
 - 30% indicated they would use a third-party company shuttle to specific destinations within the Township.
 - 9% indicated they would use a shuttle service to fixed routes.
 - 9% indicated they would use a carpooling service to specific destinations in the Township.
 - 11% indicated “other” service ideas:
 - Uber and Lyft were suggested several times (10 respondents)
 - Airport transportation

- **Business Owner survey: 33 responses**
 - 69% indicated less than 25 employees at their business.
 - 12.5% indicated 26-49 employees.
 - 12.5% have 100+ employees.
 - 6% have between 50-100 employees.
 - 44% of employees generally live in the City of Grand Rapids
 - 19% are generally live in Cascade.
 - 11% live elsewhere, including Kent County, Ada, and Metro Grand Rapids.
 - 69% indicated their employees do not use The Rapid to get to and from work.
 - 25% indicated their employees use The Rapid to get to and from work.
 - 69% indicated their employees do not use the Go! Bus.
 - 81% indicated their employees have adequate transportation to get to and from work.
 - 34% said The Rapid services adequately serve their business.
 - 53% have no opinion if The Rapid services adequately serve their business.
 - 59% indicated that if services were improved in Cascade Township, it would not be an overall benefit to their business.



- 25% said that improved services would benefit their business.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
None of these options would be beneficial to your business.	50.00% 15
Running Route 29 on its current route earlier in the morning or later at night	23.33% 7
Running Route 29 on its current route more frequently	20.00% 6
Providing a new fixed route service to service your business' location.	13.33% 4
Providing a fixed route to Gerald Ford Airport.	10.00% 3
Current services provided by the Rapid are adequate and do not need any changes.	10.00% 3
Providing door-to-door on-demand service within Cascade Township.	6.67% 2
Providing door-to-door on-demand service to Cascade Township and nearby parts of Kentwood.	6.67% 2
Providing direct fixed route service beyond Woodland Mall (where Route 29 currently terminates).	6.67% 2
Providing an express fixed route to Downtown Grand Rapids.	6.67% 2
Providing direct services from businesses to Gerald Ford Airport.	6.67% 2
Providing "loop" service connecting businesses, retailers, hotels, and other destinations to each other.	6.67% 2
Providing a third party transportation service that offers transportation directly to your business, such as a carpool shuttle.	3.33% 1
Expanded services from The Rapid Go! Bus	3.33% 1
Other (please specify)	Responses 3.33% 1

- 22% indicated their employees would have trouble getting to and from work if Rapid services were discontinued.
- 22% indicated customers would have issues accessing their business if services were discontinued.
- 66% indicated their business would have little or no impact if services were discontinued.
- 66% said they would not be willing to financially contribute to improve services in the Township.

- **Bus Rider Survey: 9 responses**

- 62.5% are Cascade residents.
- 37.5% do their shopping/errands in Cascade.
- 25% reside in another community or attend an institution in Cascade.
- 28.5% completed the survey at the 28th/Kraft location.
- 28.5% completed the survey at Cascade Road/28th location.
- 43% ride The Rapid Route 29 to get to and from work.
- 43% ride the Rapid Route 29 to get to activities.
- 86% ride Route 29 during the afternoon (11am-3pm)
- 71% ride Route 29 in the morning (6am-10am)
- 57% ride Route 29 in the evening (4pm-9pm)



- An even split of 50%/50% indicated the Rapid Route 29 meets their needs.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Buses do not stop as frequent as I need	42.86%	3
▼ I cannot get direct access to where I live or work	42.86%	3
▼ Route 29 does not provide direct access to where I need to go (without transfer)	42.86%	3
▼ None of the above	28.57%	2
▼ The stops are located too far from store/destination entrances	28.57%	2
▼ I have trouble accessing stops from where I live	28.57%	2
▼ There are not stops located near where I need to go	28.57%	2
▼ It is too expensive	14.29%	1
▼ The Route 29 schedule conflicts with my personal schedule	0.00%	0
▼ Buses do not have the facilities I need (e.g., wheelchair access, bike racks, etc.)	0.00%	0
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses	0.00%
Total Respondents: 7		

- 71% of respondents use Route 29 as a transfer to get to their final destination.
- 57% use Route 29 to get to Meijer.
- 57% use Route 29 to get to other destinations outside Cascade (Home Depot, Woodland Mall).
- 43% go to the KDL Cascade branch.
- 62.5% would use a third party on-demand transit bus with curb-to-curb service.
- 37.5% said services are fine the way they are now.