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GPTC Schedules Public Hearing to Discuss Service Reductions

The Gary Public Transportation Corporation (GPTC) is inviting customers and other interested parties to a Public Hearing at the Gary Metro Center on Thursday, July 6 at 5:30PM. To be discussed are sets of service changes required to adjust GPTC's budget outlook.

Changes will be primarily focused on complementary paratransit and service in the Hammond area. GPTC provides curb-to-curb service for those, due to a disability, that are unable to use the fixed route system. Saturday complementary paratransit service currently begins at 5:00AM, but GPTC will propose delaying the start of paratransit service to 8:00AM Saturdays. Weekday paratransit hours of 5AM-9:30PM are not affected.

Other measures will directly affect Lakeshore service – the umbrella of routes created in 2014 to fill the vacuum of the loss of service in Hammond when the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (NW-RDA) folded. Those changes include:

- Reducing service on the regional Lakeshore Connection; beginning in September, this service will return to two-hour headway between downtown Gary and downtown Hammond.
- Reducing weekday service on the Lakeshore South route serving Hammond, Highland and Munster. Service has been suspended from 10:30AM-2:30PM and after 6:30PM on weekdays. Saturday service has also been suspended.

Also to be discussed at the hearing is the potential elimination of the Lakeshore South Route in December 2017, if additional local funding to support the service is not secured. A federal grant covers half the cost of the Lakeshore South. "The other half, currently borne by GPTC, is no longer sustainable" explained Lampkins, without a partnership to cover the local cost of the service.

This is a reversal of original plans to not only maintain current Lakeshore service but to expand to northern Hammond and Whiting. "We're not at all happy about any of this," said General Manager Daryl Lampkins. "But we have no choice." He reported that hundreds of riders per day on these services will be directly impacted by these changes.

Lampkins stated that the shrinking of Lakeshore service is not a done deal if a cost-sharing agreement can be created to provide the local funding of \$72,000 per year. “We understand that all governmental agencies have to prioritize their spending” he added. “But given the need for transportation to work, medical appointments, shopping, social visits, etc., there should be more interest in investing in bus transit to expand our footprint in Northwest Indiana. We have had conversation with committees and organizations, including Lake County, RDA, and the City of Hammond – the need is agreed upon but no financial support has been offered. Gary citizens cannot remain the only local support for services that extend over nine communities.” Such an arrangement could not only restore all service to the Lakeshore South, but could actually bring to fruition the coverage that GPTC envisioned.

One potential model for such an arrangement is the expanded service GPTC is kicking off as a result of its Livable Broadway Regional Plan (LBRP). The agency will be increasing service with the Broadway Metro Express (BMex), and adding a feeder route – similar to Hammond’s Lakeshore South – that will connect with the BMex. This feeder service would not exist without a funding agreement with the Town of Merrillville, which will bear the local cost of the service and work with GPTC on monitoring and improving it once launched.

“It is examples like the Merrillville partnership and the South Shore Transit Alliance [with East Chicago Transit and North Township] that show glimpses of our future – not in competition, but in partnership”, added Lampkins. GPTC plans additional meetings in the Hammond area to provide further dialogue on what needs to be done to continue Lakeshore service.

For additional information, to request reasonable accommodations for the visually and hearing impaired, or to voice concerns, call (219) 885-7555, Extension 204 to reach David W. Wright, Planning and Marketing Manager. Mr. Wright can also be reached at PlanningManager@gptcbus.com.

The Gary Public Transportation Corporation is a municipal corporation that runs fixed-route public transit in Gary and nine other communities in Lake County, Indiana. GPTC also provides complementary curb-to-curb paratransit service to those who are, due to a disability, unable to use its fixed-route service. Follow GPTC on Twitter (@GaryTransit) and on Facebook (keyword “GaryTransit”) for service alerts and announcements.