



[The Bright Side Episode 3: Michigan on the Move](#)

Produced by
CEDAM

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Michigan Municipal League

Rory Neuner Hello, welcome to The Bright Side, the show where we shed light on the people, places and stories about the real Michigan. I'm Rory Neuner, today's host.

We're standing on Lansing's east side on Clippert Street, where the City of Lansing has just completed construction on a new complete street that includes bike lanes and safe travel for automobile traffic.

Today's episode is dedicated to transportation, the good and the bad of Michigan's transportation system and the potential to change it for the better.

I'm the project coordinator of Transformation for Michigan, a coalition created earlier this year to advance transportation policy reform in Michigan. Trans4m's goal is to make Michigan's communities more livable and our economy more robust through comprehensive transportation policy reform.

Research shows that having safe, convenient and affordable transportation options improves the community's chances of attracting jobs and talent. Today we'll look at

some projects, policies and some communities that are making progress on creating safe, affordable and convenient ways of getting around.

We're standing now on Lansing's beautiful river trail system, a 13+ mile walkable, bikable recreational trail system that connects Old Town, downtown Lansing with MSU's campus and the city of East Lansing.

Our next segment will focus on an exciting project coming soon to Detroit. The M1 Woodward Avenue light rail project will connect downtown Detroit with the city limits at 8 mile road. It will be one of the first mass transit light rail projects in the state of Michigan.

---Detroit Light Rail---

Megan Owens So the city of Detroit in 2006 started analyzing. If we're going to build rapid transit somewhere in Detroit, where should we do it and what should it be? And they decided after several years of study that it should be a light rail type of line and it should be right along Woodward Avenue.

So for at least five years now the city of Detroit has been working on developing light rail. A lot of cities around the country have a light rail. It's an on street rail line where the rail is built right into the ground and there are overhead electric lines. So it's a lot like a bus in that it drives on the street, but it's a lot faster and generally more reliable, more attractive, more convenient than regular busses are.

Fully a third of the people within the city of Detroit don't have their own cars, and so they really need to have other transportation choices. But even more so, in city after city around the country in communities that have developed light rail you've seen enormous economic development. People want to live and work and shop and play near convenient public transit. And so developers know that and they really build a lot of new hotels and lofts and condos and restaurants in much more dense, walkable communities.

So we really believe that this Woodward light rail can be an economic development catalyst for the city of Detroit.

They actually just completed a critical step on developing an environmental impact study which the federal government requires, and making the final decisions about where exactly the line's going to go, where the stops are going to be. They've lined up most of the funding at this point and they're going to be moving into the detailed engineering. Construction could start as early as next year and should be... we should be riding in about 2015.

I really see Detroit and really this whole region is at a bit of a fork in the road. We've obviously had some enormous difficulties and there is a chance that if we don't make some major changes in how we develop and how we invest in making Detroit

a place people really want to be, we really could continue down on a downward spiral.

But I think we're also at a cusp of something much greater. There's so many people who are excited to make a positive difference in Detroit and are trying their little piece at a time. I don't think that the light rail will necessarily solve all of Detroit's problems but it could really be a catalyst to focusing a lot of the development, a lot of the new energy, a lot of the new entrepreneurial spirit along this Woodward corridor and really demonstrate what's possible in Detroit in a very exciting and positive way.

I really do think that this Woodward light rail project can be a catalyst for something great for Detroit

For more on Detroit's Light Rail:
woodwardlightrail.com

Rory Neuner We're standing here at the Brenke Fish Ladder in East Lansing's Old Town at the north end of the Lansing River Trail. Our next segment is produced by our partners at Let's Save Michigan. We will hear from people on the street talking about their experiences using public transportation.

---It's About Options---

---In Michigan, we spend 93% of our transportation dollars on roads and bridges. That leaves just 7% for options like bike paths, buses, trains, and beyond. Shouldn't transportation be about moving people, not cars?---

Resident For myself, I'd love to have a wider variety of transportation options.

Resident If public transit in Detroit were reliable, I would take it to work.

Resident It would really help me to be able to look for jobs in other cities around the state like Ann Arbor or Lansing that have better public transportation.

Resident I would love better transportation options.

---There's a better way. We can redesign Michigan's transportation system so that funding isn't restricted just to roads.---

Resident Right now I don't have a car and I use my bike as my primary mode of transportation. Not quite sure what I'm going to do in the winter time and I would love some options so that I don't have to get a car.

Resident Detroit's public transportation is not reliable for me to be able to use it in any sort of meaningful way with my business or my entertainment needs.

Resident I mean, I really think we need to make a much stronger effort to provide public transportation.

Resident When I moved from Boston where there was public transportation right down the street, and when we moved to Detroit it was kind of a downside because it's just busses that run sporadically. Don't really know the schedule and there's just the People Mover.

Resident I believe that the roads would be made remarkably safer and we'd have a more active and vibrant downtown if we had safe and reliable public transportation that got people home, both in the city and into the suburbs.

Resident I just moved from New York and the expense of living in Detroit is cheap unless you have a car. If I have a car then the expenses are more than what I was paying in New York.

Resident So I think that while we consider how we spend our transportation dollar, whether it's generated locally or from the federal government, I really think we need a much broader option of transportation. So it's not just for cars. It's not just improving the big highways and improving the bridges, which needs to be done, but I think we need to look at local areas and what the local people need. To help build our city and to bring people back.

---Michigan needs a new vision for transportation that works for 21st century communities and people. Help shape the vision. LetsSaveMichigan/trans-vision---

Rory Neuner Next we'll hear about a local bike trail system and its positive impact on the community.

---Little Traverse Wheelway---

---The Petoskey Area Visitors Bureau Presents The Little Traverse Wheelway---

Frank Shumway I'm Frank Shumway. I'm from the Birchwood Inn in Harbor Springs and I'm a road rider and a mountain biker. I ride a lot on 119 on the tunnel of trees, but also it's fun to get around the water of course, being in Northern Michigan.

The way they've designed it, it weaves in and out of the trees. It's not a straight line. It is really very scenic and fun to do. You just see trees, hear birds, and see the water

off to your right. Heaven only knows where you can imagine you are in the country that could be any prettier than that.

Fred Liederbach I'm Fred Liederbach. My wife Kathy brought me up here to Petoskey twenty-three years ago. Our first date was an 80 day trip across the country with a group of folks and by the time we got to the Pacific Ocean we were ready to get married. [laughs] So biking's always been a really big part of our family and our kids.

Kathy Liederbach It's a good place too when children are learning how to ride their bicycle. Especially people I know that don't have sidewalks in their neighborhood. They take their kids down there to ride on the wheelway so they can have a safe place to learn how to ride a bike. Right Sarah?

Sarah Liederbach Yep!

Frank Shumway Just the activity of biking allows you to see a lot of things and experience a lot of things in life that you wouldn't get to in a car, where you're distracted by all the other traffic.

It's a part of our community that a lot of people don't see unless they have on two wheels and take a ride down the east park or wherever, the state park. It's a real trip.

Christian Janssens Hi, my name is Christian Janssens. I'm the owner of Latitude 45 Bicycles and Fitness in Petoskey Michigan. I love this area. I'm an avid cyclist and what a great place to be.

I love this path because it gives me a safe way to go out and exercise and enjoy myself. I don't have to worry about cars. I can take my family out. I can enjoy myself and my family on a bike, and it's realistic. I'm not going to run my five year old boys down the side of the road, but to be able to go on this bike path is a blessing.

I commute on it every day throughout the dry months and I love the views. I love everything about it. It's just a great addition to this community and one of the reasons why I have a business here and I live here.

---Harbor Springs to Charlevoix, 26 miles---

Petoskey Area Visitors Bureau
petoskeyarea.com

Rory Neuner There are public options in the city of Detroit, but without a truly regional transit system in southeast Michigan, commuting can be quite a challenge. Our next segment will show you how.

---Adventures Navigating Metro Detroit's Bus Systems---

Sean Mann Hi there, my name's Sean. And today I'm going to navigate the two bus services that service southeast Michigan and our journey is going to start out here in southwest Detroit from my house, actually. And we're going to take a bus from here to my parents' home in Livonia.

---3:17 pm--- And so first off we'll be starting off by getting on the 27 bus, the eastbound 27 bus at West Grand Boulevard. We're going to take that downtown. From there we're going to head out to the suburbs.

Here I am on the 27 bus, which is surprisingly full for the middle of the afternoon on a weekday.

---3:27 pm--- It is now 3:27. That took ten minutes for the 27 bus to get us to downtown Detroit.

Using Google Transit I'm now going to try to find the SMART Bus, which has some pickup here in downtown Detroit, to make my way out to Farmington.

I'm currently walking around downtown looking for where I'm supposed to get the next bus. There's clearly no bus shelters, and there's certainly no signage that tells me what buses are going to the stop or where they're going. Which is certainly something that could be improved upon if I were to make a suggestion.

This here appears to be the bus stop for the SMART bus., the 805. Again, there's no signage and there's certainly no shelter of any sort. There's no map to tell you where you're going. So unless you have access to the internet or you have some big idea of where you want to go, it'd be pretty hard to navigate the system.

Fearing I was in the wrong spot, I went back to the Rosa Parks Transit Center to get directions to make sure I was getting the bus to the right place. There I found there was actually no information about the SMART bus system. No maps, no schedules, anything. I was directed towards a phone number, which was not working and I was also had my smart phone and tried going to the SMART website, which was down.

I was then told to walk four blocks over to the SMART headquarters at the Buhl Building to find information.

Here at the Buhl Building I found a very helpful SMART kiosk full of information about the SMART system. But much like Rosa Parks, it didn't have any information about the other transportation system in the region.

---4:05 pm--- I eventually found myself at the shelter for the 805 bus, which it took me to Farmington. Much like other stops in the downtown, this had no signage to sort of which bus was coming and where the buses were going.

The 805 bus was full of commuters traveling from downtown to Farmington. It was very pleasant and most people seemed to know each other from their daily commutes.

It is now 5:00. The 805 bus just dropped me off in downtown Farmington, Michigan. And I've got to connect on the 385, which was going to take me down to Livonia.

---5:40 pm--- Well we're now at the end of the line. I just got dropped off by 385 bus here at 8 Mile. The reason this is the end of the line is because Livonia opted of the SMART bus system. There is a transit system in Livonia, but it's only for seniors and disabled and you have to call in advance to set up a ride, which isn't convenient for someone who is able body and chooses not to drive a car. Or it's not really convenient for someone who wants to work in Livonia with any of the employers that doesn't have access to a car.

I then started walking the final three miles to my parents' house. After a short distance I got tired and worn out and decided to call them, which was too pathetic to be documented.

All in all my trip took me just over two hours and three bus trips to get from my home in Southwest Detroit to the Farmington/Livonia corridor at 8 Mile. I'd say it was a pleasurable experience with buses running on time and buses being primarily full.

The one disappointment I'd have to say at this point was my inability to my final destination – or at least close to – via transit. And the poor communication in terms of advertising routes between the SMART.

Adventures Navigating Metro Detroit's Bus Systems

Rory Neuner Now you've seen an illustration of the problem. Southeast Michigan needs truly regional transit solutions. One possible way to get there is for the Michigan Legislature to move on a package of bills that would create a Regional Transportation Authority for Southeast Michigan.

A Regional Transportation Authority will allow the governmental structure and possible funding sources for regional transit to truly work for Detroit and the Detroit suburbs.

The Transportation for Michigan coalition supports the creation of a Regional Transportation Authority, and as you'll see in our next segment, the concept makes a lot of sense to a number of other people.

---A Regional Transit Authority---

Emilio Do you guys think we'll see a regional transit authority in our lifetime?

Aurora With the government so-so, I'm highly skeptical.

Bobby What are you guys talking about?

Aurora It's something legal. Our lawmakers just don't get it.

Karly They're scared to work together on meaningful legislation.

Bobby Are we going to be plagued by this 1980's mindset forever?

Emilio The RTA will help coordinate transit service for the whole region. The RTA will allow us to raise money to run buses and trains. It's really a no-brainer.

Karly Cool! Public transit is woefully lacking in Detroit.

Aurora And with the cost of gas these days, forget it.

Emilio My dad says he doesn't care about this because it's in Detroit, and we live in Lansing. But I tell him we should just take the long view.

Bobby Connecting Michigan is important for the whole state.

Aurora I mean, come on. We live in a global economy.

Karly So what can we do?

Aurora Well, we can't vote yet, but we can tell our parents about it.

Emilio Let's empower the RTA. Let's raise money for buses and trains.

Karly An RTA equals economic growth. We should tell our parents to call our legislators.

All Michigan Legislators, get on board!

---We need a Regional Transit Authority!---

Olivia Courant So have you ever been walking on this trail before? The one we're on.

Jackson A lot of times.

Olivia A lot of times! The River Trail. Do you live near it?

Jackson Oh, yeah. We live close to it.

Amare We actually walk the most.

Jackson Well sometimes we go to parks when we're walking.

Kyra I can... and when I get a get a little, like when I'm five, I get to ride my bike all the way to school. I can ride it really fast. And I can even beat momma.

Olivia What are some places you like to go to?

Amare Louisiana.

Olivia Louisiana?!

Amare Mmhm.

Olivia Wow, how do you get that far?

Amare We drive.

Kyra And I drive my jeep around the yard. Pretend I'm old in the yard. And when you steer that way it goes that way. When you steer that way it goes that way.

Learn more about Regional Transit Authority:
Join Let's Save Michigan
leetssavemichigan.com

Rory Neuner Next, we'll head to Ypsilanti to talk with Richard Murphy of the Michigan Suburbs Alliance about Michigan's progress on complete streets.

---Complete Streets---

Richard Murphy Complete Streets is the idea that streets should be built for all users: cars, trucks, bicycles, pedestrians, wheelchairs strollers. And the reason that complete streets is an important idea is because traditionally we've been building streets for cars. The goal of moving cars fast and smoothly and the result of that is

we get cities that are built for cars and communities that are built for cars rather than for people.

So if we start designing streets for all the ways that people need to move, then we get communities that are built for people rather than just for moving and storing cars.

John Lindenmayer Complete streets really is gaining a lot of momentum in Michigan. We are actually leading the country right now in the number of complete streets resolutions and ordinances that have been passed at the local level. We've adopted over 50 local policies just last year, year and a half or so.

Melanie Piana The city of Ferndale back in November 2010 passed its first complete streets ordinance and we were one of the first cities to pass the ordinance along the Woodward Avenue corridor.

Richard Murphy Just within the past few months, Ypsilanti became the, I think, eighth city in the state of Michigan to pass a complete streets ordinance. Basically this codifies the idea that this is an important idea for the city and that we will approach all of our road projects in a complete streets fashion.

Melanie Piana And so our bigger vision is how do we improve connectivity and mobility in our own communities, but how do we do it across communities and connecting the cities along the corridor and into Detroit.

John Lindenmayer You know, one of the neat things about complete streets: there's no one way to complete a street, so complete streets look a little bit different in an urban setting versus a rural setting versus a suburban setting. Some of the common features of complete streets are things like bike lanes, safe sidewalks, and curb cuts and things like midblock crossings for pedestrians and other things simply like adjusting the timing of the lights so people with disabilities and people pushing strollers or older folks can get across the street safely.

Richard Murphy We're at College Place in Forest avenue in the City of Ypsilanti, basically the front door to Eastern University and a pretty busy location for traffic of all kinds. So on Forest avenue behind me, it used to be just traffic lanes for cars and sidewalks without ADA accessible curb ramps. So we did a project on that street to – while repaving the street because it was in pretty rough shape add bike lanes, mostly within the same width without having to do a lot of expensive extra work. Put in all of the accessible curb ramps and move some of the bus stops to better locations.

Melanie Piana It's important because we are looking to our future and making sure that we are improving the lives of the residents who work here, but also putting in place the amenities that the young professionals want in order to invest here, either by working or by living.

John Lindenmayer More and more people are choosing again active transportation. They want to walk and bike more. I think we're going to see more and more of this happening with gas prices and some of the other reasons.

Michigan Complete Streets Coalition
micompletestreets.org

Michigan Suburbs Alliance
michigansuburbsalliance.org

League of Michigan Bicyclists
lmb.org

Rory Neuner We're here in downtown Lansing at the CATA Transportation Center, a hub of activity for CATA buses. Next we'll sit down with Dr. Michael Belzer of Great Lakes Global Freight Gateway to talk about major rail initiatives in Michigan.

---The 411---

Tiffany Lemieux McKissic Hello and welcome to the 411. I'm Tiffany Lemieux-McKissic and I'm here today with Dr. Belzer from Great Lakes Global Freight Gateway.

[to Dr. Belzer] So how are you doing Dr. Belzer?

Dr. Michael Belzer Pretty good. A little warm.

Tiffany Yeah, it's a little bit warm today, I agree. So can you tell me a little bit about what's happening around the state and what you're doing?

Dr. Belzer Great Lakes Global Freight Gateway is a plan to develop freight transportation in this region so that this region can become the new Chicago, the center of freight transportation in the Midwest.

Tiffany And why is this so important?

Dr. Belzer It's important because we need to have access to global markets in a global trade era. So the global trade center for the Midwest has been Chicago for a long time, but Chicago is very crowded and congested. Hard to get in, hard to get out, very expensive place to operate structurally. Whereas we have a lot of assets and resources as well. This is actually the fastest, cheapest way to get freight to the industrial Midwest. It's right here.

Tiffany So we're not talking about passenger at all. We're talking strictly commercial freight.

Dr. Belzer Right. What freight I'm talking about here is container freights. What you see on trains today in double stack form are 20 foot x 40 foot boxes, and those boxes are what transport freight in all over the world.

If we can attract the freight to come in to this area because we provide the best resources and the best access, then they'll want to be here. So it has a multiplier effect in terms of jobs. We're looking at this overall effort producing something in excess of 200,000 jobs and \$10 billion a year of economic activity.

We believe we have a way to develop, to deliver your freight, to get your freight to global markets, and to get freight that you need back from global markets less expensively and more predictably. Like I said, saving \$92,000 on a 100 containers a year. That's a lot of money. That's a lot of money for the value of goods. When we can save people from two to eleven days in time, and the time value of money is huge.

So we can save them that much money and serve those West Michigan customers, then they'll... it'll matter to them what happens in Southeast Michigan.

We need to tie the state together. I look at this as an in part a mechanism for tying the state together, but I'm not asking anybody to do anything for free. I'm saying we'll tie the state together by making this part of the state useful to you.

Tiffany So if someone wants to get more involved and find out more information, where can they go?

Dr. Belzer Well, I guess they would contact glfg.org. That's my website, one of our websites, and they can get access. They can send an email. They can take a look and see what's going on.

Tiffany Thank you so much. It was a pleasure.

[to the audience] And this has been the 411. Thanks for joining us.

Great Lakes Global Freightway
glfg.org

Rory Neuner As you can see, progress is being made on improving Michigan's transportation system and giving people more options. But serious challenges do still exist. We envision a 21st century system that is convenient and connected and

includes options like public transportation, affordable passenger rail, reliable freight rail and safe active transportation options that includes complete streets.

If you'd like to get more involved or learn more about transportation policy reform efforts in Michigan, please visit www.letssavemichigan.com or www.trans4m.org.

Thanks for watching this episode of The Bright Side. I'm your host, Rory Neuner. If you'd like to submit an idea for the next edition of The Bright Side, please visit www.brightsidetv.com.

---Outtakes---

Sarah Szurpicki [shaking kids' hands] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you! Thank you sir.

Tiffany Lemieux McKissic Well thank you so much for joining us.

Dr. Belzer You're welcome.

Tiffany And, uh, this is the 411. Thank you for joining us too. [looks up] That was terrible. I need to do that again.

Rory Neuner We're standing on Lansing's Eastside on Clippert street looking at a newly constructed complete street with the addition of bike lanes and some other stuff. [laughs] No, no. Okay. Let's try that again.

John Lindenmayer What about my hands? [swings them, holds them up like an Egyptian hieroglyph]

Olivia Courant Okay. So what about you? Do you like to bike or walk?

Kyra Um I. I like to, um... Um, I like to watch movies.

Rory Neuner We're standing on Lansing's beautiful river trail system, a 13+ connected... something or other. [laughs] Okay, hold on.

Amare We can't go outside and play at our park

Olivia Why not?

Amare Because, uh, our couch is in front of the place where we get there.

---Credits---

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Detroit Light Rail

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A Regional Transit Authority

Part 1: Kids RTA

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Part 2: Kids Interview

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