March 27, 2014

Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti Regional Chamber Statement of Support for the AAATA 2014 Millage Proposal

The Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority's (AAATA) Board of Directors voted to place a 0.7 millage on the May 6th ballot for voters in the cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, and Ypsilanti Township. This millage would be used by AAATA to pay for specified service improvements over a five year period. The language of the proposal states (in part): "To improve public bus, van, and paratransit services—including expanded service hours, routes, destinations, and services for seniors and people who have disabilities." These service improvements address increased route frequency, extended hours of service, additional service on weekends, and modifications to existing routes. In order to inform members, the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti (A2Y) Regional Chamber's Public Policy Committee heard separately from both proponents and opponents of the plan.

Residents of Ann Arbor currently pay a 2.0 charter millage for existing public transportation services and residents in the city of Ypsilanti pay a 0.9789 charter millage for its existing public transportation services. Ypsilanti Township residents do not yet pay a millage towards public transportation services, but do pay for AAATA services from their general fund revenues. If the millage passes it will increase the millage rates Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti city residents pay towards the AAATA and implement a new millage in Ypsilanti Township. AAATA has assured that these mills and their additional revenues will bring proportional service increases to each community, thus ensuring that the revenues generated by each member community are devoted to service improvement in each of those communities, thereby avoiding the subsidization of one community by another.

The A2Y Chamber supports the millage proposal for several reasons. The A2Y Chamber supports increased regional mass transit. This has been our policy for many years. A high quality regional public transit system is critical to enhancing our region's economic vitality and quality of life, fosters economic activity, and improves property values. It also serves as a magnet for residential and commercial development, and for attracting and retaining employees and entrepreneurs. Expanded public transit will help our citizens have better access to jobs, businesses, schools, health care, shopping and entertainment.

The plan presented to voters is sound, specific and needed. It will provide specified service improvements within our region's "Urban Core" (Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township) where they are most needed, as thousands of people's current travel needs go unmet every day. These improvements include more frequent routes, improved and modified routes, and importantly, later evening service and weekend service. AAATA's plan is also sound because it offers a specific set of services for a specific amount of tax increase; a pay for what you get equation. The plan also reflects AAATA's robust engagement with the community through a broad and comprehensive community outreach process which helped shape the plan to fit public needs.

While the Chamber supports the millage, we also believe strongly that AAATA must remain focused on maximizing efficiencies wherever possible. The millage proposal covers a five year period. Within that period, AAATA should continue to demonstrate consistent efficiency in its operations and to build on these efficiencies as feasible. This can be measured using several accepted metrics that will inform the Chamber's position on future funding proposals. With that understanding and expectation, the A2Y Chamber supports the millage proposal and urges our members to do likewise on May 6th.