

EDITORIAL

No time to delay on transportation issues

Transportation is a key issue in today's mobile world. Those who do not have access to transportation are deprived of procuring basic needs and a means to get to work, to school, to medical appointments, to social services, to grocery markets, to recreation and so on. Bottom line — without transportation, people are left at a standstill.

That's why the county's decision to cut funding for its LOOP bus service in January of 2009 left a gaping hole in the lives of so many residents in the Harlem Valley and beyond — residents whom from that point onward had no way to get where they needed to go at a reasonable cost.

As a direct result from those cuts, the Foundation for Community Health, based in Sharon, Conn., took immediate action. It formed a task force that includes municipal representatives, county groups, other not-for-profits and area residents in northeastern Dutchess County. The task force has been working hard ever since to come up with solutions to provide transportation throughout the Harlem Valley. It had no preference if those solutions came back from county or from local community groups, like the North East Community Center (NECC). And while NECC has continually provided the Care Car, for example, as a means to transport people to where they need to go, it's the county that's now stepping up to the plate.

The task force has been instrumental in pushing the county to solve local transportation woes. Just last week it was rewarded when the county proposed a flex service plan, which is the second stage of service reinstatements due later this year. The first stage was for fixed line routes, which thus far does have one sole LOOP bus route currently ending at the Metro-North train station in Wassaic.

The flex service is just now being proposed, along with an invitation by the county for the task force to help design a custom transportation service to provide for the needs of the Harlem Valley. That's practically offering the task force carte blanche. What more could residents ask for, except, perhaps, to weigh in directly on the proposed plan. Well, fortunately, they can do exactly that as the task force has created a survey, along with the help of its consultants, so residents can voice their opinions on what types of bus routes they think would best suit the region. (For the different options, read Cory Allyn's story on page A1.)

The best way to ensure optimal service is to participate. In other words — fill out those surveys! They will help shape the type of transportation services the county will likely provide through its flex service program. Now the bus route will only provide for eight hours of service a week (for now), but why not make those eight hours really count? Have that bus work for you, for your neighbors, your coworkers, your children and your friends. The only way to really do that is by filling out the survey and sending it back to the Foundation for Community Health. And the foundation is making it easy. The surveys are online, available by phone or in person at the NorthEast/Millerton Library and also through municipal representatives. Call 1-800-695-7210 or go to fchealth.org for more information.

This is a rare and wonderful opportunity for residents to help shape local transportation routes, so don't let it pass you by. Stand up and be counted, and then welcome that bus back as it takes you exactly where you need to go.