

[Carolyn Inner two pages](#)



**Response Article 3/10/08 to the Letters to Editor
in The Flint Journal
on Art at the MTA**

*By Robert J. Foy
General Manager of MTA*

Recently concerns have been expressed regarding decisions of MTA management concerning the purchase of art for display in MTA facilities.

The mission of the MTA is to provide public transportation that is safe, reliable and affordable for those that request it in our community. The focus of the Mass Transportation Authority rests in three areas. The first and primary area is providing public transportation that meets the expectations of the residents of Genesee County. Our second focus is participation as a partner in the rebirth of downtown Flint. The third focus is utilizing public transportation as an economic development tool in Genesee County.

The only real test of success or failure of the Mass Transportation Authority is in meeting the expectations of the public. The MTA has had constant growth over the last six years and provides transportation for over 125,000 passengers each week. In January 513,000 passengers were served, with 59,000 passengers requiring curb-to-curb service. As stated earlier, the MTA's mission is safe, reliable, and affordable service to the public and we believe that we do it well.

In addition, as a major employer and caring member of Genesee County, we accept other responsibilities. Several years ago the MTA became active in response to the challenge of Governor Granholm regarding the rebirth of our community. Of the four active committees created as a result of the Governor's challenge, the MTA has been involved in the committees addressing the revitalization of the center City of Flint and the economic development in our community. The committee that addressed the rebirth of downtown Flint emphasized the need to attract increased numbers of citizens into the downtown area. This challenge was to be addressed by increasing housing, encouraging new businesses, the introduction of U of M student housing, and by utilizing the 15,000 to 20,000 people a day that the MTA brings into the downtown area. Along with the other partners, we committed to focus on bringing additional people into the downtown area.

To support this effort, the Mass Transportation Authority commissioned a study to evaluate the appropriate role of our facility at Harrison and Second Street. The conclusion of the study was that the facility should be expanded into a community facility that went beyond the transfer of bus passengers. A six million dollar renovation was initiated to meet this challenge. In order to attract additional people to downtown it was proposed to open a museum dedicated to civil rights, create a memorial for Rosa Parks, and provide a community bulletin board that would advertise events being sponsored by the organizations in our community focusing on events in the greater downtown area. Art was the principal medium selected for accomplishing the objectives of commemorating civil rights in our community. The goal was to create an environment that would attract individuals from throughout the State of Michigan that would be interested in this facility for more than the transfer of passengers.

Presently the MTA has committed \$524,052 for the purchase of art throughout the fourteen facilities owned and operated by the MTA. The Mass Transportation Authority has been

accumulating funding for these facilities since the year 2000. This would average approximately \$54,500 each year. Funds for the Art in Transit program comes from State and Federal discretionary grants. No local millage money was utilized to fund this project. These grant funds are restricted for use on the construction and renovation of the service centers. The funds cannot be used for other transportation purposes. We have presently allocated \$317,500 for the Art in Transit program in the downtown transportation center, which is a special project. This constitutes approximately 3.3% of the construction cost of the facility. The other service centers provides about 1.1% for Art in Transit. The art is available for everyone to review during normal business hours. The conclusion that certain pieces of art are behind closed doors is accurate only for the Administration Building where the responsibility of the Mass Transportation Authority to maintain reasonable security for our administrative employees is balanced with the access of the general public to see the art. During normal business hours, any request to see the art in the Administration Building is encouraged and will be made available with the assistance of a tour guide. At the present time, all artwork is being done by Michigan artists. The Mass Transportation Authority is focused on providing outstanding public transportation that is affordable to the public. We are not trained in the process for evaluating various forms of art. For this reason the decision was made to contract with the Greater Flint Arts Council to act as the facilitator for this program.

The MTA believes that appropriate recognition of the efforts of Congressman Kildee, US Senators Levin and Stabenow and Governor Granholm should be noted because without their support the MTA would be unable to participate in such a meaningful way in the outstanding progress being made toward the rebirth of downtown Flint and the creation of jobs here in Genesee County.

As a final note, we hope that the Genesee County community recognizes that the Board of Directors and the 500 employees of the Mass Transportation Authority are dedicated to meeting the public transportation needs of Genesee County and utilizing their skills to partner in the rebirth of downtown Flint and the economic development in Genesee County.

#

Summary of Frequent Questions and the MTA Response on the Art in Transit Program

1. Why has the MTA commissioned art for the MTA Service Centers?

Response: *The Mass Transportation Authority was a participant in the Granholm Challenge for the redevelopment of downtown Flint that occurred several years ago. The Granholm Challenge evolved into the Community Challenge. The MTA was involved in the community meetings that led to much of the current effort in downtown Flint. The decision coming out of the group was that the most significant deficiency was the lack of people in the downtown area. If we were to revitalize downtown Flint it would be necessary to create programs that would bring a significant number of people on a regular basis into downtown Flint. Considerations were the building of loft apartments, reopening small businesses, the construction of student housing at the University of Michigan-Flint, the transition of the MTA Transportation Center into a community building and the affective use of the 15,000 - 20,000 people a day that the Mass Transportation Authority brings into the downtown area. After a study was commissioned regarding the appropriate role of the MTA facility, the conclusion was that the building should be transitioned from a facility to transfer passengers into a community facility. The decision was to concentrate on the facility being a memorial for civil rights, a seven-eleven type store for quick purchases for the new residents, expanded restroom facilities for people in the downtown area, a meeting room to allow for public meetings and a museum dedicated to civil rights that would address revolving issues. It was concluded after much discussion that art would be the medium utilized to commemorate important civil rights events. This led the MTA to include a request for funding for art as part of a \$6 million program to renovate the facility. The MTA commissioned art for the downtown facility as part of the overall community effort to attract individuals from all over the State to come to downtown Flint as a destination.*

2. How much money is being spent on art by the MTA

Response: Presently the Mass Transportation Authority has committed \$524,052 for the purchase of art throughout the fourteen facilities owned and operated by the Mass Transportation Authority. Of this amount, \$317,500 is projected for use at the downtown transportation center. \$85,262 was spent on art for the MTA Administration Building. The remaining \$122,000 is spent on art distributed throughout the MTA Service Centers.

3. Over what period of time has the art been purchased?

Response: The Mass Transportation Authority has been accumulating funding for these facilities since the year 2000. It is our intention to continue to accumulate funding for the construction of service centers through the year 2010. The \$524,052 has been accumulated throughout that period. It is anticipated that an additional \$75,000 will be allocated to this program in future request for funding. The current projection is that the total cost for Art in Transit will be \$600,000 acquired over an eleven-year period. This would average approximately \$54,500 each year.

4. What is the source of funds for this program?

Response: Funds for the Art in Transit program comes from State and Federal discretionary grants. These grant funds are restricted for use on the construction and renovation of the service centers. No local Genesee County tax dollars are spent on this program. These are discretionary dollars awarded on a competitive basis. If the Mass Transportation Authority does not receive these dollars, they will be awarded to other communities throughout the United States.

5. Can the funds be used for other transportation purposes?

Response: No

6. How much of the cost is for art in the downtown center and the other centers?

Response: The Mass Transportation Authority has spent \$9,599,485 for the original construction and renovation of the transportation center. This does not include the cost of the land, which was valued at the time it was transferred to the Mass Transportation Authority from the City at approximately \$1 million. We have presently allocated \$317,500 for the Art in Transit program in the downtown transportation center, which is a special project. This constitutes approximately 3.3 % of the construction cost of the facility. The other service centers provides about 1.1% for Art in Transit.

7. Why isn't the art available for everyone to review?

Response: The art is available for everyone to review during normal business hours. The downtown transportation center is open approximately eighteen hours a day. Service centers are open nine hours each day. The Administration Building is open from 8:30 in the morning to 5:00 at night Monday through Friday. It is our intention to have a regular open facility scheduled in conjunction with the art community to encourage the public to view the art in the Administration Center and Service Centers. The downtown transportation center will have regular art exhibits as part of our effort to attract interested people from throughout the State of Michigan to come to the center at their convenience. The conclusion that certain pieces of art are behind closed doors is accurate only for the Administration Building where the responsibility of the Mass Transportation Authority to maintain reasonable security for our administrative employees is balanced with the access of the general public to see the art. During normal business hours, any request to see the art is encouraged and will be made available with the assistance of a tour guide.

8. Is the work being done by local artists?

Response: At the present time all artwork is being done by Michigan artist, most of which are from the local area. In some cases sculptures have been awarded to artists outside of Genesee County based upon the decision of the Art Selection Committee.

9. Why are we building service centers throughout Genesee County?

Response: The Mass Transportation Authority is the provider of public transportation throughout Genesee County. After we initially implemented the program from a single location on Dort Highway, it was determined that we must decentralize if we were to meet the expectations of the small cities and townships throughout Genesee County. We are a countywide authority providing service to all of the county. We were perceived as being a City of Flint public transportation authority because of our consolidated location. As a result of the decentralization where we lease facilities, we found customer acceptance and utilization increased significantly. We are building the Service Centers throughout Genesee County to better meet the expectations of the residents of Genesee County. The Mass Transportation Authority is projected to provide for the growing transportation needs for the long-term future. It has been determined to be more cost effective, as well as responsive to the public, by building facilities designed specifically for the mission of the Mass Transportation Authority as opposed to using lease facilities that were less than

adequate in many cases. The construction and maintenance of our facilities is a significant economic development program. It provides work in many construction disciplines that is so important to the economic growth of Genesee County.

10. Who determined the Artist to be awarded the various contracts?

Response: *The Mass Transportation Authority is focused on providing outstanding public transportation that is affordable to the public. We are not trained in the process for evaluating various forms of art. For this reason the decision was made to contract with the Greater Flint Arts Council to act as the facilitator for this program. The Flint Arts Council has established a committee to review proposals and ultimately make the decision on which proposal submitted by the artist would best meet the specifications outlined in the request published by the Great Flint Arts Council.*

In addition, the committee has identified a theme for each service center. In the Grand Blanc Center the theme is the role of public transportation in education. In the Fenton Center the theme is the role of public transportation in recreation. In the Mount Morris Center the theme is public transportation in family life. In the downtown center the focus is on civil rights. The proposals by the artists must address the theme of each center.