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ACT Director Christina Kretschmer at Bellaire Facilities.
Photo by Mark McAlpine

Finding a ride when you need one

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For most residents of Antrim County, getting to work, doctor's appointments, school, or shopping is simply a matter of starting the car and heading out. For some, young and old, getting from point A to point B without personal transportation is a challenge. There are a few taxi or personal driver options in the county, but the expense can be problematic. Antrim County Transportation (ACT), the only public transportation in the county, hopes to be a solution for those in need of affordable transportation.

Driver Bill Vaughn with Antrim County Transportation bus dropping off riders in Elk Rapids.
Photo by Mark McAlpine.

ACT is not a new county service. It started in 1977 and, next year, will celebrate 50 years of service to Antrim County residents. Christina Kretschmer, Director of ACT, joined the organization in 2025 with an understanding of the community and some of the challenges ACT was facing. She is a graduate of Bellaire High School and loves the area. "We want the community involvement," Kretschmer said. "We want to get the word out. Even though we have been operating since 1977, Antrim County residents have no idea what we do at ACT."

ACT provides transportation to over 1,600 riders each month to and from Antrim County locations covering 475 square miles. Over the years, they have grown to a fleet of 17 vehicles, 4 vans and 13 buses with wheelchair lifts. According to Kretschmer, eighteen percent of the funding for ACT services comes from Federal dollars. Thirty percent comes from the state through MDOT with the balance provided by Antrim County general funds, transportation contracts with area nonprofits, grants, and rider fees. Those funding percentages change each year depending on the budget.

The primary clientele comes from the at-risk community, including seniors and disabled, school kids, and workers. Dispatch and driver operations run from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday on a reservation system. Riders can make appointments for pickup at specific times and locations, reserve rides for reoccurring trips to work, school, or other activities, and even schedule rides weeks or months in advance for special events or appointments. Connections to Charlevoix, Kalkaska, and Grand Traverse transportation services are possible with advanced planning. Rides cost $2.00 each way for senior and disabled residents. Student rates are $3.00 to and from school. Regular rates are $4.00. Children under three ride free. Contracted rates are negotiated for key nonprofit organizations with transportation needs.

According to Kretschmer, ACT is reviewing all options to educate residents and bring new services to the county. "We used to have brochures a long time ago but have not had one recently," she explained. "There is a local advisory council – folks who ride the Transit regularly – that meets once per year to provide comment on the service and recommend ways to improve things for those riding the buses." Kretschmer is also reaching out to a variety of community groups, including a recent Wednesday morning presentation at Arts & Connection in Elk Rapids with the Antrim County Women's Coffee Club. "I want to know if we are providing a good service and what we can do to improve things," she explained.

Two recent recommendations from the local advisory council and other organizations called for Saturday operations and regular routes. Pilot programs were developed for both. Saturday service from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on the first and third Saturday of each month began in 2026. Regular bus routes were developed to and from the most popular destinations in Bellaire and Mancelona. A "Local Loop" is now running each Wednesday, Memorial Day through Labor Day in those Antrim County locations. Kretschmer notes that the Saturday service has been popular and ACT is evaluating the possibility of expanding that service.

ACT has also been busy expanding contract ride services with more agencies and nonprofits. Head Start, Meadowbrook Medical Care Facility, Commission on Aging, East Jordan Family Health Center, Department of Health and Human Services, and Shanty Creek for their worker ride program, are just a few of the contract services in operation. ACT has a unique contract with the Cowell Cancer Center in Traverse City to provide daily service from Antrim County to the Cancer Center for those undergoing radiation treatments. Kretchmer hopes to find ways to become more efficient in their operations to be able to expand to fill additional community needs. She cites food banks in Antrim County as an important link for many. "We are not just providing transportation for people to go to work or appointments," she stated. "Many are without transportation and depend on us for so many things. It is clear that food pantries are important to their needs."

Kretschmer believes that ACT will continue to grow to serve the community. "There is a great need for public transportation," she stated. "We have a caring staff who will go out of their way to help the community. We are providing a service and a lifeline to connect with the community. I want people to realize that we are here if you need us. That is the passion that drives my bus."

For those interested in reserving a ride, they can contact dispatchers at 231-533-8644 Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. to set up transportation.

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