



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 20, 2009**

Contact: Susan Miller, Executive Director  
Benzie Transportation Authority

(231) 325-3000; [www.benziebus.com](http://www.benziebus.com)  
Email: [susanmiller@benziebus.com](mailto:susanmiller@benziebus.com)

## **Benzie Bus Awarded \$1.3 Million in Federal Stimulus Funds to Build Bus Garage, Replace Six Buses**

*Investment Expected to Create Local Jobs and Boost Economy*

**HONOR, Mich.** – The Benzie Bus system has been awarded \$1.3 million in federal stimulus funds to build a bus garage and headquarters and buy six new buses for its countywide and Frankfort-to-Traverse City service. Benzie Bus also expects to receive funding from a forthcoming second round of federal stimulus grants for two more vehicles and limited support of general operations.

The funds flowing to Benzie Bus under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) include \$670,000 for the building project and about \$650,000 to purchase the buses, which will replace some of the oldest vehicles currently in use.

The groundbreaking for the project – which will include renovation and expansion of a vacant building east of Honor on U.S. 31 – is anticipated in the next few months, with the building slated for completion by summer 2010. The 20,000-square-foot structure will contain the bus system’s administrative offices, dispatch center, bus garage, and maintenance operations. Benzie Bus currently rents a small space for operations and parks its 20-vehicle fleet outside year round, while maintenance is conducted offsite without the availability of lift equipment.

“We’re thrilled to be able to use the federal funding to build a facility that will improve our operations and better protect our buses, without incurring any debt to our community,” said Susan Miller, Executive Director of the Benzie Bus system, whose ridership climbed 72 percent in 2008 to nearly 70,000 one-way passenger trips. “We’re also proud that we will be creating new construction jobs and enhancing the local economy, while continuing to take people to work, shop, and other local destinations.”

The board of directors of the Benzie Transportation Authority, which directs the Benzie Bus system, voted on October 13 to spend a portion of the stimulus funds to purchase the former Heller Signs building, on U.S. 31 in Homestead Township, and its nine-acre site. The bus authority intends to renovate and expand the existing structure, which also once housed a Bill Marsh car dealership, at a lower cost than required for all-new construction. The bus authority has hired AAI Inc., in Traverse City, to provide architectural and engineering services for the project.

"AAI, Inc. is proud to have been selected as architect to design the new Benzie Bus facility and continue our longstanding involvement with public and private entities in the greater Benzie County community," said Bob Sommerville, an architect and co-founder of the company.

In addition, the bus authority anticipates applying about \$235,000 to the building project from a recent federal appropriation from U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra and state matching funds. U.S. Sens. Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow also are seeking federal support for the facility and other capital projects planned by the Benzie Bus system.

*Benzie Bus/Benzie Transportation Authority*  
(231) 325-3000; Toll free (866) 325-3380

• P.O. Box 341  
• [www.benziebus.com](http://www.benziebus.com)

• Honor, Michigan 49640  
• Email: [Susanmiller@benziebus.com](mailto:Susanmiller@benziebus.com)

"The progress made by our public bus system in just its first few years has been nothing short of amazing," said Ingemar Johansson, chair of the Benzie Transportation Authority. "We should all be proud of what we have created and the difference it has made in the lives of many of our citizens. The establishment of this facility is the next natural step."

The ARRA funding for public transit is distributed by the Federal Transit Administration through the Michigan Department of Transportation, which expects to award approximately \$25 million in two phases to Michigan's rural bus agencies.

"The Recovery Act provides an opportunity to create jobs by investing in our infrastructure and enhancing rural transit services," said State Transportation Director Kirk Steudle, whose department helps fund and regulate 20 urban and 59 rural transit systems serving Michigan residents. "Working closely with the transit agencies, our goals for selecting projects were to upgrade the overall condition of the rural transit fleet and create Michigan jobs through construction of new facilities."

The six new diesel buses funded by ARRA should arrive in late 2009 or early 2010, allowing the Benzie Bus system to retire some of its oldest vehicles, which were acquired after long use by bus agencies elsewhere in Michigan. The buses will include five, 15-passenger vehicles similar to those buses presently in use and one 28-passenger bus for use on the daily route along U.S. 31 between Frankfort and Traverse City.

The Benzie Bus system employs 25 full-time and 10 part-time employees and currently operates 20 wheelchair lift-equipped buses year-round, Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., and Saturday from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. For more information, or to schedule a ride, please call Benzie Bus at 231-325-3000 or toll free at 866-325-3380; the bus system's website is [www.benziebus.com](http://www.benziebus.com).

###