****

**Citizens Taking Action for transit dependent riders**

**www.CTAriders.org**

**Officials Respond to Detroit Man That Walks to Work**

Feb. 03--When Rochester Hills Mayor Bryan Barnett learned that a Detroit man walks 21 miles a day to get to and from work in his city, he expressed awe and admiration.

"I wanted to meet this gentleman," Barnett said of Detroiter James Robertson, who walks to his job because there is no bus that can get him to Rochester Hills. "It's a pretty impressive story of determination ... He sets a wonderful example, and challenges us to think of the future of public transportation."

But as for the present situation, Barnett had no solutions. Rochester Hills, like dozens of other Oakland County communities, is not part of the SMART bus system that Robertson uses to get to Troy -- and has no plans to be.

"That would be a large underdog to pass in our community," said Barnett, noting he only gets about two requests a year for Rochester Hills to join the SMART bus system. "It doesn't appear that there is an easy option for that, or a high demand for that."

So go the woes of metro Detroiters who can't afford cars and have to rely on public transportation systems that often don't fully cover the area or commuters' needs.

Folks like Robertson, whose story in the Sunday Detroit Free Press has spurred national attention, including social media fund-raisers that have netted more than $119,000 in donations as of Monday night. A handful of dealerships also have offered to donate a car to Robertson, a factory worker who has had a perfect attendance record in more than 10 years at Schain Mold & Engineering in Rochester Hills.

Robertson's aging Honda Accord quit on him in 2005, and he's been walking from a bus stop near Somerset Collection to his job about seven miles away ever since.

As for the possibility that a new federal program -- Job Access/Reverse Commute (JARC) -- available from Detroit's bus system, might provide a small-bus service that would pick Robertson up at home and deliver him directly to his job temporarily, he said Sunday: "I'd rather they spent that money on a 24-hour bus system, not on some little bus for me. This city needs buses going 24/7. You can tell the city council and mayor I said that."

His message was heard, loud and clear.

"That story is heartbreaking and it's not necessary. There's more that we can do," said Michael Ford, the CEO of the Regional Transit Authority, a fledgling organization that is trying to improve public transportation across metro Detroit.

Ford said while Robertson's story is "very disheartening ... there are probably many other people in his situation."

"This story is just something. It can't continue to exist," Ford said. "We have to find ways to ... get people to jobs, create mobility options so basically anybody can get to anywhere they need to by public transportation."

But to do that, transportation officials say, the suburbs have to participate.