



**KENT COUNTY COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT – HUMAN SERVICES  
TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

**INTERURBAN TRANSIT PARTNERSHIP**

Revised September 2022

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## **SECTION I. OVERVIEW OF THE RAPID**

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The Interurban Transit Partnership, known as The Rapid, is the public transportation provider for the metropolitan Grand Rapids region. It is organized and operates under Michigan Public Act 196 of 1986. The activities of The Rapid are overseen by a 15-member board of directors that represents the six municipalities in The Rapid's service area: East Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, and Wyoming.

The Rapid operates two bus rapid transit (BRT) lines, the Silver Line and the Laker Line, 21 fixed routes, demand-response services for people with disabilities and senior citizens, rideshare and vanpooling programs, and most recently an on-demand microtransit service in select geographic zones within the service area. The Rapid coordinates the RideLink senior transportation program that is funded through a county-wide senior millage. The Rapid has been embarking on an on-going effort to ensure the ADA accessibility of all its fixed route bus stops.

The Rapid's service area includes 155 square miles and a population of 615,273. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, The Rapid provided 10.5 million trips in FY 2019/2020 and most recently provided 4.1 million trips in FY 2020/2021. Like most transit agencies throughout the country, ridership severely declined beginning in March 2020 with the outset of the pandemic. Since that time, ridership levels have been incrementally returning through remain significantly below pre-pandemic levels.

The Rapid operates primarily in Kent County, Michigan, located in the western portion of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Kent County's population is 656,955 situated over the county's 847 square miles. Kent County has an estimated 92,706 people 65 years or older, equaling 14.1% of the population in the County, up from 12.5% in 2015 (US Census Bureau, 2019). The number of individuals aged 65 or older has been steadily increasing in Kent County over the last 15 years. Further, the percent of persons living with a disability (as defined by the US Census Bureau) in Kent County is 10.6%



## **SECTION II. OUTREACH EFFORTS**

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The Rapid primarily utilized existing organizations to get input on this plan. The Rapid presented the plan to the Essential Needs Task Force (discussed later in this document) and invited additional key stakeholders to this meeting as well. The Rapid also presented the plan to its Consumer Advisory Committee. These bodies include local transportation providers, human service agency personal and seniors and individuals with disabilities as well as those representing those consumers, providing an excellent cross-section of Kent County.

Furthermore, public outreach obtained during The Rapid's 2018 ALIGN study and 2021 Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) was utilized as part of this planning process to help inform unmet transportation needs and strategies to address gaps.

For a list of stakeholders who were invited and participated in this study, please see Appendix A.

## **SECTION III. ASSESSMENT OF AVAILABLE SERVICES**

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### **A. Fixed Route Transportation Services**

The primary accessible transportation service in the greater Grand Rapids, Michigan area is The Rapid's fixed route bus system (see attached system map). The Rapid's service area is primarily concentrated within the six cities in southwestern Kent County that are members of the Interurban Transit Partnership. All Rapid buses are accessible and equipped with ramps, and all but a small percentage of The Rapid's fixed route bus stops are accessible, although in certain cases there are not sidewalks serving all stops. The latest significant expansion of fixed route services occurred in August 2018, when The Rapid's Route 19 was adjusted to serve the Bridge / Michigan Street corridor and enhanced to provide 15-minute service. The service was established due to a partnership between The Rapid, the City of Grand Rapids, and Spectrum Health. However, the service ceased operations in March 2020 due to the pandemic. Since that time, The Rapid has had to reduce service levels due to operator shortages and long-term funding uncertainties.

In August 2021, The Rapid implemented the Preferred Service Alternative of an 18-month long planning process referred to as the COA (Comprehensive Operational Analysis). The COA focused on maximizing the efficiency and accessibility of The Rapid's fixed route network and culminated in a series of recommendations to adjust route alignments, route schedules, and established the parameters for the agency to implement a new, on-demand microtransit service.

While over 90% of fixed route services compared to the pre-pandemic period have been restored, the system's weekday late evening service remains absent. Currently, The Rapid's hours of operation are as follows:

- Weekdays: 5:30 am – 11:00 pm
- Saturdays: 5:30 am – 10:00 pm
- Sundays: 7:00 am – 7:00 pm

Regular fares on The Rapid's fixed route system are set at \$1.75 per ride. Since January 2022, The Rapid has fully transitioned to use of its electronic fare card system, called the Wave card, and no longer accepts paper tickets and transfer cards, though cash payments are still accepted. The Wave card allows riders to take advantage of a fare-capping system and is categorized by adult cards, youth cards (for those 19 years and younger), reduced (for those 65 or older or who have a qualifying disability), and partner cards (available for qualifying passengers eligible through agreements between partner agencies and The Rapid).

In late 2022, The Rapid will be initiating an update of its Transit Master Plan (TMP). The TMP is a 20-year visionary document that guides future development of The Rapid's array of transportation services. The plan will assess the feasibility of regional commuter services, improved span and frequency of existing services, and alternative funding mechanisms. The plan update is anticipated to conclude in late 2023.

## **B. ADA-Accessible Paratransit Services**

The Rapid's GO!Bus paratransit service provides door-to-door ADA transportation to seniors and people with disabilities who cannot access the fixed route bus service in The Rapid's primary service area. Prior to the pandemic in FY 2018/2019, GO!Bus provided approximately 335,000 rides. Most recently in FY 2020/2021, GO!Bus provided 195,000 rides. The Rapid Board oversees GO!Bus, with input from its Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) which is made up of consumers (seniors aged 65 and older and individuals with disabilities) and members of organizations representing seniors and individuals with disabilities. These members include human service agency representatives, the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan, Senior Neighbors, Hope Network, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services.

## **C. Ancillary Rapid Services**

The Rapid provides an array of additional transportation services. These include the RapidVan, a vanpool program for long distance commuters; PASS, a demand response service available to anyone living more than a third of a mile off a bus line yet within The Rapid's service area; and Rapid Connect, an on-demand microtransit pilot service operating in northwest Walker and southeast Kentwood designed to provide public transit connections in areas which are inefficient to serve with traditional 40-foot fixed route buses. As of March 2022, Rapid Connect is still operating as a pilot service from 6 am to 6 pm on weekdays.

## **D. Contracted Paratransit Services**

The Rapid holds a contract with Network 180, Kent County's Community Mental Health (CMH) agency, to provide trips for CMH clients for whom public transportation is not appropriate or who live outside the Rapid service area or need service outside



The Rapid’s hours of operation. This contract provides approximately 30,000 trips per year, and service is currently provided by Hope Network of West Michigan. Hope Network used Federal 5310 grant money for capital equipment used for this contract.

**E. RideLink**

The Essential Needs Task Force (ENTF) is a local committee that examines the accessibility of essential needs in Kent County and has produced a transportation resource guide that is available online (<http://www.kentride.org>), detailing all human service transportation services available throughout western Michigan, including Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon counties. The listed services include The Rapid’s array of transportation options located in its primary urban service area. Service options outside The Rapid’s primary service area, however, are more limited.

In response, the ENTF facilitated the creation of RideLink, a local human services transportation coordination effort. In addition to The Rapid, the region’s largest human service transportation provider, Hope Network of West Michigan, United Methodist Community House, Senior Neighbors, and Kent County Community Action (formerly) now coordinate their transportation services under RideLink. The organization is funded primarily through the Kent County Senior Millage and as such the service is reserved for individuals aged 60 and older. The Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan is the contract manager for these funds.

The RideLink call center (housed in The Rapid’s Special Services office) is the single point of contact for older adults over the age of 60 to arrange countywide transportation. The Rapid, which coordinates and schedules all RideLink trips, uses its trip scheduling software to schedule the best service provider for the trip. This has led to easier access to transportation services for clients, as well leading to efficient use of our region’s transportation resources. Ridership has grown overall since the program was implemented and spread amongst all the member agencies. However, due to COVID-19, ridership dropped significantly in 2020 and 2021.

As of May 2017, Red Cross no longer provides transportation services.

**Table 1 – RideLink Ridership by Partner Agency, 2015-2021**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
KCCA (form. ACSET)	13,254	13,952	11,698	14,059	13,042	6,668	7,702
Red Cross	3,041	5,124	1,518	0	0	0	0
Hope Network	10,206	16,792	20,296	25,856	26,525	13,963	19,311
Senior Neighbors	12,459	12,653	11,107	9,267	10,161	13,559	7,934
United Methodist	9,210	9,085	7,931	8,236	8,005	5,172	5,505
The Rapid	10,971	11,674	12,110	12,345	12,277	9,425	8,207
<b>Total Trips</b>	<b>61,156</b>	<b>69,280</b>	<b>64,660</b>	<b>69,763</b>	<b>70,010</b>	<b>48,787</b>	<b>48,659</b>

Access to RideLink is limited to people 60 years or older with or without disabilities. It currently does not provide options anyone less than 60 years of age. Since there is no

“required” fare to ride RideLink (there is a \$2.00 suggested donation per trip) this service is especially helpful to low-income seniors in the county.

#### **F. Ancillary Non-Profit Transportation Services**

Hope Network provides a variety of services in Kent County as well, namely Kent Community Transit (KCT) service to several communities outside The Rapid’s service area. KCT is a curb-to-curb service for people with disabilities and seniors that provides paratransit service for individuals residing in participating municipalities. The number of one-way trips per month for individuals is capped at 20. Hope Network also provides Community Mental Health trips through a contract with The Rapid and Network 180 and.

Hope Network launched its Wheels to Work program in July 2016. Wheels to Work assists employees with transportation to and from work for an agreed-upon fee as determined by an agreement between Hope Network and the employer. The program operates through payroll deductions with the employer and employee sharing the cost. The employee portion of the fee is deducted from the employee’s paycheck, and Hope Network bills employers for their total usage.

Another source of transportation services is Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) that either provide or reimburse clients for Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) services. Hope Network is an example of an agency that contracts with HMOs to provide some of these rides. However, little is known about the extent of the transportation provided or method by which most of this transportation service is administered.

#### **G. City of Grand Rapids Mobility Services**

The City of Grand Rapids as of early 2022 is piloting two alternative mobility initiatives, the Grand Rapids Autonomous Vehicle Initiative (AVGR) and a shared-use micromobility system, designed to provide transportation services beyond traditional demand-response paratransit and scheduled fixed route services. Both mobility initiatives leverage recent technology advancements in the surface transportation realm and are being evaluated in terms of utilization, cost effectiveness, and performance.

The AVGR program offered self-driving, autonomous vehicles along the DASH West route alignment in downtown Grand Rapids throughout 2019 and 2020. The service was expanded in 2021 as part of the second phase of the project to an on-demand mobility service covering a designated area of four-square miles around the city’s downtown and immediate westside neighborhoods. The self-driving AVGR vehicles could be requested using the May Mobility smartphone app to pick up passengers at the nearest designated pickup location and drop off passengers at designated stops closest to their points of interest. The program was funded through a partnership among the City of Grand Rapids, May Mobility, Via, and Gentex Corporation. Wheelchair accessible vehicles were made available upon request. The pilot concluded in April 2022.

A micromobility pilot in the City of Grand Rapids began in late 2020 and offers bike and scooters options at designated parking zones throughout the city.

## **SECTION IV. ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT NEEDS**

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This section details unmet transportation needs and gaps in mobility identified by regional stakeholders, The Rapid's Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC), the Kent County Essential Needs Task Force (ENTF) Transportation Subcommittee, public input received during The Rapid's ALIGN study and Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA), and demographic data obtained from the US Census Bureau.

A list of stakeholders who were invited to participate in this effort is available in Appendix A of this plan.

Workshops were held with the CAC and ENTF Transportation Subcommittee in early 2022 with the aim of obtaining feedback and insights into unmet mobility needs across Kent County. These two particular groups include several individuals representing seniors, individuals with disabilities, and representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation providers, human services providers, and other members of the public with a focused interest in mobility and transportation-related issues. Additional individuals and organizations who are not members of the ENTF Transportation Subcommittee were invited to the workshop to capture a broader range of perspectives.

Along with transportation needs identified in previous plans and studies and an analysis of recent demographic data, a series of mobility needs and barriers to transportation in Kent County were developed as contained in this section. The consensus of these groups includes the following:

### **A. Transit Services**

- Not all Kent County residents living in the urbanized area are served by fixed route transit. Options for transportation outside of the urbanized area is limited.
- A patchwork of transportation services exists in Kent County with much of it having program eligibility requirements. Both program and non-program related transportation services are limited and often rationed. This variety of transportation services can be difficult for the public to understand.
- Development continues to accelerate in areas beyond the current service area of ITP/The Rapid, leaving major employment clusters, recreation destinations, and residential areas without public transportation.
- Several portions of the county where residents are generally lower-income and have lower health outcomes, particularly the City of Grand Rapids' Neighborhoods of Focus, lack adequate access to fresh food otherwise known

as “food deserts.” Transportation services are needed to link them to better food options.

- Population in Kent County is aging with the over 65 age group increasing which will result in a significant increase in the number of transportation disabled persons.
- There is no long term, adequate and stable funding source for public transportation outside ITP/The Rapid’s service area.
- Some existing transportation options have fares that are cost-prohibitive to low-income and fixed-income customers, particularly those with chronic, treatment-intensive conditions such as dialysis.
- Service capacity limitations, which can take many forms:
  - Limited geographical area served, particularly in rural areas outside The Rapid’s service area.
  - Limited days and hours of service, particularly for workforce transportation needs for second and third shift employees.
  - Limited number of drivers available.
  - Limited eligibility
- Accessibility at bus stops during winter months.
- Options for transportation to neighboring Counties are very limited.
- Determination of what information is absolutely necessary for each provider/funder in order to make registration and/or the payment process easy for everyone
- Cost of transportation to the consumer over all modes (ex. GO!Bus service, late night taxi service, bus fare, etc.)
- Challenge of providing service in both urban and rural areas within Kent County and the different strategies needed to successfully provide transportation service to these areas.

## **B. Coordination**

- Typically, human service agency-provided trips are only available for agency clients for agency-related trips.
- While significant investments and partnerships have been successfully developed recently, there is a continued need for technology enhancements to not only coordinate trips better among various agencies but in order to:

- Allow for easier more accurate scheduling of trips.
- Allow communication with the vehicles (GPS, AVL, etc.) and the driver.
- Allow call center and/or dispatchers to see where drivers have been and where they are going
- Allow better communication on real-time service issues
- Limited accessible non-motorized paths (sidewalks, curb ramps, paved stop pads, etc.) at core service locations
- Limited street side wheelchair accessibility to transit stops
- Limited safe pedestrian crossings, particularly in the suburban areas of the Grand Rapids region

### **C. Outreach/Marketing**

- Improve information dissemination, particularly for hard-to-reach general public who are not associated with an agency.
- Lack of awareness of available transit services.

## **SECTION V. STRATEGIES & ACTIVITIES TO ADDRESS GAPS**

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The following section includes strategies and/or activities designed to address the identified gaps between current services and needs, as well as the opportunities to achieve efficiencies in service delivery.

1. Maintain existing transportation services.
2. Expand availability of fixed route transportation services within the Grand Rapids urbanized area and countywide transportation services to currently unserved area.
3. Increase funding levels for operating and capital expenditures for transportation service providers/agencies.
  - a. Increased operational funding for additional days/hours/frequency of transit service
  - b. Additional equipment/maintenance support equipment
    - i. Computers
    - ii. Tablets

- iii. Global Positioning System (GPS)/Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) equipment
    - iv. Trip scheduling software and invoicing software
  - c. Add additional vehicles, particularly low- or no-emission vehicles
  - d. Add additional vehicles with lifts
  - e. Increase operating dollars to support equipment
  - f. Administering coordination of human service transportation efforts
  - g. Ensuring the existing funding meets the costs of the services being provided
- 4. Continue development coordinated efforts
  - a. Cross market and find solutions with all arms of the Essential Needs Task Force and The Rapid Consumer Advisory Committee as transportation is a barrier to many essential services and individuals represented by the CAC members
  - b. Continue operating RideLink as a brokerage service to increase capacity of rides available to persons over 60 in Kent County and reduce costs of providing transportation
  - c. Expand capacity of the RideLink coordination network
  - d. Expand RideLink beyond just service for individuals 60 years of age or older and expand its hours of service
- 5. Expanded service for individuals with disabilities and seniors
- 6. Add and expand proven technology including automatic technology, such as Automatic Vehicle Locators, GPS capability cell phones or portable vehicle navigators, cameras to better utilize resources in providing rides in Kent County
- 7. Coordinate HMO's non-emergency medical transportation with human service transportation providers and educate the public about HMO transportation availability
- 8. Coordinate publicly-funded transportation services with private transportation providers such as AmbuCab, local services and Clocks Mobility
- 9. Advocate with local elected officials to improve support for public transportation services in Kent County and provide support/policies that encourage accessible transportation (ex. policies that incentivize transit-oriented development (TOD))

10. Continue to research and implement new transportation delivery models based on new development in transportation service delivery with a particular focus on solving first mile/last mile trips. This includes looking at Transportation Network Company models and other Mobility on Demand transportation options.
11. Promote accessible, walkable, and bikeable community that work for all modes of transportation.
12. Provide more transit services on holidays.

## **SECTION VI. PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

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Expanding capacity of existing transportation systems is a key priority. This includes reducing capacity constraints, improving geographic coverage of transportation services, expanding who is eligible for various transportation services and continuing the coordination effort between private, public and non-profit service providers. Solutions as described by the committee members will be implemented as funding becomes available.

## **SECTION VII. ADOPTION PROCESS**

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This section provides a description of the plan's adoption process, including what was approved, how it was approved, etc.

- The final plan will be submitted to The Rapid's Consumer Advisory Committee as well as the Essential Needs Task Force for these bodies' review and comment.
- The final plan will also be formally approved by the Interurban Transit Partnership's Board.
- The Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan will be sent via e-mail to the participants for electronic approval and then forwarded to the Michigan Department of Transportation.
- The Plan will also be submitted to the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC), the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization, for inclusion in its Long Range Transportation Plan.

## APPENDIX A. PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Name	Organization	Participated
<b>Aaron Estrada</b>	Mercy Health	x
<b>Alejandra Meza</b>	Hispanic Center	
<b>Amy Kettring</b>	Network 180	
<b>Andrew Ryskamp</b>	CRC	
<b>Aruna Kamara</b>	Kent County	x
<b>Autumn Smith</b>		
<b>Barbara Hawkins-Palmer</b>	Kent County	
<b>Bill Cole</b>	Hope Network	
<b>Bill Kirk</b>	The Rapid	x
<b>Bob Barnes</b>	Senior Neighbors	
<b>Carra Oteto</b>	Heart of W MI United Way	
<b>Catherine Landers</b>	North Kent Connect	
<b>Charis Austin</b>	DAKC, The Rapid	
<b>Cher Blattner</b>	SECOM	
<b>Cheri Birdsall</b>	DHHS	x
<b>Christina Hoelzle</b>		
<b>Claire Guisfredi</b>	North Kent Connect	
<b>Connie Bohatch</b>	City of Grand Rapids	
<b>Dan Mitchell</b>	LARA	
<b>Dave Bulkowski</b>	Disability Advocates of Kent County	x
<b>Dawn Frambes</b>	Calvin University	
<b>Debbi Coleman</b>	Hope Network - Wheels to Work	
<b>Debbie Jones</b>	Volunteers In Service	x
<b>Dwayne Moore</b>	United Methodist Covenant House	
<b>Emily Madsen</b>	ENTF	x
<b>Eric Kay</b>	Assisted Non Emergency Transport (ANET)	
<b>Evelyn Esparza</b>	Hispanic Center	
<b>Fred Lovejoy</b>	LEO	
<b>Fungai Mboko</b>	Notions Marketing	
<b>Ginnie Smith</b>	City of Grand Rapids	
<b>Gordie Moeller</b>	Ridge Economic Agricultural Partners	x
<b>Heather Wallace</b>	GVSU	
<b>James Dischinger-Smedes</b>	Kent County	
<b>James Treece</b>		
<b>Jason Prescott</b>	The Rapid	
<b>Jayne Vosovic</b>	Michigan League for Public Policy	
<b>Jereme Vanden Heuvel</b>	State of MI	
<b>Joana Leatherman</b>	Bethany	
<b>John Mitchell</b>	2-1-1	
<b>Karyn Pelon</b>	Kent County	
<b>Kate Schramm</b>	Feonix Mobility Rising	x
<b>Kathy Kooistra</b>	Hope Network	
<b>Katie Hop</b>	KConnect	
<b>Keenan King</b>	KConnect	
<b>Ken Miguel-Cipriano</b>	City of Grand Rapids	x
<b>Kendrick Heinlein</b>	AAA	
<b>Kimberly Doyle</b>	Senior Neighbors	x



<b>Kimberly Groeneveld</b>	Hope Network	
<b>KJ Tucker</b>		x
<b>Kristen Gravelle</b>	North Kent Connect	
<b>Laura Luchies</b>	Center for Social Research	
<b>Laura Madison</b>	The Rapid	
<b>Laurel Joseph</b>	Grand Valley Metropolitan Council	x
<b>Lillia Pimpleton</b>	Cherry Health	
<b>Lindsey DeShetler</b>	Salvation Army	
<b>Louanne McIntyre</b>	Streams of Hope	
<b>Lynn Snyder</b>	2-1-1	
<b>Maddie Strom</b>	North Kent Connect	x
<b>Marie Tubergen</b>	The Rapid	
<b>Marquis Beene</b>		
<b>Max Dillivan</b>	The Rapid	x
<b>Melissa Havey</b>	State of MI	
<b>Michael Williams</b>	Disability Advocates of Kent County	x
<b>Miguel Velasco</b>	HealthNet	
<b>Monica Light</b>	Flat River Outreach Ministries	
<b>Morgan Zielke</b>		x
<b>Neil Carlson</b>	Center for Social Research	
<b>Nicholas Grinwis</b>	Salvation Army	
<b>Nick Dobkowski</b>	ENTF	x
<b>Nicole Kukla</b>	ENTF	
<b>Patricia Dalton</b>	Kent County Medical Society	
<b>Rachel Kunnath</b>	Kent County Health Dept	x
<b>Rafael Castañon</b>	HealthNet	
<b>Sabrina Minarik</b>	AAA	x
<b>Sagar Dangal</b>		
<b>Sam Stortz</b>	emPower	
<b>Sandra Ghoston-Jones</b>	Kent County	
<b>Scott Kearney</b>	Kearney Associates	
<b>Sherrie Gillespie</b>	Kent County Community Action	
<b>Stacey Fish</b>	State of MI	
<b>Steve Hartman</b>	Hope Network	
<b>Sue Sefton</b>	Kent County	x
<b>Susan Cervantes</b>	Kent County Community Action	
<b>Susan Roeder</b>		
<b>Suzanne Reinink</b>	Volunteers In Service	
<b>Tammi Borucki</b>	State of MI	
<b>Tammy Britton</b>	City of Grand Rapids	
<b>Teresa Branson</b>	Kent County	
<b>Tiffany Pearson</b>	United Methodist Covenant House	
<b>Tom Gott</b>	Trusted Rides	
<b>Tom Oosterbaan</b>	Senior Neighbors	
<b>Tywanna Jones</b>	Priority Health	
<b>Wafa Haddad</b>	Noors Heaven	
<b>Walt Marston</b>	Urban Mobility	
<b>Wende Randall</b>	ENTF	x
<b>Wendie Preiss</b>	Flat River Outreach Ministries	
<b>Whitney Ehresman</b>	The Rapid	
<b>Winnie Brinks</b>	MI State Senator	

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