

HISTORY OF CURRENT HITA BOARD'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

HITA = Harsens Island Transportation Authority

- **Complete Research of previous HITA boards and their accomplishments.** HITA was formed in 1997, and this Board was just resurrected and put into place in 2019 after a long shut down and request from the community to do something about it. They wanted HITA to create alternative transportation to and from Harsens Island. They spent much of their time reviewing information and the history of the previous Boards and what happened with Champion Auto Ferry, The Bridge Company, Clay Township and more.
- **Dozens of meetings were held with The Detroit International Bridge Company (DIBC)** only to discover this was not going to be feasible. DIBC wanted HITA to give them \$45 million for the bascule portion of the bridge and maintain it. However, they would not allow HITA to have any say in rates or operations, which HITA deemed unacceptable. HITA abandoned this form of alternative transportation to work on an alternative ferry solution.
- **HITA learned early on that Ferry Systems receive more funding than any other form of transportation.** The Board decided this was the best plan of action, and it would maintain the integrity of the island's current form of passage, keeping the island ambience as similar as possible.
- **HITA accepted over 400 signed petitions** that were gathered stating they believe that the current form and operation of the existing transportation is not sufficient to provide the adequate services for the Health, Safety, and Welfare of the residents and visitors to Harsens Island.
- **HITA went to Lansing to get funding and received \$250,000.** With the help of Gary Eisen and Dan Lauewers, they were able to achieve this. These monies are what HITA has used thus far for many things.
- **HITA attempted to work with Champion Auto Ferry –** This effort was unsuccessful.
- **HITA researched companies and paid for a 10-week traffic study.** This showed the revenue generation and traffic patterns to be expected.
- **HITA found property on both the island and the mainland.** HITA identified property for the Ferry Port. This was needed to begin a feasibility study. MDOT and others explained to HITA that the feasibility study is a key element in grant applications. HITA has been paying monthly for this property.
- **HITA sent out over 10 requests for bids on a Feasibility Study and hired an experienced company.** OHM Advisors were chosen to do the work. Phase One was completed and paid for, but phases two and three still need to be completed to move forward.
- **HITA hired a grant writer – Linda Davis-Kirksey.** After interviewing many grant writers, Linda Davis-Kirksey was chosen, with an impressive 95% success rate. She applied for a \$750,000 grant for planning but was turned down due to lack of support from local politicians and community support. She graciously paused her contract with HITA until these things can be put into place.

- **HITA attended many SEMCOG meetings** – HITA has formed relationships with personnel who will support their efforts. HITA's project initiative has been put on the long-term range plan. This is like being put on the local Master Plan, and will help to qualify for grants, assistance, and funding.
- **HITA visited EUPTA operations.** This is the upper peninsula ferry operations. HITA nurtured relationships with EUPTA who provided much needed information, such as blueprints for docks, contracts they use for hiring and many other needed aspects.
- **HITA met with Blue Water Area Transit several times.** These meetings were to discuss previous offers for funding to Champion Auto Ferry and eligibility for future HITA funding. They confirmed HITA will be eligible and they will assist in the transfer of these funds for operating costs through Act 51 monies, when the project is completed.
- **HITA attended SCCOTS (St Clair County Office of Transportation) meetings** – HITA formed relationships again to make their efforts known, and to be on the radar for future funding.
- **HITA built a website.** To communicate with the public, the www.harsensita.org website was built to share as much information as possible. Also, to accept donations, should anyone wish to donate.
- **HITA traveled to Wisconsin to visit the Ferry Boat Builder.** Much information was gathered from the Burger Boat Company in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. HITA visited more than once, as the boat for EUPTA was being built to become educated. Each time a tour was included to experience these state-of-the-art ice-breaking ferries being put together. It takes approximately one year to build a new ferry. These vessels are very dependable, cost effective and safe. HITA really wants to see this type of service for Harsens Island.
- **Clay has attended St Clair County Board meetings** – HITA requested the County Board's support, and they pledged it.
- **HITA collected many support letters from others as well.** Support letters have been received from MDOT, Clay Twp, and St. Clair County.
- **HITA attended a Charity event with the Friends of St Clair River** – Another ally was made with this organization.
- **HITA set up a booth on Browne's Field to share their initiative.** The HITA Board attended for two days, sharing the message, and bringing about awareness to the community.
- **HITA met with a Miller Canfield Attorney to help with a proposed millage** – This entailed working with the Clay Township and St Clair County Elections department to make this happen with revisions that were needed.

This is a voluntary Board that has prepared and held dozens of meetings. The HITA Board has written and posted minutes, treasurers reports, and went through yearly audits. These 5 men have spent so much of their time without receiving any pay. All being done with kind, caring support for the community they love. Hopefully, now that it is time for everyone to give back, they will show their support. It's for the safety of our residents and the betterment of Harsens Island. It's not only for us experiencing life on this unique and special island now, but for our future generations to be able to carry on our traditions and love for this place we call home.