

# Benzie Bus brings back its flex route for county residents

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Joann and Jim Morrell are pictured inside of a bus in Benzie County in this July 24, 2024, photo. (UpNorthLive News)

BENZIE COUNTY, Mich., (WPBN/WGTU) -- A lot of things went away because of the COVID-19 global pandemic and some things never returned.

But Benzie Bus announced Wednesday morning they are bringing back a once popular mainstay of their service.

And some of the riders who have very special ties to the bus service couldn't be happier.

"Neither Jim or I drive anymore. We both have seizure disorder, so it's safer not to and this is our mode of transportation," said Joann Worden Morrell.

Right now, Jim and Joann know well that the Benzie Bus service plays an important role in their daily lives.

In fact, in the most adorable way possible, it did 12 years ago as well.

"We met on the Benzie bus. We were both sitting on the bench waiting for Benzie Bus and then we struck up a conversation. So we had a nice chat chat and then we both got on the same bus when it was time to ride and I was getting off first and I didn't want to miss an opportunity, so I gave him my calling card with my phone number. And he called me that night and we've been together ever since," Joann said.

Yep, they found love on the Benzie Bus.

This morning, like they do often, they called up the bus service for ride a breakfast date.

"The drivers are wonderful. They help out," Joann said.

Needless to say, Jim and Joann are fans of the bus service.

And more people may find rides -- and maybe love -- because at the end of the month..

"We're excited to bring back our Flex Route," said Benzie Bus operations manager Chad Hollenbeck.

What the COVID-19 pandemic shut down, the route is coming back by demand.

"It's going to run from our bus station in Honor all the way over to Frankfurt to Paul Oliver hospital. So it'll run that on an hourly basis and we have one bus leaving Honor on the hour and one bus leaving Frankfurt on the hour," Hollenbeck said.

Folks living with a 1/2 mile of the route can call the bus service and get picked up at their door and dropped off closer to their destination,

"This route is I guess what I would say our bread and butter," Hollenbeck said.

The Flex Route busses will be rolling 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. to get folks who can't or don't want to drive where they need to go.

"Different doctors offices, shopping centers, drugstores, that type of thing," Hollenbeck said.

It's a bold rebirth for a bus service that has already seen ridership jump 30% in the past two years.

This latest addition may see those numbers go even higher.

A lot of riders and potentially a lot of new ones coming on board.

Their job is to get people from here to there, but their mission may go a little beyond that.

"It's very rewarding to see that you touch people's lives from anywhere three, four years old that or are riding to a daycare or a summer camp, all the way up to people that are over 100 years old," Hollenbeck said.

Benzie Bus is hiring drivers right now and they are asking voters on August 6 for their first real millage increase in 17 years, citing increased costs, as well as a look to the future to possibly continue to expand rider options.