



ARBOC delivers fleet expansion and faster accessibility for the community of Holland-Zeeland

By Ami Sailor

With a fleet that is 65 percent ARBOC, this Holland-based operator caters to travelers of all mobility needs



Originally formed in 2000 as an outgrowth of Holland's dial-a-ride bus service, Macatawa Area Express (MAX), is a small urban transit system that provides mass transportation in Ottawa County's Holland-Zeeland metropolitan area. The system operated three simple fixed bus routes under Holland city government's direct jurisdiction until July of 2007, when it became governed by an independent Transportation Authority board made up of representatives from the city of Holland and Holland Charter Township. MAX then increased to seven fixed routes.

After 12 years of operation, Macatawa Area Express sought to expand its fleet and recognized the opportunity for diversification.

"In addition to increasing our fleet, we were searching for a bus that would offer our passengers a speedier, more convenient boarding process, while still complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)," says Beth Higgs, customer service, marketing manager, and interim co-director for Macatawa Area Express. "We wanted to focus on a quick entry that would cater to passengers of all mobility needs."

Macatawa Area Express began studying its options.

Enter ARBOC

"At the time, our research pointed to ARBOC Specialty Vehicles (ARBOC), known for representing a fully accessible bus with the efficiency we were looking for," Higgs says.

From there, MAX chose to add four of ARBOC's Spirit of Mobility (Mobility) model vehicles to their growing fleet. The Spirit of Mobility provides a single, non-discriminatory patented angled and accessible entranceway and is built on a conventional General Motors (GM) cutaway that allows all the passengers to enter through the same 39-inch wide door opening. The interior offers theater seating that provides better viewing for all riders and enhances their experience on the bus. This Mobility is equipped with a full air-ride suspension that enables the bus to kneel. The kneeling feature combined with the bi-fold ramp creates quick, easy access for all passengers and saves a tremendous amount of time during the boarding process.

"The ramp, in place of a few steps, is the biggest advantage we experience using the ARBOC buses," Higgs says. "It is easier and safer for everyone to board a low floor. This bus kneels, bringing the already low entry even closer to the ground."

The kneeling feature also allows for a 1:6 ramp slope and an entrance of less than five inches from the curb without the ramp being deployed. Many people have trouble with steps. Seniors, children, and even average adults with no mobility impairments often experience difficulty, but with zero steps throughout the bus, riders of all abilities are able to access and maneuver within the cabin without difficulty.

Positive feedback

Pleased with the initial four bus order, Macatawa Area Express added another two Spirit of Mobility low floors to their fleet in 2013, two in 2015, and 10 more in 2016.

"We are happy with the features and performance of the ARBOCs," Higgs says. "In addition to the speed and convenience of the ramp, the buses offer ample room to navigate wheelchairs in the ADA area. We chose to purchase more of the same model each time we increased our fleet. We now operate 10 fully accessible fixed routes with over 400 convenient bus stops and a fully accessible demand response service. Our fleet currently has a total of 28 buses, 18 of which were manufactured by ARBOC."

The accessible Mobility buses are used primarily for Reserve-A-MAX demand response service; however, they are also often utilized on routes that can get by with a smaller bus rather than a large heavy-duty bus. They are in operation up to 18 hours per day, driving as many as 200 miles. During the spring, four ARBOCs are used as shuttles for the Tulip Time Festival, an event that draws over 500,000 people annually from all over the world. It's because of this versatility that the Mobility continues to stand out in the transit industry, 10 years after it launched.



Vehicle specifications

The Mobility is built on the dependable GM4500 chassis with a Vortec 6.0L gasoline engine and a six-speed transmission. This bus has a Gross Vehicle Weight Rating of 14,200 pounds and is available in 23-foot, 26-foot, and 28-foot lengths. It seats up to 23 passengers and up to an industry-leading eight wheelchairs.

All vehicles in the Macatawa Area Express fleet are equipped with destination signs to display the routes, as well as bike racks so riders can bike and ride to their final destination.

Safety first

While ARBOC has been and continues to be a proponent of *Equal Access for Everyone*[®], it also put a strong focus on driver and passenger safety. ARBOC is an industry leader in safety, performing third-party safety testing on all its product lines. >>



“We go above and beyond what is required for safety testing because we want to ensure each rider can enjoy a safe, relaxing ride,” says Don Roberts, president of ARBOC Specialty Vehicles. “Safety is always our primary focus, but it shouldn’t stop when the bus leaves our manufacturing facility. Each transit agency should share the same desire for their fleet and take the measures necessary to ensure that every bus is in optimal operating condition throughout its life cycle.”

Routine maintenance is a vital component to safety as well. A good maintenance program goes a long way in preserving the life and functionality of a bus. To ensure it receives prime performance and safety from its fleet, Macatawa Area Express services its vehicles regularly. General upkeep is performed every 5,000 miles, including oil changes and routine maintenance. Four of the buses manufactured by ARBOC are now six years old, yet are still functioning in excellent condition.

Low floor is best for transit

From its start in 2000 through today, Macatawa Area Express has experienced not only a tremendous amount of growth, but also a vast improvement in safety, accessibility, and efficiency. “Safety is our number one priority,” says Higgs. “The low floor helps those with walkers or wheelchairs navigate the bus much easier and more efficiently, and the Q’Straint tie downs make our passengers feel safe and secure.”



For more information on the full line of safe and efficient ARBOC low floor vehicles, please visit www.ARBOSV.com. **BR**

Ami Sailor is marketing manager for ARBOC Specialty Vehicles. For more information, visit www.ARBOSV.com.