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**MANISTEE AREA RAIL RELOCATION FEASIBILITY STUDY
SUBJECT OF APRIL 24, 2008 INFORMATION FORUM**

Manistee, Michigan – The results of a feasibility study to relocate rail lines around Manistee Lake will be presented and discussed in an open Community Information Forum at Thursday, April 24, 2008 at Manistee's First Baptist Church from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (located at 1201 Lakeshore, just north of the intersection of US 31 and Lakeshore).

The Forum will be facilitated by the Manistee-based Alliance for Economic Success that commissioned the study by Pathfinder Engineering, Inc. under a Community Development Block Grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

The purpose of the Manistee Area Rail Relocation Feasibility Study was to obtain information and existing data and study possible alternative routes and designs and evaluate impacts as a result of the potential relocation of rail around Manistee Lake and provide cost estimates for alternatives.

Renee' Ihlenfeldt, director of the Alliance for Economic Success, said that the rail study was done because of several challenges involving the rail line that currently runs around the north end of Manistee Lake. Those challenges include:

- Safety concerns at the rail street crossings, including heavily traveled US 31.
- A rail swing bridge over the Manistee River, built in the 1800's, that could delay rail or freighter traffic if the bridge malfunctions since parts for the bridge must be custom-made.

- The need to reduce costs and improve rail efficiency in serving major employers located on Manistee Lake, all of which are mainstay Manistee manufacturers.
- Two rail bridges built in the 1830's that cannot support heavily loaded rail cars and would require approximately \$4 million to be replaced
- Natural resources threats since the current rail system crosses through and over the entire river mouth and wetland of the Big Manistee River
- Lands that are prime for economic development and job creation that are "land-locked" by the location of the current rail system around the north end of Manistee Lake

Ihlenfeldt said that the rail study looked at four options, including one from a study done in 1989. All options, as well as the existing rail system will be discussed and presented at the April 24 forum that is open to the public.

Representatives involved in the study will be available at this meeting to discuss the study's findings and answer questions, including personnel from Marquette Rail, Pathfinder Engineering, Inc., Abonmarche, Inc., and the Alliance for Economic Success.

Ihlenfeldt said that three initiatives are underway involving Manistee Lake that are independent but interrelated. In addition to the feasibility study, the Michigan State University small Town Design Initiative is leading a community-driven process to develop design concepts and images for properties surrounding Manistee Lake. There is also an Economic Development study and Marketing Strategy being completed to focus efforts on attracting businesses and jobs to the area.

"While mindful of the other related initiatives, the purpose of our Community Information Forum on April 24 will be to present and discuss the findings of the Rail Relocation Feasibility Study," Ihlenfeldt said. "If this project moves forward, it will involve and impact a number of communities, businesses, residents and other organizations. We encourage all interests to join us on April 24."