

# 114 - Social Media Policy

Effective Date: 06/01/2011

Revision Date:

## I. POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of the Macatawa Area Express (MAX) Transportation Authority to engage in appropriate Internet-based and social media communications in order to converse, educate, and share information with residents, passengers, advocates, other transit systems and those interested in public transit issues.

The Authority realizes that social media is evolving due to the emergence of new technology, such as cellular “smart” phones, portable laptops, tablets, and other mobile communication devices that are replacing traditional means of communication. Because social media has become the communication tool of choice for a large segment of the population and allows for open exchanges of ideas and information, it is proper and necessary for the Authority to engage in meaningful dialogue using social media.

## II. PURPOSE OF POLICY

This policy was developed to provide guidelines for appropriate communications and responses on social media sites for those associated with the Authority who discuss or reference MAX either speaking on behalf of the Authority or in a personal capacity. The goal of the policy is to protect the reputation of the Authority and to ensure that only factual information is disseminated via social media outlets.

## III. APPLICATION

This policy applies to Authority board members, Local Advisory Council members, employees, and volunteers.

## IV. AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL

Persons authorized to post social media comments on behalf of the Authority are the transit director, marketing and customer service manager, and marketing assistant, who monitor internet communications. This is consistent with Policy #112 – Public and Media Relations – in which official spokespersons are designated to speak on behalf of the Authority.

## V. EMPLOYEE AND VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITY

Persons affiliated with the Authority by employment, volunteering or business relationship are obligated to do the following when discussing the Authority in social media:

- a. Disclose their relationship when they post their personal using a disclaimer similar to this: *“The postings on this site are my own and don’t necessarily represent MAX’s position or opinion.”*
- b. Follow the Rules of Engagement stated in this policy

- c. Refrain from making comments that disparage or damage the Authority's credibility or reputation
- d. Refrain from disclosing information that has not been previously released to the public or has not been authorized for public release

## **VI. RULES OF ENGAGEMENT**

Our use of social media is governed by these guiding principles and rules of engagement to ensure that the two way communications in these open forums are timely, respectful, truthful, and constructive:

### **a. Responsiveness and Monitoring**

Our intent is to frequently monitor online discussions and comments and respond as appropriate as soon as possible during regular business hours. Even during business hours, however, it may not be possible to post a response or continue a discussion due to other obligations. The Authority will be judicious in responding promptly to inaccurate information posted on our social media sites. The Authority prefers to operate social media sites that are community-moderated to encourage frank discussion from the public that is both positive and negative so that issues can be addressed.

### **b. Transparency**

All legitimate and reasonable questions or issues raised through social media will be addressed by authorized Authority personnel in a professional, respectful and truthful manner. Statements made must be true and not misleading, and all claims must be able to be substantiated with facts. Be sure what you post is consistent with the Authority's Policies #104 – Business Ethics and Conduct and #701 Employee Conduct and Work Rules, and reflects our values and professional standards.

### **c. Response to Inappropriate or Inflammatory Postings**

There can be a fine line between healthy debate and incendiary reaction. Sometimes no response is the best response to criticism or barbs. However, offensive, harassing, discriminatory, disrespectful, inflammatory, or argumentative comments or postings on our social media sites are unacceptable and unwelcome and may be removed at the Authority's discretion. Persons who continually post inappropriate comments and/or monopolize Authority controlled social media sites with excessive comments may have their access restricted.

Inappropriate postings concerning the MAX Authority that are posted by others on third party sites will be questioned and reported to the site owner, and the Authority may party sites will be questioned and reporter to the site owner, and the Authority may withdraw from future participation in the discussion forum. The Authority takes no responsibility

for the content of third party sites or its content, even if the content relates to the Authority.

**d. Confidentiality**

Any sensitive or confidential information about Authority employees, passengers and operations, or legal issues and litigation, will not be discussed on social media sites. Further, information will not be released publicly prior to Authority authorization.

Persons who disclose personal, sensitive or confidential information on Authority controlled social media will be notified that their comments are inappropriate and their comments removed.

Consistent with Policy #112-Public and Media Relations, only designated spokespersons for the Authority are authorized to coordinate, clear and approve news and information prior to public release, and this policy extends to social media.

**e. Stay on topic**

Postings should be informative, thought-provoking, and engaging to evoke responses and engage the community. General comments and greets are acceptable, but steer clear of postings on topics that are irrelevant. Only blog about topics which you have some knowledge or background.