

## MCOTA Meeting DRAFT Minutes

May 22, 2024 | 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Meeting will be held virtually via Zoom.

Supporting meeting materials available on [MCOTA website](#)

### Call to Order and Member Roll Call

Vice-Chair, Diogo Reis, began the meeting at 1:01pm. Executive Director, Tom Gottfried, introduced Reis as Vice Chair and announced that the former chair, Tim Sexton, has taken another position. Sarah Ghandour has stepped in as interim MnDOT designee until a new Assistant Commissioner is appointed. Quorum was established.

Name	Organization	Attendance
Diogo Reis	Director, Health Improvement and Benefit Design Division, Minnesota Department of Human Services	X
Peter Brickwedde	Assistant Commissioner of Government and External Affairs, Minnesota Department of Commerce	
Ron Quade*	Director of Veteran Services, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs	X
Brandon Kasprick	Policy Advisor, Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan	
David Fenley	ADA Director, Minnesota Council on Disability	X
Kelly Garvey	Transportation Specialist, Minnesota Department of Education	X
Nick Lardinois	Executive Budget Officer, Minnesota Management and Budget	
Maureen Melgaard Schneider	Interim Chair, Minnesota Board on Aging	
Brandon Nurmi	Director, Minnesota Public Transit Association	X
Shirley Schoening Scheuler	Active Living Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Health	X
Gerri Sutton	Director, Metropolitan Council	X
Jennifer Pelletier	Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, State Services for the Blind	X
Sarah Ghandour	Director, Office of Transit and Active Transportation, Minnesota Department of Transportation (interim MnDOT designee)	X

\*Chris Kakos, MDVA, present

### **Review and Approve March Meeting Minutes**

Gottfried reviewed the March Meeting Minutes and confirmed there was a quorum. Motion to approve made by David Fenley, second by Brandon Nurmi, motion carried unanimously.

### **Review and Approve May Meeting Agenda**

Gottfried reviewed the May Agenda. Motion to approve made, second by Gerri Sutton, motion carried unanimously.

### **Presentation of Greater Minnesota Transit Plan**

Gottfried introduced Nathan Abney of MnDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation. Gottfried gave an overview of recent relevant legislation.

Abney presented on the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan. He gave a project overview and shared the timeline, goals, processes, and expected plan outcomes. The plan is a policy plan that falls under the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (2022). See the attached PowerPoint Presentation.

Reis asked about the plan approval process. Abney explained that all three committees on the project will approve the plan. The plan will be approved through an internal process and be approved by different department managers and state offices. Finally, the plan will be approved by the Commissioner's Office.

### **MCOTA FY 2025/26 Strategic Direction**

Gottfried introduced the priorities that were identified during the March MCOTA meeting. The top priority for FY 2025 is to "Work to identify driver shortages and address specific interventions throughout the enterprise that could aid in increasing driver availability". The MCOTA Members were instructed one week prior to review the attached document in preparation for the meeting. Gottfried led the discussion regarding the FY 2025 Work Plan Development Next Steps. Seven questions were posed in the document. Below is the discussion as it relates to each question.

#### *1. How would you define (and possibly narrow) a scope of work statement?*

Nurmi suggested first identifying root causes, such as DOT regulations, testing barriers, and pay levels across commercial license holder professions. Identifying the root causes and barriers to driver availability should be done prior to narrowing the scope to solve those root causes.

Reis suggested discussing two different opportunities to narrow the focus of the priority: trying to obtain new drivers or solving issues that current drivers face.

Kelly Garvey suggested working backwards and looking at the end goal of the priority to narrow the focus. Garvey posed the question; how can MCOTA get potential drivers motivated?

Ron Quade shared that there are strong networks supporting primarily healthcare transportation for veterans. Support is primarily coming from nonprofits and federal reimbursement programs. Quade shared that the replacement and retention of drivers is a challenge, possibly due to compensation.

David Fenley shared that MCOTA's scope of work is broad administratively. Fenley suggested taking an implementation heavy approach, rather than only advising legislation. This may look like amending statute to create change. Gottfried requested input from the other members on this idea.

Gottfried recommended focusing on obtaining funding. There is the ability to affect legislation through other agencies.

Shirley Schoening Scheuler shared that there is a lack of funding specifically for transportation. The grants go out to communities and local leadership can determine how the funding should be used. Transportation has been prioritized but moving it forward is a challenge. Scheuler suggested identifying the expected questions that are to come with the transportation goals and projects, such as insurance costs and training.

Sutton agreed with Nurmi's statements. Identifying hiring and retention issues is the first step to narrowing the scope of work. Sutton has been seeing the benefits of increasing wages and reimbursements for drivers. Each region in the state faces unique challenges that could be addressed.

Nurmi posed the question; is this discussion about paid operators or volunteer drivers. Gottfried explained that this conversation could define which is priority. Sutton shared that volunteer drivers could better meet the needs of the greater Minnesota area. Nurmi suggested that the decision between the two types of drivers should be prioritized prior to narrowing the scope.

Jennifer Pelletier asked for clarification. Gottfried shared that the drivers MCOTA are focusing on are being reached through programs involved with the various State departments. Pelletier suggested looking to the rider's needs to narrow the focus of the goal and suggested investigating how riders are educated on their options. She shared that State Services for the Blind recently hired drivers for their staff and those drivers could be leveraged.

Gottfried requested input from other members on Nurmi's question; should MCOTA focus on volunteers or paid professional staff/operators.

Reis suggested looking at the root causes of driver barriers and deciding what problems MCOTA can influence rather than focusing on the targeted audience.

Guest, Rhonda Danielson, asked if there is a way to combine bus drivers and public driver pools to avoid competing for drivers. Nurmi shared that school bus drivers can drive transit vehicles, but not vice versa.

Sutton shared that there is a challenge with recruiting split shift drivers. Bus drivers may be able to fill that gap.

Reis explained that Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (special transportation service) providers must be certified. Reis suggested that it may be an opportunity to review the requirements.

Nurmi explained that the conversation had shifted to transportation coordination rather than driver availability. Reis asked for clarification. Reis sees certification requirements as a barrier to entry for drivers.

*2. Who are the key MCOTA member stakeholders?*

Gottfried requested member input on who the key stakeholders are to assist in building a work team. Pelletier shared that DEED would be a part of the work team. Gottfried asked if any member or member organization does not want to be involved. By omission of comment, all member agencies/organizations were interested. Gottfried suggested involving DHS staff in the conversation.

*3. Are there key stakeholders that are not MCOTA members? If so, who are they?*

DPS may be involved due to their work with bus drivers and MnDOT's Motor Carrier staff may be involved.

Pelletier asked if there is a way to bring in perspectives of drivers. Gottfried explained that there is an opportunity for drivers to contribute to the work team.

*4. What are key milestones to be achieved during the year to gauge progress?*

Gottfried explained that the milestones will be naturally formed after the meeting schedule and goals are determined.

Ghandour requested a goal deadline set to determine what the barriers and goals MCOTA should focus on are.

Nurmi asked about the format of the work team and how the barriers will be identified. Gottfried explained that the work team will be formed to identify the barriers relative to driver shortages within each member's agency/organization. A statement of impact will accompany each barrier.

*5. What are the risks in achieving the priority?*

Tabled.

*6. What additional staff resources can your agency provide to achieve the priority?*

Gottfried explained that MCOTA staff time will be significant. Met Council staff may be able to assist.

Ghandour proposed to amend the potential schedule. July or August may be a more reasonable time to have a scope determined.

*7. What should the schedule/format for MCOTA meetings and working groups be over the year to support the goal?*

Gottfried reviewed the drafted schedule. It has been recommended to postpone the senior leadership meeting until October for additional time to prepare and provide an update on the process. The members shared their agreement with the proposed meetings schedule, with flexibility regarding the meeting agendas.

Pelletier asked a question regarding the occurrence of the meetings. The members concurred that the work team meetings should be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month at 1pm.

Gottfried charged the members to identify other people or entities that may want to be a part of the work team.

**Action Items**

- Send out the work team and MCOTA meeting schedule in email.
  - o Send the calendar invitation for the June 26 meeting.
    - Confirm members, designate co-leaders, and create monthly topic timeline.
    - Send the rest of the invitations following the June meeting.
- Work team members - Confirmed.
  - o Jenny Pelletier
  - o Gerri Sutton
  - o Brandon Nurmi
- Work team members – Tom will reach out.
  - o Diogo Reis
  - o David Fenley/People with Disabilities
  - o Sarah Ghandour/Drivers
  - o Department of Public Safety
  - o Department of Corrections
  - o MnDOT Motor Carrier
  - o Remaining MCOTA Members

- Talking points for members to invite other staff to the work team.

Gottfried opened the conversation to members for additional input. No response. Reis reminded the members to share input outside of the meeting as well via email.

### **Public Comment**

Reis opened the floor for public comment. No response.

### **Future MCOTA Meetings, Through October 2024 (1:00 - 3:00 PM)**

MCOTA Work Team Meetings

- June 26, 2024
- July 24, 2024
- August 28, 2024

MCOTA Meetings

- September 25, 2024

Senior Leadership Meetings

- October 23, 2024

### **Adjourn**

Reis concluded the meeting at 2:38pm.

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