

**Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Meeting Minutes**  
**Senior Leadership Meeting**  
**Friday, July 24, 2020**  
**3:00 – 4:30 PM**  
**Zoom Virtual Meeting (Hosted by UMN Center for Transportation Studies)**

**Senior agency leadership present:**

Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Matthew Anderson, Minnesota Department of Human Services  
Larry Herke, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs  
Mary Manning, Minnesota Department of Health  
Steve Kelley, Minnesota Department of Commerce  
Mary Cathryn Ricker, Minnesota Department of Education  
Charlie Zelle, Metropolitan Council

**MCOTA members present:**

Chair – Tim Henkel, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Vice Chair – Diogo Reis, Minnesota Department of Human Services  
At-Large Representative – Victoria Nill, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Peter Brickwedde, Minnesota Department of Commerce  
Tiffany Collins, Minnesota Public Transit Association  
John Doan, Minnesota Board on Aging  
Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education  
Shawn Kremer, Minnesota Management and Budget  
Susan Bishop, Minnesota Department of Health  
Rolando Sotolongo, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs  
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council  
Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

**MCOTA members absent:**

Kody Olson, Minnesota State Council on Disability  
Suzanne Sobotka, Office of the Governor

**Others present:**

Robyn	Bernardy	Dakota County
Kristie	Billiar	MnDOT
Liz	Connor	Minnesota Management and Budget
Heidi	Corcoran	Milligan Partners
Nancy	Daubenberger	MnDOT
Frank	Douma	University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs
Ashley	Eckdahl	ECRDC - RTCC
Thomas	Gottfried	MnDOT
		Tri-Valley Opportunity -Rural Transportation Collaborative
Marcia	Haglund	Program
Alan	Herrmann	TCAP- Scott/Carver Counties- Smartlink
Don	Hickman	Initiative Foundation
Sheila	Holbrook-White	Washington County, MN
William	Jensen-Kowski	Minnesota Department of Transportation
Kaydee	Kirk	U of M Center for Transportation Studies
Michelle	Lichtig	MNDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation

Arlene	Mathison	University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies
Bryan	McCoy	Headwaters RTCC
Heather	Molesworth	West Central Minnesota Communities Action
Scott	Olson	Newtrax
Karen	Onan	East Central Regional Development Commission
Shelly	Pflaum	United Community Action Partnership
Lynnell	Popowski	Northwest Regional Development Commission
Ron	Quade II	Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
Mary	Quirk	Living at Home Network
Mark	Schermerhorn	Anoka County Transit
Beverly	Sidlo-Tolliver	Arrowhead Regional Development Commission
Susan	Siemers	Minnesota Department of Transportation
Courtney	Whited	Minnesota Board on Aging
Joan	Willshire	Willshire Consulting

### **Welcome**

MnDOT Commissioner Anderson Kelliher welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief overview of the agenda.

### **Roll Call**

All attendees were asked to RSVP prior to the meeting and the names of those who RSVPed were displayed on the screen. Additionally there was a verbal roll call of senior agency leadership members and of designated MCOTA members.

### **Public Comment (2-3 minutes per comment)**

Kim Pettman offered the following comments:

There are a lot of people that feel very frustrated right now with the COVID-19 time. I know you all are working so hard at the state and we don't know when these long hours and everything else this going to end. And you're asked to do things that are so hard with little money and little time and little resources. There are actually people that felt this way before COVID-19 hit and they are people that are in the transit dependent populations. And that's what MCOTA is about – to help those people.

I want to give you some suggestions on how working on this in an interagency way, to be present, and to work with each other will help. First of all, for any meetings that you have on any topic, remember to reach out to the RTCCs and the TCAPs and invite them. Don't make the decision for them. Just say, hey, we have this meeting and would you like to come. If your programs don't include transportation, they're not going to work very well. And it's really important, especially in greater Minnesota in the suburbs too.

Second, make sure to include your equity and your ADA coordinators. Have them be invited to meetings and have them help train. Do not forget these community engagement people.

Third, make sure that the people that you give grants to are practicing disability inclusion. It would be completely unthinkable to put up a sign that says people of color are not welcome here. But when programs and websites and attitudes are not accessible, that is saying that people with disabilities are not welcome here.

So I'm asking that you do these three things. And also please work with each other. Please work really well in an interagency way not just on this, but on many things. It will help you and save you a lot of time. I ask the senior leadership to come by now and then and if you can do these things that will really help your own organization and it will help save you money and it'll help save you time too. Thank you.

Mary Quirk offered the following comments:

Thank you very much and thanks for this opportunity for public comment. I'm commenting the volunteer driver discussion that will occur later in the meeting.

I'm with the Living At Home Network, a network of 32 nonprofits across Minnesota that help older adults stay living at home. As you can guess, a big part of what we do is volunteer transportation. Annually we help more than 10,000 older adults staying living at home. Because volunteer transportation is so essential were part of the volunteer driver coalition and have been working on this legislation and we're here to ask for your support for legislation to reduce barriers for volunteer drivers.

Our network members serve parts of Minnesota, where the distances are long to get anywhere to doctor appointments to grocery stores. And what Mike Schendel, who was hoping to speak today, would like to share is a perspective of living in greater Minnesota. He's in the community of Stephen, Minnesota in the far northwestern corner of the state close to North Dakota border and actually a still a ways away from Canada, and when you live there, there are no doctor services in town. The closest primary care physician is 30 minutes away. Any secondary care or more advanced care is an hour or more away, getting into Grand Forks, Crookston, or Thief River Falls. Because of that, if there weren't volunteer drivers older adults would have to give up their drivers license and they would basically have to leave town because there'd be no way to get appointments as most people don't have family members living in the area. Volunteer drivers are that critical glue that both allows people to stay living in their home and to be active contributors to their community and that keeps life going on. Our network programs have a hard time finding good volunteer drivers. We have good ones, but there are few and far between. Because when you think of giving somebody who's frail ride that's taking on a lot of risk as is it's often a half day or more to take somebody into an appointment that is an hour or two away and bringing them back home. Because of that, volunteer drivers are short supply and that is why we're asking as part of the volunteer driver coalition to really do what we can to reduce barriers for all volunteer drivers and thank you for this opportunity to comment. Appreciate it.

Mike Schendel offered the following comments:

Like Mary said, we are out in the country and our particularly town is 40 miles from Canada and 10 miles from North Dakota. So we're out a ways. Our nearest clinics are 25 miles away. Our next nearest, which are larger clinics, are between 45-50 miles one way. So in trying to obtain volunteer drivers, they need to be willing to drive anywhere from 50 mile round trip to a 200 mile round trip. One particular program serves one person that needs to be transported to Minneapolis two to four times a year for appointments. And so the volunteer drivers are very important, which is a big component of our living at home program. Thank you.

Dawn Simonson offered the following comments:

I'm the director at the Metro Area Agency on Aging and we're a funder of transportation services. We have a focus on assisted transportation and we're also the Board on Aging's partner in providing Senior Linkage Line services in the metro area where we, on a daily basis, help older adults find transportation options.

I'm here today though, as one of the four co-chairs of the Minnesota volunteer driver coalition and I'm making my comments today on behalf of the thousands of Minnesotans who depend on volunteer drivers for access to health services and for participation in the broader community.

The volunteer driver coalition is new. We formed last year and we stand at 81 members, including nonprofits counties, Area Agencies on Aging, and membership organizations such as the Association of Minnesota Counties, the Minnesota Township Association, the Living at Home Network, the Minnesota Transit Association, the Leadership Council on Aging, and the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits. So together our coalition represents far more than its 81members.

The coalition has examined the MCTOA goals and we support them. We are very much with you in terms of reducing transportation gaps and developing effective services and providing more transportation options. The

coalition came together over a shared and deep concern for the viability of volunteer driver programs and for the well-being of the people who count on the service that volunteer drivers provide.

As we've heard, our members serve predominantly older adults but also serve people with disabilities. In addition, we serve refugees, including those who are victims of torture. And our drivers give rides to youth in some circumstances. Of critical importance, especially now during the pandemic when older adults must self-isolate, volunteer drivers are the engine behind the delivery of meals on wheels, we can't forget that.

So volunteer drivers are essential throughout the state in the metro for sure and absolutely critical in rural areas, and I think that the scale and scope of services volunteers contribute may surprise you. It surprised me. The coalition conducted a survey of services provided in 2018 and we learned that 77,474 people utilized volunteers for rides in 2018 to get to medical appointments, grocery stores, and for community services. About 1,900 volunteers provided 168,398 one-way trips driving 9.6 million miles. As we consider the scale, that is essential.

Now we have an ask of you. We are asking you to champion two strategies: One is to define a volunteer in statute and the second is to create an income tax subtraction for mileage reimbursement. We are encouraging you to bring our request to Governor Walz for inclusion for his priorities in 2021. The coalition will support you and we pledge to activate the voices of literally hundreds of riders, drivers, and organizations across the state. Thank you.

Tiffany Collins offered the following comments:

Thank you again. I'm Tiffany Collins, the transit director for the Central Community Transit and we serve Kandiyohi, Meeker, and Renville counties. I also sit on the board for Minnesota Public Transit Association, that's the association that I'm an MCOTA member for.

So I just wanted to give just a little bit of perspective on that. I have been an MCOTA a member for over six years or so, now, and for the last five years we've been working on the volunteer driver issues and trying to bring down some of the barriers to these volunteer drivers that are associated throughout the state. As Dawn mentioned, there's almost 9 million miles per year that are being done and performed by volunteer drivers. So that's an addition to all of the public transit and all of the private providers that are also doing some of the same things to work with seniors, disabled, and the non-emergency medical transportation providers to get to those appointments. So we feel that volunteer drivers are a very, very large part of the structure of our overall transportation program.

I had intended to actually have a volunteer driver provide the comment today and I wanted to share a couple things that he would have done, but unfortunately yesterday he was needed to take a trip to Rochester this afternoon. So he did in fact do that. So I said I would share his comments. He really wanted this group to understand what volunteers are doing. They are on call almost seven days per week. Most are available for trips starting at 3-4am and sometimes they don't return home until 9-10pm, and this is for rural MN. So if you have an appointment that goes to the Twin Cities, Rochester, or St. Cloud, there's a lot of waiting time and there's a lot of running around, trying to find the passenger once they've gone into the large medical facilities. They do all of that and they do it without being paid for their time and they're all just being reimbursed for their mileage. There has been some insurance barriers that they are being said and categorized as drivers for hire, so that they should have to pay a higher premium; and then they are also being taxed on the reimbursement that they receive for the mileage reimbursement. So they are asking for your attention to try to bring down some of those barriers so that the volunteer driver can continue into the future.

My concern is that you would understand that if we were to have to replace the volunteer driver programs, that would cost additional funding so that we will have to either higher paid drivers and purchase more vehicles to cover all of the trips that are done throughout Minnesota. So this cost is a very large concern for all of us, and should be to be able to replace those and pay drivers. I really thank you for your attention in this matter. I really appreciate the time to be able to make those comments. Thank you.

## **2020-2024 Strategic Plan and 2020/21 Work Plan**

Gottfried provided a high-level overview of the strategic plan as well as the work plan. He provided details on the work teams. Members did not have any questions.

## **Volunteer Driver Legislation**

Anderson Kelliher provided an overview of the topic. Connor added that the biennial budget process and timeline is driven by statute. The critical time when MMB would anticipate to have change items or budget proposals for consideration is mid-October. Working backwards, agencies have to develop and evaluate their own slate of potential budget proposals prior to that. It is anticipated that sometime in late August MMB will issue budget instructions/format guidance for agencies.

Munyon presented the request for endorsement and active support of the 2021 legislative initiative to assist in the recruitment and retention of volunteer drivers as detailed in the document shared prior to the meeting. Anderson Kelliher commented that MnDOT would likely take the lead on these two legislative efforts while working with their counterparts in the other agencies to be able to then recommend this to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor.

A motion was made by Kelly of the Department of Commerce that MCOTA agencies will support Minnesota State Legislation and advocacy for inclusion in Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Flanagan's budget proposal for 2022-2023 that:

- 1) Defines a volunteer driver; and
- 2) Provides an income tax subtraction for volunteer drivers.

Ricker with the Department of Education seconded the motion. The motion was **approved unanimously** with twelve yes votes and zero no votes.

A motion was made by Doan who is with the Minnesota Board on Aging that MCOTA urges Congress to take action to change the 14 cents per mile reimbursement for volunteers to match the business mileage reimbursement which is, as of July 2020, about 57 cents. This request is to the Appropriations Committee in addition to the Minnesota Delegation. The motion was seconded by Manning of the Department of Health. The motion was **approved unanimously** with twelve yes votes and zero no votes.

Anderson Kelliher added that a letter will be prepared from MCOTA to members of Congress that will include the language and the background. In addition, the Metropolitan Council could enlist their federal group to work on advocacy of this issue and MnDOT can also work on similar advocacy through AASHTO.

Munyon thanked the agency leadership for all their support throughout this process.

## **MCOTA, RTCC, and TCAP Program Issues & Opportunities**

- Identify and discuss transportation issue(s) that MCOTA, RTCC, and TCAP Programs can address.
- Identify and discuss how Agency Programs can support the mission and implementation of RTCC and TCAP Programs.

Gottfried shared how the TCAPs and RTCCs are working on the gaps in food access/distribution in light of COVID-19. For example New Trax, a nonprofit, has delivered 1.5 million meal deliveries since COVID-19 hit. Instead of people traveling to congregate dining, it was congregate dining traveling to them. There is potential for transit agencies to partner with others to address specific food access concerns more and more into the future. Gottfried has been closely working with Bishop and the Department of Health staff on these issues. Bishop thanked transit providers and shared that they have connected with local public health and other entities to identify food access needs in community and fill them.

Henkel shared he serves on the Governor's Food Security Group. The goal is this group is simple, but complicated by many factors. The goal is to provide food meals food services across the state. The role MnDOT has played as a

member of this group is to bring the transportation capacity that exists in greater Minnesota. Nick Thompson also sits on this committee from the Metropolitan Council and provides the Twin Cities metropolitan area perspective on transportation in providing transportation accessibility. The transit system has been 10-20% of what it was pre-COVID-19 so there was capacity in the system to help with getting groceries/meals to people in all parts of the state. Over the last four months, 90,000 were delivered to persons in need.

Popowski shared that the Red Lake reservation community was identified as urgent and that the Area Agency on Aging has worked to meet that need. They were contacted by the Governor's office. There's been significant work done. Anderson Kelliher added the issue of food security and tribal nations and that the MnDOT Office of Transit Administration was working very closely with a number of tribes to identify where help was needed. One tribal location had some maintenance and operations staff out doing some food delivery; that was typical of the early stages of the pandemic and particularly across the country where there are significant tribal populations.

Pettman added that it is good to understand the impact of the worker shortages before COVID-19 and it's much worse now. Workers such as PCAs, direct support workers, and independent living services workers. When things are delivered to the front of a residential building, sometimes the individual cannot make it to the front entrance. Or other people are not able to sit in line at a place like Fare for All. Understand the RTCCs and TCAPs and what choices are for bus and other transportation services. Greater Minnesota doesn't have as many choices. Understand the impacts on medical transportation. Don't forget about housing and NIMBY, "not in my backyard" – often lower cost housing or workforce housing is located away from the main part of the town; then people get stranded if they don't have a car. Pettman recommended working these things into the topics that MCOTA is working on.

Yanda shared that one of the issues regarding the career force locations is developing the return to work plans. They'll be limited to who can come into their building and stay in their building, some people will need to stay outside that building. When their transportation isn't on time or they're waiting for their bus/ride, there are safety and weather concerns. The same is true for medical appointments and other types of trips. Working with the RTCCs and TCAPs can help us problem-solve these issues.

Yanda also shared that as a provider of services to job seekers, they are not always aware of all the transportation options. Better coordination between workforce development and RTCCs and TCAPs on this issue would be helpful so service providers can better advise their job seekers. Gottfried will follow up with Yanda on this issue and determine next steps.

Doan shared that Dakota County is doing innovative work around workforce development and giving rides through the Lyft pilot program. Bernardy from Dakota County shared that since March 2019 they been recipients of an innovation grant from DHS and have set up a program where individuals on HCBS waivers can take Lyft to/from work and community activities. There are 450 riders as of August 1 and very successful, even during COVID-19. Other counties are looking to this best practice. Yanda echoed the success she has seen with one of the people she works with and who uses this Lyft program – it has greatly reduced the employee's stress getting to/from work via Lyft (and have the flexibility in staying later) vs. the unpredictability of Metro Mobility. Haglund shared that she would like to see Lyft in northern Minnesota for these same reasons. Anderson Kelliher also noted this also is an equity issue (gender, race, geography, etc) since services like this may not be present in Greater Minnesota.

Kelly shared that the Department of Commerce continues to support the maturation of the RTCCs and the specific work of MCOTA with respect to insurance issues. Brickwedde as the MCOTA representative has been helping with this.

### **Wrap up + Adjourn**

The Commissioner thanks everyone who organized this meeting and for all those across jurisdictions and organizations that showed up to participate. The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 pm.