

Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Meeting Minutes
March 24, 2021, 1:00–3:00 PM
Meeting held via Zoom.

Members present:

Chair – Tim Henkel, Minnesota Department of Transportation
At-Large Representative – Victoria Nill, Minnesota Department of Transportation
Susan Bishop, Minnesota Department of Health
Peter Brickwedde, Minnesota Department of Commerce
Tiffany Collins, Minnesota Public Transit Association
John Doan, Minnesota Board on Aging
Alexis Donath, Office of the Governor
David Fenley, Minnesota State Council on Disability
Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education
Shawn Kremer, Minnesota Management and Budget
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council

Members absent:

Vice Chair – Diogo Reis, Minnesota Department of Human Services
Rolando Sotolongo, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Others present:

- Minnesota Department of Transportation:
 - Office of Transit & Active Transportation: Tom Gottfried, Mark Nelson, Sue Siemers
- University of Minnesota:
 - Humphrey School of Public Affairs: Frank Douma
 - Center for Transportation Studies: Kaydee Kirk, Arlene Mathison
- Stephanie Aasness, Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging
- Robyn Bernardy, Dakota County
- Emily Castaneda
- Heidi Corcoran, Milligan Partners
- Eric Day, MMRDC
- Ashley Eckdahl, East Central Regional Development Commission and RTCC
- Mike Greenbaum, Newtrax
- Alan Hermann, Scott County
- Matt Kallroos
- Bryan McCoy, Headwaters Regional Development Commission & North Central MN RTCC
- Shelley Madore
- Heather Molesworth, WCMCA
- Ted Nelson, Prairie Five CAC Inc.
- Scott Olson, Newtrax
- Karen Onan, East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council
- Kim Pettman, Transit Advocate
- Shelly Pflaum, Southwest Regional Development Commission
- Kathleen Picard
- Mark Schermerhorn, Anoka County Transit
- Terry Smith, MMRDC
- Brian Strub, MN Department of Commerce
- Mai Thor, MN Department of Health
- Courtney Whited, MN Board on Aging
- Joan Willshire, Willshire Consulting
- Nick Zelle, Jefferson Lines

Call to Order + Member Roll Call

Henkel called to order the March meeting of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access at 1:02 PM on March 24, 2021. There was a quorum of MCOTA members with 11 of 14 members present. There was a new member from the Governor's Office, Donath, who introduced herself.

Review and Approve Agenda

Kremer moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Doan. The agenda was unanimously **approved**.

Public Comments

Pettman shared the following:

There was a blue ribbon panel that was told to come up with a solution to save \$100 million from the DHS budget. One of the proposals they came up with was to have one vendor for medical transportation. This has been done multiple times in the past and failed greatly. Unfortunately, a lot of people from the public were not allowed to be equally heard when these things were discussed. I'd really like the members to seriously talk about not only this matter, but other things too. It's really important to hear how things affect the public and those working with the public, such as stakeholders. And for each of you agencies, if this goes through, you might end up putting in a lot more work doing a lot more cleanup and also having negative budget impacts. I really like you to discuss this during the meeting.

I also want to give you all a compliment that the agenda really looks a lot more interactive and that's getting a lot closer to what the legislature intended. It's really good to see a lot more people on the agenda being able to discuss items.

The last thing to say is that it took a really long time the forums to come together. I really appreciate all the people who heard my requests and the volunteer driver forums were able to discuss disability inclusion and I really hope that lots of you, if not all of you, can please come to the one in April. That will focus on trauma informed care and that can benefit all the state agencies. Thank you very much.

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Collins moved to approve the March minutes, seconded by Sutton. The minutes were unanimously **approved**.

Legislative Updates

- Doan shared that he received an update from the Volunteer Driver Coalition that the Senate bill for the volunteer driver tax income tax subtraction was heard 3/23/21 by the Senate tax committee and is being considered for the omnibus tax bill. He felt this was a great step forward and thanked everybody for continued support.
- Gottfried shared that the legislation on the definition of volunteer driver continue to move forward. Both the House Transportation Committee and Commerce Committee had a unanimous vote to support this. It is now being held over for the omnibus bill.
- Fenley shared that the PCA driver bill has made all the deadlines in the House and Senate. In brief, this is a bill giving flexibility to personal care attendants to drive their customers around to use vehicles and drive them around. This is an update in State law to allow for that. There is good reception, and it helps with accessibility and transportation, especially in greater Minnesota.
- Gottfried added that the cycle of getting legislative items endorsed and supported by MCOTA for the following year's session begins at the March MCOTA meeting. In March, relevant items are discussed and then in May then are finalized and to be sent to the June senior leadership meeting.

MCOTA Work Teams

Operations: Gottfried shared that this group recently completed the logic model discussion. MMB was very helpful in providing technical assistance.

- **Research:** This group is also looking at potential research and they are compiling a list of potential research projects. Members will be given this list soon and it will be presented at the June senior leadership meeting to happen during the next fiscal year.

Communications

- **Quarterly Newsletter:** Mathison provided an overview of the March topics. It will be sent by the end of the month. Sutton moved approval of the newsletter, Kremer seconded the motion. The newsletter was unanimously **approved**.

Doan asked if moving forward the newsletter could be approved the executive director as part of program administration. Doan made a motion that the executive director, with approval of the MCOTA chair (or the vice chair in the chair's absence), has the authority to issue newsletters and that members have been given ample opportunity to give input and feedback on the content; Fenley seconded the motion.

- *Discussion:* Kremer requested that at the next meeting that the executive director give a brief overview on how this would work moving forward. Sutton would like to know the process of how members will be able to review and give input. Doan suggested members could potentially review content of the newsletter by email. Bishop and Fenley supported an informal process to proactively review of newsletter content and also ask members if they have content. Both felt the program could revert back to a more final review in the future, if needed. Henkel confirmed that there would be ample time for members to give input and feedback in this new process.

The motion was unanimously **approved**.

For the June newsletter, Sutton suggested an article on the MDH/Metro Transit partnership on vaccine units. It is important to highlight the partnership example of state agencies. Henkel requested that members send any other ideas to Gottfried.

- **Website Redesign:** Mathison showed members the draft home page and an interior/regional page. Gottfried added that the drafts will be sent to members for review by email before the May meeting.
- **Member Orientation Manual:** Gottfried shared that the draft manual is ready for member review. Mathison will send this draft to members; comments are requested before the May meeting. The goal is to have it finalized by the May meeting.

Volunteer Driver

- **Highlights from Volunteer Driver Virtual Forum Series** – Onan shared that the 5th stop was March 17th and included both a morning session (96 participants) and afternoon session (55 participants). More info can be found on the MCOTA [website](#). The forums have added enhanced audience engagement. The technology went smoothly. It is requested that people forward forum information to all in their networks to those who interested. To provide input on topics for future sessions please let Onan know. Henkel thanked the group for this work and the successful turnout these events have generated. Recordings from the forums are posted online on the [website](#).

June 23 Agency Senior Leadership meeting:

- Gottfried shared that this is an annual meeting where the commissioners, or the commissioners' designees, attend. The senior leadership meeting is one action in the MCOTA strategic plan that was adopted by MCOTA in spring 2020. MnDOT Commissioner Anderson Kelliher will host and facilitate. Gottfried walked through the draft agenda. He shared it would be beneficial for members to meet with their commissioner prior to the June meeting. The idea is to go over the agenda in detail to prepare their leadership for meeting discussion on topics like service gaps relative to their program delivery and where that has been impacted by transportation (or lack of), how the priorities of the RTCCs are positively impacting agency programs, and other policy/legislative topics that are relevant, etc.
- Doan asked if at the meeting there is an opportunity for senior leaders to discuss and take a more collaborative approach to what a new normal post-pandemic is going to look like around transit and paratransit. Gottfried agreed there could be an opportunity to integrate this into the agenda and have it serve as a launching topic for viable conversation among senior leadership members.

- Bishop added it would be good to engage leadership to look at how transit can be reconfigured given our more virtual world post-pandemic. Gottfried will follow up see how to add this to the agenda.
- Gottfried will follow up next week to send out a message from the MnDOT Commissioner to all the other commissioners with the agenda and purpose and request this be placed on calendars. Henkel also asked members to work with their admin staff to put a hold on the commissioners' calendars in the meantime.

Greater MN Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCCs) & Twin Cities Transit Coordination Assistance Projects (TCAPs)

1. Program/Grants Update – Gottfried provided updates on the RTCC application deadlines for phases 2, 3, and 4; RTCC trainings; and RTCC geographic information systems (GIS).

2. MN Board on Aging Presentation – Doan provided an overview of the Mn Board on Aging, the state's unit on aging, and is a conduit for the Federal Older Americans Act funds that come to MN. The funds are distributed to the 7 Area Agencies of Aging throughout the state (including tribes). Their board has 25 very active members who are volunteers and appointed by the Governor. Whited is the lead DHS staff person to the MN Board on Aging in the area of transportation. She presented on the funding of transportation, the AARP long term services and supports scorecard, and the Live Well at Home RFP.

Agency Updates:

- **Olmstead Plan** – Madore shared that they have several work groups that are starting over the over the next two months where they will be focusing on barriers for employment, housing and other services. Members are welcome to follow up with Madore if there are additional questions and she can present on these topics at a future MCOTA meeting.
- **Covid-19 Transportation Issues:**
 - **MnDOT:** Nill shared about the MDH/Metro Transit/MnDOT mobile vaccination unit that has been created in retrofitted smaller bus vehicles and 40-foot buses. These will be used in both the metro and greater MN areas. They should be ready in April. MDH is working with the other agencies on where these units will be deployed. Other states have been contacting MN to learn more about how they can do this. Also, MnDOT staff met with transit agencies in greater MN and they are seeing a recovery in the demand response but not so much ridership on the fixed route. Some agencies are starting to charge fares again. Agencies are also following CDC guideline changes to potentially increase the number of people on buses and decrease the distance between people.
 - **MN Council on Disability** – MDH is looking at employing home nurses to do home vaccinations. Also, there are covid community coordinators (CCC) and some of their work has focused on transportation to/from vaccination sites.
 - **Partnership with RTCCs and Facilitating Vaccine Access** – Thor shared about testing and vaccination efforts for person with disabilities in accessible and welcoming ways throughout the state. The covid community coordinators (CCC) efforts have identified transportation as a significant component. Connections with RTCCs are important for transportation. MDH has also begun talking about putting together an interagency work group on transportation, including the well-connected CCC cohort – Thor will follow up with Gottfried and Fenley and anyone else interested in this. Bishop added that her team is working with an interagency work group regarding migrant and seasonal worker concerns and getting access to vaccines.
- **Additional Member Round Robin:** Bishop shared about their work the past 5 years on disability grants focus on persons with mobility and intellectual disability. A result of this has been an inclusive pedestrian planning guide. This effort is also getting national attention. Her office is also reapplying for a disability grant focused on improving health and chronic disease for people with disabilities and she may reach out to MCOTA members in their planning.

Review Draft Agenda for Next Meeting

Henkel and Gottfried provided an overview of the May meeting. Members did not have any changes or questions.

Adjourn: Bishop made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Fenley. The motion was unanimously **approved**. The meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.