

Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Meeting Minutes
July 28, 2021, 1:00–3:00 PM
Meeting held via Webex.

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
Rolando Sotolongo, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council
Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education

Members absent:

Alexis Donath, Office of the Governor
Liz Connor, Minnesota Management and Budget
Vice Chair – Diogo Reis, Minnesota Department of Human Services
David Fenley, Minnesota State Council on Disability
Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Call to Order + Member Roll Call

Tori Nill called to order the July meeting of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access at 1:06 PM on July 28, 2021. There was not immediately a quorum of MCOTA members with only 6 of 14 members present. As the meeting progressed and more members joined, a quorum was established with 9 of 14 members present.

Public Comments

Dawn Simonson (President and CEO of Trellis) commented first, saying:

I'm here today as the co-chair of the volunteer driver coalition, and first want to thank MCOTA for your leadership and support in defining a volunteer driver in law and being certain that we have in place an income tax subtraction for volunteer drivers. We are very grateful for your assistance and my comment to you today was also captured in a letter that the coalition sent to chair Tim Henkel and Tom Gottfried, but to make an additional ask to MCOTA, we ask for MCOTA to lead the next phase of work to sustain and grow volunteer driver programs, and specifically our ask to you is to lead an initiative with our federal congressional delegation to change federal law so that the charitable mileage reimbursement rate is set annually as the same rate as that set by the IRS for business mileage. The result of this then will be an ability for non-profits and others that reimburse mileage for volunteer drivers to reimburse up to that business rate, and then that rate/reimbursement would not be subject to federal income tax. We think that while the income tax subtraction at the state level was a wonderful start, we've got more work to do. This would resolve the problem at the level it needs to be resolved, and it really does require the work of a broad base of stakeholders, and MCOTA we believe is well positioned to lead that work. The volunteer driver coalition of course will be here to support your efforts. Our coalition is eighty plus members strong, and together with the number of associations that are part of the coalition, we represent hundreds of non-profits and governmental units across the state, and so I would ask for your consideration to move forward with making this change in federal law a priority for MCOTA. Thank you!

Jeff Krueger (Executive Director-Minnesota Assoc. of Townships) commented next, saying:

Thank you for having me today. My name is Jeff Krueger, and I'm the Executive Director of the Minnesota Association of Townships. More than 1,781 townships exist in every area of the state. While a few are in metropolitan areas, most remain rural agricultural centers. As our population continues to age in place at their rural

homes, volunteer drivers are greatly needed as we strive to ensure equal access to healthcare and to the broader community. In some communities in rural Minnesota, volunteer drivers are the only option for transportation services. That is why the Minnesota Association of Townships strongly supports these volunteer driver programs. Statewide, volunteer drivers provide more than 168,000 rides each year for seniors and people with disabilities. Volunteer drivers are already making a financial sacrifice to help transport those in need. In some cases, they are paying higher insurance rates. When this happens, it becomes increasingly difficult for local community agencies to recruit and retain volunteers. While the state income tax subtraction helps - a volunteer driver must still claim a different amount on their federal taxes. We need federal legislation protecting and strengthening volunteer driver programs and the township way of life. Residents want to continue the tradition of volunteerism and help their neighbors. They want to contribute their talents, skills, and ideas to preserve the quality of life and build their communities across Minnesota. It is our hope the MCOTA assign someone to work with the MN Delegation in Washington to introduce this legislation in both bodies. Thank you.

Sherry Munyon (MPTA and Volunteer Driver Coalition Representative) added to the public comment segment, saying:

Good morning, and thank you Tom and thank you Tori, and to everyone on the call today. I'll reference quickly that I'm representing the Minnesota Public Transit Association, as well as being a member of the coalition. I point to Dawn's letter on behalf of the coalition, where she referenced that when the charitable rate was at 14 cents the business rate at that time was 32.5 cents, and we just want to call out that that was 43 percent of the business rate. Today, however, since the business rate has grown it is currently 56 cents. Now a volunteer driver is getting 25 percent of that for mileage reimbursement, so, they've gone from at one time receiving 50 percent to now receiving 25 percent basically. The reason we're asking MCOTA to lead again is that this is a joint collaborative effort between several state agencies, and carries a lot of weight behind it, and the volunteer drive programs generally fall under MnDOT and DHS which are two of the major players at MCOTA. So, operating under those two agencies, the coalition members, public transit, non-profits, as well as our local government partners believe that you are best suited to be the lead. That doesn't mean any of us are going to stop working or work any less than we did during the legislative session, it just helps to have one coordinated effort, and whether it's Dawn's organization, or my organization, we all have some federal affiliations, and so once this has the weight of MCOTA behind it, we'll be working to get more broad support for the initiative. In fact, I know Jeff and Matt have already been working on it, and during the legislative session with their other policy discussions had brought this up with the entire delegation. Whereas MPTA gets to Washington one time a year, MNDOT has more frequent contact. Thank you very much for taking this under consideration, and since you've already adapted the policy support it's mostly an action item of how to move forward.

Tiffany Collins (MPTA and Central Community Transportation Representative) concluded the public comment segment, saying:

Since we don't have a quorum, I'm very interested in stating my support for this as a public transit provider and part of the coalition and MPTA. This just feels like the next step to make sure that the federal piece of this is acted upon, and if we can work with MCOTA and MnDOT to try to keep moving this forward, I think we've got the momentum and I'd really like to be a part of continuing that.

Review and Approve Agenda

Gerri Sutton moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Susan Bishop. The agenda was unanimously **approved**.

5/26/21 Meeting Minutes

John Doan moved to approve the May meeting minutes, seconded by Tiffany Collins. The minutes were unanimously **approved**.

Agency Senior Leadership Meeting Updates

- Tom Gottfried shared the revised date for the Senior Leadership meeting. The new date is Friday, October 1st, 2021 from 1-3 p.m.

- Agenda was explained in overview.
 - Public Comment
 - Legislation 2021 Session Update:
 - Issues & Opportunities *Action: Discussion*
 - *What is your agency's top transportation challenge that could benefit from a strategic and holistic enterprise approach?*
 - Why is this your top issue?
 - What resources are you planning to spend/utilize in 2022/23/24 to address this challenge?
 - Is there an opportunity for MCOTA be an asset to your agency to partner with you to address this transportation issue?
 - Do you see other state agencies as partners (beyond MCOTA) to address this challenge, is there opportunity for an enterprise level approach?
- John Doan and Susan Bishop proposed the following amendments to the Senior Leadership Meeting agenda:
 - John Doan proposed adding public comments from this 07/28/21 meeting to the agenda, saying it could help to coalesce the senior leadership group around tangible items. It offers some concrete items that they can discuss and take action on.
 - Susan Bishop proposed letting leadership know about priorities that are surfacing within MCOTA, as well as to order them for understanding the regional needs, prior to the Senior Leadership Meeting.
- John Doan moved to approve the agenda as amended, seconded by Tiffany Collins. The motion passes unanimously.

Legislative Updates

- Tom Gottfried shared that legislation relative to Non-Emergency Medical Transportation did not go anywhere. Also, working with commerce, we were able to get volunteer driver language relative to insurance issues very clear legislatively speaking. We are looking at creating a fact sheet which will hopefully be completed soon.

Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan

- Presentation by Hally Turner (Policy Planning Director) to update and request for input.
- This presentation was included in the follow-up email sent out on Wednesday, July 4th, along with all other follow-up materials.
- The following link was provided for those interested in learning more: www.MinnesotaGo.org/stories

MCOTA Work Teams

Operations:

- **MCOTA Vendor Status:** Tom Gottfried provided an update on MCOTA Administrative Support Vendor status, saying we hope to have the vendor (University of Minnesota CTS) to be under contract by the September 22nd meeting.



Communications:

- **Updates:** Michelle Lichtig provided an update on who would be involved in the Annual Report, the themes, and key messages of this report.

Themes/key messages

- Importance of partnerships in responding to COVID-19 locally and statewide (food delivery during COVID-19, COVID cultural consultants, vaccine buses, COVID+ transportation, Washington County Automated Shuttle)
- Crucial volunteer driver legislation passed; Volunteer Driver Forum series highlights and statistics; available as on-demand training
- GIS mapping of transportation providers creates guidance for local communities and helps to identify gaps at the statewide level
- Local innovations by RTCCs and TCAPs: such as travel training, marketing/recruiting, and

Lyft partnerships

- She then recommended, on behalf of the Communications Work Team, proceeding with developing and prepping the themes and messages shared. Tim Henkel moved to approve the recommendation, seconded by Gerri Sutton. The motion carried unanimously. Michelle Lichtig then provided the update that we are 90-95% done with the MCOTA website.

Volunteer Driver:

- **Debrief from Volunteer Driver Virtual Forum Series** –Tom Gottfried provided a brief summary of what the forum series did and how long it was active (November 2020-June 2021). He provided an explanation of the topics covered during this series, as well as next steps that can be anticipated in the upcoming year, including a volunteer driver fact sheet/brochure.

Update on the Volunteer Driver Fact Sheet (Brochure) Tom Gottfried:

- Legislation to include:
- Clearly **defines a volunteer driver** in law as not “for-hire.”
- Creates a state income tax subtraction for volunteer drivers to **reduce their tax liability** in Minnesota

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

- **Program/Grants Update** – Michelle Lichtig shared about the Regional Transportation Coordination Council (RTCC) and Transit Coordination Access Project (TCAP) phase status as of July 1st, 2021. She then detailed the grant timelines for TCAPs and RTCCs, and shared various maps and helpful graphics.

Agency Updates:

- **Olmstead Plan:** Kristie Billiar of MnDOT provided an update on revised goals for 2023 as it pertains to implementation of the Olmstead Plan, as well as touching on how the structure of the plan has changed.
- **Covid-19 Response:**
 - **MDH:** Susan Bishop mentioned there are still a number of staff currently re-deployed to help with the vaccine effort. The mobile vaccine units are being decommissioned, and all of them will likely be gone by early September. Finally, she mentioned that the delta variant is very concerning and will potentially greatly impact Minnesotans.
- **Member Round Robin:**
 - John Doan provided a link to a news article that may be useful for the September 22nd meeting:
<https://www.publicnewsservice.org/2021-06-10/senior/program-to-give-rides-for-non-medical-errands-to-eligible-seniors/a74558-1>

Review Draft Agenda for September Meeting

Tori Nill and Tom Gottfried provided an overview of the September 22nd meeting. That agenda was included with this meeting’s packet of invite materials. Members did not have any changes or questions.

Adjourn: Tim Henkel made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Gerri Sutton. The motion was unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 2:50 PM.