

MCOTA February 2021 Newsletter - DRAFT

This email newsletter is an effort by the [Minnesota Council on Transportation Access \(MCOTA\)](#) to provide periodic updates about its initiatives to the public and to interested stakeholders. Please let us know what you think by contacting Tom Gottfried at tom.gottfried@state.mn.us.

2021 MCOTA Annual Report published

MCOTA's 2021 annual report highlights the ways MCOTA and its partners impacted Minnesotans during the pandemic, and details the work to enhance volunteer driver programs, leverage technology to quantify gaps in service, and expand transportation access at the regional and local levels.

Special transportation options were created throughout the state to address the unique circumstance presented during the pandemic, including:

- Transporting those with COVID to medical appointments, those recovered from COVID home from hospitalization, those with COVID symptoms to testing sites and those with financial barriers to vaccination sites.
- Bringing mobile vans to vaccinate underserved communities
- Delivering food to those in need

MCOTA worked to promote transportation access through the following activities:

- Advocating for new legislation to strengthen volunteer driver programs by reducing barriers
- Presenting a webinar series on the importance and state of volunteer drivers in Minnesota which offered best practices in establishing volunteer driver programs
- Sharing examples from RTCCs and TCAPs on the impact of their work
- Enhancing relationships through work teams and communication activities, including a new website

View full annual report

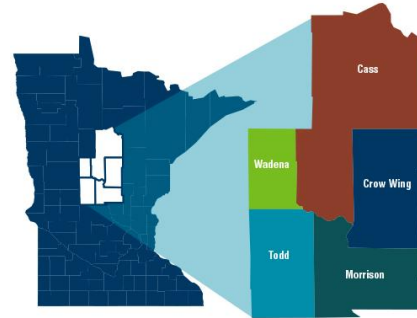
- [2021 Report on the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access \(PDF\)](#)
-



Region Five RTCC: Promoting the Value of Volunteer Drivers and Regional Transportation Connections

The Region Five RTCC produced two new videos to help recruit volunteer drivers and increase awareness of regional transportation connections.

Stakeholders contributed to both video projects. “Stakeholder involvement was key in getting the right information in the videos since they have firsthand experience with both video topics,” said Matt Kallroos, regional development planner.



The [volunteer driver recruitment video](#) focuses on encouraging more people to either sign up or return to volunteer driving with the advance of COVID-19 vaccines. “The Region Five RTCC region is unique because of Cass County, which has no public transportation,” he said. “This is a major need in the region as volunteer driver programs are heavily leaned on.”

The [second video](#) looks at regional transportation connections and shows the ways community members in the region can make use of multiple transportation options to reach their destination. “This idea was seen as another step toward a Transportation Management Coordination Center by stakeholders,” Kallroos said.

Washington County finds food pack delivery partnership popular among residents

There have always been individuals and families who have struggled with food insecurity—and the pandemic has only increased those numbers. Whether due to job loss or lack of transportation, more people have had issues accessing high-quality, nutritious food over the last two years.

To help meet this increased need, Washington County organized a new food delivery program. The Food Pack Delivery Partnership was



comprised of food shelves, transportation providers, and three county staff members. With funding from the Minnesota Department of Health’s Statewide Health Improvement Partnership, this coalition—between the county, Valley Outreach, Christian Cupboard Emergency Food Shelf, White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf, the Metropolitan Council’s contracted Transit Link services, and Newtrax (a nonprofit transportation provider)—has allowed residents to request free no-contact food deliveries to their homes since April 2020.

When residents need food delivered, they either call the county’s Food Support Line, complete an online form, reach out via social media, or make a request through staff at a food shelf. From there, the county forwarded these orders to the food shelves for fulfillment and to transportation partners for delivery.

Washington County commissioned an evaluation of the Food Pack Delivery Partnership, resulting in a report that summarizes the strengths, challenges, and participant experiences. One element that worked very well is that every organization in the coalition was able to leverage their expertise and do what they do best: the county provided centralized support and technical expertise, food shelves provided food to people that need it, and transportation providers coordinated delivery routes to get that food to people’s doorsteps.

Other factors that have been crucial to the program’s success include:

- One organization acting as the main point of entry (Washington County, in this case)
- Good communication between the partners (enabling them to fulfill emergency food requests)
- Innovation (like transportation providers delivering food to people’s homes rather than driving people to food shelves, as had happened pre-pandemic)
- Flexibility (such as food shelves serving those who are outside of their usual territories)

One of the main challenges of the program was a change in transportation partners. Six months into these efforts, Transit Link (the coalition’s original transportation partner) was less able to deliver foods, so the county brought in Newtrax to spread out the work of delivering food packs.

Participants of the Food Pack Delivery Partnership were surveyed about the program. Most participants had positive feedback about the process to request food, with nine in ten survey respondents saying the process was either easy (68%) or somewhat easy (22%). Participants cited delivery to their residence as the most important element of the program, and they also said they would appreciate more choice and customization in the food pack items.

Partner organizations believe delivery will still be needed in the future, even as COVID has less impact on our daily lives. Survey respondents agreed: 78% said they would have used the delivery service if it had been available to them pre-pandemic, and 77% anticipate needing the delivery service moving forward.

While Washington County has had a key role in the delivery pack program from the beginning, the County's financial and staff support were only available due to COVID. The coalition partners are continuing the delivery program, and the County has transitioned its customer service and system management roles to the local food shelves in the partnership.

Recent headlines

Below is a sampling of recent news and research on transportation technology, equity, and sustainability that are relevant to transportation access in Minnesota. Several of these are from [weekly alerts curated by the MnDOT Library](#).

- [Autonomous vehicle policies with equity implications: Patterns and gaps](#) (open access; Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 2022)
- [CVS, Uber partner on health equity initiative](#) Becker's Hospital Review (January 19, 2022)
- [WisDOT works to address school bus driver shortage](#) WSAW (January 18, 2022)
- [Study: Small electric shuttles ideal for last-mile transit](#) Government Technology (January 14, 2022)
- [Metro Transit receives DHS award for mobile vaccination units](#) KSTP (January 14, 2022)
- [Bus makers are merging electrification and autonomy](#) Government Technology (January 18, 2022)
- [Five ways technology will change transportation in 2022](#) Forbes (December 22, 2022)

Upcoming MCOTA meetings

MCOTA usually meets bimonthly on a Wednesday from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. In accordance with recommendations from the State of Minnesota to help slow the

spread of COVID-19, upcoming meetings will be remote only. The meetings are open, and members of the public are welcome to attend. Each meeting includes time for public comments. See the [MCOTA website](#) for more details.

- March 23, 2022, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
 - May 25, 2022, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
-

About MCOTA

The Minnesota Council on Transportation Access was established by the Minnesota Legislature in 2010 to “study, evaluate, oversee, and make recommendations to improve the coordination, availability, accessibility, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and safety of transportation services provided to the transit public.”

www.CoordinateMNTransit.org