

2022 report on

Minnesota Council on Transportation Access

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Contents

Summary	5
Introduction	7
MCOTA 2022 Activities and Accomplishments	10
Strategic Work Teams	10
Leadership Changes	13
Regional Coordination Progress	13
Partnerships to improve access	14
Scott/Carver County update: Hop Scott finds novel ways to deliver access	14
Dakota County TCAP update: Lyft Ridesharing Program frees riders, inspires other jurisdictions	15
Arrowhead RTCC facilitates vehicle sharing among community agencies to expand capacity and resources	16
Newtrax riders glimpse future in pilot of automated Bear Tracks shuttle bus	17
Increased awareness to expand community transportation access	18
Region 5 RTCC grant targets more livable community through better access for all	18
Northwest RTCC provides free event rides to cultivate more transit users	19
Dakota County encourages riders through ‘travel training’	19
National and statewide presentations showcase Minnesota’s approaches	20
Growing the impact of RTCCs	21
Region 5 RTCC ties together rural communities with single access point	21
Growing 6W RTCC coalition improves coordination at all levels	22
Strategies to strengthen volunteer driver programs	23
Mid-Minnesota RTCC tests volunteer driver recruitment strategies	23
Northwest RTCC develops ride-sharing program using idle senior van	24
Innovations to meet evolving community needs	24
Washington/Ramsey County update: Reimagined transportation service upcycles food to meet continuing need	24
Metro Transit micro expands access through a new on-demand service option	25
Improved local coordination planning	26
Coordination is vital in filling local transportation access gaps	26

East Central RTCC maturity contributes to local coordination plan	27
FY23 Priorities	29
Conclusion	29
Appendix A: List of Abbreviations	30
Appendix B: 2022 MCOTA Members	31
Appendix C: MCOTA Legislative Duties and Accomplishments Since Inception	32
Appendix D: Top Challenges and Opportunities of Members	42

Legislative Request

This report is issued to comply with [Minnesota Statutes 174.285, subdivision 5.](#)

174.285 MINNESOTA COUNCIL ON TRANSPORTATION ACCESS.

Subd. 5. Report.

By January 15 of each year, beginning in 2012, the council shall report its findings, recommendations, and activities to the governor's office and to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over transportation, health, and human services, and to the legislature as provided under section 3.195.

The cost of preparing this report is \$TBD.

Summary

For many Minnesotans, getting from where they are to where they need to go is no simple task. They may not own a car, they may not be able to drive, and they may live in a place without public transit or with gaps in public transit.

The Minnesota State Legislature recognizes the challenges that those Minnesotans face and the vital role that transportation plays in the overall health of the state's economy and its communities. It also values effectively coordinating and using existing transportation options as well as exploring new ways to expand transportation access.

Many agencies, departments, programs, and regional and local providers throughout Minnesota work hard to deliver transportation services. What can help them reach even more people who need to travel to work, see their doctors, buy groceries, attend events, or visit family and friends?

The answer lies in an ability to improve the coordination of existing resources and to bring the many players together to identify and address gaps in transportation access. To those ends, the Minnesota State Legislature formed the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access in 2010, under Minn. Stat. 174.285, "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."

The unique structure of MCOTA allows it to form partnerships at both the state and local levels. As the statewide coordinating council, MCOTA includes senior leadership from 13 state agencies and organizations listed in Appendix A: Minnesota departments of Commerce, Education, Employment and Economic Development, Human Services, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs; the Metropolitan Council; the Office of the Governor; the Minnesota Board on Aging; Minnesota Management and Budget; Minnesota State Council on Disability; and the Minnesota Public Transit Association.

Understanding the value of coordinating all efforts — statewide, regional and local — MCOTA has developed a statewide network of regional transportation coordinating councils, which serve Greater Minnesota, and transportation coordination assistance projects in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. RTCCs and TCAPs consist of stakeholders and community members interested in expanding transportation options to those most in need, such as older adults, people with disabilities, low-income adults, and veterans.

These partnerships address gaps in transportation with innovative approaches. They also leverage federal, state, regional and local resources, and adapt quickly to changing circumstances.

Building statewide, regional and local networks is not an easy task. It requires engaging a variety of stakeholders in discussions, planning and, ultimately, action — all of which takes time and much effort. The dedicated efforts of volunteers and professionals throughout the state have brought RTCCs and TCAPs to life and continue to move them forward.

This annual report highlights the work of MCOTA and the ways that RTCCs and TCAPs make a difference for those who face barriers to transportation. Some, but not all, examples of this work and impact include:

- Vehicle-sharing opportunities made possible by RTCC leadership and participation.
- Continued success of the Lyft Ridesharing Program, a TCAP initiative — as measured by ridership, satisfaction surveys, and cost efficiencies.

- Efforts to remove the barriers to volunteer driving and new approaches to recruiting volunteer drivers.
- Travel training to increase awareness of existing transportation options and help for those who need these options for access.
- Pilot study of an on-demand ride service program to improve access for high-frequency routes and increase mobility in historically underserved communities.

Indeed, MCOTA, in partnership with a network of TCAPs, RTCCs, and many others, lays the foundation required to address the daunting challenge of ensuring transportation access throughout the state. Moreover, MCOTA facilitates greater understanding of unmet transportation needs and new ways to meet those needs.

Introduction

Imagine a person involved with a supportive employment organization has requested a ride to their job, which requires traveling between Sherburne and Anoka counties.

It doesn't sound complicated. But transportation services that end at county lines can make it almost impossible because the request requires locating a transfer site and figuring how the transfer between services would work.

It actually took a collaborative effort that included Connect Central Minnesota RTCC, ConnectAbility of Minnesota, Tri-CAP, Anoka TCAP, Traveler Transit Link, Metropolitan Council, MnDOT, city and county representatives, and others.

This example shows the indispensable role of coordination in improving mobility management, an approach to designing and delivering transportation services that starts and ends with the customer. Mobility management begins with a community vision of the entire transportation network — public transit, private operators, cycling and walking, volunteer drivers and others — working together with customers, planners and stakeholders to deliver transportation options that best meet community needs.

MCOTA, RTCCs, and TCAPs help form the foundation for mobility management gains in the state. At their core, they focus on providing a place for all those agencies and organizations (public and private) to join forces. That foundation makes transportation possible for people in places without it, and it makes access easier for people who struggle with consistent transportation.

With that in mind, MCOTA pursues three key transportation goals:

- Identify and reduce transportation gaps.
- Develop effective and streamlined access to transportation.
- Provide more transportation options.

The stories that follow demonstrate only a few results from the hard work of MCOTA, TCAP and RTCC representatives in 2022. With mobility management, even the smallest of wins leads to a larger impact... bolstering the economy with more workers, improving health with greater access to care, and strengthening communities by reducing the isolation that comes with limited transportation access.

The report also includes an update on MCOTA work teams, which comprise MCOTA leadership team members, agency staff, content experts, and RTCC and TCAP representatives. The work teams tackle specific initiatives, such as communications, legislation, and research.

Thanks to the strength of its partnerships, MCOTA and its TCAP and RTCC partners continue to work toward a place where transportation services can offer more seamless transportation access, starting and ending with the customer in mind.

MCOTA Mission

The mission of MCOTA is to work together to remove obstacles that prevent the successful coordination of transportation programs and resources among their respective customers.

MCOTA Vision

Minnesotans will have access to coordinated transportation services to meet their mobility needs.

MCOTA Legislative Duties

Under [Minn. Stat. 174.285](#), the purpose of MCOTA is 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.”

To improve coordination and accessibility, the statute assigns the council 20 duties:

1. Compile information on existing transportation alternatives for the transit public, and serve as a clearinghouse for information on services, funding sources, innovations and coordination efforts.
2. Identify best practices and strategies that have been successful in Minnesota and in other states for coordination of local, regional, state and federal funding and services.
3. Recommend statewide objectives for providing public transportation services for the transit public.
4. Identify barriers prohibiting coordination and accessibility of public transportation services and aggressively pursue the elimination of those barriers.
5. Recommend policies and procedures for coordinating local, regional, state and federal funding and services for the transit public.
6. Identify stakeholders providing services for the transit public and seek input from them concerning barriers and appropriate strategies.
7. Recommend guidelines for developing transportation coordination plans throughout the state.
8. Encourage all state agencies participating in the council to purchase trips within the coordinated system.
9. Facilitate the creation and operation of transportation brokerages to match riders to the appropriate service, promote shared dispatching, compile and disseminate information on transportation options and promote regional communication.
10. Encourage volunteer driver programs and recommend legislation to address liability and insurance issues.
11. Recommend minimum performance standards for delivery of services.
12. Identify methods to eliminate fraud and abuse in special transportation services.

13. Develop a standard method for addressing liability insurance requirements for transportation services purchased, provided or coordinated.
14. Design and develop a contracting template for providing coordinated transportation services.
15. Recommend an interagency uniform contracting billing and accounting system for providing coordinated transportation services.
16. Encourage the design and development of training programs for coordinated transportation services.
17. Encourage the use of public-school transportation vehicles for the transit public.
18. Develop an allocation methodology that equitably distributes transportation funds to compensate units of government and all entities that provide coordinated transportation services.
19. Identify policies and necessary legislation to facilitate vehicle sharing.
20. Advocate for eliminating barriers to coordination, implementing coordination strategies, enacting necessary legislation and appropriating resources to achieve the council's objectives.

MCOTA 2022 Activities and Accomplishments

Since its creation in 2010, MCOTA has pursued projects and activities to improve transportation coordination in Minnesota. Below are brief descriptions of key council activities and accomplishments during 2022. The numbers referenced in Table 1 are the numbers of the duties in the statute and listed on p. 8-9 of this report.

Table 1: Key MCOTA 2022 activities and accomplishments

Activity	Legislative Duties Addressed Under Minn. Stat. 174.285
Strategic Work Teams: New teams formed to address pressing challenges	All
Volunteer Driver Program initiatives: Legislation, fact sheet	10, 13, 20
Stakeholder communications	1
Local innovations and partnerships by RTCCs and TCAPs	1-11, 13-14, 16-17, 19-20
Olmstead Plan progress monitoring	3, 4

See Appendix C for a list of all initiatives grouped by legislative duty.

Strategic Work Teams

MCOTA’s Strategic Plan recommended the creation of several work teams to develop specific initiatives. The work teams include MCOTA members, agency staff, content experts and RTCC/TCAP members. The work teams support priorities identified in the Strategic Plan and by senior leadership.

At MCOTA’s Senior Leadership Meeting held on October 1, 2021, members and senior leaders identified and ranked their top transportation challenges and opportunities (see Appendix D for list of themes). MCOTA then conducted an engaged process with members and partners to identify and prioritize proposed suggestions to address these challenges and opportunities, resulting in updated focus areas and the establishment of two additional work teams to advance these priorities: the Accessibility & Olmstead and the Removing Barriers Work Teams. These work teams join the Volunteer Driver Program Initiatives and Communications Work Teams.

In identifying their priorities for developing their FY23-24 work plans, each team considered and discussed:

- Needed resources for each activity
- Intended goals and outcomes
- Timeline considerations
- Who needs to be involved (stakeholders and partners)

Accessibility & Olmstead Work Team

The purpose of the Accessibility & Olmstead Work Team, as one of the two new work teams established this year, is to address issues related to accessibility for people with disabilities, including intersections with the Olmstead Plan. The objective is to remove barriers to enable safe and accessible pedestrian and multimodal transportation facilities, including ride share services (Lyft/Uber), for all users. This includes ADA compliance and user accessibility for transportation services and facilities at all levels of government.

Chaired by MCOTA member David Fenley with the Minnesota Council on Disability, the work team identified four priorities for its FY23-24 work plan, which was approved in the July 2021 MCOTA meeting. Each priority presents a transportation issue related to accessibility.

The Accessibility & Olmstead Work Team's four priorities are:

1. Develop a single phone number and website for individuals who need a wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) can call to find one (taxis, TNCs, buses).
2. Integrate transportation planning into all state-supported housing plans – universal and walkability planning.
3. Incorporate transportation planning for the future through the Olmstead Plan by creating a goal of at least bi-annually investigating the usage of non-regular route transportation for people with disabilities and addressing new growth opportunities to build regular route service.
4. Many people who are eligible for NEMT are not aware of it. MCOTA should conduct outreach to inform individuals who are eligible for NEMT, either directly or by working with counties to increase their outreach.

Removing Barriers Work Team

The goal of the Removing Barriers Work Team is to remove transportation barriers for people to access health care and other essential needs (e.g., food & groceries, pharmacies, socializing, recreation, etc.) that contribute to well-being. Includes additional funding and diversification of funding sources and/or policy changes to support this need, including for rural Minnesota. This work team has been intentional about recruiting people living with disabilities to ensure engagement and understanding of the perspectives of people living with disabilities, end users, and other people who are impacted by transportation services.

Chaired by MCOTA member Dylan Galos with the Minnesota Department of Health, the work team identified five priorities for its FY23-24 work plan.

The five priorities of the Removing Barriers Work Team are:

1. Assure that people with behavioral and accessibility challenges have meaningful access through ongoing engagement, accurate rates, and to build in a financial add-on to providers who 1) are equipped to serve a population requiring additional support (e.g., lift vehicles, specially trained drivers, rider support, etc.) and 2) actually serve individuals requiring pre-defined additional supports.
2. Reduce barriers to sharing vehicles identified in 2013 Vehicle Sharing study, including providing incentives to these providers to both share their vehicles with others and provide more individualized transportation services in their region to non-client populations.
3. Set accurate market rates for reimbursements (in negotiating with counties/funders); need to account

for increased costs (include a fuel escalator in contract as well as different mode rates); one blended rate creates incentive for providing rides to ambulatory customers and disincentive for those with additional mobility needs.

4. De-mystify current confusion and lack of consistent information regarding waived services reimbursement; lack of communication between DHS and providers (e.g., could be missing out on federal funding); difference between state and county DHS waiver dollars and how they can be spent.
5. Identify ways of improving cost effectiveness of rural transportation, as well as researching different types of modeling to create sustainable efficiencies are important to improving and reforming in how rural transportation is delivered.

Volunteer Driver Program Initiatives Work Team

This team focuses on strengthening volunteer driver programs, including reducing legislative barriers and providing opportunities for networking and professional development.

Co-chairs Tiffany Collins, MN Public Transit Association and Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, Arrowhead RTCC, led the work team's efforts to coordinate with the Minnesota Department of Revenue to update [mileage reimbursement guidance for volunteer drivers](#) to reflect the legislative changes from the 2021 session, requested MCOTA's endorsement for proposed federal mileage reimbursement legislation, and developed a work plan for FY23-24, which includes the following activities:

- Updating a Volunteer Driver Brochure for use by volunteer driver programs
- Holding Volunteer Driver Forums
- Identifying and conducting research related to volunteer driver programs

Communications Work Team

The Communications Work Team, under the leadership of Chair Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, proposes content for and reviews the MCOTA annual legislative report, newsletter, website (including RTCC and TCAP sections) and other products such as a member guide. Its FY23-24 work plan was approved by MCOTA in July 2021.

MCOTA Newsletter

MCOTA continued to produce a quarterly email newsletter that began in 2017 in response to requests from stakeholders. The distribution list includes people who were invited to, or attended the workshops, transit stakeholders and those who self-register on the CoordinateMNTransit.org website.

The newsletter included updates about new resources, highlights from individual RTCCs and TCAPs, and articles about equity, automated vehicles, and technology related to transportation coordination. The readership statistics are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: MCOTA newsletter readership statistics

	December 2021	February 2021	March 2022	June 2022
Recipients	760	757	750	741
Open rate	25.5%	24.2%	28.9%	27.3%
Unique click-through rate	12.8%	8.5%	7.8%	13%

These communications tasks relate to MCOTA’s first legislative duty of sharing information with stakeholders on state coordination efforts.

Leadership Changes

Longtime MCOTA Chair and MnDOT Assistant Commissioner Tim Henkel announced his retirement in May 2022. He stated that it has truly been a privilege and an honor to facilitate the work of MCOTA and that it has been one of the most rewarding activities of his career. The topic of accessibility is critical in the state. As vice-chair, Diogo Reis of the MN Department of Human Services will serve as chair and work with members and Commissioners to determine next steps for leadership. [will update after September election]

Regional Coordination Progress

In Greater Minnesota, MCOTA works with local governments and organizations throughout the state to create and support Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils and the Metro Area Transit Coordination Assistance Projects. RTCCs and TCAPs include stakeholders and public members interested in improving mobility for those with limited transportation options such as older adults, people with disabilities, low-income individuals and veterans.

RTCCs and TCAPs build on the service delivery foundation of public transit systems, and layer on mobility management to expand service options and to provide transportation across service boundaries.

Each RTCC and TCAP has a formalized coordination plan among providers and service agencies to achieve three outcomes:

1. Identify and reduce transportation gaps
2. Streamline access to transportation
3. Provide more transportation options

[Will add status updates, maps, and chart for next draft]

Partnerships to improve access

Transit coordination assistance projects and regional transportation coordinating organizations look for projects and programs that multiply impact and better leverage available resources and funding, as well as bring ideas to the table that help address long-standing problems in new ways.

Scott/Carver County update: Hop Scott finds novel ways to deliver access

When Scott County noticed a drop in the numbers of its volunteer driver program, it wanted to know why.

The Scott/Carver County TCAP learned of driver frustration. Insurance companies classified them as paid drivers. They had responsibility for handling passenger fares. Volunteers with more than \$600 a year in reimbursements also were liable for federal taxes.

“We looked for a different model that could eliminate these barriers,” said Alan Herrmann, Scott/Carver County TCAP mobility manager and SmartLink supervisor.

Hop Scott helped eliminate some of those barriers, while at the same time offering a service to improve transportation in the county’s more rural areas where public transit may be limited. The program relies on volunteer drivers, a much less costly alternative than subsidized transit, but addresses driver obstacles by providing the vehicles for volunteers and instead of fees encouraging donations by including prestamped envelopes in the van.

“So far, we have used Hop Scott to deliver goods from food shelves, transport clients to mental health centers, transport non-emergency medical transportation clients to medical appointments, and some miscellaneous needs that citizens could not find using public transportation,” Herrmann said.

Scott County literally built Hop Scott on the foundation of partnerships with community organizations and volunteer drivers. MnDOT administers a federal grant that funds the mobility management work of TCAPs.

“As mobility managers, linking the transportation resources in a geographic area with the needs of the citizens in those areas is what it is all about,” Herrmann said.

Currently, Hop Scott works with food shelves and Scott County Human Services. The food shelf partnerships started when public transit was no longer available to deliver food.

“Our next partnership we are working on is a food shelf and family resource center combination to get citizens access to food and services,” Herrmann said. “This partnership also helped the food shelf to get some grant money for Hop Scott transports.”

Other partnerships with local Lions clubs, churches, Nextdoor, and Facebook focus on driver recruitment. The efforts help promote the good work of the volunteers as “Hometown Heroes,” a graphic that appears on the driver door of every van. City libraries and cities also contribute by lending their parking lots to vehicles and a hosting key boxes for volunteer drivers to check out vehicles.

Hop Scott launched in late 2021, but the pandemic and struggles with purchasing vans slowed down the effort. This year, though, trips rose from four in January to 84 in June.

“It took a long time to get going because of COVID but all of the Scott County commissioners are excited about its potential and have decided to help fund it with transportation sales tax dollars through 2024,” Herrmann said.

The county purchased the Hop Scott vans and a Live Well at Home Grant funded 50% of the cost. The county insures and maintains the vans and uses software to track all trips for easy reporting. Scott County covers most administrative costs, with supplements from the Scott County transportation sales tax. Donations help support vehicle maintenance.

“Scott County Human Services is applying for a grant to fully fund a fourth van for Hop Scott in 2023,” he said. “We also are exploring how we can help the more populated areas of Scott County with volunteers from those areas.”

Work continues to attract volunteers. With transportation to regularly scheduled events, Hop Scott has attracted a new source of volunteers: 20-year-olds who can deliver food after work or transport people to their medical appointments on their day off.

“Recruitment and retention have always been the biggest challenge to any volunteer program, but hopefully this different approach will make a difference in this challenge.”

Dakota County TCAP update: Lyft Ridesharing Program frees riders, inspires other jurisdictions

Dakota County launched its Lyft Ridesharing Program in March 2019 with 23 riders. The program now has 1,100 riders and counting.

In 2022, building on its success, the program received an innovation grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services to help expand on-demand service to riders who use mobility devices. The grant provides financial incentives to attract drivers with wheelchair-accessible vehicles to the Lyft platform and, once on the platform, to keep them driving, said county transportation coordinator Robyn Bernardy.

“We want to have enough drivers and WAV vehicles available to meet demand,” she said. “Right now, we have 33 people who need WAVs and are eligible, but we think there are more.”

Currently, Lyft subcontracts with Mobility for All for wheelchair-accessible services, which requires riders to call for rides rather than use the Lyft app. Lyft is working on adding the WAV option to its platform. That change and increasing the number of drivers with WAV vehicles would help improve service to riders with wheelchairs, Bernardy said.

The idea for Lyft dates to 2017, when lack of transportation lowered employment rates among those receiving human services. The Dakota County team saw the need for a ride-sharing option, and they chose Lyft as a provider. The county received DHS backing and a 2018 DHS innovation grant.

The program requires participants to live in Dakota County, work with a case manager, qualify for a home and community-based service waiver, and have a smartphone as well as a Lyft account. Participants can use the Lyft app to request transportation, see the cost of rides, and view the balance of their available funding.

“It’s very seamless on the rider side,” Bernardy said. It’s also very popular with riders.

In a rider survey, the county asked new participants how happy they were with their transportation options before Lyft: 15% said they were satisfied or extremely satisfied, and 85% of same people responded six months after using Lyft that they were satisfied or extremely satisfied. “It flipped,” Bernardy pointed out, “which is really fun to see.”

Those surveyed also indicated Lyft reduced their dependence on family and friends for rides, reduced the stress of waiting for transportation, improved reliability, and helped increase their flexibility in accommodating employer requests.

The county compares the cost of rides with other services, and Lyft proves economical. “Right now, it’s less costly than those options,” Bernardy said, “and also gives people that independence and that choice.”

Dakota County is happy to share its experience with other counties. In fact, the Dakota County program inspired other counties to establish Lyft programs.

In Washington County, a Lyft partnership was encouraged by the TCAP collaborative structure and by Dakota County’s willingness to consult with other counties, said Barbara Bursack, community services mobility manager for the county.

“Washington County has few public transportation options,” Bursack said. “It’s really filling an important need that couldn’t be filled by other means at this time.”

Lyft rides in Washington County numbered 61 in the two-week period at the beginning of August. “It’s absolutely being used, and it’s something we’ll continue to use.”

Arrowhead RTCC facilitates vehicle sharing among community agencies to expand capacity and resources

Karen Herman understands the value of vehicle sharing to support broader transportation access.

“Sharing vehicles maximizes the use of a vehicle in service to a population,” said Herman, executive director of Udac, a Duluth-based nonprofit that assists individuals with disabilities through employment and civic life to advance community inclusion. “Transportation is one of the biggest, if not the biggest barrier to community participation and access to resources. Multiple organizations using vehicles helps address these issues.”

The structure and coordination provided by the Arrowhead RTCC made it possible to take the idea and turn it into a ride-sharing project.

“The RTCC sets the foundation for coordination by cultivating ‘buy-in,’” said Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, senior planner with the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission. “One of the intentions of the RTCC is to break past the long-standing silos and identify the incentives to make changes and work with different stakeholders.”

After Herman discussed vehicle sharing at the board level and expanded those into the community, which led to conversations with a regional health provider and a vehicle-sharing solution. Since Udac’s day service programs remained closed or very limited because of the pandemic, their vehicles were available. The regional health center found an important use for the vehicles.

“Partnering with the regional healthcare provider to use the day service provider vehicles allowed for the rapid mobilization of vaccine clinics,” Herman said. “This process supported rural and marginalized communities to have access to vaccines more rapidly and without additional wait time and expense to purchase vehicles.”

Similarly, the Bois Forte Reservation and Big Woods Transit also launched a community vehicle-sharing initiative in the Arrowhead region by using a wheelchair-accessible van for non-emergency medical transportation.

More vehicle-sharing opportunities offer the potential to offset challenges with evening and after-hours non-emergency transportation in rural areas, Herman said. More shared-vehicles opportunities also will help organizations learn more and share their successes with these types of programs.

“Vehicle sharing makes sense to expand capacity and resources to populations and communities,” she said. “Maximizing the use of vehicles to make transportation more accessible to more people and with expanded hours is a win-win.”

With the increasing demand for transportation, the Arrowhead RTCC encourages new avenues to strengthen transportation options.

“The RTCC supports organizations to explore possibilities and assists with problem-solving the challenges to find solutions that exist to make vehicle sharing possible,” Herman said.

Newtrax riders glimpse future in pilot of automated Bear Tracks shuttle bus

In August, passengers in White Bear Lake embarked on a special journey launching a yearlong pilot to test the performance of the [Bear Tracks](#) automated shuttle bus in all four seasons of weather.

The research and demonstration project involves a host of partners, including Ramsey County TCAP Newtrax, which operates and houses the shuttle. Newtrax has been a key contributor to the project from its start.

The shuttle, with a top speed of 15 mph, transports passengers at no charge on a 1.5-mile route with four stops: the White Bear Area YMCA, two senior housing developments and a day program for adults with developmental disabilities. A Newtrax certified driver serves as the shuttle’s safety officer during operations. The shuttle can carry up to 12 passengers, including one in a wheelchair.

Bear Tracks offers a glimpse into the evolution of transportation and possible solutions to current transportation barriers.

“There are so many significant gaps in transportation for people with disabilities and seniors that I hope this is part of the future to reduce some of those challenges,” said Mike Greenbaum, Newtrax executive director.

That potential motivated Newtrax to join an effort spearheaded by the White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce to pursue a MnDOT grant for piloting an automated vehicle in a suburban community. The group, which included the White Bear Lake School District, the City of White Bear Lake, the White Bear Lake Chamber, and Newtrax, explored a possible route as a key initial step.

The winning route serves many community members in buildings who use Newtrax services. “This has been a nice addition to give them this pilot opportunity,” said Scott Olson, Newtrax community transportation coordinator.

The route also increases access to the White Bear Lake YMCA, another project partner. “The Y has been just a terrific partner with this from the start,” Greenbaum said. “They loved the idea of increasing access to seniors and people with disabilities.” In fact, the Y is offering a one-day pass for anyone who rides the shuttle.

In addition, the group interviewed engineering consultant firms as part of their grant application and hired AECOM, which now serves as the project manager. Navya, which specializes in the design and construction of autonomous and electric vehicles, is providing the automated shuttle for the pilot. The MnDOT Connected and Automated Vehicle Office is funding the project and serves as project lead. The University of Minnesota will take the lead in evaluating the pilot. Other project partners include the Minnesota State Transportation Center of Excellence and Ramsey County.

“One of the exciting things for us is all the different parties that have come together to make this happen and the great partnerships that have been formed and established throughout this entire process,” Greenbaum said.

Based on the first week of operation, which averaged 20 riders a day, the shuttle will be busy.

“From our perspective it was a huge success,” Greenbaum said. “We want anyone and everyone to experience riding this over the next 12 months and encourage people to come and give it a try.”

Increased awareness to expand community transportation access

Transit coordination assistance projects and regional transportation coordinating organizations are getting the word out in their communities as well as throughout the state to increase the use of public transit and other transportation options.

Region 5 RTCC grant targets more livable community through better access for all

When the annual AARP Community Challenge was announced, staff at the MnDOT-funded Region 5 RTCC wasted no time in generating potential project ideas to further leverage its existing partnerships and funding for community benefit. The highly competitive AARP program provides small grants to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages.

Region 5 RTCC staff considered an incentive program for volunteer drivers who recruited other volunteer drivers, as well as transit passes and memberships to the Brainerd Food Co-Op. But, in the end, AARP selected their proposal to provide transit passes, transit training and memberships to a local health and wellness center for low-income seniors, veterans, and members of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.

In 2021, AARP received more than 3,500 applications from nonprofit and government entities and distributed nearly \$3.4 million to fund 244 projects nationwide. AARP set seven possible project outcome areas, including transportation and mobility options that increase connectivity, walkability, bikeability, wayfinding, access to transportation options, and roadway improvements.

With their winning grant award, the RTCC produced five short transit training videos, provided gym memberships in partnership with local gyms for six months and offered transportation on an as-needed basis. It promoted and increased awareness about the project by printing and distributing flyers, emailing various groups, producing a video, promoting it on the radio, and boosting Facebook posts.

The project garnered more than 100 participants, aging in range from 12-years-old to 85-years-old. It offered some community members their first-ever gym membership, for others the opportunity to rejoin a gym, and for many, the opportunity to make new friends and pursue a healthier lifestyle.

The project also helped bring new riders to transit services and supported the development of educational tools, such as videos on how to ride the bus, which will continue to help community members gain access to existing transportation options.

Northwest RTCC provides free event rides to cultivate more transit users

In 2021, the Northwest RTCC provided free rides to support the first annual mental health and suicide awareness event in Thief River Falls, but no one took advantage of the expanded service.

In hopes of crafting a different approach this year, Lynnell Simonson Popowski, regional transportation coordinator for the Northwest Regional Development Commission, turned to the RTCC network for ideas and assistance.

She consulted behavioral health service providers and consumers for ways to improve ridership to this important community event. They suggested that anxiety over calling for a ride and waiting for a bus might have prevented potential attendees from participating. Others indicated that waiting as a group could increase comfort in riding the bus.

“This time, we have arranged three stops at specific times at locations that have low-income housing, senior housing, or people who are less likely to have transportation,” she explained, noting that one bus will service the route.

The Tri-Valley Opportunity Council offered the free transportation. A volunteer also offered to help with travel training and describe what to expect with the bus experience. In addition, a case manager helped to identify community members possibly interested in travel training, and the agency advertised the availability of free rides, which were tracked for later analysis.

The Northwest RTCC hosted a booth at the event to help increase awareness about transportation options. Popowski said efforts such as providing free rides to an event offer the potential to pave the way for more regular use of transit.

“If they get the first time free,” she said, “maybe they sense they can do this and it’s not as scary as they may have thought.”

Dakota County encourages riders through ‘travel training’

Matthew Ferrie now knows how to navigate the transportation options in Dakota County, and it’s making a big difference.

“Before travel training, I would mostly rely on my mom to drive me places,” said Ferrie, who relies on a wheelchair because of his spina bifida. “If my mom was unavailable, I really didn’t have that many options.”

A Dakota County video on its travel training program featured Ferrie, who at the time used transit options twice a day to attend a certification course, and two other travel training participants who gained independence by learning what was available to them and how to access it.

Dakota County’s TCAP supports one and a half travel trainers, whose goal is to make it possible for more community members to access available options. Those travel trainers work with public transportation and community transportation providers, many of whom are a part of Dakota County’s TCAP advisory committee.

“Dakota County has many transportation options,” said county transportation coordinator Robyn Bernardy, but they are not always widely known or understood by community members.

“Part of travel training is teaching people about all the different options,” she added. “We work with individuals with disabilities, older adults, and community members in Dakota County who want to learn the transportation options that are available to them.”

The Dakota County travel training program helps community members in three ways. Through one-on-one travel training, trainers assess a participant’s situation in advance, then teach them about the route. Trainers may accompany them on the route to help them become comfortable before they go it alone.

Trainers also meet and train groups, either in person or online. The trainers may take the group on an actual route and sometimes groups ride the route together. For example, seniors at centers may learn the bus route to an event, travel to the event on that bus route, then select another activity that requires training for a new route. Group members often can find themselves helping and learning from each other.

The third type of training, train-the-trainer helps train people who will teach others, such as case managers, teachers, and employment support providers. Because Dakota County locates its TCAP in the social services department, it’s easy to reach case managers, disability service providers and others.

“We try to meet them where they are and build the training around that group,” Bernardy said. “We have found that many case managers and teachers have never been on buses or other mass transit before. Part of it is getting them comfortable with options so that they can be an advocate in talking about this transportation option with the people they work with.”

In 2022, trainers provided group training for approximately 450 community members, and technical assistance for 600, focusing on tasks such as responding to phone calls with specific route questions. Bernardy expects only growth in travel training.

“With the continued push to have people with disabilities work in competitive employment, it needs to be a high priority, because if people can’t get to jobs, then how are they able to get them or keep them?” she asked. “There is definitely a need and demand and that’s only going to continue.”

National and statewide presentations showcase Minnesota’s approaches

MCOTA staff and RTCC and TCAP representatives showcased Minnesota’s approach to improving transportation options and supporting independence among persons with disabilities and older adults. They shared information about person-centered mobility management and transportation coordination initiatives in their communities with audiences in Minnesota and nationally.

Raising awareness at the local, statewide, and national levels supports improvements to transportation access in the state and influences conversations and practices beyond Minnesota. Audiences included the Minnesota Social Service Association Conference, American Public Transportation Association (APTA), National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO), National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC), Regional Lions Club, and the Twin Cities Shared Mobility Collaborative.

Potential Infographic:

Total # of presentations

Total local

Total in-state

Total national

Growing the impact of RTCCs

Building networks. Strengthening relationships. Joining together to accomplish what was not possible without coordination among many. Partnerships are at the heart of transit coordination assistance projects and regional transportation coordinating organizations. They make possible the transportation services that enhance and expand the lives of community members throughout the state.

Region 5 RTCC ties together rural communities with single access point

It takes 30 minutes to drive from the Central Lakes College campus in Brainerd to the Central Lakes College campus in Staples, a trip that involves passing through five counties and several small towns.

No one transit system serves the route, though, a barrier to easy access. “You’d have to make five calls to go 30 minutes,” said Cheryal Lee Hills, executive director of the Region 5 Development Commission and North Central Economic Development Association. “People don’t do that.”

The lack of connections also reduces the possible employment pool of small towns along the route and limits their ability to grow. “All those towns between there suffer,” Hills said. “Our economy is not realizing the advantages it could if we had interconnected systems that made it user friendly.”

It was the close alignment of transportation with its regional development strategies that prompted the R5DC to bring together stakeholders for a discussion about forming an RTCC for the region. Those stakeholders asked R5DC to take the lead in moving RTCC goals forward, and the commission agreed.

“This process allowed for local places to make decisions about how RTCCs would be formed, and it leaned into organizations that had really deep relationships across private, public and nonprofit sectors to create really robust RTCC networks that are doing some pretty amazing work,” Hills said.

Commission staff started by gathering ideas and perspectives from many in the region, including riders. Those efforts helped shape work to secure ride-sharing vehicles that transcend county lines, to support volunteer driver programs and volunteer driver recruitment, to offer travel training that helps community members access available transit, and to leverage the RTCC for funding from other sources.

“There are lots of assets that people don’t think about through the RTCCs that we’re building for rural communities,” Hills said. “It’s not just creating that one-stop for travel information. That one-stop to help people access transportation is one tool, but there are lots of other tools, like ride-share programs, volunteer driver programs, recruitment for riders.”

Region 5 RTCC consists of 20 different agencies and organizations working together, as well as reaching out to RTCCs in other regions.

While the pandemic slowed progress, Hills looks forward to taking transit ridership to new levels, increasing ride-sharing availability, developing an online platform for easy transportation access, leveraging funding sources for new initiatives and more.

RTCC programs also help communities in other less visible ways, such as reducing social isolation, opening opportunities for work and education not previously available and improving health and well-being.

“This isn’t just about going from Point A to Point B,” Hills said. “When you are able to bring people together, even on a bus, you are creating community and culture.”

Growing 6W RTCC coalition improves coordination at all levels

In early August, a new wheelchair-accessible van made its maiden voyage to transport a veteran to a medical appointment, thanks to partnerships that resulted from forming the 6W RTCC.

Noting the struggles of veterans in the region to find such rides, veteran service officers brought their concern to other members of the 6W RTCC. Working together, they identified an opportunity, a Support Our Troops grant from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs. The RTCC wrote and submitted the grant application, with the VSOs supplying letters of support. For the first time, MDVA approved funding for an outside organization to purchase a vehicle.

RTCC partners also have begun promoting the service, visiting VFWs and American Legions in the region with the van and producing a brochure.

“All that wouldn’t have come about without the RTCC,” said Ted Nelson, associate director of Prairie Five Community Action, which leads the region’s RTCC efforts. “There’s no doubt in my mind that the RTCC is the one that pushed that through.”

The Minnesota DVA and Prairie Five initially covered the cost to purchase the Support Our Troops van. Prairie Five is working with MnDOT to help cover operating cost of the van within the public transit system, Prairie Five RIDES.

Prairie Five Community Action provides an array of programs from childcare to food shelves to its Prairie Five RIDES program. The desire to reach even more community members who need transportation prompted Prairie Five to take the lead in organizing the 6W RTCC.

Building from its own network, Prairie Five keeps expanding the RTCC coalition in the region, to the benefit of all. The list of participants currently includes Area Agency on Aging, workforce development, regional development commission, transportation providers, human services agencies, transportation and human service advocates, centers for independent living, Minnesota continuum-of-care coordinators, veteran services offices, health care systems, public and private funders of transportation services, tribal representatives, and city and county representatives.

“Where I feel the RTCC has been successful is being able to bring all those entities to the table,” Nelson said, because those relationships help in identifying transportation gaps and finding ways to fill them.

“I feel like everybody has a gap,” he said. “Everybody hears about somebody not getting a ride or struggles trying to get someone a ride.” The question becomes, how to fill those voids, and building more relationships and partnerships helps make better solutions for all, he said.

Another RTCC initiative — a web resource — makes it simpler for community members to access rides. The RTCC itself makes it easier to coordinate efforts at all levels, Nelson said.

“We’re not going to fix everything today,” he said, “but hopefully it’s building that foundation to fix a lot of it in the future.”

Strategies to strengthen volunteer driver programs

Volunteer drivers are essential to Minnesota’s transportation system, especially in rural areas. In this time of extreme driver shortages, transit coordination assistance projects and regional transportation coordinating organizations are experimenting with ways to attract new drivers and to reduce the barriers to volunteering.

Mid-Minnesota RTCC tests volunteer driver recruitment strategies

In its continuous search for fresh ways to attract more volunteer drivers, the Mid-Minnesota Rural Transportation Coordinating Council tapped its members for new ways to increase awareness about the critical shortage of volunteer drivers. Recent MMRTCC efforts involved Minnesota media and the region’s drivers.

- A national news report featuring a high-profile school bus driver prompted a Mid-Minnesota Development Commission discussion about the value of reaching out to news media. MMRTCC transportation resource coordinator Terry Smith contacted a WCCO-4 TV News reporter originally from the region about the critical shortage of volunteer drivers at Central Community Transit and throughout the state. Smith collaborated with CCT executive director Tiffany Collins to develop talking points for an interview and to ensure that volunteer driver representatives would be available to answer questions. The resulting news report, which aired in February featuring a CCT volunteer driver, highlighted significant transportation gaps in the region and the pressing need for more volunteer drivers.
- Another strategy Smith used to reach potential volunteer drivers involved sharing driving opportunities with students of local mature driver accident prevention classes, still often referred to as “55-Alive” classes. The safety-focused classes help older drivers — who often can receive auto insurance discounts by attending — improve their driving skills. Smith discovered that most participants are completely unaware of the volunteer driver program, let alone the opportunity to volunteer themselves. For MMRTCC, the success of this strategy hinges on establishing good relationships with course instructors. Though the instructors may have some initial skepticism, Smith has found that they have come to see his short presentation as a nice course enhancement. “While they do believe it’s valuable for their classes to know there is a volunteer driver service available for them when they need it,” Smith said, “they’re also happy to present their classes with the opportunity to help their nondriving neighbors while they’re still feeling comfortable and competent behind the wheel.”

Supporting volunteer drivers and volunteer driver programs is just one of a handful of initiatives undertaken by the Mid-Minnesota Rural Transportation Coordinating Council, which is funded by a MnDOT grant (both state and federal dollars) with a 10% program match from the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission.

Northwest RTCC develops ride-sharing program using idle senior van

Northwest RTCC provided more options — including volunteer drivers — to make use of an underutilized Warroad Senior Living Center van.

“Because of the staff shortages with COVID, it was difficult to have staff provide transportation,” said Lynnell Simonson Popowski, regional transportation coordinator for the Northwest Regional Development Commission.

Ride sharing fit the bill as a solution, but the center also needed help developing a volunteer-driver program to find the drivers. To start, the RTCC sponsored an open house at the center in spring to explain the opportunity to potential volunteers. The event resulted in the first three volunteer drivers, all who had family members living at the center.

Most van trips take the seniors to the health center in Roseau. The bus also goes there, but community members often experience long waits. “A ride-share program would give them better access,” Popowski added.

In addition, the Northwest RTCC volunteer work team is planning a video about volunteer driving that features the Warroad Senior Living Center, which funds the center’s volunteer driver program. “The hope would be that if we get enough volunteers, we would be able to offer it to the public,” Popowski said.

The senior center also needs volunteers for another new vehicle, a trishaw bike, basically a rickshaw powered by electricity. A grant funded the trishaw, which can take seniors for a ride or short trips.

Innovations to meet evolving community needs

The pandemic disrupted almost all aspects of life. The massive amount of change in a short time also has resulted in new ways of meeting community needs. Transit coordination assistance projects and regional transportation coordinating organizations continue to build on those innovations and to explore promising new ideas.

Washington/Ramsey County update: Reimagined transportation service upcycles food to meet continuing need

As a senior environmental specialist for Washington County, Rob Murray looks for ways to reduce food waste. When the pandemic forced restaurants to quickly shut their doors, he and his Washington County food security unit colleagues knew the amount of food waste could increase significantly.

Was there a way to distribute the food before it went to waste, they asked, while, at the same time, restocking food shelves also facing numerous obstacles from the pandemic?

It turns out the answer to that question was a resounding yes, and the Washington County TCAP was there to bring the players together and ensure efficient and smooth coordination.

Born from a crisis and realized by community partnerships, the food delivery program launched in April 2020. It filled an important need during the pandemic — a need that continues.

“The opportunity started because of the pandemic, recognizing the food that could go to people instead of wasting and recognizing the high need for food,” Murray said.

Pre-pandemic, transportation providers focused on bringing people to food shelves. The shutdown flipped that approach, with transportation providers delivering food to people’s doorsteps. The delivery program also returned pandemic-sidelined vehicles from Metropolitan Council transit and nonprofit transportation provider Newtrax.

But instead of ending as the pandemic has eased, the program continues to grow. “There was even more demand than we had thought,” Murray said.

By August 2022, transportation providers made close to 10,000 deliveries. Washington and Ramsey County residents can request free food pack deliveries from local food shelves through the [Valley Outreach website](#).

In a 2021 evaluation of the program, Washington County learned more about its popularity:

- 78% of survey respondents said they would have used the delivery service if it had been available pre-pandemic.
- 77% respondents anticipate needing the service moving forward.
- Nine in 10 respondents agreed the process to request food was easy or somewhat easy.

The report cited the program’s innovation, flexibility, strong communication among partners, and Washington County’s single point of entry as factors in its success.

The food-pack delivery partnership includes the county, Valley Outreach, Open Cupboard (formerly Christian Cupboard), White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf, Metropolitan Council-contracted Transit Link Services, and Newtrax, which runs Ramsey County’s TCAP. The program has received funding from the Minnesota Department of Health Statewide Health Improvement Partnership, Trellis, St. Croix Valley Foundation, the CARES act, and others.

The investment in sustaining and enhancing the service continues. Toward that end, Washington County has transitioned its customer service and system management roles to local food shelves. In addition, the program now partners with DoorDash for food delivery. DoorDash provides the added benefit of real-time delivery information for those community members who order a delivery.

Creativity and nimbleness all helped bring the program to life and change the delivery of the food to those in need, Murray said. “We’re excited to see the innovation move forward.”

Metro Transit micro expands access through a new on-demand service option

Metro Transit on September 10, 2022, launched its first on-demand ride service, Metro Transit micro, in a 2.5-square-mile area that includes parts of the Near North, Bryn Mawr, and Harrison neighborhoods in north Minneapolis and the edge of downtown Minneapolis.

Metro Transit micro works much like other ride-sharing services. Community members in the area can request a ride directly from their smartphone app or phone, track the vehicle’s location, and view an estimated pick-up time. Riding Metro Transit micro costs the same as regular bus fare, and transfers are free.

Metro Transit micro’s fleet differs from the conventional ride-sharing services, such as Uber and Lyft, because each of the five vehicles can accommodate 10 to 12 passengers. Their smaller-than-a-bus size, though, makes

it easier for them to access more locations directly than fixed-route transit. The ADA-accessible vehicles include wheelchair lifts, bike racks and priority seating areas for those with mobility aids.

With this new service, Metro Transit wants to improve access to high-frequency routes and increase mobility choices in historically underserved communities. Based on those goals, Metro Transit selected the area for a pilot of a new and convenient transportation option for residents. During the pandemic, the Metro Transit system experienced an overall ridership decline, a trend also consistent nationwide. This area of north Minneapolis, though, had a different story: The METRO C line retained 60% of its ridership — one of the highest in the system.

The pilot will run for a minimum of one year. Passengers can take Metro Transit micro anywhere within the service zone. Metro Transit expects the project to expand mobility choices for residents and workers within the service zone, increase access to high-frequency METRO C Line service between Brooklyn Center and downtown Minneapolis, demonstrate an innovative service model in an area with a high propensity for transit, make a transit investment in low-income and historically underserved communities, and add a new service to a transit corridor where ridership remained resilient during the pandemic.

Improved local coordination planning

Coordinated transportation involves multiple entities working together to deliver one or more components of a transportation service to increase capacity. Regional transportation coordinating organizations leverage ongoing partnerships with the many agencies, organizations, and local businesses to provide critical support for developing required local coordination plans.

Coordination is vital in filling local transportation access gaps

In 2017, regional organizations throughout Minnesota completed and submitted five-year local human service public transit coordination plans, which the Federal Transit Administration requires for regions to qualify for FTA Section 5310 funding that supports the enhanced mobility of seniors and people with disabilities.

In 2022, the regions again worked to update the local coordination plans, but with the addition of regional transportation coordinating councils, which help strengthen planning, make more efficient use of resources, and improve transportation access.

Minnesota RTCCs, which were developed as a part of local coordination plans in 2017, now involve a coalition of representatives from the diverse agencies, nonprofits, and for-profit organizations that address gaps in transportation access.

“RTCCs were formed from the 2017 local coordination plans to look at larger regional areas than cities and counties,” said Tom Gottfried, MCOTA executive director and MnDOT program director for mobility management.

Area regional development commissions — or MnDOT for areas that don’t have regional development commissions — have been tasked with developing LCPs since 2007 as part of a funding requirement. But those involved in the planning process realized the need for a structure to support ongoing partnerships with the many agencies, organizations, and local businesses.

RTCCs provide that structure, aided by a combination of federal funds, state funds, and a match by a regional economic development commission or a community organization.

“This was a local initiative,” Gottfried said, with MnDOT spearheading a competitive application process to establish RTCCs, as well as funding and program support through MCOTA. “This is a bottoms-up effort. It has to make sense at the local level.”

While many transportation options exist, they don’t exist equally for all people and all regions, Gottfried said. Though Minnesota has relatively robust rural public transit services, “none of the public transit services would ever claim that they meet all the transportation needs of their geographical area or region,” he explained.

Coordination is vital in filling the gaps. For example, a regional organization may find federal funding to purchase a bus or van, but questions remain about who drives it, who pays the driver, and who insures, stores, and maintains the vehicle. RTCCs help facilitate the relationships that put all the necessary pieces in place.

LCPs, which initially define the scale and scope of the problem, really help shape the agendas of the RTCCs as they advance their workplan strategies and actions.

But this year, Gottfried is seeing a concerning trend among early LCP submissions, which are due by December 31. RTCCs have experienced a significant drop in volunteer drivers due to COVID-19, further limiting transportation access at a time when tax and insurance barriers had already contributed to a decrease in numbers. One region lost 40 out of its 70 volunteer drivers during the pandemic.

“The demand for service and the demand for that type of service have actually gone up,” Gottfried said, “so now the gap has gotten wider.”

East Central RTCC maturity contributes to local coordination plan

Five years ago, the 2017 local human services transit coordination plan for the East Central Regional Development Commission (Minnesota Region 7E) included a priority to establish an RTCC. It happened the following year.

According to Karen Onan, RTCC coordinator and community development planner for the region’s development commission, the RTCC work has fostered a better understanding of regional transportation priorities and what’s needed for the local coordination plan.

In fact, the ECRDC determined that their RTCC was best suited to complete work on the next five-year LCP, which was required in 2022. In particular, the ECRCC offered involvement to their advisory board, the region’s stakeholders, along with public input. With that in place, they built the structure to move forward on the next set of regional transportation access priorities for the new five-year plan.

The 2022 plan includes some ambitious transportation priorities from looking at transportation hub development, multiregional call centers where community members can find transportation options, a vehicle donation program, to training for residents traveling via public transportation and volunteer drivers.

Onan has overlaid those priorities with the East Central RTCC work plan and found much common ground. Many of the RTCC tasks fit with the priorities of the new local coordination plan.

“I am excited that we’re going to have the opportunity to do those tasks within our RTCC because they do merge nicely,” Onan said.

Next steps include breaking down tasks into specific six-month and 12-month actions and pulling together subcommittees to guide and support the efforts.

Onan credits the strong connections among the state’s RTCC and TCAP network and MnDOT for enabling members to frequently share ideas and successes with one another. “It’s important that we all support one another,” she said.

FY23 Priorities

The four MCOTA work teams intend to make progress on their FY23-24 work plans, with the goal of submitting legislative recommendations to MCOTA by March 2023, for consideration and approval by May 2023 and sharing with senior leadership in June 2023. Other policy recommendations will be submitted to MCOTA as they are finalized.

[Will add more here for next draft as well as a graphical timeline of process and key decision points]

Conclusion

As the COVID-19 pandemic has continued, the year 2022 again demonstrated the importance of access to transportation, and it exposed the gaps in access and the impact of those gaps on people's lives. It also brought innovations resulting from the collaborations that MCOTA supports and the partnerships that TCAPs and RTCCs have developed.

From turning food delivery during the pandemic into an ongoing program and expanding ridesharing, to launching vehicle-sharing projects, helping remove the barriers to volunteer driving, and helping pilot an automated shuttle, TCAPs and RTCCs have shaped solutions that are helping to reduce those gaps in access.

RTCCs also laid the foundation for future efforts with the development of local human service public transit coordination plans, which help identify strategic priorities and workplans for the next wave of projects.

Looking forward, MCOTA will continue to work with its partners to refresh the dwindling volunteer-driver pool throughout the state. The volunteer driver shortage, exacerbated by the pandemic, hits particularly hard in rural areas where many community members depend on volunteers as a primary source of transportation.

Other key steps involve supporting RTCCs as they complete work on their LCPs and implement strategies and action plans, as well as continuing to develop the 2023–2024 workplans of the four MCOTA work teams. Those work teams hope to have legislative recommendations for MCOTA by March 2023 and present other policy recommendations when they are finalized.

As partnerships grow, so too does the potential for further success in eliminating barriers, developing new approaches, and launching lifechanging projects. The MCOTA foundation of collaboration, together with TCAP and RTCC partnerships, pave the way for greater efficiencies and even more progress in meeting the transportation needs of all Minnesotans.

Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

DHS.....	Minnesota Department of Human Services
DTCCC.....	Dakota County Transportation Coordinating Collaborative
MCOTA.....	Minnesota Council on Transportation Access
MnDOT.....	Minnesota Department of Transportation
MPTA.....	Minnesota Public Transit Association
NEMT.....	Nonemergency Medical Transportation
PTPP.....	Public Transportation Policy Plan
RTCC.....	Regional Transportation Coordinating Council
STS.....	Special Transportation Service
TCAP.....	Twin Cities Area Transit Coordination Assistance Project
TNC.....	Transportation Network Company (e.g., Lyft, Uber, etc.)

Appendix B: 2022 MCOTA Members

Tim Henkel, Chair (through May 2022)
Minnesota Department of Transportation

Diogo Reis, Vice Chair
Minnesota Department of Human Services

At-Large Representative: Mark Nelson
Minnesota Department of Transportation

Rachel Dame (since September 2021)
Office of the Governor

Alexis Donath (through August 2021)
Office of the Governor

David Fenley
Minnesota State Council on Disability

Gerri Sutton
Metropolitan Council

John Doan (through November 2021)
Minnesota Board on Aging

Maureen Schneider (since December 2021)
Minnesota Board on Aging

Peter Brickwedde
Minnesota Department of Commerce

Kelly Garvey
Minnesota Department of Education

Jodi Yanda
Minnesota Department of Employment and
Economic Development

Dylan Galos (since December 2021)
Minnesota Department of Health

Susan Bishop (through December 2021)
Minnesota Department of Health

James A. Miller (since April 2022)
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

Rolando Sotolongo (through April 2022)
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

Nick Lardinois (since September 2021)
Minnesota Management and Budget

Elizabeth Connor (through August 2021)
Minnesota Management and Budget

Tiffany Collins
Minnesota Public Transit Association

Appendix C: MCOTA Legislative Duties and Accomplishments Since Inception

Year(s)
2011-2022, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #1
Compile information on existing transportation alternatives for the transit public and serve as a clearinghouse for information on services, funding sources, innovations and coordination efforts.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minnesota coordination website • Economic cost-benefit studies • Transportation section of Minnesotahelp.info • NEMT Advisory Committee support • NEMT Coordination Study • Local Transit Coordination Case Studies • Primer of funding sources for “transit public” in Minnesota • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance • Study of economic benefits of Minnesota volunteer driver programs • Study of public-private partnerships in transit • Periodic stakeholder e-mail communication • Volunteer Driver Program Forum • Study on best practices in youth employment transportation

Year(s)
2011-2022, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #2
Identify best practices and strategies that have been successful in Minnesota and in other states for coordination of local, regional, state and federal funding and services.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEMT Advisory Committee support • NEMT Coordination Study • Vehicle-sharing Study • Successful Local Transit Coordination Case Studies • Minnesota mobility management case studies • Strategic planning • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance • Volunteer transportation programs inventory and survey • Study of economic benefits of Minnesota volunteer driver programs • Study of public-private partnerships in transit • Volunteer Driver Program Forum • Study on best practices in youth employment transportation

Year(s)
2012-2022, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #3
Recommend statewide objectives for providing public transportation services for the transit public.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEMT Advisory Committee support • NEMT Coordination Study • Definition of coordination • Strategic planning • Olmstead Plan goals and measures • Homelessness and transportation services • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance

Year(s)
2011-2022, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #4
Identify barriers prohibiting coordination and accessibility of public transportation services and aggressively pursue the elimination of those barriers.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEMT Advisory Committee support • NEMT Study • Synthesis of 2011 Greater MN regional transportation coordination plans • Planning guidance for the 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plans in Minnesota • Maps of human service transportation providers' areas of service in MN • Strategic planning • Olmstead Plan goals and measures • Homelessness and transportation services • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance • Ways to increase vehicle sharing in Minnesota • Study of public-private partnerships in transit • Study on best practices in youth employment transportation

Year(s)
2011-2022, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #5
Recommend policies and procedures for coordinating local, regional, state, and federal funding and services for the transit public.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis of 2011 Greater MN regional transportation coordination plans • Successful Local Transit Coordination Case Studies • Primer of funding sources for "transit public" in Minnesota • Strategic planning • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance • Study of public-private partnerships in transit

Year(s)
2011, 2014-2022, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #6
Identify stakeholders in providing services for the transit public and seek input from them concerning barriers and appropriate strategies.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis of 2011 Greater MN regional transportation coordination plans • Participation in the MN State Council on Disability's annual Town Hall Mtg. • Data collection and analysis of vehicle sharing • Strategic planning • Homelessness and transportation services • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance • Ways to increase vehicle sharing in Minnesota • Volunteer transportation programs inventory and survey

Year(s)
2011-2022, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #7
Recommend guidelines for developing transportation coordination plans throughout the state.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis of 2011 Greater MN regional transportation coordination plans • Planning guidance for the 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plans in Minnesota • Successful Local Transit Coordination case studies • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance

Year(s)
None of the years between 2011-2021
Legislative Duty #8
Encourage all state agencies participating in the council to purchase trips within the coordinated system.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This model of centralized purchasing is not in place in Minnesota.

Year(s)
2011-2012, 2014-2021
Legislative Duty #9
Facilitate the creation and operation of transportation brokerages to match riders to the appropriate service, promote shared dispatching, compile and disseminate information on transportation options, and promote regional communication.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility management webinars • Planning guidance for the 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plans in Minnesota • Successful Local Transit Coordination case studies • Minnesota mobility management case studies • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance

Year(s)
2011, 2015-2022, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #10
Encourage volunteer driver programs and recommend legislation to address liability and insurance issues.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful local transit coordination case studies • A survey and selected case studies of volunteer driver programs in MN, including faith-based programs • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance • Volunteer transportation programs inventory and survey • Study of economic benefits of Minnesota volunteer driver programs • Volunteer driver insurance and reimbursement issues and education • Volunteer Driver Program Forum • Volunteer Driver Program resolution, brochure

Year(s)
2016-2022, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #11
Recommend minimum performance standards for delivery of services.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance

Year(s)
None of the years between 2011-2021
Legislative Duty #12
Identify methods to eliminate fraud and abuse in special transportation services.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be addressed in future work plans

Year(s)
2013, 2015-2021 expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #13
Develop a standard method for addressing liability insurance requirements for transportation services purchased, provided, or coordinated.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehicle-sharing Study RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance Ways to increase vehicle sharing in Minnesota Volunteer driver insurance and reimbursement issues and education Volunteer Driver Program resolution, brochure

Year(s)
2011-2012
Legislative Duty #14
Design and develop a contracting template for providing coordinated transportation services.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of contract template RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance

Year(s)
2011, 2014-2021 expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #15
Recommend an interagency uniform contracting and billing and accounting system for providing coordinated transportation services.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration on development of a Unified Transit Data Center pilot project in Scott and Carver counties • Common standards for financial records • RTCC organizing and implementation

Year(s)
2012-2021 expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #16
Encourage the design and development of training programs for coordinated transportation services.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEMT Advisory Committee support • NEMT Study • Mobility management webinars • Minnesota mobility management case studies • Minnesota Mobility Management Handbook • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance

Year(s)
2016, expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #17
Encourage the use of public school transportation vehicles for the transit public.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance

Year(s)
2014-2015 expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #18
Develop an allocation methodology that equitably distributes transportation funds to compensate units of government and all entities that provide coordinated transportation services.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common standards for financial records • RTCC organizing and implementation

Year(s)
2013, 2015, 2016 expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #19
Identify policies and necessary legislation to facilitate vehicle sharing.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vehicle-sharing study • Data collection and analysis of vehicle sharing • Maps of human service transportation providers' areas of service in Minnesota • Outreach to providers about options and benefits of vehicle sharing • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance

Year(s)
2012-2021 expect to continue the Supporting Activities in 2023
Legislative Duty #20
Advocate aggressively for eliminating barriers to coordination, implementing coordination strategies, enacting necessary legislation, and appropriating resources to achieve the council's objectives.
Supporting Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEMT Advisory Committee support • Transportation section of Minnesotahelp.info • Primer of funding sources for “transit public” in Minnesota • Strategic planning • RTCC development, stakeholder engagement, guidance and website assistance • Volunteer driver insurance and reimbursement issues and education • Volunteer Driver Program resolution, brochure

Appendix D: Top Challenges and Opportunities of Members

10/01/2021 MCOTA Senior Leadership Meeting: Top Challenges and Opportunities, as ranked by senior leaders and members

#1 Theme: Transportation accessibility and availability

1. **Sufficient and affordable transportation** throughout the state (DHS, MDVA)
2. Remove transportation barriers for people to **access health care and other essential needs** (social, groceries) that contribute to well-being (DHS, MDH)
 - o MCOTA's role: Encourage state agencies that fund transportation for Minnesotans to offer flexible transportation funding options. i.e., Dakota County developing contract with Lyft to transport people with disabilities to and from the workplace. (DEED)
3. Remove barriers to enable **safe and accessible pedestrian facilities** for all users (MDH)
 - o Greater compliance with ADA requirements for bus stops is needed
4. **Buy-in at all levels of government** that **ADA compliance AND accessibility and usability** are **essential** for all projects, programs & services, including requiring that Transportation Network Companies such as **Lyft and Uber offer accessible vehicles and be accessible** for people with disabilities. (MCD, MDVA)
5. Ease of connecting to rides for "**just-in-time service**" (MDH)
6. **Equity initiative**: potential state-wide adoption of [Transit Assistance Program \(TAP\)](#) modeled after the Council's program. (Met Council)
7. **Waiver Transportation Pilot** (Met Council)

#2 Theme: Driver shortages

1. **Driver shortages** for public transit and other transportation (Met Council)
2. We need more **volunteer drivers** due to fewer available people and increasing demand for senior transportation, including wheelchair accessibility. (Bd on Aging, MDVA)
 - o MCOTA's role: MPTA would like MCOTA and MnDOT to carry the lead on the Volunteer Driver Program. Specifically, we are requesting that your federal liaison work directly with congressional staff with hopes of raising the IRS charitable mileage reimbursement rate to match the federal business rate.
3. **Low mileage reimbursement rate** and tax liabilities are barriers for **volunteer drivers**. (Bd on Aging, MPTA)
 - o MCOTA's role: MPTA would like MCOTA and MnDOT to carry the lead on the Volunteer Driver Program. Specifically, we are requesting that your federal liaison work directly with congressional staff with hopes of raising the IRS charitable mileage reimbursement rate to match the federal business rate.
4. **School bus driver shortage** (Education)
5. **Limited/costly insurance** is a barrier for **volunteer drivers**. (Bd on Aging)

- MCOTA's role: Carry the lead on the Volunteer Driver Program. Specifically, working on reducing insurance rates for volunteer drivers and volunteer driver programs.

#3 Theme: Public transit

1. **Additional funding and diversification of funding sources for rural transportation** (MPTA)
2. Rebuild **passenger confidence in safety** of transit service in the pandemic environment. (MnDOT)
3. Change in 5310 recipients' services require smaller vehicles to be flexible and responsive to serve more community-based jobs and bring more effective services to customers. Change program to enable smaller vehicles. (MnDOT)

#4 Theme: Legal, regulatory or policy barriers

1. Challenge with **long-term resource capacity** to support MCOTA, RTCC and TCAP programs (MnDOT)
2. Transportation providers serve Minnesotans in multiple programs and must meet **duplicative standards**. (DHS)
3. Service collaborations face **legal, regulatory or policy barriers** that make it very complex and difficult to coordinate. (MnDOT)
4. **Inability to share data** between state agencies is a barrier to collaboration and coordination. (Met Council)
5. In partnering with multiple state agencies and counties to help people with employment, **each has distinctions in eligibility and methods**. (DEED)

#5 Theme: Insurance

1. **Limited/costly insurance** is a barrier for **volunteer drivers**. (Bd on Aging)
2. Opportunities and challenges with automobile **insurance** in an **evolving personal transportation environment** (Commerce)

#6 Theme: Climate change

1. **Climate resiliency and adaptation** will impact transportation and transit choices and options such as electric vehicles. (Commerce)