

MCOTA News, January 2023, 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.

2022 MCOTA Annual Report published

This year's annual legislative report, which is now available for download, highlights the ways MCOTA is addressing transportation barriers. Examples include:

- Updating guidance on mileage reimbursement for volunteer drivers to reflect 2021 Minnesota legislation on the definition of volunteer drivers, a state income tax subtraction and federal regulations.
- Endorsing the [Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act of 2022](#) (U.S. House File 7432), a bill to raise the charitable mileage reimbursement rate for volunteers from 14 cents per mile to equal the rate for business travel as set annually by the IRS (currently 62.5 cents per mile).
- Establishing work teams to develop strategic priorities that focus on removing barriers to transportation access, especially for people with disabilities.
- Reducing barriers to volunteer driving and sharing new approaches to recruiting volunteer drivers.

View full annual report

- [2022 Report on the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access \(PDF\)](#)

Register for Feb. 16 MCOTA volunteer driver program virtual forum

Join us for the second event in the 2022-2023 MCOTA volunteer driver virtual forum series, [Minnesota's Road to Volunteer Drivers](#). The series provides participants with the

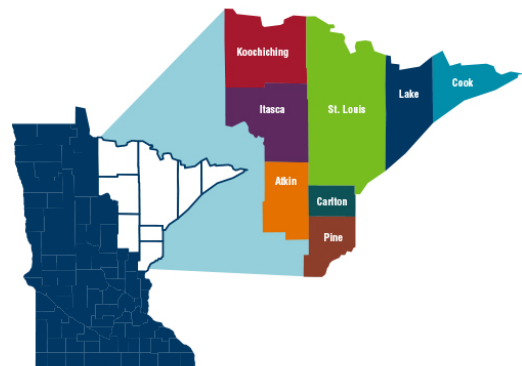


opportunity to share information to help maintain and strengthen these programs.

The [February 16 forum](#) will include presentations on ways to attract and support volunteer drivers, innovative pilot programs to supplement volunteer driver programs, and the Lyft program in Dakota County. The virtual forum will be recorded and available online.

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

“Sharing vehicles maximizes the use of a vehicle in service to a population,” said Karen Herman, executive director of Udac Inc., 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.”



Bois Forte Reservation and Big Woods Transit vehicle van.

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, Arrowhead RTCC mobility manager. “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, those discussions expanded into the community, and 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-vehicle opportunities also 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,” Herman said. “Maximizing the use of vehicles to make transportation more accessible to more people and with expanded hours is a win-win.”

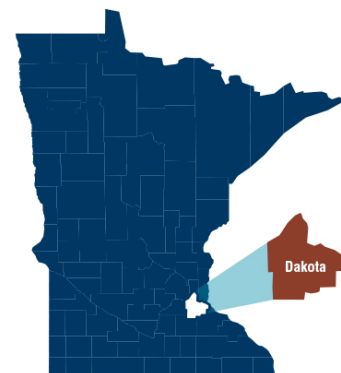
With the increasing demand for transportation, the Arrowhead RTCC encourages new avenues to strengthen transportation options.

“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.

Dakota County and Washington County TCAPs update: Lyft ride-sharing program frees riders

Dakota County TCAP launched its Lyft ride-sharing 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 Robyn Bernardy, county transportation coordinator and TCAP mobility manager.

“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. Fifteen percent said they were satisfied or extremely satisfied, and 85% of same people responded that they were satisfied or extremely satisfied six months after using Lyft.

“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

Dakota County Lyft
Current ridership: **1,100** eligible for program
July 2022: **850** took a ride (78% of eligible people)
Average trips per month: **22**
Average cost per ride: **\$17.50**

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.”

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 and TCAP 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.”

Users logged 61 Lyft rides in Washington County during the two-week period at the beginning of August.

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

Metro Transit launched Metro Transit micro, its first on-demand ride service, on Sept. 22, 2022. The service covers 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



Metro Transit micro provides on-demand service to north Minneapolis (Photo: Metro Transit)

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
- Add a new service to a transit corridor where ridership remained resilient during the pandemic

In the news

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](#).

- [PennDOT assisting autonomous transit vehicle pilot test](#)
AASHTO Journal (January 6, 2023)
- [Are self-driving vehicles legal in my state?](#)
MotorTrend (January 6, 2023)
- [Snowy roads mean difficult or impossible transit for disabled Minnesotans](#)
Minnesota Public Radio News (January 4, 2023)

- [Minnesota changes environmental review to measure climate impacts](#)
Minnesota Public Radio News (December 26, 2022)
- [EPA enacts tougher pollution rule for trucks, vans and buses](#)
Washington Post (December 20, 2022)
- [Improving health care through transportation](#)
TRB Blog (December 2022)
- [Self-driving taxis are causing all kinds of trouble in San Francisco](#)
Slate (December 8, 2022)
- [Honda to develop advanced level 3 self-driving technology by 2029](#)
Reuters (November 30, 2022)
- [In Northern Minnesota, autonomous vehicles are hitting rural roads](#)
The Daily Yonder (November 29, 2022)
- [Transportation needs to share more info on connected vehicle strategy, watchdog says](#)
Nextgov (November 28, 2022)
- [Study finds self-driving cars perform better than with humans behind wheel](#)
KYW (November 26, 2022)
- [Evaluating weather's effects on the accuracy of automated vehicles](#)
Crossroads, Minnesota's transportation research blog (November 17, 2022)
- [Barriers and Facilitators of People with Disabilities in Accepting and Adopting Autonomous Shared Mobility Services](#) (Southeastern Transportation Research, Innovation, Development and Education Center STRIDE, November 2022)

Upcoming MCOTA meetings

MCOTA usually meets bimonthly on a Wednesday from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. 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 22, 2023, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
 - May 24, 2023, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
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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