

**Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Meeting Minutes**  
**May 26, 2021, 1:00–3:00 PM**  
**Meeting held via Zoom.**

**Members present:**

Vice Chair – Diogo Reis, Minnesota Department of Human Services  
At-Large Representative – Victoria Nill, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Susan Bishop, Minnesota Department of Health  
Peter Brickwedde, Minnesota Department of Commerce  
Tiffany Collins, Minnesota Public Transit Association  
Liz Connor, Minnesota Management and Budget  
John Doan, Minnesota Board on Aging  
David Fenley, Minnesota State Council on Disability  
Rolando Sotolongo, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs  
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council  
Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

**Members absent:**

Chair – Tim Henkel, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Alexis Donath, Office of the Governor  
Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education

**Others present:**

- Minnesota Department of Transportation:
  - Office of Transit & Active Transportation: Kristie Billiar, Tom Gottfried, Michelle Lichtig, Noel Shughart
- University of Minnesota:
  - Humphrey School of Public Affairs: Frank Douma
  - Center for Transportation Studies: Kaydee Kirk, Arlene Mathison
- Robyn Bernardy, Dakota County
- Emily Castaneda
- Eric Day, MMRDC
- John Dukich
- Marie Falk
- Klara Grochulska
- Mike Greenbaum, Newtrax
- Alan Hermann, Scott County
- Matt Kallroos
- Amy Lopez
- Bryan McCoy, Headwaters Regional Development Commission & North Central MN RTCC
- Meghan Mathson
- Heather Molesworth, WCMCA
- Sherry Munyon
- Scott Olson, Newtrax
- Karen Onan, East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council
- Kim Pettman, Transit Advocate
- Shelly Pflaum, Southwest Regional Development Commission
- Lynnell Popowski
- Terry Smith, MMRTCC
- Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, Arrowhead RTCC

**Call to Order + Member Roll Call**

Reis called to order the May meeting of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access at 1:03 PM on May 26, 2021. There was a quorum of MCOTA members with 11 of 14 members present.

## Review and Approve Agenda

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

## Public Comments

Falk shared the following:

I am the director of public policy at Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare. Although I am here today providing public testimony on behalf of the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MMCCD) in my role as a board co-chair, we do recognize NEMT is outside of the scope of decision making of this council but as this was on the agenda as a legislative update, we wanted to make sure that concerns around this proposal were noted.

The letter that I will read to you was drafted from the perspective of organizations through children who know that there are broad concerns regarding the impact this will have on both children and adults with disabilities. I also want to thank the Department of Human Services and Diogo Reis in particular for being available to have discussions with stakeholders about the NEMT program both as it relates to this proposal and other questions and concerns over the last several years. We do consider DHS a good partner to disability communities, and we know that there are good intentions to reform this program. And this is the letter:

Dear Health and Human Services Conference Committee Members,

As organizations providing services to children across the state who rely on non-emergency medical transportation to access critical services we submit the following feedback for your consideration. We ask you to please consider the impact that the changes to the program will have on access to safe and reliable NEMT services for children and both the metro area and greater Minnesota. While we agree that there are areas of the NEMT program that need reform, and we also have some ideas on how the program can be improved for children, it is hard to understand how positive reform can happen with the extensive cuts to the program proposed. We ask that you please put this proposal on pause this session and spend the time that the blue ribbon commission was not able to spend understandably under the circumstances of the pandemic working directly with stakeholders and, most importantly, the individuals and families served by this important program to discuss program improvements focused on access and quality. Thank you for your service to state and for your attention to this into the many other sections of the Omnibus bills that impact children.

This letter has been signed by 28 organizations that I will not read you, but I believe you were all provided with a copy. These are all organizations serving children or coalitions that include members that serve children, so thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Reis added that this was a proposal from the blue ribbon commission and it was included in the Governor's budget and it wasn't included in the House Health and Human Services Conference Committee report. A special legislative session will likely begin June 14. It is not in the Senate position, so we remain to see what the legislature elects to do related to this proposal.

Pettman added and shared the following:

Pettman asked that members take a careful look at this proposal since there will be a lot of implications/work that will come to their departments as a result of this because it will be creating a big gap in service. In greater MN, there is a big lack of good providers of NEMT. Many companies will close their doors, go out of business, or refuse to take Medicaid rides. This will also put more pressure on volunteer drivers. She felt that this decision would hurt a lot of people.

## 3/27/20 Meeting Minutes

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

## Legislative Updates

- The House has another Governor's proposal in their position that may be possibly awaiting further discussion the conference committee to consider a proposal that would allow for a broader use of public bus passes for individuals on the non emergency medical transportation program.
- Munyon shared that both of their joint initiatives are still in play for possible adoption. The volunteer driver definition is included in the House Omnibus Commerce Committee bill while the income tax subtraction for volunteer drivers is included in the Senate Omnibus Committee bill. They were hopeful that the Commerce Conference Committee would adopt the House definition provision and that the Tax Conference Committee would adopt the Senate tax subtraction. Session ended May 17, with no resolution on major omnibus bills but work continues through the "work groups" that have been formed in place of conference committees. While there have been no public hearings, discussions taking place between committee chairs and others regarding both finance provisions and policy provisions. The Governor, House Speaker and Senate Majority Leader agreed that committee spreadsheets on spending should be completed by May 28 while decisions on policy items have until June 4 to make policy decisions. The Legislature is expected to be called back into a special session on June 14 to vote on the various omnibus bills. Should there not be agreement by that time, the deadline to adopt state budgets in June 30. MCOTA and its agency representatives, the Volunteer Driver Coalition members and the Minnesota Public Transit Association have all been engaged in efforts to secure passage of both these Important provisions.
- Brickwedde shared there is cautious optimism about the inclusion of the volunteer driver language in the House commerce bill being included in the final product, and will hopefully know definitively by early next week.

## 6/23 Agency Senior Leadership Team Meeting Final Draft Agenda

Gottfried shared that this is an annual meeting where the commissioners, or the commissioners' designees, attend. The senior leadership meeting is one action in the MCOTA strategic plan. MnDOT Commissioner Anderson Kelliher will host and facilitate. Gottfried walked through the draft agenda. It would be beneficial for members to meet with their commissioner prior to the June meeting to prep them for the group to have the leadership engage in a fruitful conversation at the meeting on issues that impact one than one agency and that an enterprise approach can benefit from. Gottfried is available to help prep leadership if members would like to contact him. Gottfried and Reis stated that RTCCs, TCAPs, members of the public, and MCOTA members are welcome and encouraged to attend. Pettman suggested that members involved their departmental members so more people can understand what MCOTA is. She also felt that a visual image of the MCOTA program organizational chart would be helpful to display on screen at the meeting. The group also talked about how they are hearing there is a lack of rides for people who are wanting them but there is also a lack of requests for rides – the group felt coordination around this could be discussed at the meeting. Gottfried shared a meeting reminder will be sent a couple weeks in advance of the meeting. He will also be touching base with members one-on-one about a week before the meeting to prepare. Here is a link to the [two-page overview](#) of MCOTA and here is a link to the [draft agenda](#).

## Update on FY21 Budget + Review FY22/23 Budget

Gottfried shared that everything is on track, on schedule/time, and on budget. The proposed budget is similar to the current year but just a bit higher given inflation costs. He will present the budget in depth with the work plan at the July meeting.

## MCOTA Work Teams

### Operations:

- Gottfried shared that this group recently completed its work on the logic model and performance measures for RTCCs and TCAPs work plans.

### Volunteer Driver:

- **Highlights from Volunteer Driver Virtual Forum Series** – Onan shared the most recent session on May 19 had more than 100 people attending statewide and some from across the nation. The final forum will be June 2. The forums have added enhanced audience engagement. A total of 337 people have registered and expressed interest in the forum series as a whole. The work team for this effort is looking

for ways to carry this work into the next fiscal year with a couple of potential events. Recordings from the forums are posted online on the [website](#).

#### **Communications:**

- **Quarterly Newsletter:** Mathison provided an overview of the June topics and the potential topics for September. Pettman suggested that future communications (or other work team) meetings be listed in the newsletter.
- **Website Redesign:** Mathison overviewed the new MCOTA webpages including the regional pages. There was a great amount of input from the RTCCs and TCAPs on the creation of these pages. Next steps are to finish the migration, make styling changes, verify the accessibility, and have the Communications Committee do a thorough review at their next meeting, which is June 10. Mathison also clarified that the language in the “about” section can be simplified. The website will go live before the end of June, possibly before the Senior Leadership meeting.
- **Member Orientation Manual:** Mathison provided an overview of the manual. This is a living document and will be updated about each year. Pettman asked if some of the content in the manual could be shared at the Senior Leadership Meeting. Gottfried stated that this will be included in the packet.

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

- **Program/Grants Update** – Lichtig and Shughart shared about the Regional Transportation Coordination Council (RTCC) and Transit Coordination Access Project (TCAP) Application Process using the logic model workplan. They detailed the application tasks, process, and timelines.

#### **Agency Updates:**

- **Metro Transit:** Sutton shared that draft 2022-2025 Transportation Improvement Plan is now open for public comment, and more detailed information is on the Met Council's website under the meetings page where there is an events and public meeting link. A public meeting via webinar will be June 22. Comments can be submitted by mail or email.
- **Covid-19 Transportation Issues:**
  - **MDH:** Bishop mentioned the mobile vaccine units that have now saturated the metro and they are also working on filling gaps to target audiences in greater MN that local public health or community clinic aren't able to fill. This will be a significant focus over the summer.
  - **MN Council on Disability:** Fenley shared that the Council on Disability is hosting an hour-long Commissioners Roundtable on June 2 where the Governor and Lieutenant Governor are expected to attend for part of the time. He will send the info to Gottfried to share with the RTCCs and TCAPs.
  - **MnDOT:** Gottfried shared that MnDOT has been involved with vaccine drives and working with local transit agencies on this effort.

#### **Review Draft Agenda for Next Meeting**

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

**Adjourn:** Sutton made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Fenley. The motion was unanimously **approved**. The meeting adjourned at 2:43 PM.