

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

Members present:

Margaret Anderson Kelliher (Chair) and Tim Henkel, Minnesota Department of Transportation
Diogo Reis and Cynthia MacDonald, Minnesota Department of Human Services
Victoria Nill (At-Large Representative), Minnesota Department of Transportation
Mary Manning and Susan Bishop, Minnesota Department of Health
Grace Arnold and Peter Brickwedde, Minnesota Department of Commerce
Tiffany Collins and Ryan Daniel, Minnesota Public Transit Association
Rachel Dame, Office of the Governor
John Doan, Minnesota Board on Aging
Heather Mueller and Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education
David Dively and David Fenley, Minnesota State Council on Disability
Ahna Minge and Nick Lardinois, Minnesota Management and Budget
Ron Quade, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
Charlie Zelle, Metropolitan Council
Chris McVey, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Members absent:

Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council

Call to Order + Member Roll Call: Commissioner Anderson Kelliher called to order the Senior Leadership meeting of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access at 1:01 PM on October 1, 2021. There was a quorum of MCOTA members present.

Legislation 2021 Session Updates:

MCOTA Volunteer Driver Legislation Status

The legislation for the recommended definition of a volunteer driver was successfully passed. It made clear that volunteer drivers are not for-hire or commercial drivers and they are not receiving wages or income. They receive cost reimbursement. The other legislation passed was the income tax subtraction.

MCOTA's recommendation and support of MN Volunteer Driver Coalition

Swanson is Executive Director of the Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging, President of the Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and Co-Chair of the Minnesota Volunteer Driver Coalition. He shared the following:

On behalf of the Volunteer Driver Coalition, I would like to thank all for your support in defining what a volunteer driver is in Minnesota State statute and created an income tax subtraction for our volunteer drivers. This is a tremendous success for the over 1,900 volunteer drivers that provide transportation services to over 75,000 Minnesotans.

The Coalition now turns its attention to important advocacy that needs to be undertaken at the federal level. As you know, the current Charitable Mileage Rate is set at 14 cents/mile. This rate was determined in 1998 when the costs of owning and ensuring a personal vehicle were much lower and the business rate itself was 32.5 cents/mile. While the business rate is adjusted each year by the IRS, there is no mechanism to adjust the rate for miles driven in service to a charitable organization. Knowing the essential role that volunteer drivers play as part of the transportation system, the Coalition's position is that volunteer mileage should be reimbursed at the business rate set by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to reflect the actual costs of owning and driving a

personal vehicle for charitable purposes. Volunteer drivers contribute at a high level by donating their time, reducing isolation for riders, and providing access to medical care for thousands of Minnesota residents. Their mileage should be reimbursed relative to costs, and they should not be subject to income tax on any reimbursement that falls within business rate set by the IRS.

On behalf of the eighty-five (85) organizations that make up the Minnesota Volunteer Driver Coalition, we ask you, the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access, to lead an advocacy initiative with our state's Congressional delegation to gain their active support to increase the Charitable Mileage Rate for volunteer drivers to match the business rate set by the IRS. Your leadership to hold meetings with our federal elected officials is the most promising avenue to move this issue forward into the federal policy change process at a meaningful level. The Volunteer Driver Coalition will support your efforts as we did for the recent legislation passed on the definition and state income tax subtraction provisions.

With the incredible success we were able to attain last legislative session, we feel now is the appropriate time to continue to advocate for our communities so that they can provide this essential service of transportation. We are stronger when we work together to make change that will have benefits for countless Minnesotans. Thank you for your leadership and your consideration in the manner.

Munyon, who is with MPTA and the Volunteer Driver Coalition, thanked MCOTA for its support of the legislative initiatives in 2021 which included the volunteer driver definition and the income tax subtraction. She thanked agency leaders who were involved with this including Reis, Brickwedde, Dukich, Rudeen, and Gottfried. She also thanked MCOTA for the endorsement of federal legislation to support the increase of mileage reimbursement. MCOTA is asked to expand this support with the MN Congressional delegation members through their agencies' legislative liaisons. Once legislation is introduced the MN supporters will be broadening the partnership to bring more than MN authors to the table.

Doan shared that the MN Board on Aging full board met on 9/24/21 and there was unanimous consensus among the board that, regarding transportation, that volunteer drivers and volunteer driver programs throughout Minnesota is their top priority. Information on the significant decrease in volunteer driver over the last decade was shared. For example, if there were 100 volunteer drivers in an organization in 2010, that number today would be 25-30 volunteers.

Report-out of Agency Transportation Challenge and/or Opportunity Themes: An overview was given by agency leaders for each of the six themes that agencies flagged as top priorities in pre-meeting conversations.

Top Challenges and Opportunities from Members

Theme #1: Driver shortages

1. We need more **volunteer drivers** due to fewer available people and increasing demand for senior transportation. (Bd on Aging, MDVA)
2. **Limited/costly insurance** is a barrier for **volunteer drivers**. (Bd on Aging)
3. **Low mileage reimbursement rate** & tax liabilities are barriers for **volunteer drivers**. (Bd on Aging, MPTA)
4. **School bus driver shortage** (Education)
5. **Driver shortages** for public transit and other transportation (Met Council)
6. Added during the meeting: need for **skilled or certified drivers specific to wheelchair accessibility** (MDVA)

Theme #2: 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)

Theme #3: Public transit

1. Rebuild **passenger confidence in safety** of transit service in the pandemic environment. (MnDOT)
2. Change in recipient use (5310) and its impact on capital (vehicles): **Right-size vehicles** to serve more community-based jobs and bring services to customers. (MnDOT)
3. **Additional funding options for rural transportation** (MPTA)
4. **Diversify funding options** for transit operations. (MPTA)

Theme #4: Transportation accessibility and availability

1. Transportation barriers for people to access health care and other essential needs (social, groceries) that contribute to well-being (DHS, MDH)
2. Ease of connecting to rides for "**just-in-time service**" (MDH, MDVA)
3. **Sufficient and affordable transportation** throughout the state (DHS)
4. Remove barriers to enable **safe and accessible pedestrian facilities** for all users (MDH)
5. **Buy-in at all levels of government** that **ADA compliance AND accessibility and usability** are **essential** for all projects, programs & services (MCD, MDVA)
6. **Waiver Transportation Pilot** (Met Council)
7. **Equity initiative**: potential state-wide adoption of TAP program modeled after the Council's program. (Met Council)

Theme #5: Legal, regulatory or policy barriers

1. Challenge w/ **long-term resource capacity** to support MCOTA, RTCC and TCAP programs (MnDOT)
2. Transportation providers serve Minnesotans in multiple programs & 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** b/w state agencies is a barrier to collaboration & 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)

Theme #6: Climate change

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

Brainstorm Additional Challenges and/or Opportunity Themes

Members did not have any additional themes to add.

Select Top Priority Theme(s)

Themes were ranked in the following order as members used Mentimeter to vote:

First-ranked Theme:	Transportation accessibility and availability
Second-ranked Theme:	Driver shortages
Third-ranked Theme:	Public transit
Fourth-ranked Theme:	Legal, regulatory or policy barriers
Fifth-ranked Theme:	Insurance
Sixth-ranked Theme:	Climate change

The challenges/opportunities in the top three themes were ranked by members using Mentimeter:

Members ranked the importance of these **transportation accessibility and availability** challenges/opportunities:

1. **Sufficient and affordable transportation** throughout the state (DHS, MDVA)
2. Transportation barriers for people to access health care and other essential needs (social, groceries) that contribute to well-being (DHS, MDH)
3. Ease of connecting to rides for "**just-in-time service**" (MDH)
4. Remove barriers to enable **safe and accessible pedestrian facilities** for all users (MDH)
5. **Buy-in at all levels of government** that **ADA compliance AND accessibility and usability** are **essential** for all projects, programs & services (MCD)
6. **Equity initiative**: potential state-wide adoption of TAP program modeled after the Council's program. (Met Council)
7. **Waiver Transportation Pilot** (Met Council)

Members ranked the importance of these **driver shortage** challenges/opportunities:

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. (Bd on Aging, MDVA)
3. **Low mileage reimbursement rate** and tax liabilities are barriers for **volunteer drivers**. (Bd on Aging, MPTA)
4. **School bus driver shortage** (Education)
5. **Limited/costly insurance** is a barrier for **volunteer drivers**. (Bd on Aging)

Members ranked the importance of these **public transit** challenges/opportunities:

1. **Additional funding options for rural transportation** (MPTA)
2. Rebuild **passenger confidence in safety** of transit service in the pandemic environment. (MnDOT)
3. **Diversify funding options** for transit operations. (MPTA)
4. Change in recipient use (5310) and its impact on capital (vehicles): **Right-size vehicles** to serve more community-based jobs and bring services to customers. (MnDOT)

Next Steps + Member Follow-up: Gottfried shared that at the 11/17/21 MCOTA meeting the priority themes will be shared as we draft a proposed work plan. The 1/26/22 meeting will present a work plan for member approval. Work teams will also be structured to support the priority themes.

Public Comments: There were no requests for public comment.

Adjourn: The meeting ended at 2:55 PM.