

Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Meeting Minutes
March 23, 2022, 1:00–3:00 PM

Meeting held via Zoom.

Members present:

Chair – Tim Henkel, Minnesota Department of Transportation
Vice Chair – Diogo Reis, Minnesota Department of Human Services
At-Large Representative – Mark Nelson, Minnesota Department of Transportation
Peter Brickwedde, Minnesota Department of Commerce
Tiffany Collins, Minnesota Public Transit Association
Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education
Dylan Galos, Minnesota Department of Health
David Fenley, Minnesota State Council on Disability
Nick Lardinois, Minnesota Management and Budget
Maureen Schneider, Minnesota Board on Aging
Rolando Sotolongo, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council

Members absent:

Rachel Dame, Office of the Governor
Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Others present:

- Minnesota Department of Transportation: Kristie Billiar, Amber Dallman, Tom Gottfried, Michelle Lichtig, Ben Lowndes, Mark Nelson, Alexandra O'Reilly
- Center for Transportation Studies: Kaydee Kirk, Arlene Mathison, Samantha Redmond
- Justin Beldo, EON Inc.
- Robyn Bernardy, Dakota County
- Brenda Brittin
- Barbara Bursack, Washington County
- Tammy Buttweiler, ConnectAbility of MN
- Emily Castaneda
- Heidi Corcoran, Milligan Partners
- Rhonda Danielson
- Eric Day, MMRTCC
- Ashley Eckdahl, ECRDC
- Mike Greenbaum, Newtrax
- Alan Hermann, Scott County
- Jean Houlding
- Matt Kallroos
- Nick Leske

- Ted Nelson
- Scott Olson, Newtrax
- Lynnell Popowski, NWRTPCC
- Lisa Raduenz
- Robin Rohr
- Mark Schermerhorn, Anoka County Transit
- Dawn Simonson, Trellis
- Terry Smith, MMRTCC
- Jason Swanson
- Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, Arrowhead RTCC
- Darla Waldner
- Donna Whitcomb
- Courtney Whited, Board on Aging

Call to Order + Member Roll Call

Henkel called to order the March meeting of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access at 1:01 PM on March 23, 2022. There was a quorum of MCOTA members.

Review and Approve Agenda

Reis moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Sutton. The agenda was unanimously **approved**.

Meeting Minutes

Sutton moved to approve the January minutes, seconded by Schneider. The minutes were unanimously **approved**.

Legislative Updates

Reis shared that the legislature heard a bill for rates for non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) last week. Providers have said the cost of fuel, especially beyond \$3/gallon has become a hardship. The Senate bill is related to a fuel escalator which means that as gas increases above \$3/gallon that the reimbursement would go up somewhat proportionate. This has not been around the House yet. Reis will share more updates on this topic at the next meeting.

Fenley shared that there was a hearing on the PCA bill today. This topic is related to PCAs being allowed to transport individuals they are serving. It was not looking promising that things would move forward.

MCOTA Work Teams

Gottfried noted that at the next meeting he will share a comprehensive timeline of activities and due dates of the work teams and their activities.

- **Removing Barriers:** Galos shared that the work team has identified a need to have better representation on the group, most notably from persons who live with disabilities. One person has since joined the team and a few other invites have been extended. The team agreed these perspectives are needed. The team has also made good progress on their draft work plan and identified many barriers to address. More time will be needed to identify and make a plan to address all elements of the work plan. The team will have a draft ready for the May MCOTA meeting.

- **Accessibility and Olmstead:** Fenley shared that this group has met two times since the last MCOTA meeting. This team is also has begun a draft work plan. The next meeting the group will refine the plan to identify the highest priorities. The team will have a draft ready for the May MCOTA meeting.
- **Volunteer Driver Work Team:** Collins shared that they had a productive meeting with the Dept. of Revenue to finalize the volunteer driver fact sheet/brochure. This fact sheet will be brought to the May MCOTA meeting. The team has also been moving the virtual forum series forward and the June 6th forum will be 9-11am and 1-3pm on building innovative partnerships and volunteer driver network. The October forum date has not been selected but the team decided on highlight topics of legislative changes and marketing.
- **Communications Work Team:** Lichtig shared updates on the newsletter including the relatively high open rate, the content of the March newsletter, pros/cons of other communication tools, resource library on MCOTA website, and annual report planning. Mathison shared some ideas for the content for the next newsletter.
- **Driver Shortage:** This work team is currently on pause and Gottfried is working with agency leadership and the Governor's office MCOTA representative, Rachel Dame, on these issues. Garvey and Yanda have expressed interested in being on this team once it forms.
- **Operations:** Gottfried shared that this team would begin in June. More information will be shared at the May meeting.

Request to Proactively Standardize Accessibility for Regular MCOTA Meetings

Fenley provided more information on the request for ASL interpretation and CART services for MCOTA meetings. Members were very supportive of this and suggested including this as part of MCOTA's working norms. It was also hoped this could be part of future RTCC and TCAP meetings. Some members asked if work team meetings are considered public facing and these services will be provided. *Accessibility* is proactive and something done on the front end whereas *accommodation* is reactive after a request has been made. At a minimum it was felt MCOTA meetings do need these services and it was highly encouraged to consider this for other MCOTA meetings.

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

- Program/Grants Update – Lichtig provided a number of updates on the RTCCs and TCAPs including some recent presentations given around the state about the regional work of MCOTA, RTCC/TCAP facilitation skills training done by the MN Administration Dept.
- Presentation: Kallroos gave a presentation on the work of the Region Five RTCC. [Here](#) is a link to the presentation slides.
- Presentation: Smith and Collins gave a presentation on the work of the Central Community Transit and the Mid-Minnesota RTCC. [Here](#) is a link to the presentation slides and a link to a recent [WCCO story](#) on this work.

Presentation: 2025-2045 Greater Minnesota Transit/Mobility Investment Plan (TMIP)

Raduenz presented on the Greater Minnesota Transit/Mobility Investment Plan's purpose and goals. Other presentation topics included transit planning federal and state requirements, greater MN public transit funding, greater MN public transit systems, greater MN transit investment plan requirements, Olmstead Plan baseline span of service, OTAT service funding requirements, advisory groups, project timeline, public engagement and communications.

6/22 MCOTA Agency Senior Leadership Meeting Attendee and Draft Agenda Update

Gottfried shared that nearly all of the senior members are confirmed and all agency representatives are confirmed to attend. He will be sharing a solid draft of the 6/22 meeting at the May MCOTA meeting. The 6/22 meeting will focus on the work team plans and potentially discuss items for a legislative proposal. A formal invitation will come from the MnDOT Commissioner's office in the near future and a calendar appointment will follow.

Agency Updates

Olmstead Plan: For the transportation portion of the plan there won't be reporting again until the May/June timeframe. The plan update is proceeding as planned and they made some adjustments to their expected goals for the infrastructure elements. The revised version will be released in April. The group is finalizing changes to the Olmstead goals (which is an annual process) which includes revising the targets for the coming year.

Member Round Robin: Gottfried and members thanked Kirk for her work as part of MCOTA. She has decided to move on from her position at the University's Center for Transportation Studies and will be doing a personal sabbatical and discerning next steps in her vocation. CTS will be hiring and will be sharing more about that in the near future. Samantha Redmond from CTS will be temporarily filling some MCOTA roles.

Review Draft Agenda for May Meeting

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

Public Comment

Simonson, President and CEO of Trellis the Agency on Aging in the metro area, shared on behalf of the Volunteer Driver Coalition about their work at the congressional level that is moving forward. They are working with Rep. Pete Stauber's office. He will be introducing a bill that will amend the Internal Revenue Service code so that the charitable mileage rate for volunteer drivers will be also available at that IRS business reimbursement rate. This will give organizations the option to reimburse at that rate and that the reimbursement would not be subject to federal income tax. Last year they worked together to ensure this exemption was in the state income tax law. Simonson will be in DC next week to continue the work with partners and Congressional representatives on this. Simonson will share this language with Gottfried to share with MCOTA and would welcome endorsement from MCOTA. Henkel suggested after the language is shared to move forward to with potential action at a future MCOTA meeting.

Adjourn

Collins made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Fenley. The motion was unanimously **approved**. The meeting adjourned at 2:55 PM.