

Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Meeting Minutes
May 25, 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
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
Jim Miller, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Members absent:

Peter Brickwedde, Minnesota Department of Commerce
Tiffany Collins, Minnesota Public Transit Association
Rachel Dame, Office of the Governor
Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council

Others present:

- Minnesota Department of Transportation: Kristie Billiar, Tom Gottfried, Michelle Lichtig, Mark Nelson, Mai Thor
- University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies: Arlene Mathison, Samantha Redmond
- Barbara Bursack, Washington County
- Heidi Corcoran, Milligan Partners
- Rhonda Danielson
- Heather Everson, Options Resource Center for Independent Living
- Mike Greenbaum, Newtrax, Inc.
- Marcia Haglund, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council Inc
- Shelley Madore, MN Olmstead Implementation Office
- Karen Onan, East Central Regional Development Commission
- Helen Phalen, RTCC and Dancing Sky AAA/Senior Linkage Line
- Lynnell Popowski, NWRTPCC
- Lisa Randall, ElderCircle Retired & Senior Volunteer Program
- Robin Rohr, Hennepin County
- Mark Schermerhorn, Anoka County Transit
- Dawn Simonson, Trellis
- Terry Smith, MMRTCC

- Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, Arrowhead RTCC
- Donna Whitcomb, Ecumen RSVP
- Joan Willshire, Willshire Consulting LLC

Call to Order + Member Roll Call

Henkel called the May meeting of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access to order at 1:02 PM on May 25, 2022. There was a quorum of MCOTA members.

Review and Approve Agenda

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

Meeting Minutes

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

Legislative Updates

Henkel mentioned that the Legislature completed the session without acting on key proposals, including the tax bill and transportation bill and that negotiations between the governor and House and Senate leaders do not look promising for the scheduling of a special session. One implication is that the state of Minnesota can be a recipient of Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act Federal funding only if there are matching funds. MnDOT is working with the Governor's office on how to the position the state for receipt of those federal funds.

Reis reported that the Legislature did pass the human services bill, but it was limited in scope, only including some provisions that the Senate and the House had already agreed to, nothing related to NEMT or other transportation. There is some close agreement on two aspects of NEMT that could move forward if there is a special session: 1) a fuel adjuster and 2) a decent investment in NEMT rates.

Fenley said that the only item the Legislature passed was a Rare Disease Advisory Council movement from the University of Minnesota to the Council on Disability.

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

- Program/Grants Update – Lichtig provided an update on mobility management by the RTCCs and TCAPs, with a successful example of creating a solution for a customer who needed transportation between Sherburne County and Anoka County. Barriers to overcome included service boundaries and creating a transfer site/process. Organizations involved included:
 - Connect Central Minnesota RTCC
 - ConnectAbility of MN
 - Tri-CAP
 - Anoka TCAP
 - Traveler Transit Link
 - Met Council
 - MnDOT
 - City/County
 - Area businesses
 - Others

- Another example is Newtrax celebrating their 10th anniversary and launching their autonomous electric vehicle, which will be serving a section of central White Bear Lake.

MCOTA Work Teams

Henkel reminded members about the purpose of the work teams and how they support priorities identified by senior leadership with respect to areas where agencies could work together under the umbrella and objective of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access in the October 2021 meeting. During that brainstorming session, a number of potential focus areas were identified and priorities were established. Those priorities became areas for additional work. The culmination of that work is those topic areas for each of these work teams that has been drawn out further over the course of time between the senior leadership meeting and today. I believe what we have ahead of us now is a refinement of activities necessary to fulfill the overall objectives that the CEOs had for some of those priority work areas. What Tom has done after we listened to these work plan areas activities is to try to roll that up into an overall work plan, and I think positions, the committee nicely to report back to the leadership.

Removing Barriers

Galos introduced the work plan for the Removing Barriers Work Team by talking about how the how one of the team members stressed that we need to have the presence of people living with disabilities on the team, so they paused and recruited one more person to join the team.

Galos also relayed a message from work team members Nancy Lee and Rachel Garaghty who want to highlight the importance of engagement and really getting the perspective of people living with disabilities, end users, and other people who are impacted by transportation services.

Galos shared the activities listed in this table:

| Activities |
|---|
| 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.

Accessibility Work Team

David Fenley shared the activities the Accessibility & Olmstead Work Team selected.

Activities

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). Chicago has done this.

2. Integrate transportation planning into all state-supported housing plans – universal and walkability planning

3. Many people who are eligible for NEMT aren't 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.

4. Work with transportation providers to discuss their challenges with providing accessible and usable transportation.

Request for CART and ASL

David reiterated his March 2022 request for MCOTA to provide ASL interpretation and CART services for MCOTA Meetings, and Tom Gottfried shared the cost options. Providing ASL interpretation and CART services as a rule rather than only following accommodation requests sends a message to the disability community that they are included. Maureen Schneider and Shelley Madore spoke in favor of Fenley's request for full accessibility. The Olmstead Implementation Office also offers full accessibility for all its public meetings. The

next step is to bring the recommendation forward as a part of the budget proposal in the July meeting, along with the other budget items for consideration and approval.

Request:

- Providing ASL and CART services is about \$900 for a two-hour meeting.
- The approximate annual cost for both ASL and CART is: \$6,300.00

Alternative option 1: Provide ASL Interpretation with Automated Captioning

- The approximate annual cost for just ASL is: \$2,800.00

Alternative option 2: Only Provide CART Services

- The approximate annual cost for CART Services is: \$3,500.00

Volunteer Driver Work Team

Sidlo-Tolliver shared the activities identified by the Volunteer Driver Work Team.

| Activities | Date |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Volunteer Driver Mileage Reimbursement Fact Sheet | May 2022 |
| 2. Volunteer Driver Brochure | TBD |
| 3. 1st Volunteer Driver Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools to build and sustain your volunteer driver services • Innovative programs | October 2022 |
| 4. 2nd Volunteer Driver Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on recent legislative changes • Marketing 101 to expand volunteer driver pool | February 2023 |
| 5. Update 2017 volunteer driver program research, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternatives & solutions for future, especially since COVID-19 • Cost-benefit analysis for volunteers • Benefits and barriers for volunteers | Potentially July 2022 – December 2023 |

Federal mileage reimbursement legislation

Dawn Simonson, President and CEO, Trellis, and one of the co-chairs of the Volunteer Driver Coalition updated MCOTA on the Coalition's advocacy to raise the charitable mileage reimbursement rate for volunteer drivers to equal the rate for business travel as set annually by the IRS.

Rep. Pete Stauber introduced the Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act of 2022 (House File 7432). Representative Angie Craig has signed on and the Coalition is scheduling a meeting with Representative Fischbach and have asked Senator Smith to introduce the Senate companion bill. They are seeing support from some national organizations such as the Community Transportation Association of America, the National Association of Towns and Townships, the National Council of Nonprofits, and other organizations at the state level. For example, the California Association of Nonprofits and the Association of Area Agencies on Aging in Illinois.

The request is for MCOTA to endorse the [proposed legislation](#).

H.R.7432 - Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act of 2022
A BILL

To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to equalize the charitable mileage rate with the business travel rate.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. Short title.

This Act may be cited as the "Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act of 2022".

SEC. 2. Increase in charitable mileage rate.

(a) In general.—Subsection (i) of section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended by striking "shall be 14 cents per mile" and inserting "shall be—

“(1) except as provided in paragraph (2), 14 cents per mile, and

“(2) in the case of transportation of persons (other than the taxpayer) or property on behalf of an organization described in subsection (c), the rate determined by the Secretary, which rate shall not be less than the standard mileage rate used for purposes of sections 162 and 212.”.

(b) Effective date.—The amendment made by this section shall apply to taxable years beginning after December 31, 2021.

Danielson made a motion for MCOTA to endorse the language in the House bill. Schneider seconded it. The motion passed unanimously. Lardinois abstained from voting on this motion.

Volunteer Driver Mileage Reimbursement Fact Sheet

Sidlo-Tolliver walked through the new fact sheet that has been now created in collaboration with the Departments of Revenue and Commerce. It reflects 2021 Minnesota legislation on the definition of volunteer drivers and state income tax subtraction. It also includes guidance for federal regulations.

Gottfried recommended that MCOTA adopt the fact sheet to be posted and distributed to volunteer driver programs across Minnesota. Miller made the motion, and Yanda seconded it. It passed unanimously.

Communications Work Team

Yanda presented the work plan for the Communications Work Team.

| Activities | Date |
|---|--|
| 1. Annual legislative report | May-December 2022 May-December 2023 |
| 2. Quarterly newsletter | December, February, March, June each year |
| 3. Website maintenance | Ongoing |
| 4. MCOTA member guide/manual – annual review and update | May-June 2022 May-June 2023 |
| 5. Resource Library for RTCCs and TCAPs | June 2022 and ongoing |
| 6. Communications & Outreach support for other Work Teams | TBD: June 2022 and ongoing |

2022-2024 Draft Work Plan

Gottfried shared the draft workplan, including staffing and funding impacts. It will be finalized for consideration and approval at the July meeting.

6/22 MCOTA Agency Senior Leadership Meeting Draft Agenda

Gottfried shared the draft agenda and announced that Nancy Daubenberger was appointed as MnDOT Commissioner this week. The main agenda item of the Senior Leadership Meeting is an update to the enterprise transportation access opportunities and challenges priorities discussion that was held in October

2021, including sharing what items MCOTA is moving forward on via four work teams' plans. It's an opportunity for senior leaders to see the progress and plans, as well as to ask them if there are any remaining gaps that MCOTA needs to consider. Henkel and Gottfried asked members to let them know by the end of next week if they have concerns or if they feel the agenda isn't productive for their commissioner. In the meantime, Gottfried will share this as a final draft for consideration by MnDOT Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger.

Agency Updates

Olmstead Plan: Billiar reported that MnDOT submitted the information on transportation goal number two, which is the number of service hours. We saw a significant drop in the number of service hours provided from 2019 to 2020. It was a drop of 286,242 service hours, and that has been quite a loss, almost all of it is attributed to COVID impacts and simply the reduced service inability to provide service. The change from baseline is negative 35,242 hours, which means that effectively all of the gains that we have identified since have been wiped out. We are not trying to guess exactly where we are going to be on our 2020 reporting, there is still a fair amount that is getting sorted out in Greater Minnesota transit and it will look different. Some of this loss is in part due to changes in the DT&H programs since some of them outright closed during the course of COVID. We will not be making any recommendations to alter this goal going forward. It continues to be a reliable measure of overall access and availability of service and how our money is being expended in Greater Minnesota transit.

Member Round Robin: Henkel shared that this will be his last meeting as chair of MCOTA. He is retiring from MnDOT as of July 5, and his last day in the office will be June 3. He said that it has truly been a privilege and an honor to facilitate this work and that it's been one of the most rewarding activities that he has been involved in. The topic of accessibility is critical in the state. As vice-chair, Reis will serve as chair and work with members and Commissioners to determine next steps for leadership.

Review Draft Agenda for July Meeting

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

Public Comment

No comments from the public were submitted for this meeting.

Adjourn

Reis made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Miller. The motion was unanimously **approved**. The meeting adjourned at 3:01 PM.