

Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Meeting Minutes

September 28, 2022 | 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Meeting held virtually via Zoom.

Members present:

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
Maureen Schneider, Minnesota Board on Aging
Jim Miller, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
Tiffany Collins, Minnesota Public Transit Association
Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council
Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Members absent:

Rachel Dame, Office of the Governor
Peter Brickwedde, Minnesota Department of Commerce
Nick Lardinois, Minnesota Management and Budget

Others present:

- Minnesota Department of Transportation: Kristie Billiar, Tom Gottfried, Michelle Lichtig, Mai Thor, Davin Simmons
- University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies: Arlene Mathison, Samantha Hahn-Douville, Michael McCarthy
- Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, Arrowhead RTCC
- Barbara Bursack, Washington County
- Tammy Buttweiler, ConnectAbility of MN
- Heidi Corcoran
- Eric Day, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission/RTCC
- Alan Herrmann, Scott/Carver TCAP
- Karen Onan, East Central RTCC
- Shelly Pflaum, United Community Action Partnership
- Robin Rohr, Hennepin County
- Anne Larkin Walter, Anoka County
- Donna Whitcomb
- Frank Douma, University of Minnesota
- Gavin Bukovich, Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging
- Heather Everson
- Jacqueline Peichel, Minnesota Board on Aging

- Jennell Stai, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
- Matt Kallroos, Region Five RTCC
- Michelle Thomas
- Mike Greenbaum, Newtrax
- Nick Leske
- Robyn Bernardy, Dakota County
- Scott Olson, Newtrax
- Shelley Madore, Olmstead Implementation Office
- Sherry Munyon, Minnesota Public Transit Association
- Terry Smith, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission/RTCC
- Troy Schroeder, Northwest Regional Development Commission

Call to Order + Member Roll Call

Reis called the September meeting of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access to order at 1:04 PM on September 28, 2022. There was a quorum of MCOTA members.

Review and Approve Agenda

Yanda moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Miller. The agenda was unanimously **approved**.

Meeting Minutes

Collins moved to approve the July minutes, seconded by Sutton. The minutes were unanimously **approved**.

Proposed Bylaws Updates

Gottfried presented the 2022 By Laws Draft to those present. Gottfried identified Article II which states that Council membership consists of 13 members, of whom represent the Commissioner or agencies set in statute. Gottfried noted that under Article VI he is suggesting language to include the At Large member as a member of the Executive Committee. Gottfried identified that Article IX discusses duties of the At Large Member in the Executive Committee and suggested the added language of “and MCOTA Executive Committee” to clarify the purpose of the position. Gottfried additionally noted that an additional suggested change is to have the bylaws in one document, instead of two, as identified in the 2022 By Laws Draft document. He has additionally added notation at the bottom to show what By Law language was historically used for Articles VIII, IX, and X.

Nelson stated that it should be noted that the At Large member is not a voting member of the Council.

Reis suggested that the soon to be newly elected Executive Committee put together a recommendation regarding these suggested changes and bring it for a final vote at the next MCOTA meeting.

Miller moved that this be tabled until next meeting.

Annual Election of Officers (chair and vice-chair)

Gottfried shared that Tim Sexton is the new Assistant Commissioner of MnDOT and is the new designee appointed to be the new member of MCOTA. Gottfried noted that Sexton has many years of experience, including the Office Director of the Office of Transit and Active Transportation. Gottfried

also noted that Sexton’s background and experience is in and he has led initiatives for sustainable transportation needs across the state and country. Gottfried shared that Sexton is the only nominated candidate for Chair and there are no nominated candidates for Vice Chair.

Reis opened the floor for nominations for the Chair position.

Reis indicated that he additionally nominates Tim Sexton for the Chair position.

Reis closed the floor for nominations for the Chair position.

Reis motioned for a vote of current MCOTA members to elect Tim Sexton as the Chair of MCOTA. The vote was unanimously **approved** to elect Tim Sexton as MCOTA Chair.

Reis opened the floor for nominations for the Vice Chair position.

Sutton nominated Diogo Reis for Vice Chair.

Reis closed the floor for nominations for the Vice Chair position.

Reis motioned for a vote of current MCOTA members to elect Diogo Reis as the Vice Chair of MCOTA. The vote was unanimously **approved** to elect Diogo Reis as MCOTA Vice Chair.

Legislative Updates

Reis reported no legislative updates from DHS.

Schneider informed the group that the MN Board of Aging held their annual meeting last week. One report that came from a colleague from California found that transportation and access to it was embedded in each strategy. She noted that it serves as a reminder that as we are planning programming for senior and thinking about anything that we might do to increase involvement and engagement for seniors, we must always remember how they are going to get there. Schneider also noted the importance of transportation for caregivers.

Presentation on Hop Scott Program

Hermann stated that mobility management involves two things; what is available for transportation in a geographic area and how do you discover the needs that aren’t being met in those areas. Hermann identified that they call these “discovery of needs” groups.

Hermann reported that in 2018 and 2019 they discovered that especially in rural areas that there were either no options or very few options for transportation. They additionally discovered that the number of volunteers in the volunteer driver program was declining. One action they implemented was to put vehicles in rural areas for volunteer drivers to use. To do this, they applied for the Discovered Live Well at Home Grant with Scott County board approval.

Hermann noted that the grant was awarded in 2020 to last through June 2022.

Hermann identified that the partners engaged with this program included: Scott County Human services, rural cities, libraries (access for key boxes), local food shelves and food deliveries, senior buildings, fleet, MnDOT, volunteer recruitment.

Hermann identified the marketing and recruitment efforts used for this program, including the use of an outreach coordinator. He also explained the purchase of vans for this program, which are county-owned and handicap accessible.

Hermann noted that the Hop Scott program gives volunteer drivers the choice to drive their own vehicle or the county van. Volunteers are vetted and trained by SmartLink. They have found that this program has opened the program to other types of volunteers – like younger drivers who deliver food.

Currently, van check out software is being installed allowing for van placement in rural cities. Volunteer drivers are still being recruited, trained, and vetted. Current use is at 3 food shelves, 1 mental health center, 2 senior buildings, 1 family resource center, NEMT, and random medical requests. They are doing a purposeful roll-out and not a broad roll-out because of volunteer inventory. The software they are currently using as the potential to book requests with no call in.

Presentation on Newtrax

Greenbaum explained that Beartracks (operated by Newtrax) is a 12-month MnDOT Pilot Project testing automated vehicle (AV) technology in White Bear Lake, MN starting in August 2022. It is funded through MnDOT's Destination CAV Program (CAV = connected and automated vehicles). It is one of three pilot projects in the state testing the technology in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

One project goal is research and demonstration. This is a research and demonstration vehicle, and project and key goals include shared learnings, advance technology, and testing in all seasons.

Another project goal is improving the future of Minnesota. Connected and automated vehicles have the potential to provide many benefits to MN residents, businesses, and visitors, including more efficient movement of people and goods, more inclusive planning and greater access and mobility, economic and workforce development, increased safety, and improved environment.

The vehicle shuttle is fully accessible and runs a mile and a half route that takes it from PAI to senior residential facilities and to the White Bear Area YMCA. The YMCA provides anyone who rides the shuttle a free day pass. The vehicle operates M-F from 9:30am to 1:30pm. It is free to ride and open to the public.

Greenbaum then discussed safety features of the shuttle. A vehicle attendant will always be onboard to take over manual operations if necessary and verify the safe operation of the vehicle. The vehicle is equipped with a number of autonomous systems including 8 LiDAR sensor to detect obstacles and ensure precise positioning. The vehicle travels at 12-15 MPH. The route and hours of operation were intentionally selected to minimize traffic impacts.

MnDOT is leading the research pilot as part of its statewide Connected and Automated Vehicle (CAV) program. AECOM is the consultant project manager. Newtrax is the shuttle operator.

The shuttle itself is highly automated and holds up to 10 passengers plus safety operator. It is 100% electric and ADA compliant.

MnDOT and UMN will be conducting surveys regarding public perception including neighbor perceptions, pre- and post-rider surveys and surveys of the public.

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

Lichtig explained that the past two presentations were TCAP projects. Lichtig explained that mobility management is an approach to designing and delivering transportation services that starts and ends with the customer. It begins with a community vision in which the entire transportation network – public transit, private operators, cycling and walking, volunteer drivers, and others – works together with customers, planners, and stakeholders to deliver the transportation options that best meet the community's needs.

Lichtig explained that mobility management addresses when transportation need exceeds resources.

Lichtig stated that the best way to begin addressing the needs of transportation is to begin with a community vision in which the entire transportation network works together with customers, planners, and stakeholders to deliver the transportation options that best meet the community's needs. The root structure includes County Commissioner, Area Agencies on Aging, Workforce Development, Human Services non-profits, Transportation Advocates, Veteran Service Organizations, Managed Care Centers for Independent Living, Consumers, Business Community, Local Public Health, and many others.

Lichtig outlined that mobility management is supporting transportation needs for older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals. It is meeting the needs when public transportation is insufficient, inappropriate, or unavailable. It is often a relatively low number of a region's population but is a significant challenge that these individuals face.

Lichtig stated that mobility management is a transportation service that starts and ends with the customer.

MCOTA Work Teams

Communications

Lichtig reported that the team is in the midst of drafting the MCOTA annual legislative report. The report covers the work of MCOTA and the work of the RTCCs and TCAPs. The first draft was sent out to MCOTA members, and the Work Team is looking to receive comments from members about how it represents MCOTA's key activities and if there are any significant errors or omissions. The report will be revised in October.

Volunteer Driver

Collins reported that they will host a Volunteer Driver Forum on October 6th. It will include a legislative update along with their current efforts. They are working on a tentative forum in February. The group is also reviewing the first draft of the Volunteer Driver brochure.

Removing Barriers

Galos shared the following information, identifying the updates of combined priorities and group members with the Accessibility and Olmstead Plan Work Group.

Members

Dylan Galos, Chair
 Barbara Bursack, Washington County
 Rhonda Danielson
 Rachel Garaghty, Minnesota Department of Health
 Mike Greenbaum, Newtrax
 Alan Herrmann, Scott/Carver County
 Nick Lardinois, Minnesota Management and Budget
 Gary Ludwig, Trailblazer Transit

Nancy Lee, Minnesota Department of Health
 Shelley Madore, Olmstead Implementation Office
 Maureen Melgaard Schneider, MN Board on Aging
 Ted Nelson, Prairie Five Community Action Council, Inc.
 Mike Pinske, AmeriCare Mobility Van, Inc.
 Lynnell Popowski, NWRDC
 Diogo Reis, Minnesota Department of Human Services
 Tim Schmutzer, Phase Industries

Removing Barriers Work Group	New Configuration	New Configuration Subgroup Members
Priority #1: Ensure that people with behavioral and accessibility challenges have meaningful access and are involved in planning	No change	Rhonda Danielson, Mike Greenbaum
Priority #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.	Combine Priorities #2 and #5	Nancy Lee, Alan Hermann, Tim Schmutzer, Rhonda Danielson, Rachel Garghty, Dylan Galos
Priority #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	Combine Priorities #3 and #4 from Removing Barriers and Priority #4 from Accessibility	Removing Barriers: Tim Schmutzer, Gary Ludwig, Alan Hermann, Mike Greenbaum, Rachel Garaghty, Dylan Galos, Rhonda Danielson; Accessibility: David Fenley, Robyn Bernardy
Priority #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	see above	
Priority #5: Identify ways of improving the effectiveness, accessibility and reach of rural transportation as well as researching different types of modeling are important to improving and reforming in how rural transportation is delivered	see above	

Yanda motioned for approval of the updated changes. Collins seconded. The updates were unanimously **approved.**

Accessibility & Olmstead

Fenley shared the following updated changes to the Work Team Plan.

Members

David Fenley, Chair
 Eric Falk, Minnesota Management and Budget
 Robyn Bernardy, Dakota County
 Shelly Pflaum, United Community Action Partnership
 Penny Messer, Isanti County

Rachel Garaghty, Minnesota Department of Health
 Kristie Billiar, MnDOT
 Rhonda Danielson
 Shelley Madore, Olmstead Implementation Office

Accessibility and Olmstead Work Group New Configuration	New Configuration	New Configuration Subgroup Members	Notes
Priority #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, managed care/insurance providers). Chicago has done this.	No change	David Fenley, Robyn Bernardy, Rhonda Danielson	This subgroup is not meeting until 2023
Priority #2: Integrate transportation planning into all state-supported [or all] housing plans – universal and walkability planning	Combine Priorities #2 and #3	Kristie Billiar, Rachel Garaghty, Penny Messer, Shelley Madore, Rhonda Danielson	
Priority #3: Incorporate transportation planning for the future through the Olmstead Plan by creating a goal of at least bi-annually (every other year) investigating the usage of non-regular route transportation for people with disabilities and addressing new growth opportunities to build regular route service.			
Priority #4: 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	Combine Priority #4 from Accessibility and Priority #3 and Priority #4 Removing Barriers	Removing Barriers: Tim Schmutzer, Gary Ludwig, Alan Hermann, Mike Greenbaum, Rachel Garaghty, Dylan Galos, Rhonda Danielson; Accessibility: David Fenley, Robyn Bernardy	

Galos motioned for approval of the updated changes. Yanda seconded. The updates were unanimously approved.

Agency Updates

Olmstead Plan

Billiar stated that they are pausing the budget development that had begun in August. They were asked by the chair, the Commissioner of Housing for Olmstead to come up with a budget proposal. However, the timeline was found to be quite short and they would not have been able to have things vetted within each respective agency in a timely manner. They are continuing to look for opportunities within the current budget.

Billiar also stated that they are quickly approaching the annual revision of goals and updates to the Olmstead Plan and as of this time they are not planning to submit any updates to the transportation goals. They will delay revising their goals until 2023.

Public Comment

Sherry Munyon, Minnesota Public Transit Association, stated that she recently returned from a trip to Washington DC to meet with Congressional delegation. They spent the majority of their time highlighting the volunteer driver issue. Many of the delegation members have signed onto the legislation proposed by Representative Stabber and Representative Craig. Munyon stated that Representative Stabber's bill matches the volunteer driver mileage reimbursement to the federal reimbursement allowing the IRS to set the rate rather than requiring a change of Congress in the future. Representative Craig introduced a second bill in part in response to the rising fuel prices suggesting that due to additional hardship on drivers, including volunteer drivers, that a 2-year temporary rate increase could occur. Munyon also stated that additional language to Representative Craig's bill would drop the rate to 24 cents after the 2-year temporary raise.

Review Draft Agenda for Next Meeting

The draft agenda of the November meeting was shared. Members did not have any changes or questions.

Adjourn

Reis adjourned the meeting at 2:47 p.m.