

# Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA)

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## 2012 Annual Report

## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary.....   | 2  |
| MCOTA Members.....   | 3  |
| Introduction .....   | 4  |
| Statutory Purpose .....  | 4  |
| Background: The Case for Transportation Coordination in Minnesota.....                         | 4  |
| Figure 1: Minnesota Household Growth 2010-2020 .....   | 5  |
| Figure 2: Projected Average Annual Growth in Selected Disabilities 2010-2020 in Minnesota..... | 5  |
| State Coordination Endeavors: From ICTC to MCOTA.....  | 6  |
| MCOTA Duties.....  | 7  |
| MCOTA Activities & Accomplishments .....   | 8  |
| Member Agency Coordination Accomplishments .....   | 8  |
| MCOTA Recommendations.....   | 9  |
| Conclusion.....  | 10 |

## **Executive Summary**

The Minnesota State Legislature created the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access in 2010 to study, evaluate, oversee, and make recommendations to improve the coordination, availability, accessibility, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and safety of transportation services provided to the transit public. In its annual report, the Council provides a summary of 2011 activities and an overview of member agencies' efforts to foster an environment of heightened communication and cooperation among transportation providers in Minnesota. This document also offers the Council's recommendations for further improvements of transportation coordination in Minnesota.

## **MCOTA Members**

Tim Henkel, Chair  
Minnesota Department of Transportation

Joan Willshire, Vice Chair  
Minnesota State Council on Disability

Dan Pollock  
Office of the Governor

Tony Kellen  
Minnesota Public Transit Association

Scott Leitz  
Minnesota Department of Human Services

Doug Benson  
Minnesota Department of Health

Gerri Sutton  
Metropolitan Council

Kelly Wosika  
Minnesota Department of Education

Ron Quade  
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

Mary Koep  
Minnesota Board on Aging

Chuk Hamilton  
Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Tina Armstrong  
Minnesota Department of Commerce

Britta Reitan  
Minnesota Management and Budget

## **Introduction**

It is easy for most people to take transportation for granted. However, lack of adequate transportation services is a real and persistent barrier for those unable to use a personal vehicle as they attempt to earn a living, get an education, access medical care, purchase groceries or fulfill many other basic daily needs. To enable people without personal vehicles the freedom to accomplish these essential tasks, the state of Minnesota makes a substantial investment in transit services. In 2006, Minnesota spent approximately \$1 billion on health and human service transportation, public transit, and public school transportation. Despite this investment, available transportation services are often fragmented and difficult for consumers to navigate. Transit services are costly to operate, a problem that is sometimes exacerbated by inconsistent, duplicative, or restrictive federal and state rules and regulations. In some cases, transportation services are simply not available to meet the public's needs. This is especially problematic in rural areas, where many residents live without access to public transportation. Improving coordination and efficiencies among providers of transportation services is critical to helping seniors, persons with disabilities, persons with low incomes, and others enjoy independence and participate fully in our state's economy.

In Minnesota, the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access serves as a clearinghouse to address transportation coordination topics from a statewide perspective. The Minnesota State Legislature established the group in 2010. The group includes member representatives from thirteen agencies listed on page 3. MCOTA's work focuses on increasing capacity to serve unmet transportation needs, improving quality of transit service, improving understanding and access to these services by the public, and achieving more cost-effective service delivery. In addition, fostering communication and cooperation between transportation agencies and social service organizations leads to the creation of new ideas and innovative strategies for transportation coordination and funding.

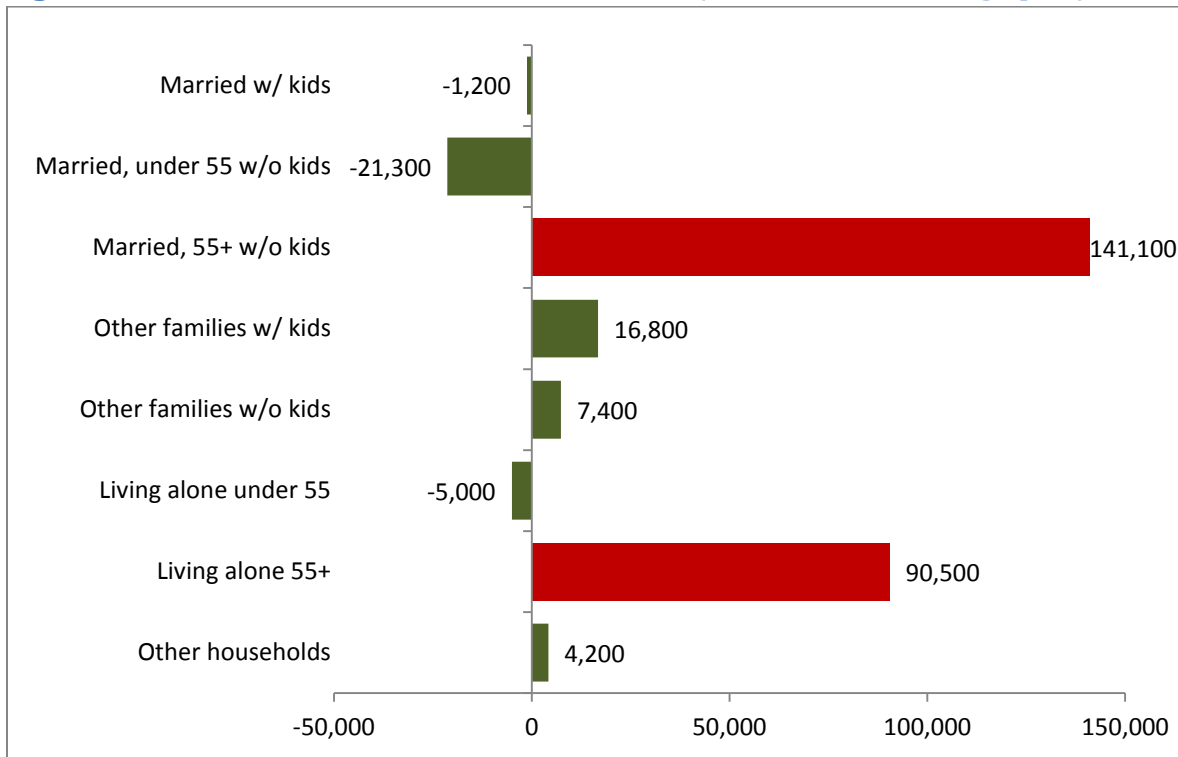
## **Statutory Purpose**

The purpose of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access is to “study, evaluate, oversee, and make recommendations to improve the coordination, availability, accessibility, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and safety of transportation services provided to the transit public.” (MN Statute 2010 174.285)

## **Background: The Case for Transportation Coordination in Minnesota**

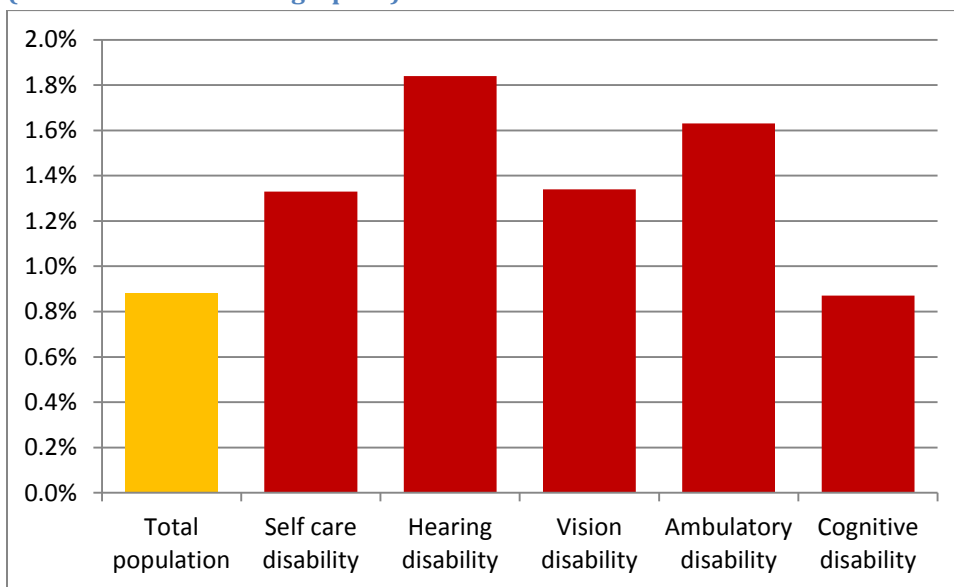
Access to transportation is an especially timely and critical issue, given projected growth among transportation-disadvantaged populations during the next 20 years. Demographic projections indicate that the number of individuals relying on transportation services is growing rapidly, while growth in transit service levels is not keeping pace. In Minnesota, the percent of population over age 65 is expected to grow from approximately 13 percent in 2010 to more than 20 percent in 2030. Empty nesters and elderly individuals living alone have the largest projected growth between 2010 and 2020. Figure 1 illustrates this trend.

**Figure 1: Minnesota Household Growth 2010-2020 (Minnesota State Demographer)**



Meanwhile, annual growth in the population with disabilities is expected to outpace population growth. Figure 2 documents this trend.

**Figure 2: Projected Average Annual Growth in Selected Disabilities 2010-2020 in Minnesota (Minnesota State Demographer)**



Low-income populations are also experiencing growth. Today, more than 599,000 Minnesotans, or 11.6 percent of the state's population, live below the poverty line. Transportation expenses are especially burdensome to low-income families; the poorest 20 percent of the population spends approximately 40 percent of take-home pay on transportation.<sup>1</sup>

Providing transportation services to a growing population of transit-dependent individuals is not an insignificant cost. The Minnesota Department of Transportation estimates that \$55.3 million was spent on public transit in Greater Minnesota in 2009, providing approximately 11.1 million rides and meeting about 61 percent of estimated need for transportation services. To meet 100 percent of projected transportation need in 2030, spending would have to increase to approximately \$216.9 million to cover operating costs alone required to provide approximately 22 million rides.<sup>2</sup> These figures greatly understate the urgency of this issue because they do not incorporate the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Finding efficiencies among transportation providers and improving coordination of resources can off-set the costs of increased service provision.

## **State Coordination Endeavors: From ICTC to MCOTA**

MCOTA addresses the need for cost-effective transportation services by promoting public transit and human services coordination throughout the state. It succeeds the Interagency Committee on Transit Coordination, which was established in 2005 by executive order of Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty to ensure that transit services funded through state agencies were effective and accessible.

Representatives from the Departments of Transportation, Health, Human Services, Employment and Economic Development, Commerce, Veterans Affairs, and Education; the Metropolitan Council; the University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies; the Minnesota Public Transit Association; the Board on Aging; and the State Council on Disability were part of the ICTC. Upon its formation, Gov. Pawlenty charged the ICTC with surveying existing coordination strategies that have worked in Minnesota and other states and developing a series of recommendations for improving the levels of transportation coordination in Minnesota. Between 2005 and 2010, the ICTC met on a regular basis and undertook a number of initiatives toward those goals.

Established in 2010, MCOTA builds on the ICTC's prior work while taking on the specific duties listed on the following page. Through its ongoing efforts, the Council aims to increase transportation capacity to serve unmet needs, improve quality of service, improve understanding and access to services by the public, and achieve more cost-effective service delivery. By creating a more efficient, effective and accessible transit system, the Council helps improve lives and support economic growth in Minnesota.

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<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey Briefs: Poverty 2009 and 2010 US Census Bureau

<sup>2</sup> The Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan, 2011. The Minnesota Department of Transportation. Available: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/reports/investmentplan/index.html>

## MCOTA Duties

To work towards its goal of transit coordination and accessibility, the Council is tasked with 20 duties, as defined in Minn. Stat. 174.285:

1. Compile information on existing transportation alternatives for the transit public, and serve as a clearinghouse for information on services, funding sources, innovations, and coordination efforts.
2. Identify best practices and strategies that have been successful in Minnesota and in other states for coordination of local, regional, state, and federal funding and services.
3. Recommend statewide objectives for providing public transportation services for the transit public.
4. Identify barriers prohibiting coordination and accessibility of public transportation services and aggressively pursue the elimination of those barriers.
5. Recommend policies and procedures for coordinating local, regional, state, and federal funding and services for the transit public.
6. Identify stakeholders in providing services for the transit public, and seek input from them concerning barriers and appropriate strategies.
7. Recommend guidelines for developing transportation coordination plans throughout the state.
8. Encourage all state agencies participating in the council to purchase trips within the coordinated system.
9. Facilitate the creation and operation of transportation brokerages to match riders to the appropriate service, promote shared dispatching, compile and disseminate information on transportation options, and promote regional communication.
10. Encourage volunteer driver programs and recommend legislation to address liability and insurance issues.
11. Recommend minimum performance standards for delivery of services.
12. Identify methods to eliminate fraud and abuse in special transportation services.
13. Develop a standard method for addressing liability insurance requirements for transportation services purchased, provided, or coordinated.
14. Design and develop a contracting template for providing coordinated transportation services.
15. Recommend an interagency uniform contracting and billing and accounting system for providing coordinated transportation services.
16. Encourage the design and development of training programs for coordinated transportation services.
17. Encourage the use of public school transportation vehicles for the transit public.
18. Develop an allocation methodology that equitably distributes transportation funds to compensate units of government and all entities that provide coordinated transportation services.
19. Identify policies and necessary legislation to facilitate vehicle sharing.
20. Advocate aggressively for eliminating barriers to coordination, implementing coordination strategies, enacting necessary legislation, and appropriating resources to achieve the council's objectives.



## MCOTA Activities & Accomplishments

Since its creation in 2010, MCOTA has pursued projects and activities recommended by the Council's issue area committees to further its goal of improving transportation coordination in Minnesota. In 2011, council members divided work among four committees tasked with addressing specific topics. These committees addressed planning and coordination, legislative issues, budget, and interagency contracts. Notable Council activities and accomplishments during 2011 are listed below:

- Maintained the Minnesota Coordination website ([coordinatemntransit.org](http://coordinatemntransit.org)), which serves as a centralized resource for transit coordination information in Minnesota.
- Promoted local agencies' understanding of coordination implementation techniques through the development of topic-specific webinars, to be broadcast in early 2012. Topics include mobility management, resource sharing, and Medicaid-public transit coordination. These webinars will introduce local agencies to best practices in coordination implementation and offer stakeholders the opportunity to ask questions of transit experts. Webinars will be archived on the MCOTA website as a long-term information resource.
- Promoted statewide understanding of coordination best practices and highlighted Minnesota achievements in coordination through the compilation of 21 case studies in a document entitled "Successful Local Transit Coordination Case Studies." Case study topics address specific strategies in coordination, including interagency contracting, coordinating agency schedules, coordinating dispatch, sharing resources, enhancing volunteer driver programs, implementing mobility management positions, and customer travel training. Each case study outlines the problem, solution, results and lessons learned as experienced by the featured agency. This document was distributed to agencies statewide during the local human service transit coordination planning process and is available on MCOTA's website.
- Supported use of a planning guidance document for the 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plans in Minnesota. This document provided a framework for the coordinated planning process and enhanced consistency in locally-driven coordination planning across the state.
- Created a synthesis document analyzing the 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination planning process. These plans were conducted in Minnesota's twelve Economic Development Regions in 2011; each region identified strategies and project ideas to address local barriers in transit coordination. The synthesis document summarizes the twelve plans and identifies statewide themes in coordination, including implementation progress since 2006, common barriers to transit coordination experienced across regions, and preferred coordination strategies and project ideas statewide. The synthesis document also lists recommendations to improve the local human service transit coordination plan development in the future.

## Member Agency Coordination Accomplishments

The Council's member agencies implemented several coordination projects of note in 2011. Throughout 2011, Council members were informed of these projects through presentations at monthly meetings and offered feedback and staff support to member agencies on these activities. The atmosphere of

collaboration and regular communication supported by MCOTA enhanced the quality of these projects. Projects include:

- Collaboration on the development of a Unified Transit Data Center pilot project in Scott and Carver counties. The software interface developed through this project is a tool that facilitates reporting, accounting, billing, and dispatch among transit brokers, county human service offices, and the Minnesota Department of Human Services. This allows the Scott/Carver county public transit system to provide rides to clients receiving Medical Assistance reimbursement, a notable achievement in human services/transit coordination. MCOTA member agencies Metropolitan Council, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Minnesota Board on Aging, and the Minnesota Department of Human Services provided funding and staff support for this project.
- Development of a successful Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative grant application, which resulted in a \$1.188 million federal funding award to the Minnesota Department of Transportation. The grant program funds one call/one click information centers that allow veterans, military families, and others to contact a single resource for information on available transportation services. Minnesota will use the grant to augment the existing Minnesota Help Network to include information about public, non-profit, and private transportation services. The project will also design and implement a statewide trip planning database to enhance the Minnesota Help Network. This represents a major step forward in coordination by creating the first-ever centralized database of existing transportation resources in Minnesota. MCOTA member agencies the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Board on Aging, and the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs provided support for this application and will participate in grant implementation from 2012 to 2014.
- Support the use of a cost allocation methodology developed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation. The methodology is designed to more consistently and effectively describe transportation costs and allow client-sharing partners to equitably divide the costs of transportation services for transit systems in Minnesota.
- Participation in the Minnesota State Council on Disability's annual Townhall Meeting, part of an on-going Transportation Dialogue series. At the meeting, more than 100 people statewide participated in a "State of the State of Transportation" discussion, engaging disability advocates and transportation providers on how to better serve persons with disabilities.

## **MCOTA Recommendations**

Based on the outcomes of its 2011 activities and accomplishments, MCOTA makes the following recommendations to the Minnesota State Legislature:

- State agencies should conduct demonstration projects to investigate coordinated planning, vehicle/client sharing and cost sharing.
- Legislature should support the recommendation made by the Minnesota Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Committee to use bus passes for NEMT clients to increase the use of public transportation when it is accountable and cost effective.

- Vehicles used in human service transportation should be made available to other state, federal and/or publicly-funded programs. State agencies should not restrict grantees to serving only their own parent programs through barriers to billing and accounting structures or liability concerns.
- State agencies should work together to create funding mechanisms that support their shared ownership of funding responsibilities while completing reporting and tracking requirements for various funding streams.
- State agencies should support the implementation of strategies identified by regions in the local human service transit coordination plans.
- State agencies dealing with transportation services should agree upon common measurements and definitions for tracking and reporting the cost of transportation services.

## **Conclusion**

Through its ongoing efforts, MCOTA has continued to advance its goal of transportation coordination in Minnesota. Not only has it created numerous tools and resources for local use and served as a valuable single-source coordination resource for the transportation community, its existence fosters interagency connections that promote a heightened level of cooperation, communication and synchronization of transportation within all levels of state and local government.

The Minnesota State Legislature should be commended for creating an environment that supports a coordinated transportation system. In today's economic climate, it is essential to extract the maximum value from every taxpayer dollar – a key goal of MCOTA's transportation coordination efforts. By continuing to improve transportation coordination in Minnesota, we can reduce duplication of transportation services and provide greater access to transportation for Minnesotans.

With continued support for MCOTA, the state of Minnesota will continue to work toward its important objective of removing obstacles that prevent the successful coordination of transportation programs and resources, giving Minnesotans access to transportation services that meet their mobility needs.