

Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Meeting Minutes

April 22, 2020, 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 – Victoria Nill, Minnesota Department of Transportation
Susan Bishop, Minnesota Department of Health
Peter Brickwedde, Minnesota Department of Commerce
Tiffany Collins, Minnesota Public Transit Association
Liz Conner (proxy for Shawn Kremer), Minnesota Management and Budget
Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education
Kody Olson, Minnesota State Council on Disability
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council
Jim Varpness, Minnesota Board on Aging
Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Members absent:

Rolando Sotolongo, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

Others present:

Minnesota Department of Transportation:

Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Commissioner

Kristie Billiar, ADA Program and Policy

Tom Gottfried, Office of Transit and Active Transportation

University of Minnesota, Center for Transportation Studies:

Kaydee Kirk

Arlene Mathison

Charles Androsky, Mankato/North Mankato Area Planning Organization (MAPO)

Robyn Bernardy, Dakota County

Heidi Corcoran, Milligan Partners

Ashley Eckdahl, East Central Regional Development Commission

Mark Greenbaum

Jill Hatfield

Deb Hesli, Touchstone Mental Health

Alan Hermann, Scott County

Sheila Holbrook-White, Washington County

Bryan McCoy, Headwaters Regional Development Commission and North Central Minnesota RTCC

Heather Molesworth, West Central Minnesota Communities Action, Inc. and West Central Minnesota RTCC

Sherry Munyon, MN Public Transit Association

Scott Olson, Newtrax

Karen Onan, East Central RTCC

Kim Pettman, Transit Advocate

Shelly Pflaum, United Community Action Partnership

Lynnell Popowski, Northwest Regional Development Commission

Robin Rohr, Hennepin County

Beverly Sidlo Tolliver, Northeast Minnesota Regional Transportation Coordinating Council

Mark Schermerhorn, Anoka County Transit

Barb Van Reese

Janet Westlund, Touchstone Mental Health

Courtney Whited, Minnesota Board on Aging

Call to Order + Introductions

Henkel called to order the April meeting of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access at 1:03 PM on April 22, 2020. Everyone introduced themselves. He shared that the Minnesota Council on Disability notified MCOTA recently that they are going through staffing changes and Willshire has departed the organization.

Review and Approve Agenda

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

Public Comments

Pettman shared the following comments:

- Pettman thanked Commission Anderson Kelliher for attending today's MCOTA meeting.
- She noted how MCOTA has potential to be a good interagency leader but everybody's hearts need to be in it. Tom Gottfried is doing a good job. The work of MCOTA is very important to the people around the state.
- The types of stress and isolation that Covid-19 is bringing is not new to marginalized people such as those experiencing homelessness, persons with disabilities or people that are economically disadvantaged. It is not new to these populations the frustration of not being able to go to the places they need to go. With Covid-19, now more than ever we need transportation coordination. Everyone on MCOTA can be a hero to people across the state by helping people get the transportation coordination they need.
- She asked that there be thorough introductions of names of people attending the meeting and where they are from, to be said clearly and slowly; especially this is important for those who are hard of hearing. Pettman said that she needs to write things down, it helps her to focus. Or, for example, today there are ASL interpreters at meeting so it is important to slow down introductions (for example for finger spelling of names) and so everyone knows who is in the room.
- She is requesting MCOTA have a good and well-reviewed disability inclusion training so that all people, especially marginalized populations, can have an equal playing field. MCOTA is supposed to be about marginalized populations.
- She said MCOTA has been working on Transportation Access for a long time. She told an example of something Kim's mother said to her as a child, she would say "Hop to it! Like a little bunny!" and we need to "Hop to it!"

Comments from Commissioner Anderson Kelliher:

- She thanked everyone on MCOTA for their efforts, both members and those who participate regularly in the activities of MCOTA.
- She noted the many things MCOTA has done the last ten years since 2010, the last year she served in the Minnesota Legislature. All accomplishments have been outlined in the annual reports of MCOTA. There are many important issues MCOTA is working on, including those related to volunteer drivers.
- She agreed with Pettman that in this time of Covid-19 and pandemic, the issues around public transportation connection to community are more important than ever. MCOTA is making steps to leap forward in these areas. She also noted the press conference with the Governor that is happening later in the day that will include some good news.
- MnDOT has high expectations of their work and their partners and we need to keep those up. MnDOT is also reflecting on their mission and how to move forward and in the face of this emergency, like they've faced other emergency situations before. This emergency is affecting every single person statewide so it is critical they assure people that there is safety involved. It is important to balance the strategic planning work with the very real immediate work of Covid-19.

January and February Meeting Minutes

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

Sutton moved to approve the February minutes, seconded by Yanda. The minutes were unanimously **approved**.

MCOTA 2020/21 Draft Work Plan

Gottfried reviewed the draft work plan with the group including the activities planned. He also asked members to consider how they'd like to be involved as a member of a Work Team(s) as the teams are in the process of being established. Members did not have any questions or concern regarding the draft work plan. Sutton moved to

approve the work plan, seconded by Varpness. The work plan was unanimously **approved**. Gottfried will be reaching out to members offline to serve on the work groups.

State FY21 CTS Draft Contract

Gottfried walked through the draft contract including the seven tasks. Some of the work plan pieces that members just approved may have some slight adjustments in the final contract to align better with the work plan.

Connor asked what the funding source for the draft budget – is it existing dollars or does it require an additional appropriation to fund these activities? Gottfried that there are sources of the budget are state funds. The RTCCs are funded with state and federal dollars. All funds have been appropriated and identified. The funds flow through MnDOT Office of Transit.

Bishop noted it would be good to reach not only drivers but the users and would like to know how what type of outreach is reflected in this contract. Gottfried noted that this would be part of the work teams so it is identified in the contract under task #6 for FY21 MCOTA Working Teams meeting coordination.

Volunteer Driver Work Team

Volunteer Driver Brochure Update

Varpness shared that the brochure has been on hold until after the legislative session so they could incorporate any kind of amendments made during session. The brochure would like be two different brochures, one focused on volunteers and the other for agencies that are operating and providing volunteer driver programs. Henkel thanks Varpness for his work on this topic. Members did not have any comments or questions.

Volunteer Driver Work Team 2020/21 Tasks and Update on Proposed Volunteer Driver Forum (Nov/Dec 2020) Program

Onan and the work team members have reviewed the materials and summaries from the 2018 forum and are using this information to plan for this year's forum. She noted it will be a virtual event and the team is looking at how other groups are organizing virtual meetings. The event will be held over two days in mid-November (possibly Nov 17-18) and each day will be a half day. The first day the group is thinking will be a policy day and the second will be focused on practice. The overall focus of the forum would be a dialogue and conversation with policymakers. The shared and walked through a draft of the forum agenda. Gottfried added the team has been working closely with the volunteer driver coalition group that is working with MPTA. The forum planning will be revisited at either the May and/or June MCOTA meeting.

Communications

Quarterly Stakeholder Communication Topics

Mathison provided an overview of the May potential topics that currently include an article on NewTrax written by Holbrook-White and the listing of upcoming meetings. Gottfried suggested highlighting the forum but that that wait until MCOTA has approved the plan and the dates. Potentially information on RTCCs could be included. Also, could use the communication as providing information about COVID-19 as it relates to transportation coordination. The group will review a final draft of the communication topics at the May meeting.

MCOTA Website Redesign

Mathison shared that the purpose of the website redesign is to move to the University's Drupal system. The RTCCs would then be able to manage their individual web pages directly. Other than this there is not a major redesign, however CTS is open to hearing what other content may be useful on the pages. Onan shared that as a member of an RTCC this will be so helpful. The changes should be ready this summer. In response to Pettman's request, Mathison noted that the site will be fully accessible. Mathison shared that the current site has this and was fully reviewed by the Minnesota Council on Disability. The templates for the new website have already been check for accessibility and anything added on will also be checked. Mathison will also follow offline with Bishop regarding her request to have state agency links on the website.

Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) Update

Sidlow-Toliver from the Arrowhead Regional RTCC shared about their group. They are currently in phase two of their planning. Their council members generally consists of public transit agencies, including through the Duluth Transit Authority (DTA), Arrowhead Transit, tribal transit agencies, their volunteer driver agencies, direct client service providers, veteran services, healthcare representatives, and they have a count of a representative from each county. They would like to add in a representative from a private transportation sector, and then also a citizen either citizen, a writer or volunteer driver.

She also shared that their work plan focuses on building foundation for coordination between transportation services and in the region and then filling the identified gaps - a lot of this they did in this last phase. They collected information from 175 transportation providers in the region and they are creating a database.

For phase three, they're looking at creating a rider-orientated tool which a rider could create a profile of their particular needs - that would then produce transportation options based on where they need to go and their needs.

They are doing rider training, which is focused on building materials for new potential riders and helping them feel comfortable using the transit systems and efforts to help improve access for them. They did some focus group with persons with disabilities to help with this effort.

They are also focused on volunteer drivers and following the legislation and have provided support in these efforts.

For phase three, they hope to support more new volunteer driver programs and also help the existing programs navigate through billing waiver services.

Another task they are focused on is vehicle sharing and helping facilitate the 5310 funded vehicles.

Pettman asked if they have enough PPEs for the drivers and passengers. Sidlow-Toliver shared that the DTA had a temporary shortage when PPE was directed to the hospitals and healthcare. But now there is sufficient access for drivers and passengers. However, she noted that most drivers right now have shifted away from providing rides and instead are just providing essential item deliveries.

Agency Updates

MPTA Volunteer Driver Legislation

Collins shared that most legislation is only focused on COVID-19. But MPTA and their coalition are still pushing to get a definition of volunteer driver in the session.

Olmstead Plan

Billiar shared the next meeting is 4/27 and topics include the quarterly report that will be discussed at the May subcabinet meeting. MnDOT has two transit-related measures they are reporting on. First is reporting out the number of service hours that they have annually. They have a goal to increase the total number of service hours to 1.7 million in greater Minnesota by 2025 and currently they are reporting 1,444,652 hours; that is an increase of 242,652 from the baseline. So this is continuing their general upward trend. They did have a little bit of a dip in 2017 because of adjustments and consolidations among the systems. And what they are now seeing in the 2018 numbers and going forward is an increase with the new starts programs. So they should be continuing that trend and are on track with that measure.

Second is the transit systems on-time performance. The goal is that all transit system statewide will be at a 90% or greater. For the Greater Minnesota component, they had some concern about the accuracy of our numbers and they actually did not report 2017 numbers because they had embargoed it to deal with some policy pieces. They will be reporting out the 2017 numbers and they basically remained flat in Greater Minnesota in terms of their on-time performance. They are at 78% and that only is an uptick of 2%. They won't

be reporting on 2018 or 2019. They have begun their new data collection for this item in 2020 and revising. The reports on this will likely be in August.

Other Member Updates

- Billiar shared the new OIO director Shelley Madore reached out to Billiar to share they are concerned people in Greater Minnesota and at-risk populations have access to transit during COVID-19. Billiar will connect Madore to the relevant MnDOT OTAT staff.
- Food Access:
 - Bishop shared that bubbling up through the Food Security Task Force (that she serves on) and through local public health partners is this need for coordination around food access and asked if there is an opportunity within MCOTA to play a role. Bishop and Gottfried have already connected on a related webinar to be held in May that would help highlight how the RTCCs and other transit organizations can help support food access and connect local public health to resources within their communities. Bishop's team also had questions for MCOTA members including: Are there emerging transit issues related to food delivery or essential workers to work safely that are rising up at the regional or local level? And how can we help support that through the state or local incident command structures? Pettman and Bishop will connect offline regarding food access and insights that she has on certain populations being left out. Henkel shared that the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) can help with this.
 - Collins added that regarding food distribution she thought it was a great idea to reach out to the RTCCs. All of the transit agencies and transit public transit providers are available to help with distribution of food.
- Collins also shared that as a public transit agency they are dealing with the issue of transporting COVID-19 positive and symptomatic passengers in the rural areas since they don't have all the PPE needed. These groups are being leaned on heavily by emergency management, health organizations, and nursing homes to help with this. Other transit options are necessarily available, like private providers. Sidlow-Toliver shared that in her area the private sector transit providers are stepping up for medical transportation. Sutton shared that Shelley Madore from the Olmstead Implementation Office has been working on this and suggested Collins connect with her.
- Pettman suggested ways to help including finding local people who are connectors, those who are tipping point connectors. Connectors may not be equipped with internet or email but they have strong relations to many on the ground and can make the key links. Make it easy for people to reach the connectors. Also, take down the formality and open up people who may be outside a particular issue area or stakeholders you might not normally think of.
- Yanda shared that although unemployment is very high now there are still job openings. DEED is looking for job seekers. Services are being offered virtually. She mentioned about other services like dislocated worker programs, vocational rehab services, and state services for the blind, MFIP and Welfare to Work programs are all still running. Also, when they can work one-on-one in person, DEED offers training to persons with disabilities that need transportation training. Finally, she noted they can provide transit passes for people that are job seeking or going to some form of training. Gottfried will connect with Yanda offline to get this info to the RTCCs.

Review Draft Agenda for Next Meeting

Henkel reviewed the draft agenda. Gottfried requested to add in a discussion of the CTS contract as it relates to budgeting. Members did not have any other comments.

Adjourn

Varpness made a motion to adjourn; Bishop seconded. The motion was unanimously **approved**. The meeting was adjourned at 2:52 PM.