

**Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Meeting Minutes**  
**June 24, 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  
Peter Brickwedde, Minnesota Department of Commerce  
Tiffany Collins, Minnesota Public Transit Association  
John Doan, Minnesota Board on Aging  
Kelly Garvey, Minnesota Department of Education  
Shawn Kremer, Minnesota Management and Budget  
Kody Olson, Minnesota State Council on Disability  
Mickey Scullard, Minnesota Department of Health (proxy for Susan Bishop)  
Gerri Sutton, Metropolitan Council  
Jodi Yanda, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

**Members absent:**

At-Large Representative – Victoria Nill, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Rolando Sotolongo, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

**Others present:**

- Minnesota Department of Transportation:
  - Nancy Daubengerger, Deputy Commissioner
  - Office of Transit & Active Transportation: Tom Gottfried, Michelle Lichtig, Mark Nelson, Noel Shughart
  - Kristie Billiar, ADA Program and Policy
- University of Minnesota:
  - Humphrey School of Public Affairs: Frank Douma
  - Center for Transportation Studies: Kaydee Kirk, Arlene Mathison
- Cathleen Amick, United Community Action Partnership
- Charles Androsky, Mankato Area Planning Organization
- Robyn Bernardy, Dakota County
- Brian Carlson, SE MN Regional Transportation Coordinating Council and Three Rivers Community Action
- Sara Chute, Minnesota Department of Health
- Heidi Corcoran, Milligan Partners
- David Hann, Minnesota Association of Townships
- Don Hickman, Initiative Foundation
- Mike Greenbaum, Newtrax
- Alan Hermann, Scott County
- Sheila Holbrook-White, Washington County
- Matt Kallroos, Region 5 Development Commission
- Heather King, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission
- Shelley Madore, Olmstead Implementation Office
- Bryan McCoy, Headwaters Regional Development Commission & North Central MN Regional Transportation Coordinating Council
- Laura Milbrandt, Prairie Five Community Action, Inc.
- Sherry Munyon, Minnesota Public Transit Association
- Scott Olson, Newtrax
- Karen Onan, East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council
- Kim Pettman, Transit and Public Policy Advocate
- Shelly Pflaum, Western Community Action
- Lynnell Popowski, Northwest Regional Development Commission
- Mary Quirk, Living at Home Network

- Robin Rohr, Hennepin County
- Dawn Simonson, Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging
- Mark Schermerhorn, Anoka County Transit
- Beverly Tolliver, Arrowhead Regional Development Commission and Northeast Minnesota Regional Transportation Coordinating Council
- Lori Vrolson, Central Minnesota Council on Aging

### **Call to Order + Introductions**

Henkel called to order the June meeting of the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access at 1:00 PM on June 24, 2020. Everyone introduced themselves.

### **Review and Approve Agenda**

Kremer moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Collins. The agenda was unanimously **approved**.

### **Public Comments**

Pettman shared the following:

Thank you for all the people that are at the meeting and I encourage you to bring more people. My comments in short are that this is a very interagency effort and let's take advantage of that.

I want to let you know of a problem that is happening for many people. I am asking everyone in the room to think about how we can solve this together. You know how you feel right now with feeling very overwhelmed with all the work that you have to do? Some of you may have been reassigned. And many people are working seven days a week and long hours, and it's very difficult during this time of COVID-19. A lot of people felt that way before COVID-19 even hit and a lot of these people are people in marginalized groups (people with disabilities, older people, people living in poverty, and people in equity groups). What has happened, unfortunately, is that before COVID-19 hit a lot of people didn't understand how these individuals felt and how frustrating it was. Some people try to understand but they weren't personally experiencing the same thing as someone in a marginalized group.

And then people went into the emergency mode with COVID-19 and only COVID-19-related items were prioritized by many organizations/agencies with respect to their stakeholders. Transportation is very much needed during this emergency. It's very important that each of you MCOTA voting members get your agencies to be fully responsive to the needs of the community, which also includes the nonprofit organizations and others. So there's been a communication breakdown.

Also, you might think this might take time away from what I've been told I have to do at work. I think it can save a lot of time because sometimes maybe people in another agency or another area might be able to help you fix some bugs. Maybe you might not know why your program isn't working. But people that are on the ground, people in the community, they might be able to tell you something that could help you. Maybe instead of spending 100 hours on a project, they can save you maybe half of that time. Last administration, there was a really big community engagement effort. So please MCOTA voting members and others, look to your community engagement resources at your agencies. The reason I say this is that there will be more and more people coming to these meetings and they may not know the right person to talk to. But if you can feel comfortable with networking and connecting even virtually, you can help all this work together better. This is a really urgent need. I hope that we can have time in meetings where we can network and connect and bounce ideas off of each other because that will help all of us work together.

Simonson shared the following:

I am with the Metro Area Agency on Aging, but I am speaking to you today representing Minnesota's volunteer driver coalition as one of its co-chairs. The volunteer driver coalition formed in 2018. We currently stand at 81 members and these members include nonprofits, counties, AAAs like my organization, and associations and membership organizations. Some of our organizations, for example, include the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, AMC, the Township Association, and the Living at Home Network. So we are at 81 members strong.

We came together due to a shared and very deep concern for the viability of volunteer driver programs across the state and, most important, for the well-being of the people who depend on the services of volunteer drivers. Our members serve predominantly older adults and people with disabilities. But we also do serve some youth. We serve refugees who are victims of torture. We need to remember that volunteer drivers are the engine behind the delivery of Meals on Wheels. Volunteer drivers are essential to the delivery of social services and to access community for so many Minnesotans.

We conducted a survey of the Council's services and looked at data from 2018 and we learned really just how essential volunteer drivers are to the well-being of people in Minnesota. A total of 77,474 people depended on volunteers for rides in 2018. This includes rides to medical appointments grocery stores and other community services. Currently 1,900 volunteers provided 168,400 one-way trips to those 77,000 Minnesotans covering over 9.6 million miles. Volunteers in Minnesota in 2018 contributed more than 500,000 hours driving fellow community members.

Our concerns are for the viability of these volunteer driver programs - they are increasingly threatened by a lack of definitional clarity and law. This leads to pressure on volunteers by insurance companies to pay higher rates. Our programs are at risk for recruiting and retaining volunteers for this reason but also due to a disincentive whereby current volunteers who received more than \$600 a year in mileage reimbursement are subject to tax that is considered income. Our asks from MCOTA is really to champion and remedy the situation. We believe the path is straightforward. We are seeking definition statute more volunteer driver and the creation of an income tax subtraction. I'm here to tell you today that the coalition will support MCOTA as a champion of this issue and we are able to pledge our coalition to activate the voices of hundreds of riders and drivers and organizations across the state to aid your efforts.

Vrolson shared the following:

I am the director of the central Minnesota Council on Aging which is an Area Agency on Aging covering 14 counties in the central part of the state, an area with a mix of some larger towns like St. Cloud, but a much more rural composition. I am also co-chair on the volunteer driver coalition.

Dawn has mentioned two of the key issues that have been impacting our volunteer drivers regarding the rideshare classification as well as income tax, taxation, mileage reimbursement, and you know what with the time that we're in right now with COVID-19 the volunteer drivers is a critical service. We're seeing a decline in volunteer drivers at this time. I was on the telephone the other day with the Faith in Action Program in Morrison County and they have about 50 older adults that they're providing rides to, primarily to medical appointments and dialysis. In the past they have had 51 volunteer that have been driving for older adults, and they are now down to five volunteers are willing to drive at this time. Most of their volunteers are older adults themselves so their ability and willingness to be able to transport other individuals to dialysis or to doctor appointments, they've had to curtail that. When we're at a point where we already have a volunteer shortage, having additional barriers such as the mileage reimbursement and the rideshare classification, it's critically important that we look at how we can take those barriers down as well as the opportunities where we can develop jointly statewide a campaign to recruit more volunteers across the state to do assisted transportation. I think of the marketing campaign that was used for the roundabouts education. That was something that was very positively done and had good results. So if we can also look at something similar across the state where we can look at recruiting volunteers, as well as educating those in need of transportation....those are all very important aspects that we hope to work with MCOTA as well as other transportation players across the state on this.

Hann shared the following:

I'm the executive director of the Minnesota Association of Townships. We are a nonprofit charitable organization focused on education and advocacy for the 1,781 townships across the state, the 9,000 township officers, and nearly 1 million residents that live in townships. We are members of the volunteer driver coalition. I am here today to show support for the work Sherry will be presenting on later in the meeting

regarding the recommendations that the volunteer driver coalition has to try to get some relief in statute. We would hope that your organization would be supportive of that as well.

We became a part of the volunteer driver coalition because we, as townships, recognize that this is a very efficient way to get people where they need to go. This is especially important in rural communities where it's very important to do things in a cost effective way. Townships are very efficient - they're very resistant on spending money where they don't need to. They always do a great job and being efficient and this is an efficient way to help people.

We support the efforts to try to mitigate some of the disincentives that currently exist to volunteer drivers which includes the income tax consequences faced by some drivers as well as the insurance costs that volunteers may find disheartening or maybe even not possible to comply with. We are very concerned since we have seen a continuing erosion in the number of people who express a willingness to volunteer to help others. We support the efforts of the driver coalition and, as townships, we very much support the initiative.

Munyon shared the following:

I have sent written memorandum for your consideration. In short, we're specifically looking for MCOTA to forward a recommendation to each state agency Commissioner to support these efforts. We have specified at a minimum that 1) the volunteer driver definition and 2) reimbursement issue (which is a tax exemption) should be the two minimum issues that go forward. Our goal is to have the Governor announce in his legislative package the state support for these two initiatives to be passed in 2021. The two initiatives, minimum ask is:

1. Define a volunteer driver. In our proposal we defined a volunteer driver under the insurance industry statute 65B to state: a volunteer driver means an individual who transports persons or goods on behalf of a nonprofit entity or governmental unit and receives no compensation for services provided, other than the reimbursement of actual expense. And we've been asked, why do we say *goods* and what's meant for goods and specifically, there are two major issues. One was already mentioned and that's Meals on Wheels delivering food and sometimes groceries to those who can't get out themselves. Also, volunteer drivers participate in moving organ donations. So these are absolute necessities for the public, as well as the rights they receive.
2. On the volunteer driver reimbursement, MCOTA is familiar that we're all grappling with a federal issue and lack of change since the volunteer driver reimbursement is still at 14 cents a mile, where we have been between 57-59 cents for reimbursement for vehicles that are driven for business. Once again a volunteer driver is put at risk and suffers tax consequences, in some cases, for being a good citizen. The language under volunteer driver reimbursement proposal states that a taxpayer is allowed a subtraction equal to the amount of mileage reimbursement paid by an organization to the taxpayer for work as a volunteer driver. The subtraction is limited to amounts paid by the organization in excess of the mileage reimbursement rate for use of an automobile in rendering gratuitous services to a charitable organization and do not exceed the standard mileage rate. So this means an organization can pay anywhere between the minimum 14 cents a mile authorized or the maximum the IRS authorizes for business, since that changes. This language was written so as does not require an organization to pay more than they have the ability to. Some organizations might pay 14 cents, but that was the bare minimum. Most pay in the middle of the 14-58 cents and some pay the maximum. In greater Minnesota these can be extremely long trips with a lot of miles. Some of our volunteers are super volunteers and they do meet the threshold of \$600 in reimbursement, which puts them into having to declare it as taxable income.

So as we are moving through the process. We have the two items for state action. We would like those to be adopted by the Governor and understand that right about now agencies will start preparing their legislative initiatives and forward to the Governor. We're asking each state agency to include action on volunteer drivers in their requests to the Governor. We also have a request for Federal action. We know that state agencies have government liaisons at the federal level, and we are looking for leadership there. MnDOT had lead some on this issue already (thank you) with the Minnesota delegation, but we're asking that this issue be brought up not only with the Minnesota delegation but also with other leadership in Congress – and that would be the tax committees and the Transportation or Appropriations Committee. Again, this is to increase and heighten awareness over the lack of equity for our volunteer drivers who deserve it the most.

## **May Meeting Minutes**

Yanda moved to approve the May minutes, seconded by Kremer. The minutes were unanimously **approved**.

### **Update on Plans for Agency Senior Leadership Team Meeting**

Gottfried shared the meeting will happen Friday, July 24 from 3:00-4:30 PM. He walked through the draft agenda that was shared prior to the meeting. Agenda items include public comment, 2020-21 strategic plan and priorities, and also MCOTA/RTCC/TCAPs programs. Those invited are all commissioners that are part of MCOTA and all other agency executive leadership (e.g. Board on Aging, Minnesota Council on Disability, etc.). All MCOTA members are invited too. Gottfried will be mailing hard copies of the meeting materials to the commissioners for the review. Relative to the public comments heard at the beginning of today's meeting, Brickwedde said it would be helpful to have an agenda item at this commissioner-level meeting to talk about a coordinated approach on legislative proposals across state agencies as well as congressional outreach.

Per discussion below under the "MPTA Volunteer Driver Legislation" item, the MPTA legislative items will be added to the 7/24/20 agency senior leadership team agenda.

Also, members agreed that the strategic plan and priorities item will be changed to *inform*, as opposed to *endorse*.

### **Work Teams Updates**

**1. Volunteer Driver Forum Dates + Planning** – Onan walked through the plan and draft agenda for the virtual forum series that was shared ahead of time. Brickwedde appreciated all the work that has gone into this effort – he also noted that Wednesdays in the spring are difficult to make work for staff who are involved with the work at the legislature since standing committees meeting those afternoons – could a shift to Fridays work during the spring? Also the legislature typically has adjourned by the week following Memorial Day so it is assumed that week would not present as much of a conflict. Gottfried and Onan will bring this forum series agenda back to MCOTA for final approval at the July meeting. Onan also requested to have a meeting before the 7/24 senior leadership team meeting to square away the forum series before presenting to leadership – Gottfried will take this to the MCOTA executive committee for consideration.

**2. Communication Work Team** – Gottfried shared that he will be reaching out to members to form this work team. As always, members can connect with Gottfried to volunteer for this work team or ask any questions.

**3. Operational Work Team** – This team has met once and is due to meet again July 1. MMB has offered to provide staff for technical assistance regarding performance measures, specifically focusing on the TCAPs and RTCCs.

### **MCOTA Communication**

**Newsletter:** Mathison shared that the next newsletter is due to send in September. An update from the senior leadership meeting and info on the forum series will be shared that issue. Another agency or two will be highlighted in this issue.

**Inclusive Outreach:** Henkel shared that per testimony received MCOTA wants to continue to grow its communication and outreach and to connect with those that care about the work of transportation coordination. Gottfried said one idea is to start with what the TCAPs and RTCCs are already doing having built good partnerships. These partnerships can be better leveraged. These issues are also tied to MCOTA communications work and having more effective communication. Pettman asked MCOTA voting members to contact their agency's equity coordinators and community engagement staff to work with MCOTA. There may be stakeholder organizations out there that don't yet have a connection to MCOTA, perhaps some of them small nonprofits. She suggested a personal invite/phonecall would yield better results than email invite. Can agency staff help build bridges to those who are often shut out? Scullard said the state emergency operations center (through the Dept. of Public Safety) might be a good partner to connect with. Others added that connecting with groups serving persons with disabilities would be helpful. Henkel shared that Gottfried will document some suggested strategies and bring them back to this group for consideration and action on the outreach and involvement of MCOTA's work.

### **MPTA Volunteer Driver Legislation**

See also the series of public comments from the beginning of meeting. Munyon walked through the documentation shared prior the meeting for endorsement and active support of 2021 legislative initiative to assist in the recruitment and retention of volunteer drivers. She restated the two main points they'd like MCOTA support on: 1) Defining a volunteer driver and 2) providing the income tax subtraction to volunteer drivers. They had other asks in their bill that they still think are very important and one being that the insurance should not be raising the fee for a volunteer driver simply for being a volunteer driver. Collins echoed that now is the time to address and act at the leadership team meeting on this important issue. Brickwedde was also supportive of this topic on the leadership team meeting agenda. He also mentioned the HHS Reform and Policy Committee informational hearing on a proposal that would make some grants out of the federal COVID funds and that the coalition could potentially be eligible.

Doan also stated that he'd like the Minnesota Board on Aging (MBA) to be one of the agencies consulted on this topic and Doan is the link to MBA on this issue.

Collins made the motion for MCOTA to support the MPTA legislative proposal recommendations (defining volunteer driver, the income tax subtraction, as well as outside of legislation for the agencies to support continued engagement at the federal level) and bring this to their commissioners at the 7/24/20 leadership meeting to eventually send to the Governor to send in his legislative package; Brickwedde seconds; the motion was unanimously **approved**. This item will be added to the agenda.

### **Twin Cities Area Transit Coordination Assistance Program (TCAP) Presentation + Discussion on Transit Response to COVID-19**

This item was tabled to the next meeting due to time constraints.

### **Agency Updates**

**Olmstead Plan** – Billiar said the next scheduled subcabinet meeting is August 24. There are transportation reporting items some of which relate to the Metropolitan Council on transportation goal five which is by 2040, one-hundred percent of the target population will be served by regular route service for the prescribed market areas.

### **Other Member Updates**

RE: COVID-19:

- Henkel shared that about 50% of MnDOT employees are teleworking and other 50% are coming into work. MMB has asked agencies to determine what a return to work will look like. Telework continues for those that can. Much of MnDOT is operations related and in the field. When it comes to transportation as a whole, there is a big drop in vehicle transportation but conditions are starting to return to pre-COVID. With aviation, travel is significantly lower.
- Washington County: The importance of food security is key in addressing COVID-19 and Holbrook-White provided a comprehensive overview of what is being done in Washington County on this per the PPT slides that were shared prior to the meeting on the topic of food and COVID-19 as it relates to transportation.

### **Review Draft Agenda for July Meeting**

The group agreed to look at rescheduling the July 22 meeting to July 15 to give ample time to prepare for the July 24 leadership meeting. Gottfried will follow up. Since meeting, the date was changed to July 15.

### **Adjourn**

Olson made a motion to adjourn; Yanda seconded. The motion was unanimously **approved**. The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 PM.

### **Future meetings:**

2020:

- *Wednesday, July 15*
- *Thursday, September 10*
- *Wednesday, November 18*

2021: *Wednesday, January 27, Wednesday, March 24, Wednesday, May 26*