MINNESOTA

Minnesota Council on Transportation Access

May 2020 Update

This email update is an effort by the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) to provide periodic updates about its initiatives to the public and to interested stakeholders. Please let us know what you think by contacting Arlene Mathison at mathi032@umn.edu or Tom Gottfried at tom.gottfried@state.mn.us.

Newtrax transportation service blooms from partnership and innovation

Newtrax is an innovative partnership created in 2011 between two long-established day training and habilitation (DT&H) nonprofits, PAI and Merrick, Inc., to increase the efficiency of transportation services to the persons with disabilities they serve.

As a Section 5310 Transit Coordination Assistance Project, Newtrax continues to be guided by its founding principles of innovation and partnership. Mike Greenbaum, who previously served as finance and development director at Merrick, became the first full-time executive director of Newtrax, which is located in White Bear Lake.

The Newtrax approach — innovating new services through partnerships while remaining flexible and nimble — has led to an unusual array of projects with multiple partners, passenger populations, and objectives. Included in the far-reaching Newtrax portfolio:

- Connecting students to prosperity: Newtrax is making evening and weekend classes feasible for many first-generation Century College students, some non-traditional in age and life experience.
- Partnering to support greater access to care: Newtrax is expanding connections to healthcare and wellness services by partnering with M Health Fairview to provide rides to and from multiple healthcare facilities for women from the Karen community one day a week. A similar initiative being planned will focus on increasing access to the Roselawn Clinic for men from the Karen community who live on the border between Roseville, Saint Paul, and Little Canada.

- Crossing new technological frontiers: Newtrax is actively involved in a major technological pilot scheduled to begin in October (or possibly later due to Covid-19-related delays) using an automated vehicle (AV) to connect older adults and persons with disabilities to multiple destinations. Those destinations include senior living facilities, vocational programs for persons with disabilities, and the White Bear Lake YMCA, running on a 1.25-mile fixed-route loop. The project is a unique partnership with the City of White Bear Lake, the White Bear Lake School District, the White Bear Lake Chamber of Commerce, Ramsey County, the University of Minnesota, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). The pilot, which heralds a new wave of technology in its operation, also will test the functional operations of an AV over 12 months, including a Minnesota winter — information that is critical to MnDOT. But the AV pilot is more than a simple demonstration — it also will provide cutting-edge educational opportunities to high school, community college, and university students preparing for related careers.

Read more about Newtrax' background

Upcoming MCOTA meetings

MCOTA usually meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at the MnDOT Central Office, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. In accordance with recommendations from the State of Minnesota to help slow the spread of COVID-19, upcoming meetings will be remote only. The meetings are open, and members of the public are welcome to attend. Each meeting includes time for public comments. See the MCOTA website for more details.

- June 24, 2020, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
- July 22, 2020, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
- September 23, 2020, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

About MCOTA

The Minnesota Council on Transportation Access was established by the Minnesota Legislature 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."

www.CoordinateMNTransit.org