Arrowhead Regional Transportation Coordinating Council
Operational Implementation Plan

July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020

Project Contact:
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Background

In the fall of 2017, the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) and the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA) began discussions about developing a Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) in northeastern Minnesota and seeking a Phase 1: 2018 Organizational Planning Grant from the Minnesota Department of Transportation. A process was designed to help local stakeholders within the 8 participating counties (Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, Pine, St. Louis) develop a structure and process to ensure transportation needs are met in northeastern Minnesota and to support successful implementation of the 2017 regional local human service transit coordination plan.

AEOA was the applicant for the MnDOT RTCC planning grant and served as the lead agency for the process. ARDC supported the Phase I planning process as a subcontractor by providing expertise in planning, research, facilitation and documentation.

This document outlines the results of the Phase I RTCC planning process and the operational implementation plan for the Arrowhead RTCC for the initial 12-month implementation period.

Structure

The Phase I Coordinating Council determined that utilizing an existing regional agency to host the RTCC was preferable to creating a new organization. The Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) was selected as the host agency for the Phase 2 implementation period. The Arrowhead RTCC will be an advisory committee to ARDC.

ARDC is the designated transportation planning agency for the Arrowhead region and has completed numerous transit planning processes, including the recent local human service transit coordination plan, which calls for better coordination of transportation options for citizens, particularly those with low incomes, disabilities, increased age and other mobility challenges. Other ARDC advisory committees include the Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Advisory Committee and the Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership (NEMNATP).

Description of Council Membership

During the Phase I planning process, over 325 stakeholders were identified, representing the following sectors or agencies:

- Area Agency on Aging
- Centers for Independent Living
- County Representatives (elected and staff)
- Funders (public/private)
- Health Systems
- Human Service Agencies
- MN Continuum of Care Coordinators
• Transportation and Human Service Advocates
• Transportation Providers
• Transportation Users
• Tribal Representatives (Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake)
• Veterans Service Organizations
• Workforce Development

All stakeholders have been invited to participate in planning meetings and are apprised of the planning process outcomes through email communication and an interim project website. A group of 48 stakeholders have regularly attended meetings, with approximately 20-25 participants at each RTCC planning meeting.

A preliminary Phase I Coordinating Council roster was created in February 2019 to finalize bylaws and develop the work plan for Phase 2 RTCC implementation. Membership on the Phase 1 Coordinating Council was not capped to support engaging the interest and energy of all interested participants throughout the planning process. An application process was developed to identify individuals wishing to serve on the Phase 2 Coordinating Council as well as those who would prefer to be engaged through project work groups. Prior to July 1, 2019, final representatives from each sector will be selected to serve on the initial Coordinating Council based upon interest, engagement and geographic representation. Initial work groups for each task area will also be developed to support ongoing engagement of all stakeholders.

The Phase 1 Coordinating Council roster is included as Attachment A.

Bylaws
Bylaws developed and approved by the Coordinating Council during Phase 1 are included as Attachment B.

Continuing efforts on Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan

During the initial RTCC planning committee meetings, an abbreviated human service transit coordination plan process was conducted to engage participants in identifying current strengths, gaps and opportunities to improve access to transportation through communication, coordination and collaboration. Many of the stakeholders and steering committee members from the 2017 Human Service Transit Coordination Plan process were represented at these meetings, and results from both the 2017 and the 2010 plans were shared during development of the RTCC Phase 2 work plan.

The Arrowhead RTCC work plan includes three of the seven projects included in the 2017 plan:

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**Project #1: Transportation Provider Database development**
Project Overview: Provide a central database of all public transportation providers in the Arrowhead Region and their contact information.
Population Served: Human service professionals, caregivers, public
Communities Served: Communities within Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Koochiching, Lake, Itasca, and St. Louis counties
Responsible Entities: Regional coordination council and public transit
Strategies Addressed: Make information about existing transportation providers in the region, and how to use these services, more accessible to the public.

**Project #2: Regional Transit Planning**

Project Overview: Engage communities and the public to further identify gaps in service, accessibility needs in the existing transit system, and strategies to improve transit in Northeast Minnesota.
Population Served: Transit riders, seniors/elders, residents with disabilities, low-income residents, public
Communities Served: Communities within Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Koochiching, Lake, Itasca, and St. Louis counties
Responsible Entities: Regional planning agency, public transit, and disability advocates
Strategies Addressed: Expand services, including but not limited to additional routes, extended hours of service, and additional vehicles, to enhance mobility throughout the region.

**Project #4: Transit Rider Training**

Project Overview: Coordinate the production of transit schedules, maps, and/or how-to-ride materials by public transportation providers region wide to fill an education gap for existing and potential transit riders.
Population Served: Potential transit riders, youth, seniors/elders
Communities Served: Particularly communities with localized transit service (Bois Forte, Duluth metropolitan area, Fond du Lac, Hibbing, etc.)
Responsible Entities: Public transit
Strategies Addressed: Make information about existing transportation providers in the region, and how to use these services, more accessible to the public.

The Arrowhead RTCC intends that work related to Projects #1 and #2 will develop a foundation to support future development of a Transportation Management Coordination Center (TMCC) providing a single point of contact to learn about available transportation resources. Work related to project #4 will be limited in scope initially with the potential for replication/expansion.

In addition to these local priorities, the Arrowhead RTCC will also engage in activities to support **Volunteer Driver Programs** and **Vehicle Sharing** in accordance with statewide focus areas.
Goals and Objectives

The goal of the Arrowhead RTCC is to improve access, availability and options for transportation services in northeastern Minnesota through improved communication, coordination and collaboration.

Objectives:
1) Identify unmet personal mobility needs and facilitate the development of services responsive to those needs;
2) Prioritize programming;
3) Identify and understand all available transportation options in the region;
4) Increase access to services, education and centers of commerce;
5) Increase coordination between transportation service providers;
6) Advocate for high quality transportation services which are safe, efficient, effective, reliable and responsive to consumer needs;
7) Increase available transportation services within the region;
8) Identify, support and expand best practices; and
9) Direct the allocation of resources as appropriate

Continued involvement of partners and stakeholders

During the development process for the application for Phase 1 RTCC planning funds, over 275 individuals representing key stakeholder groups were identified and contacted regarding the RTCC planning process. Through a mail-chimp email database, communication regarding RTCC development has been shared with these stakeholders throughout the RTCC planning process. Additional individuals have been added to the database as awareness of the RTCC grows throughout the region, bringing the total number of stakeholders to over 325.

During Phase 1 RTCC planning, a more diverse and representative group has been convened compared to the original Steering Committee that led the development of the 2017 Local Human Service Transit Coordination plan. The RTCC planning efforts have engaged county and tribal representatives in a more meaningful way and have brought together a wide array of stakeholders with energy and enthusiasm for implementing local plan priorities. While leadership of the RTCC for the Phase 2 implementation will be provided by the Council, the intent is to continue to communicate with and seek to engage the broader group of stakeholders to inform and support RTCC implementation. The mail chimp database will continue to be maintained and developed, and opportunities to engage key stakeholders and partners to support work plan implementation will be identified and implemented.
Communication strategies will also be developed for Phase 2 implementation elements to ensure widespread awareness and understanding of the RTCC and its initiatives.
Work plan

RTCC SUPPORT AND ADMINISTRATION
The structure and bylaws of the Arrowhead RTCC have been established and will be finalized prior to the July 1, 2019 start date. The following activities will support RTCC operations:

Tasks
A. **Staffing support**: The Arrowhead RTCC will enter into an agreement with ARDC for initial staffing support for RTCC operation July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020 dependent on Phase 2 Implementation funds awarded by MnDOT
B. **RTCC meetings**: A council meeting schedule for the first 12-month period will be developed and approved. ARDC staff will support and facilitate RTCC meetings.
C. **RTCC subcommittees**: Subcommittee and/or work group structures will be developed to support completion of work plan tasks and approved by the Council. Each subcommittee will be chaired by a Council member. ARDC staff will support and facilitate subcommittee meetings.
D. **Communication plan**: The Council and subcommittees will develop a communication plan to engage and inform various audiences, including key partners, stakeholders, transportation users and the general public. The communication plan will also identify information to be posted on the MCOTA RTCC webpage.
E. **Council Development**: Continue to evaluate representation on the RTCC and recruit participants to represent key stakeholders or geographic region as required
F. **Funding**: Identify and pursue public/private funding options to support work plan activities.

LOCAL COORDINATION STRATEGIES
The initial implementation processed outlined below will address three of the priority strategies from the 2017 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan:

- Development of a transportation provider database
- Regional transit planning to identify gaps in service, accessibility, needs in the existing transit system and strategies for improvement
- Transit Rider Training

Work on the first two strategies will establish baseline data for the Arrowhead RTCC and begin to build a foundation for the development of a Transportation Management Coordination Center (TMCC) and incorporate the first 2 local coordination strategies. Transit Rider Training will be piloted on a limited scale during the initial 12-month period, with the intent to replicate and expand efforts as resources allow.
RTCC Baseline Development/TMCC Foundation Work

A TMCC serves as a one-call or one-click service for transportation, providing customers with a single point of contact to learn about available transportation resources. The Arrowhead’s TMCC development process will include multiple phases. While a fully operational TMCC is not expected to be developed during the initial 12-month Phase 2 Implementation Process, the goal is to develop the database of current capacity and service levels, understand the limitations and restrictions of the current system, identify potential technology platforms, apps or tools to support a TMCC, and identify opportunities to expand access.

Tasks

A. **Subcommittee development:** An RTCC subcommittee will be developed to support this work. The subcommittee will be chaired by a member of the Coordinating Council and will include Council members and other partners and stakeholders to support this work.

B. **Data collection:** To provide transportation options to potential users and those assisting them, the RTCC needs to gather and understand many things about those options. Service areas, user restrictions, cost, routes, schedules, capacities and other data sets will need to be collected and a database developed. The following providers will be contacted as a part of the data collection process:
   
   a. Fixed route providers: Arrowhead Transit, Duluth Transit Authority, Hibbing Transit, Big Woods Transit, Fond du Lac Transit, Leech Lake Transit and others
   
   b. Point to point providers: Taxis, Uber/Lyft, medical vans/transports, STRIDE, shuttles, veterans’ services, and others as identified
   
   c. Long distance providers: Private bus systems, shuttles
   
   d. Volunteer drivers (aging services, veterans, health care and others programs)
   
   e. 5310 recipients, churches, non-profits
   
   f. Medical facilities, group homes
   
   g. Others as identified

C. **Data analysis:** Data collected will be entered into a Geographic Information System (GIS) database and displayed spatially on an interactive, internet-based map (ESRI Story Map). The RTCC and stakeholders can review the map and ensure accuracy. Data points that do not lend themselves to an interactive map will be noted. The information will be analyzed to determine gaps, barriers, and opportunities regarding transportation in the Arrowhead Region.

D. **Public, potential user, and provider input:** The RTCC will conduct a process to garners information about how the current transportation system is or is not serving potential users. ARDC will gather the information through a process that is approved by the RTCC which may include rider and provider surveys, focus groups, demographic research and
analysis, human service provider interviews/surveys, existing Wilder Foundation information, and community discussions. The information gathered will be put into the GIS database.

E. **Coordination tool:** The RTCC will then create a coordination interface that can be used by human services providers, social workers, medical staff, job trainers/counselors, or others that work with disadvantaged populations to direct clients or people they contact to the best transportation options. Potential users could also access the coordination tool directly. The tool will be developed with a significant amount of guidance from existing tool kits, case studies, and pre-developed software options. The tool will continue to be improved and expanded in future years of the RTCC, with the intent that regional data can be incorporated into a statewide system if eventually developed.

**Transit Rider Training**  Potential rides frequently are uncertain about how to utilize transportation options, or experience fear, confusion or other barriers that affect their ability and willingness to access available options. A subcommittee will be created to focus on identifying barriers and developing resources to support transit rider training, including trainings, printed materials, communication strategies. Strategies and resources developed will be disseminated to regional partners through the RTCC.

**Tasks**

A. **Subcommittee development:** An RTCC subcommittee will be developed to support this work. The subcommittee will be chaired by a member of the Coordinating Council and will include Council members and other partners and stakeholders to support this work

B. **Identify barriers** to utilizing transit options

C. **Develop resources and strategies** to support transit rider training based upon known barriers. Explore strategies including printed materials, you-tube video tutorials, individual and group training, newsletter and social media tips and reminders.

D. **Provide initial transit rider training** through People First meetings (monthly) and Self-Advocacy Conference (Duluth, approximately 100 participants). Evaluate effectiveness of training and modify as needed to support replication.

E. **Share tools and trainings developed with transit providers.** Disseminate information gathered and training tools developed through the RTCC.
STATE LEVEL COORDINATION EMPHASIS AREAS

Volunteer Driver
The Arrowhead RTCC will convene volunteer driver programs across the regional to facilitate increased coordination and efficiency of volunteer driver programs. The RTCC will support the priorities identified in the May 2018 MCOTA report related, with particular emphasis on the MN2030 Service Coordination priorities which can be supported at the local level and include:

- Utilizing Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils
- Increasing county-to-county transportation
- Increasing knowledge of transportation services
- Sharing county resources
- Establishing a local community outreach/task force
- Increasing use of mobility management organizations
- Creating an organized, volunteer program database
- Removing barriers to services caused by county borders

Tasks

A. **Subcommittee development:** An RTCC subcommittee will be developed to support this work. The subcommittee will be chaired by a member of the Coordinating Council and will include Council members and other partners and stakeholders to support this work.

B. **Program identification/gaps analysis:** All programs offering volunteer drivers will be identified in conjunction with the Transportation Database Development initiative. Gaps will be identified. Because both subcommittees will potentially be communicating with Volunteer Driver programs, communication will be coordinated to ensure that messaging is clear and requests for data and participation are not duplicated. Each identified program will be invited to participate in subcommittee or work group activities and to attend sessions convened by the RTCC. Gaps will be documented through GIS.

C. **Explore shared software opportunities** (i.e. Rideshare and others): Exploration of software or web-based tools that could be implemented across all volunteer driver programs in the region, leveraging the RTCC and organizational resources to maximize resources.

D. **Explore information sharing opportunities**, rules and potential barriers to create a reference of rules related to sharing volunteer and client data.
E. **Develop financial strategies** (buy-down options) to enable the RTCC to assist organizations in securing and implementing selected software solutions to enable a common, shareable system across the region.

F. **Shared Practice development:** Document current practices in volunteer driver programs, identify best practices based upon post-transport surveys and follow up practices, create tools to identify rider/driver demographics, knowledge and abilities, medical issues and other skills/needs to support better matches between drivers and passengers. Develop training and volunteer driver manuals to align program practices across the region, creating program efficiency and streamlining processes.

G. **Volunteer Driver Program Policy Advocacy:** Define communication channels between Arrowhead RTCC and MCOTA and provide information on the impacts to local programs on mileage reimbursement, insurance and other policy issues.

H. **Improve accuracy of Volunteer Driver program information available in data clearinghouses:** Create an awareness campaign and strategies to support all transportation programs are listed on the Minnesota Board on Aging’s MinnesotaHelp and 211. Currently services are available but are not listed, creating challenges for those trying to identify available options.

**Vehicle Sharing**

The Arrowhead RTCC will begin to explore and gain knowledge around opportunities and barriers to vehicle sharing. An initial opportunity to explore this area has been identified, as local health care systems have encountered barriers in discharging older adults from the emergency department who have been transported to the facility by ambulance but who cannot return to facilities (assisted living, nursing homes) after hours. Because these individuals are medically stable, the ambulance service is not reimbursed for transport from the ER to their place of residence. However, the housing facilities do not have staff available (and potentially vehicles) to transport residents after hours. A vehicle sharing arrangement will be explored and, if feasible, piloted. Lessons learned and best practice developed through this initial opportunity can be shared and replicated within and outside of the region.

**Tasks**

A. **Subcommittee development:** An RTCC subcommittee will be developed to support this work. The subcommittee will be chaired by a member of the Coordinating Council and will include Council members and other partners and stakeholders to support this work.
B. Identify and explore critical issues related to vehicle sharing including insurance/liability, appropriate vehicle (type, required reporting, fuel, maintenance, operability issues), driver requirements (licensing, training, contracting), scheduling, hours of operations, service area and other critical components.

C. Explore existing information and resources around vehicle sharing (sample contracts, similar models in operation)

D. Develop policies, procedures, legal agreements/contracts to support limited-scope vehicle sharing to address identified need. Establish service delivery goals and parameters.

E. Pilot vehicle sharing for pre-determined time period, evaluate and adjust operations based upon partner and client feedback.

F. Share lessons learned and best practices. Expand scope and support replication as appropriate.
Organizational Resources for RTCC Implementation

Project Team
Contingent upon a Phase 2: RTTC Implementation funds awarded, the following ARDC staff will lead and support proposed RTCC implementation:

Andy Hubley, Director (.08 FTE)
Andy Hubley will oversee RTCC implementation. Hubley has over 20 years of planning experience in Northeast Minnesota. His planning experience includes land use, transportation, housing, recreation, strategic, and comprehensive planning. He is certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, ARDC’s Transportation Coordinator (1.0 FTE)
Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver will be the full-time coordinator of the RTCC. She has extensive experience in team building, multi-county coordination, public engagement, and program development. She will organize and staff the Coordinating Council, its subcommittees and work groups and will coordinate the overall process. She will be the main point of contact for the RTCC.

Charlie Moore, ARDC’s GIS Specialist (.19 FTE)
Charlie Moore is well-versed in ArcGIS Online application development and manages ARDC’s ArcGIS Online Account. He has created dozens of data based interactive maps for various projects. Charlie will manage the data development and analysis portion of this project.

ARDC fiscal staff (.05 FTE) will support grant administration and fiscal management.

Regional Transportation Coordinating Council and Other Stakeholders
For successful RTCC implementation, ARDC will need ongoing assistance and support from the Council’s members and other key stakeholders. These individuals and agencies will provide guidance, enrich ideas, and bring expertise and resources to implementation efforts. RTCC subcommittees and/or work groups comprised of Council members, stakeholders and other partners will be developed to plan and execute each of the proposed tasks in the 12-month implementation work plan.

Budget and local match

Personnel
Salary, fringe (34%) and indirect per cost allocation plan
for 1.70 FTE project staff (see prior page) \( $177,510 \)

**Direct Costs**

- **Mileage** \( 8,000 \)
- **Duplicating/printing** \( 1,200 \)
- **Meeting expenses (Council, subcommittee and workgroups)** \( 2,400 \)
- **Program expenses/outreach** \( 10,000 \)

Total Budget \( $199,110 \)

Matching funds will not be required for MnDOT Phase 2 RTCC Implementation funding awarded for the period 7/1/19-6/30/2020.

For subsequent years, it is anticipated that required matching funds will be provided by the ARDC levy, council member contributions, funding from participating counties and/or grant funding (if allowable as match).
Attachments

A: Preliminary Arrowhead RTCC Council Membership

B: Arrowhead RTCC Bylaws