

East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council Advisory Board Meeting

29 in attendance

Quick recap

This meeting was a transportation coordination meeting for the East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council, where participants introduced themselves and shared recent transportation experiences. Service providers discussed current challenges including high workers' compensation costs for independent contractors, vehicle maintenance issues, and the need for more accessible transportation options. Bonnie Buchanan and Michelle Lindorff from Jefferson Lines announced plans to add new stops in Mora and Cambridge in 2027, with buses likely scheduled to arrive around 3:50 PM in Mora and 4:30 PM in Cambridge when heading southbound, 2:50pm in Cambridge and 3:30pm in Mora when heading north. Robin Kaufman and Ashley Hudson from Bolton & Menk presented an overview of the new Connected and Automated Vehicles (CAV) pilot program, explaining that the project will focus on improving transportation access for residents in Kanabec and Mille Lacs counties through community engagement, advisory committee meetings, and development of recommendations by early next year.

Next steps

Amy Van Keuren

- Will discuss with Mille Lacs Health System management about potentially hosting or participating in a community meeting to support volunteer driver recruitment.

Andrew Small

- Work with Karen Onan and Michelle Thomas to plan a community outreach event in northern Mille Lacs County (e.g., Onamia area) this fall to recruit volunteer drivers for the Tri-Cap program and talk about CAV project with those in attendance.

Bonnie Buchanan

- Provide the detailed schedule for the new Jefferson Lines stops in Mora and Cambridge by next week and coordinate with local transit and city officials for stop locations. Michelle and Karen to schedule an introductory meeting for Michelle Lindorff and Bonnie Buchanan to meet Arrowhead and Timber Trails to assess and discuss appropriate bus stop locations for Jefferson Lines.

Karen Onan

- Explore options with Kevin Stobb for obtaining ADA-compliant vehicles through MnDOT grant programs (e.g., 5310) and keep an eye out for other potential funding sources.

Michelle Thomas

- Connect Terry Lovgren with Jocelyn Wahlberg from Trusted Transportation to discuss workers' compensation insurance options.

Terry Lovgren

- Follow up with Breena regarding her father's dialysis transportation needs, coordinating with the insurance.

Collaboration

- Karen Onan & Michelle Thomas: Schedule the kickoff meeting for the Connected and Automated Vehicles (CAV) pilot project with Robin Kaufman and Ashley Hudson, aiming for next week.
- Karen Onan & Michelle Thomas: Finalize and recruit members for the CAV Advisory Committee (6-12 people) focusing on Kanabec and Mille Lacs counties, specifically northern areas.
- Robin Kaufman & Ashley Hudson: Conduct community listening sessions, pop-up events, and a workshop for the CAV pilot project in late summer/fall, with recommendations report expected early next year.

Summary

Transportation Assistance and Challenges

Meeting participants discussed recent transportation assistance cases and operational challenges. Terry Lovgren from Attaboys shared a successful case where they helped connect someone with dialysis transportation needs and raised concerns about expensive workers' compensation insurance costing \$400 per driver per month. Kevin Stobb from Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Health and Human Services described their current operations, including efforts to combine dialysis appointments to reduce costs and vehicle wear, and noted they are experiencing increased late cancels and are seeking two wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Karen suggested exploring vehicles through MnDOT as a potential solution for the wheelchair van needs.

Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Discussion

Andrew Small, Tri-CAP, noted that volunteer drivers aged 55 and older can drive for Tri-CAP without paying taxes on mileage through the RSVP program. The discussion clarified that TriCap's service area in 7E does not cover Kanabec County.

Public Transit Updates Meeting

Meeting participants discussed updates on public transit services. Chris Fourness, Timber Trails, mentioned that a new smaller bus, a Transit T350 with a lift, is expected to arrive in September. Kathy Burski from Kanabec County Community Health and Timber Trails Public Transit shared updates about their aging fleet. Aaron Westling from the Great Plains Institute introduced himself as the Shared Mobility Program Manager working on transportation solutions for non-drivers. Kirsten Faurie from the City of Mora shared news about their newly implemented active transportation plan, including a new bike trail connecting a low-income neighborhood to the local grocery store, which was installed a week and a half prior.

Transportation Funding and Accessibility Challenges

Tim Schmutzer from PHASE/Industries discussed the recent legislative session's impact on transportation funding, noting that while they successfully prevented electronic visit verification requirements for waiver transportation, there were still limitations placed on reimbursement rates for fiscal intermediaries, including a cap on admin fees at 6%.

Community CAV Transportation Planning Pilot

The meeting introduced a pilot program for community-driven transportation planning focused on CAV (Connected and Automated Vehicles) and EAV (Electric Automated Vehicles) solutions. Ashley Hudson and Robin Cauffman from Bolton & Menk presented the project goals, which include improving transportation access to medical appointments, grocery stores, social services, and transit hubs while reducing reliance on volunteer drivers. The project will focus on specific populations and geographies within Kanabec and Mille Lacs counties, with plans to form an advisory committee of 6-12 people who will meet six times over six months. The team outlined an engagement timeline including community listening sessions, pop-up events, and a workshop, with the goal of finalizing recommendations by early next year. Ashley estimated that advisory board members would need about an hour per month for six months, with the first meeting potentially lasting 1.5 to 2 hours.