East Central Regional Transportation CC Recurring Advisory Board Meeting
September 10, 2026

Meeting summary

The ECRTC Advisory Board meeting focused on updates from transportation providers and MnDOT representatives. Providers shared current challenges and initiatives, including Andrew from TriCAP discussing volunteer driver recruitment and reimbursement rate changes, Michelle Lindorff from Jefferson Lines updating on new routes to Duluth with stops in Cambridge and Mora pending grant approval, and Terry Lovgren from Attaboys sharing a successful case where communication resolved an accessibility issue for a dialysis patient. Lynnell Simonson-Popowski from MnDOT announced new requirements for monthly reports to include rider stories and discussed the local coordination plan process, confirming a one-year timeline for completion. The group also discussed upcoming community listening sessions for the connected and automated vehicles project on October 6th in Mille Lacs and Kanabec counties, and Karen highlighted ongoing grant applications including the Mobility Access and Transportation Insecurities (MATI) grant and CCAM grant for operational expenses. Tim Schmutzer raised concerns about a new 6% administrative fee cap on transportation services in statute 256B that could significantly impact providers, particularly rural ones, though implementation details remain unclear pending DHS guidance.

Next steps

Andrew

- Reach out to partners for letters of support or memoranda of understanding for the CCAM grant application.
- Continue outreach and networking for the Volunteer Driver Program, and reach out to partners for potential partnerships related to the CCAM grant.

Karen

- Reach out to partners for letters of support for the MADI grant application and for more formalized partnership agreements for the CCAM grant.
- Share promotional materials for the October 6th listening sessions with the advisory board once finalized, and request assistance in promoting them.
- Research and follow up on the new DHS administrative fee statute (6% cap) and provide an update at the next ECRTCC Advisory Board meeting on November 12th.
- Send out the meeting notes to attendees for review and comment.

- Follow up with Karol (Arrowhead Transit) to get contact information for Holly regarding the Volunteer Driver Program.

Michelle Thomas

- Share finalized promotional materials (flyers, social media, news release) for the October 6th listening sessions with the advisory board once approved.

Collaboration

- All attendees: Save the chat for contact information and consider providing testimonials or stories for MnDOT's monthly reporting requirement.
- Karen, Andrew, Amy: Discuss volunteer driver recruitment and outreach at their upcoming meeting.

Summary

ERCRTC Advisory Board Updates

The meeting began with introductions for the ECRTCC Advisory Board members, including several new participants. Karen requested that everyone share their contact information in the chat for future reference. The meeting focused on gathering updates from transportation providers, with Andrew Small from TriCAP being asked to report on new volunteer drivers in Mille Lacs County and the current volunteer driver reimbursement amount.

Volunteer Driver Program Updates

The meeting covered updates on volunteer driver programs and transportation services. Andrew reported that while no new volunteers were recruited, the increased reimbursement limit from $600 to $2,000 has helped retain current drivers and made them less anxious about fuel costs. He also mentioned implementing a Live Well at Home grant targeting older adults and adding a ride inquiry feature to their website. Michelle from Jefferson Lines provided an update on their 5311 grant application, noting they added new stops in Mora and Cambridge, with results expected on the 18th and potential implementation by January. The group discussed the need for further conversation about north-south transportation routes, particularly along highways 35 and 65, with plans to continue this discussion in a future meeting.

Volunteer Driver Program Updates

Karen discussed contact information for the Volunteer Driver Program, with Karol Strube confirming that Holly Bachschneider should be the point of contact. Terry provided an

update on Attaboys Transit's operations, highlighting challenges with UCARE insurance transitioning to Medica and sharing a successful case where they were able to transport a wheelchair user to dialysis after finding a simple solution. Karen praised Terry's work and mentioned collaborative efforts with Arrowhead and Transit Link to arrange transportation for someone in our southeastern area needing to get into the northeastern t.c. suburbs, though the ride didn't ultimately happen due to communication issues from the requestors.

AI Health Plan Transition Concerns

The group discussed concerns about health plans transitioning from human to AI coordination for care. Terry shared that her daughter works for UnitedHealthcare and reported employee concerns about AI not meeting expectations, not able to know what questions to ask due to personal/human conversation communication. Karen mentioned they would raise this topic at an upcoming meeting with Mille Lacs County insurance providers. The discussion highlighted long wait times for insurance support, with Amy and Terry both describing waiting 40 minutes or more on hold, and Terry noted that providers and patients share the same hold queue despite different access buttons.

MnDOT Program Updates and Initiatives

Lynnell provided updates on MnDOT initiatives, including a new requirement for monthly rider stories in reports to highlight the impact of mobility management programs in rural areas. She also discussed the local coordination plan, confirming that communities will have a year to complete the plan rather than six months. Karen and Michelle shared updates on the community-driven connected and automated vehicles project, including upcoming listening sessions in Mille Lacs and Kanabec counties on October 6th, and applications for the Mobility Access and Transportation Insecurities Grant and CCAM grant. Tim Schmutzer raised concerns about a new 6% administrative fee cap on transportation services in state statute, which may significantly impact providers, particularly in rural areas.

Attendees: Karen Onan (ECRDC), Michelle Thomas (ECRDC), Amy Van Keuren (MLHealth System), Rick Olseen (ECRDC Board Member), Rebecca Perrotti (CMJTS), Natalie Koerber (ECRDC), Nicki Klanderud (Allina Health), Emily Carpenter (MHealth Fairview), Tim Schmutzer (PHASE/Industries), Michelle Lindorff (Jefferson Lines), Karol Strube (Arrowhead Transit), Andrew Small (Tri-CAP Volunteer Driver Program, Natalie Matthewson (CMCOA), SaraJTreiber (ECRDC Board Member/Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures), Lynnell Popowski

(MnDOT), Terry Lovgren (Attaboys Transit), Chris Fourness (Timber Trails Transit), Ryan Palmer (Chisago County HHS)