

Regional Transportation Coordinating Council Planning Project Management Team

Minutes

Meeting 4 of 5

Tuesday, April 9, 2019

2-4 p.m.

Great River Regional Library

Attendees

- Ahmed Mohidin, Career Solutions.
- Tom Gottfried, MnDOT/ MnDHS.
- Tom Cruikshank, WSB.
- Vicki Johnson, Saint Cloud APO.
- Brian Gibson, Saint Cloud APO.
- Mary Jo Cobb, Sherburne County.
- Lisa Parteh, Functional Industries.
- Ben Byker Central Minnesota Council of Aging.
- Lee Nichuls, WSB.
- George Fiedler, Benton County Veteran Services Office.
- Melanie Erickson, Morrison County.
- Scott Mareck, WSB.
- Bob Fix, Functional Industries.
- Teri Diercks, Functional Industries.
- Anna Bohanon, Wright County.
- Doug Diedrichsen, Saint Cloud Metro Bus.
- Gary Ludwig, Trailblazer Transit.
- Nikki Juntunen, Reach Up, Inc.
- Katie Hanson, Benton County.
- Terry Markfort, Care Cab.

Meeting was called to order at 2 p.m. by Brian Gibson and Tom Cruikshank.

Mr. Gibson stated the purpose of the meeting was to review the draft Operational Implementation Plan (OIP). Mr. Gibson stated the deadline to submit the final OIP was June 30, 2019. He stated the plan for the meeting was to clarify various concerns found in the draft OIP and include that feedback before submitting the final version to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT's) Office of Transit and Active Transportation (OTAT). Mr. Gibson stated he and Mr. Cruikshank were doing County Board presentations to inform members about the draft document. He presented the draft OIP document to meeting attendees using the similar format.

Presentation on the draft RTCC OIP

Mr. Gibson provided information on the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC). This included the following information:

- *What is an RTCC?* This slide discussed the fact there are a lot of providers with various buses and other vehicles within the area and stated that it was determined there was a large number of rides and needs going unmet. The slide also posed the question about how can people use the resources that are currently out there to fill the unmet need.
- *Who is at the table?* This slide showcased a partial list of the various stakeholders that have been participating – either through the Project Management Team (PMT) or through other formal and informal means – in the process. Mr. Gibson stated the feedback and insight that has been received by those stakeholders has been appreciated.
- *Not a new idea.* This slide discussed other RTCC type models within Minnesota (such as the effort in Dakota County and the SmartLink program in Scott and Carver counties) and across the nation (Mountain Ride in Colorado and the program in Ohio's Miami Valley). Mr. Gibson said these RTCC-style models address equity by

improving transportation for everyone to access among other items education, jobs, and healthcare services.

- *The ask.* This slide asked counties for a one (1) year commitment to participate on the to-be-developed RTCC board. Mr. Gibson said this commitment was important in order for the RTCC to prove its value to the counties. He stated that once the RTCC was established he believed it would be easier to go back to the counties to ask for additional funding to sustain the organization. Of note, Mr. Gibson said the first year of funding would be fully covered by MnDOT. Mr. Gibson said six (6) counties were approached to be members of the RTCC. This was based upon travel shed data collected by the APO in conjunction with WSB. He stated several of the counties that potentially would be participating in RTCC could sit on other RTCC boards throughout the state.
- *How much?* WSB and the APO had developed a draft budget for the cost of implementing the RTCC. Mr. Gibson stated WSB and the APO had approached this budget conservatively by stating the ultimate goal would be to have one (1) person on staff. However, Mr. Gibson stated, in discussion with the PMT, the stakeholders involved felt the RTCC needed to show value right away and had increased the staffing recommendations from one (1) to three (3).
 - Mr. Gibson said the APO Policy Board has preliminary agreed to act as the host agency for the RTCC (officially named Central Minnesota Transportation Council or CMTC). This hosting arrangement would allow the CMTC to share overhead costs. CMTC staff would not be APO staff and will report to a separate board.
 - Mr. Gibson stated he believed going forward ultimately MnDOT would contribute 80 percent of funding to sustain RTCCs across the state, meaning the remaining 20 percent would have to come from a local match. Mr. Gibson presented a proposed sample budget of \$300,000 to sustain the organization with funding sources primarily driven by the counties. The proposed budget showed a graphic which allocated fees to the counties based on population. The remaining funding would come from dues paying members such as providers and independent sources). Mr. Gibson said in this model the counties should be approached for funding only as a last resort.
 - Mr. Gibson said it would be responsibility of the CMTC's Mobility Manager to find other funding sources such as grants to sustain the organization.
 - An independent board comprised of investing members and area counties would govern the CMTC. Mr. Gibson said the CMTC's first year would primarily focus on a lot of administrative work.
- *Hosting.* Mr. Gibson said the APO's Policy Board is likely to agree to host the CMTC. He said he was unclear as to where the benefits package for the CMTC staff members would come from. Mr. Gibson said as the APO's Executive Director, he may be able to provide some support to the CMTC staff in an advisory role.
 - Mr. Gibson said the APO could act as the fiscal agent for the CMTC. This would include accepting the grant on behalf of the CMTC and providing insurance to MnDOT against waste. Mr. Gibson said this role would be strictly oversight as APO staff would not be providing guidance to the CMTC on how to allocate funding.
- *Summary.* The presentation concluded with the one year commitment ask and discussed the benefits of an RTCC as it pertained to economic development and providing transportation access to everyone.

Discussion

Mr. Cruikshank opened the floor to discussion from the PMT and stakeholder group.

Mr. Byker asked about the responses from the counties to the presentation.

Mr. Gibson and Mr. Cruikshank had spoken with Wright County board members. He said one (1) commissioner had said no to the RTCC.

Ms. Bohanon had asked which commissioner said no.

Mr. Cruikshank had stated Commissioner Darek Vetsch. Mr. Cruikshank said Mr. Gibson and he had spent over an hour with the Wright County Board of Commissioners. He said there was some interest, but concerns about the RTCC. Mr. Cruikshank said he and Mr. Gibson had been in the process of visiting with each of the six (6) counties and the commissioners for those counties. He said in his experience there were different levels of interest among the six (6) counties. Mr. Cruikshank said it had inspired several conversations. Mr. Cruikshank said the RTCC was not an easy project to sell, but it had helped knowing the state was providing funding for the first year. He also stated the importance of having the counties at the table.

Mr. Cruikshank said at the three (3) previous meetings with the PMT there was a feeling among PMT members that it was important for the counties to be part of the development of the RTCC considering the amount of investment counties were making in public transit and non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT). Mr. Cruikshank said when presenting at the board level, some commissioners did not feel the same way. Concerns were raised by commissioners that the state has a history of promising 100 percent funding then asking for counties to assuming funding responsibilities for various programs. Mr. Cruikshank said the funding situation was unknown after year two (2). Mr. Cruikshank said if the state wants the RTCC effort to be successful, he hopes funding for the RTCCs will continue at the 80 percent level (80 percent state/20 percent local) so there is not so much of a burden on securing funding at the local level.

Mr. Cruikshank said there were a lot of questions from county commissioners on how the RTCC would interface with current transit providers. In particular, this was brought up surrounding ride-broker MTM. Mr. Cruikshank said some counties have a good working relationship with MTM, others have a rocky relationship. Mr. Cruikshank said county commissioners were curious if RTCCs would be able to fill the role of MTM. Mr. Cruikshank said that was a possibility, but not practical on day one (1). Mr. Cruikshank said the state's goal for RTCCs was to develop a one-call/one-click center. He stated he had the sense the state was willing to make the investment in technology to achieve this.

Mr. Gibson said this does not mean that individual RTCCs would set up a one-call/one-click center. He said this could be achieved through another provider. Private market could also be a solution to this. He stated the importance of the CMTC Board and staff to gather information on this.

Mr. Markfort asked how private providers would fit in to the RTCC. He stated his assumptions that private providers would be pretty big players. He also stated a lot of work would have to be done. Mr. Markfort brought up insurance payments and medical assistance. He was curious as to if the RTCC would handle this. He was also wondering the logistics of how an RTCC would interact with provides – for example would the RTCC broker rides?

Mr. Cruikshank said he had similar conversations with MTM about a month prior. He said private providers are already providing valuable transportation and would be part of the RTCC formula and could stand to gain additional trips.

Mr. Cruikshank said he could see insurance carriers as potential partners. He also stated the RTCC could become a ride broker or even assuming medical billing. However, that would not be the case starting on day one (1) and would have to be determined by the CMTC board. He said it would be possible for the CMTC to contract with Care Transportation or another dispatching center.

Mr. Markfort said MTM is currently providing service in Stearns, Benton, Sherburne, Wright, and Mille Lacs counties. He hoped that the RTCC could provide broker services or would evolve to do so on the lines of what happens in the Twin Cities metro.

Mr. Cruikshank said the main goal right now is to focus on the OIP to ensure the opportunity to move into the Phase II grant. Mr. Cruikshank said once the RTCC is up and running the stakeholder group can provide guidance on what they would like to see done. This is why, Mr. Cruikshank said, having stakeholders, especially the counties, at the table guiding the process is so important.

Ms. Bohanon stated that Mr. Gibson addressed economic development in the presentation. She asked if there was any data to prove that point. Ms. Bohanon stated that it would be easier to sell the RTCC to the counties if a return on investment could be proven. Specifically, she asked for information related to where economic development was happening.

Mr. Cruikshank said his view of economic development was not just in medical transportation. He said trips are needed for people to get to schools, work, and age in place. He said there were gaps identified and that it was necessary to allow the RTCC to find solutions for those gaps. He said the RTCC could work with employers on transportation solutions if those employers need to expand. Mr. Cruikshank said that unless people are riding Metro Bus, Tri-CAP, or Trailblazer there are very few people using other transit options to go to work. He said this could be an area where working with private providers would be an option. He said this could also be an option for the state to invest in additional resources for public providers.

Ms. Bohanon asked again if actual data exists. She also inquired if there was data from other places that have implemented a similar RTCC model. She asked if those places had seen any additional changes.

Mr. Gottfried said the state can do the research. He provided an example of the Green Line and Blue Line construction in the Twin Cities costing billions to develop but also leading to billions in economic development.

Mr. Gottfried said in the late 1990s there was an in-depth analysis done on rural transit. He stated that study illustrated the importance of rural transit. Mr. Gottfried said there is also national data that supports this. He stated that at the county level transit can be more efficient and lead to better economic development with the aid of an RTCC.

Mr. Gibson provided the example of someone residing in rural Wright County. If transportation was not a barrier, Mr. Gibson said this person could age in place and would

be able to participate in the local economy by spending money at various shops and businesses.

Mr. Byker stated that if we can pay for transportation it can provide more options for people. But it can also pose more challenges as well.

Ms. Bohanon brought up one (1) challenge being related to food deserts. She said this issue is an important one in Wright County.

Mr. Cruikshank provided the example of northern Mille Lacs County. He said this area is a food desert with a lot of the population being low-income and transit dependent. He said there is also a large crime rate among that area. Mr. Cruikshank met with the county and was told this was something the county was paying attention to. He said the key focus areas for the county was how quickly can people respond to this issue. Mr. Cruikshank said this issue was also Tri-CAP's radar. He said that through visiting each county he has learned that all of them have different examples where transportation access is an issue and the fact there is a need to come up with solutions.

Ms. Bohanon asked if the RTCC's PMT has considered comprehensive plans, more specifically the transportation section of those plans.

Mr. Gottfried said if they look at older comprehensive plans there is no reference to human transportation, at least not like there is when it comes to cars or highways. He said the RTCC's bring human transportation into focus and that county engineers need to be looking on ways to include this.

Review of the draft OIP

Mr. Cruikshank began reviewing the draft OIP. This included the following:

- A presentation on the goals and objectives.
- Discussion on the relation of those goals and objectives to those found in the 2017 Local Human Services plan.
- A discussion on the staffing and geographic region of the RTCC.
 - It was acknowledged that Morrison and Mille Lacs counties would be participating in other RTCCs as well (Region 5 and Region 7E respectively).

Mr. Cruikshank said he and Mr. Gibson had been meeting with each county board and doing informational workshops with commissioners.

Ms. Parteh said she believes the workshop conversations would have gone further if Mr. Cruikshank and Mr. Gibson would have lead off with discussing the objectives of the RTCC. She said Mr. Cruikshank and Mr. Gibson said leading off with the costs was not the best strategy. She suggested approaching the board with the goals and objectives first. She said she felt commissioners would want to hear how an RTCC would benefit the people it would serve.

Mr. Cruikshank said the reason they had brought up the finances first was because originally the RTCC had to provide a budget and a way to make up the local match.

Ms. Parteh said the presentation to the counties could be strengthened by discussing the substance first. Once people understood the point they would understand the ask for funds.

Mr. Byker asked when Phase I of this grant would end and when would Phase II begin.

Mr. Gibson said Phase I would end June 30. He stated the Phase II solicitation was currently out and due Friday. He said the state did that so there would not be a funding gap.

Mr. Markfort said when it comes to funding he recommends that to have a voting role on the RTCC the organization must be a financial investor.

Mr. Cruikshank said that point was discussed in the original draft of the OIP. He said when it was discovered that Phase II was going to fully cover the costs and would not require a financial investment up front Mr. Cruikshank still thought it important to bring up the RTCC to the counties to make sure representatives from the counties were at the table. There was discussion about how funding would be divided up for the counties – if it would be proportional to the population – and about the representation. Mr. Cruikshank also said there was also discussion if providers would also get a seat. He said more discussion is needed to vet all of these issues. He said this decision would rest with the CMTC board, but for sure, Mr. Cruikshank said the state would like to see the counties have a seat on the board.

Ms. Bohanon brought up equity. She said basing the funding scheme on population would not be equitable, especially since a lot of the smaller counties in population are much more rural. She said it is something to be mindful of.

Mr. Cruikshank discussed the Miami Valley RTCC in Ohio had a larger board structure with over fifteen (15) members. He said there were different categories of membership in that group. He said it could be decided amongst the stakeholders who would get a seat – for example if representatives from all six (6) counties would get a seat or would there be one (1) county representative speaking on behalf of all the counties.

Mr. Gibson said there could be a rotation system developed. Mr. Cruikshank agreed and said other strategies could be brought to the table as well.

Mr. Fiedler stated since other organizations like RTCCs exist he felt it would be beneficial to incorporate some of these tangible examples into the presentations to the county.

Ms. Parteh agreed. She said that counties are less likely to invest significant money on a hope that the organization will work. She said she believes county commissioners would want to know that this was reasonable and would like to see results.

Ms. Cobb said she believes this is also something the stakeholders present need to do. She said that the stakeholders present need to be generating some enthusiasm for the RTCC. Ms. Cobb noted this is a challenge and a big task to do.

Mr. Gottfried stated if the task was easy it would have already been done. He stated the issues that are being discussed have been talked about for the past thirty (30) years. He said people have recognized that this problem has gotten worse. Mr. Gottfried said his job is to help facilitate the existence of RTCCs. He said it is the stakeholders' job to illustrate where the value of the RTCC is. Mr. Gottfried said there is no public transit service that runs 24/7 in outstate Minnesota. He also stated that for any wide range of programs offered by the county or state, transportation access always ranks in the top three (3) for problems. He said MnDOT has put money down to invest in these RTCCs and it will not cost anyone money on the local level. Mr. Gottfried said MnDOT is not confused on the length or the price tag associated with doing this project.

Mr. Gottfried said the challenge is to find the cheapest and most efficient way to provide transportation. He stated that the reason why MnDOT and MnDHS want the RTCCs to exist is because transportation is local. Mr. Gottfried asked the stakeholders if there were DHS/DOT issues that were getting in the way of effective transportation. He stated the RTCC will provide opportunities for various organizations. He said stakeholders are already paying the local price tag for a lack of coordinated transportation. Mr. Gottfried said this would be evident with the development of the RTCC.

Mr. Gottfried said Minnesota has the most robust rural transit system in the country and the RTCC would take that to the next level. He said his role is to cheer the RTCC stakeholders on and help get counties to understand the importance of this organization.

Mr. Byker said even at this point the concept of an RTCC is so abstract. He said it has gotten better since the first stakeholder meeting. He asked if there were metrics available to measure the success going forward.

Mr. Gottfried said DHS could not provide the total tab for transportation expenses. He estimates that about \$25 million is spent on transportation for one program. DHS runs several programs.

Mr. Gibson acknowledged Ms. Cobb's point that the RTCC effort is not WSB's or the APO's. He said the RTCC effort is ultimately the stakeholders and it is up to them to decide what the RTCC should be.

Mr. Fiedler said the concept was a good one. He said there would be a problem convincing board members of this especially given the fact that he said boards are super conservative. Mr. Fiedler said having tangible benefits would be important to show them.

Mr. Markfort said it would be good to have good stories to illustrate this point similar to the efforts WACOSA used down in the Twin Cities metro. He said there is social value to getting people out working or to events.

Ms. Bohanon said stories tend to sit well with decision makers.

Mr. Cruikshank said one of the requirements of the grant is to obtain a resolution of support from the counties. This resolution is a key deliverable of the project. He said he hopes the conversations with the counties will be fruitful.

Mr. Gibson said at this point he and Mr. Cruikshank are asking for a one (1) year commitment free of cost to help build the organization to whatever it needs to be. He said they are not asking for a lifelong commitment. Mr. Gibson said that if after one (1) year the counties do not like the RTCC, the counties still have the option to say no.

Ms. Erickson said she has done children services for twenty-five (25) years and has seen out of home placement costs increase. She said it is the expectation of the counties to provide transportation services. Ms. Erickson said social workers are spending time arranging and calling for rides. She said this is a reasonable effort and is being paid for with county tax dollars.

Mr. Cruikshank said the issue Ms. Erickson described means that she and other social workers are being forced into the transportation industry.

Ms. Erickson agreed. She said she would like to see social workers in the home rather than trying to broker rides.

Mr. Byker said those are the costs he was referring to.

Mr. Gottfried said Functional Industries would have a lot of those similar stories. He said these stories are the documentation. He said the costs associated with these issues are real. He said the RTCC could have accomplished the same thing as the counties, but the difference would be that it would be RTCC staff time coordinating this instead of county social worker time. Mr. Gottfried said instead of pulling in cost information from across the country, the focus should be on the cost to Minnesotans.

Mr. Fiedler disagreed.

Mr. Gottfried stated the stakeholders already have examples and county commissioners would be much more impressed by these local examples than ones on the national scale.

Ms. Hanson said she had more stories to tell from her work.

Mr. Mohidin stated there was no question that transportation was a real issue. He said at Career Solutions it would be easy to implement a program, but the main issue is transportation for program participants. He provided an example about a summer youth program and the difficulties of getting people there to participate due to a lack of transportation. He said the stakeholders have stories and if they could compile them it could help sell the RTCC to commissioners.

Ms. Erickson agreed.

Mr. Gibson said he liked the incorporation of stories. He said he will try to include stories in the presentations to the counties. Mr. Gibson said he has three (3) more board workshops scheduled and will be asking for resolutions of support from the counties in May. He also stated for the Phase II implementation grant that what is currently in there is that the counties would get a seat on the board. Mr. Gibson stated one of the first things that needs to be done with the RTCC is to write up a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA).

Ms. Cobb provided an example of the four (4) county mental health group between Stearns, Benton, Sherburne, and Wright counties. She said with that group the board had each of the counties represented and a large provider/client advisory committee.

Mr. Gibson said the structure proposed in the Phase II grant application may not be the long term solution. He said what he wanted to do was to call all the stakeholders present individually to see if they would be able to attend either the county commissioner workshops or the board meetings to help make the case for the RTCC.

Mr. Gibson said there would also be chance for public input on this process.

Ms. Cobb said she believes that transportation does not have a home in any county department – DHS, veterans, public works. She feels that in order to make this work there needs to be a champion.

Mr. Cruikshank said in the past DHS representatives have been the ones present at the meetings.

Mr. Fiedler said DHS has the most customers that would need transportation so he felt it was the logical home for this.

Ms. Bohanon asked what definition was being used for transportation. She asked if active transportation was considered.

Mr. Cruikshank said active transportation has not been addressed. He said a potential solution could be found with Safe Routes to School. He said school districts have not been approached to work with the RTCCs.

Mr. Ludwig said approaching schools might be a good idea. He said approximately 30 percent of trips on Trailblazer Transit are school related.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Vicki Johnson, Saint Cloud APO.