

**Monadnock Regional Coordinating Council
For Community Transportation**

Minutes

November 21, 2023

Present: Frank Dobisky, Chair, *Thomas Transportation*; Charlie Pratt, Vice Chair, *Home Healthcare, Hospice and Community Services (HCS)*; Erica Alusic-Bingham, *Southern New Hampshire Services (SNHS)*; Ellen Avery, *Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC)*; Alberta Bronson, *The Lukas Community (TLC)*; Mary Jensen, *Keene Senior Center (KSC)*; Sally Malay, *Keene Housing Kids Collaborative (KHKC)*; David Meader, *Citizen Member*; Lisa Steadman, *Liberty Mutual (LM)*.

SWRPC Staff Present: Terry Johnson, *Senior Project Manager*; Jason Cooper, *Planner*.

Guests: Teri Palmer, *NH Statewide Mobility Manager*.

I. Welcome

Chair Dobisky called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. and introductions were made.

II. Approval of October 17, 2023 Minutes

Motion: To approve the minutes of October 17, 2023.

Motion by Lisa Steadman, seconded by Ellen Avery. Approved by unanimous vote.

III. Treasurer's Report

In the absence of Cheshire County representatives, Terry Johnson presented the September 2023 financial reports. He reported that the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) report shows split expense amounts for HCS and CVTC Purchase of Service (POS) line items, representing actual POS expenses and related indirect amounts.

IV. Partner Updates

Ellen Avery reported on a new IRS rule regarding mileage reimbursement which impacts volunteer drivers. Effective 2023, volunteer drivers will be taxed on mileage reimbursement amounts exceeding \$600. She indicated that half of CVTC's drivers will be receiving 1099s because of this new rule. This could cause drivers to limit the number of rides they provide. Teri Palmer confirmed that this could be an issue and described advocacy measures that she is working on for which the MRCC may be able to play a role.

Charlie Pratt reported that HCS has been soliciting public input on their bus routes. As a result of input received, a change to the routes and schedules are being developed. It will include new stops at Kohl's Plaza where Aldi's grocery store is located, Monadnock Family Services behind Kohl's Plaza, and the new Cheshire Medical Center (CMC) clinic on Maple Avenue. He highlighted some of the challenges involved in accommodating these changes including making it difficult for drivers to maintain their one-hour loop schedules. For example, the entrance to the CMC clinic is at the back of the building which requires more time to navigate in and out of traffic on the main route. Both Terry Johnson and David Meader indicated the value of the public input process. They attended a meeting of the HCS Customer Service Committee at which transit users shared their experiences and provided keen insights into the route changes.

Lisa Steadman shared updates regarding personal insurance options for individuals who drive for private services such as Uber and that she thinks this may help take the burden off transportation providers. She https://orgswrpc.sharepoint.com/sites/SWRPCFileShare/Shared%20Documents/Data/Transportation/UPWP%202024-2025/500_TechAssistance/505_RCC/Meetings/MRCC/MRCC%202023-11-21/MRCC%20Minutes%202023-11-21%20draft.docx

also discussed the current status of Monadnock Regional School District's transportation providers. They are still contracting with First Student for school buses and sometimes utilize Thomas Transportation's smaller vehicles when they have capacity.

Teri Palmer shared discussion from the New Hampshire Municipal Association annual meeting related to the need to consider transportation access when creating new housing developments. Terry Johnson cited a local example where Keene Housing has discussed with HCS extending transit service to the future Keene Housing Roosevelt Apartments affordable housing development on Washington Street.

Terry Johnson mentioned that SWRPC submitted a Letter of Intent for a U. S. Department of Transportation Thriving Communities grant. The grant would provide technical assistance and capacity building support for identifying and securing funding for project delivery for transportation projects that have already been planned and scoped. Such support would assist with implementing the microtransit study framework, which includes transit zones, fare structures, cost estimates, and phasing recommendations. The next step, which is currently underway, is collaborating with community partners to identify the most appropriate entity to operate the service. Funding will be needed to support both the launch and ongoing operations of the service.

Ellen Avery provided an update on the Peterborough-based food delivery business, SweenEats, owned by Ed Sweeney. He also operates a new taxi service called SweenFleetz Taxi Service. Ellen Avery recommended inviting Ed Sweeney to join the MRCC and to be involved in future collaborative efforts in general. Sally Malay added that the Hannah Grimes Center (HGC) might be able to support his business. Terry Johnson said the business may be a candidate for the HGC microenterprise program. Ellen Avery said she will reach out to Ed Sweeney.

V. MRCC Coordinated Plan Update

Terry Johnson provided an overview of SWRPC efforts to update the MRCC Coordinated Community Transportation Plan for the Monadnock Region (Coordinated Plan). He said the purpose of today's discussion is to solicit the MRCC's input on project priorities to be addressed during the next five years. He presented updated data on transit dependent populations that will be included in the Coordinated Plan to set the stage for discussion. Data was presented in the following categories: households without vehicles, households with fewer vehicles than occupants, household poverty, population over 65, population under 14, and people with disabilities. The data presentation stimulated discussion on where transit dependent populations live in relation to the region's distribution of social services programs, affordable housing developments, public transportation, and more.

Terry Johnson shifted the group's attention to a project priorities worksheet that was distributed at the beginning of the meeting. He asked members to take 10 minutes to review the priorities and assign a ranking for each on the worksheet based on what they see as important for the MRCC to focus on. He asked them to consider the potential impact and feasibility of each priority in their rankings. He also instructed the group that the worksheet has spaces for listing additional project ideas.

Terry Johnson shared a story to illustrate that unmet need cannot be documented in cases where people who have tried to use public transportation, have given up because the system does not meet their needs. He described a Keene resident who testified at a 2023 Keene GACIT hearing who falls into this category. The individual has a medical condition, is unable to drive and relies on a co-worker for transportation to work. The individual is also unable to secure convenient public transportation to visit family on the New Hampshire Seacoast and in Londonderry. Terry Johnson shared this story to remind the group to consider additional ridership groups that are not currently being served.

Lisa Steadman asked a question about how Section 5310 funding is distributed. Terry Johnson replied that the funding flows from the Federal Transit Administration through the NHDOT to the transportation

providers which currently include HCS, CVTC and KSC. He said the funding primarily supports transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Erica Alusic-Bingham asked for a definition of unmet need. Terry Johnson responded that unmet need refers to ride requests to providers that are unable to be provided, typically due to driver unavailability. Ellen Avery added that much of the unmet need occurs from same-day requests as well as riders that live outside the region.

Ellen Avery suggested that the project priority for providing services to riders experiencing loneliness and social isolation should be clarified. Teri Palmer illustrated how needs can be difficult to detect, are very individualized, and should not be assumed. There was discussion about how this priority could be focused on specific at-need groups that experience social isolation.

Erica Alusic-Bingham expressed interest in seeing a vehicle repair program for low-income individuals included as an MRCC priority. She suggested a related program to provide small loans to people to purchase cars in cases where their vehicles would be too costly to repair. She said some individuals have no option other than driving cars in need of repairs and the complications that arise with passing inspections, as well as for homeless individuals living out of their vehicles.

Chair Dobisky and Ellen Avery voiced their support for more attention, funding, and service brought to the Eastern Monadnock region towns. Monadnock Community Hospital should be brought to the table to support these services. Terry Johnson shared that SWRPC is planning to convene a Task Force for the Transit Operating Model project which will bring stakeholders to the table on this topic and others.

Sally Malay discussed the challenges involved with the priority project to develop and implement a framework to use under-utilized vehicles and drivers. She said it would be challenging to establish a system across multiple organizations and entities to operate this approach.

Ellen Avery shared the need for more funding to advertise transit services. Advertising purchases can be very expensive. She would like to see a program to create a pool of funds for advertising the services of the transportation network on a regional level.

Lisa Steadman shared her stance that better meeting unmet demand is the most important project priority.

Terry Johnson wrapped-up the discussion by stating that the input from today's meeting and the project priority worksheets will be reviewed, analyzed and integrated into the draft of the Coordinated Plan.

VI. Mobility Manager Update

Deferred due to lack of time.

VII. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for December 19, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

VIII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 10:31 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jason Cooper, Planner