

**Monadnock Regional Coordinating Council
For Community Transportation**

Minutes

November 19, 2024

Present: Frank Dobisky, Chair, *Thomas Transportation*; Jennifer Robinson, Treasurer, *Cheshire County*; Erika Alusic-Bingham, *Community Action Partnership of Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties (CAP)*; Sally Malay, *Keene Housing Kids Collaborative (KHKC)*; David Meader, *Citizen Member*; Lisa Steadman, *ABLE NH*; Alison Welsh (remote), *Cheshire County*.

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

Guests: Trisha Cheever, *Town of Peterborough*; Terry Clark, *Cheshire County*; Allan Gillis, *Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC)*; Randy Schoonmaker, *Southeast Vermont Transit*.

I. Welcome

Chair Dobisky called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. and introductions were made.

II. Microtransit Presentation

Randy Schoonmaker introduced Southeast Vermont Transit, also known as the MOOVer. He shared that this year, the agency is operating with an \$8.9 million-dollar operating budget and provides about 500,000 rides annually. The MOOVer operates microtransit in two regions (Windsor and Brattleboro, Vermont), and the agency is currently planning for deployment in a third region. Randy explained that microtransit operates similarly to Uber or other on-demand transit services which provide door-to-door service rather than following a fixed route. Microtransit requires reservations and attempts to group riders together in one vehicle when their destination is similar. Microtransit is more expensive on a per-ride basis compared to fixed route transit and requires that riders reserve their rides online or through the phone.

Randy Schoonmaker explained that microtransit service can be used to achieve different goals. In Windsor, microtransit is the sole method of public transit available for the town and it is mainly used to serve personal trips, such as for medical appointments or grocery shopping. In Brattleboro, where there is significant heavy industry with round-the-clock shifts, the microtransit service is critical to provide service for car-less individuals that need transportation to and from work in the evenings. It is a complementary piece of the existing fixed route service which operates during the day.

The MOOVer has found there are many successes and challenges with microtransit service. Some successes include very active public support and input, grassroots marketing, good software operation, and good media coverage. Challenges include convincing riders to take the leap and try their first ride, increasing ridership from its current level, identifying local match funding, and demonstrating local investment to justify state, federal, and private funding for longer-term sustained support.

Randy Schoonmaker provided some suggestions for the Next Generation Transit project in the Monadnock Region. He identified that running microtransit over too large an area can be prohibitively expensive and suggested providing more fixed route options within the region that could connect to microtransit service in Greater Keene. He explained that running a microtransit service over a larger region can also result in unacceptable wait times for customers. Randy additionally suggested that one way to mitigate existing costs and to simplify existing services is to “braid” the Friendly Bus, Para Express, and Non-Medical Emergency Transportation (NEMT) into one call center, one fleet, and one staff. He explained that this would be a significant leap but would help streamline service and increase efficiency.

Randy Schoonmaker identified that, while the county governance model may be what makes the most sense on paper for the Monadnock Region, he suggested having local representation on the Board or advisory committee to gather public support and build their sense of input and ownership. Additionally, Randy emphasized that the Region has a unique opportunity to create a strong image and brand for this new service, which can help create excitement for new riders.

Terry Johnson asked Randy Schoonmaker whether the MOOVer would be interested in expanding microtransit services across the border into the Monadnock Region. Randy responded that the organization would be interested but would also be happy to support the initiative in any way possible. Terry asked how the MOOVer was able to build a strong support network. Randy explained that they followed the initiative and plan of other transit services in Vermont which helped them guide their initial work. The MOOVer additionally established strong local partnerships such as with the local hospital which helped drive further growth. Terry asked Randy if, in addition to establishing microtransit in Greater Keene, it would make sense to establish a satellite service in Peterborough. Randy replied that it would be important to better understand the desires of Peterborough residents before doing so. For example, he shared that Peterborough residents might prefer commuter service to Keene or to Manchester rather than service within the town itself.

Chair Dobisky asked how many employees the MOOVer has. Randy Schoonmaker answered there are 91 full-time employees as well as 35 volunteers. Terry Clark asked if the MOOVer’s vehicles are accessible. Randy replied that of the MOOVer’s 91 vehicles, 87 are equipped with hydraulic lifts. Todd Horner asked whether the MOOVer charges for microtransit service. Randy Schoonmaker replied that all of their services are provided free to the public. He explained that studies show, in many cases, when services are free and then start charging, roughly one-third of ridership will stop using the service. These studies additionally show that when services stop charging a fee, that same margin will begin using the services.

Randy Schoonmaker shared that service in the winter increases to accommodate capacity for travel to local ski resorts like Mount Snow, Stratton, and Okemo. The MOOVer provides service for additional seasonal employees who are primarily hired from overseas and come to the region without access to transportation. The MOOVer allows these employees and tourists to access the ski resorts and provides over 200,000 rides per winter.

Erica Alusic-Bingham shared that she supports the idea of fixed route transit from population centers outside of Keene to a transportation hub within Keene that is served by microtransit. This would help bring folks into the city who would then be served more adequately by the microtransit service. She additionally

suggested that it will be critical to acquire support from private entities within the Greater Keene area who would stand to benefit from direct transit service.

III. Approval of Minutes of September 17, 2024, and October 15, 2024

Motion by Erica Alusic-Bingham, seconded by David Meader. Approved by unanimous roll call vote.

IV. Treasurer's Report

Jennifer Robinson presented the October 2024 NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) financial report. Terry Johnson shared that total expenditures are trending over budget through October, largely because Cheshire County has charged most of its allocated indirect expense for the year. Terry additionally suggested that the group should review ridership and denial trends and identified that CVTC trip denial levels are higher than expected. Allan Gillis explained that this is due to a shortage of drivers and shared that the organization plans to do in-person marketing at locations such as grocery stores and hospitals. Terry Johnson shared that the Keene Senior Center's ridership levels are higher than expected and that is a testament to Kim Rumrill's leadership.

V. Mobility Manager Report

Terry Johnson shared that the NHDOT SFY 26-27 5310 Capital Solicitation has been released. Applications are due on February 18, 2025, which will allow the MRCC sufficient time to review and approve any applications. Erica Alusic-Bingham shared that the Greenville Falls elderly housing community will be looking to purchase a new vehicle, but it is unknown whether they would be eligible for this funding. Lisa Steadman shared that software is an eligible capital expense and suggested that maybe the MRCC should purchase software to better coordinate existing service. She suggested that perhaps HCS could purchase the software for shared use by transportation providers in the region.

Terry Johnson explained that NHDOT is planning to open applications for 5310 RCC funding for SFY 26-27 in early 2025. He shared that Cheshire County will lead the development of the application soliciting proposals from subcontractors for transportation and mobility management services.

VI. Partner Updates

Erica Alusic-Bingham shared that Southern New Hampshire Services is now known as Community Action Partnership of Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties. With respect to providing Non-Emergency Medical Transportation for Medicaid recipients, Alison Welsh said she would support the State moving away from the transportation broker, Coordinated Transportation Services (CTS). She expressed that there are other entities that provide more reliable service. Lisa Steadman shared that ABLE NH is working with statewide mobility manager, Teri Palmer, to collect data on unmet NEMT trips. Allan Gillis shared that he met with Sally Malay to discuss the possibility of CVTC providing transportation for KHKC youth.

VII. Next Meeting

The next MRCC meeting is scheduled for December 17, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.

VIII. Adjourn

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

Respectfully submitted, Jason Cooper, Planner