State agencies partner to provide mobile ‘vaccine buses’ to serve communities statewide through the summer

On April 21, 2021, the Governor’s Office announced the launch of mobile vaccination units to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to communities throughout the state of Minnesota. The six retrofitted and accessible Metro Transit buses are an important tool in reaching underserved communities and reducing barriers to vaccination by going to people where they live or work.

The mobile vaccination units are a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Health, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Metro Transit, the Metropolitan Council, and Minnesota Department of Transportation.

According to the press release, MDH Commissioner Jan Malcolm stated, “We recognize the historical discrepancies and inequities in health care delivery and we’re making every effort to engage with communities and partners to expand access to vaccines.”

The “vaccine buses” will go to locations identified by demographic, vaccination, and testing data as well as by local public health and community organizations. MDH also offers a request form that community partners can use to request a site visit.


Minnesota’s Road to Volunteer Drivers Virtual Forum Series

The 2020–2021 Volunteer Driver Virtual Forum Series wrapped up this month and is now available as on-demand training.

This series, convened and sponsored by MCOTA in partnership with the Minnesota Volunteer Driver Coalition, attracted volunteer driver program administrators, volunteer drivers,
riders, funders, transportation policy advocates, and transportation stakeholders.

Each live forum has drawn an average of 110 attendees from nearly 300 registrants from every Minnesota county, from tribal nations in Minnesota and Montana, and from across the United States.

Many attendees expressed appreciation for the information presented, particularly because of its usefulness in support of the services they provide. “The information was well organized and plainly stated,” one participant shared, echoing the comments of several others. “It was really applicable to my rural community.”

Series recordings:

Policy and legislation
• Current State and a Look into the Future of Volunteer Drivers
• Policy Issues and Real-Life Stories

Nuts and Bolts of Volunteer Driver Programs
• Volunteer Driver Recruitment and Promotion
• How to Start a Volunteer Driver Program

Disability and diversity training

• Person-Centered Practices and Disability Etiquette for Volunteer Drivers
• Cultural Diversity and Equity Training
• Trauma-Informed Care Training
• Providing Community Education About People Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Best Practices

• Module 1 – Safety & Security
• Module 2 – Emergency Preparedness
• Module 3 – Passenger Assistance & Safety
• Module 4 – Dealing with Difficult Customers and Self Care
• Module 5 – Ethics and Boundaries
• Module 6 – Best Practices & Summary

Recordings are available on the Virtual Forum Series web page.
MCOTA senior leadership meeting highlights
MCOTA held its second annual agency senior leadership meeting with commissioners on June 23, 2021.

[Tom writing news item on this]

Volunteer driver program bills to become law
[To be updated and included if this happens!]
MCOTA and the Volunteer Driver Coalition advocated for two bills to help protect Minnesota’s 1,959+ volunteer drivers during the 2021 legislative session. At session’s end (?), these bills [passed?] and will be effective as of [August 1, 2021].

- **HF1031** Omnibus Commerce, Climate and Energy Bill – language to define a volunteer driver has been incorporated into the bill.
- **HF586** (Murphy) / **SF748** (Jasinski) – Clearly defines a volunteer driver in law as not “for-hire.”
- **HF1716** (Koegel) / **SF1766** (Howell) – Creates a state income tax subtraction for volunteer drivers to reduce their tax liability in Minnesota.

Learn more from the Volunteer Driver Coalition at [https://volunteerdrivermn.org/status-updates-on-2021-bills/](https://volunteerdrivermn.org/status-updates-on-2021-bills/).

Mid-Minnesota RTCC driver recruitment campaign garners attention
The Mid-Minnesota Rural Transportation Coordinating Council has long been aware that a shortage of professional and volunteer drivers has been a significant barrier to providing rides in its region (Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker and Renville counties).

This past spring, the MMRTCC obtained MnDOT approval for repurposing otherwise-unused funds to promote driving opportunities to area residents. Transportation resource coordinator Terry Smith first developed a small multimedia campaign to publicize the opportunity to sign up for a local volunteer-driver program. Smith also designed a parallel campaign to promote the benefits of driving occupations. He hoped to attract those who might drive a transit bus or work for a provider of non-emergency medical transportation or a specialized transportation service. He shared the news via the region’s largest radio broadcast company as well as through smaller AM stations, Minnesota Public Radio, and local newspapers. The ads direct listeners and readers to the MMRTCC Ride Resources webpage and provide Smith’s contact information.
When Smith is contacted, he screens for location and interests, then he provides a warm handoff to an appropriate service provider. The provider determines which candidates are a good fit to help the region’s non-drivers get to medical appointments, social engagements, and other activities.

In addition, Smith has been raising awareness in other ways besides paid ads. Recently, the region’s largest newspaper published a front-page story, and the local public television station broadcast a report on the need for volunteer drivers. Smith hopes to publicize the need for drivers through local radio interviews, blog posts, and public presentations. He recently spoke with a local service club about incorporating volunteer driving into their service mission, and he has consulted with other RTCCs interested in similar efforts. To learn more, contact Terry.Smith@mmrdoc.org.

For more information:

- Looking for retirees ready to hit the road for others in Kandiyohi, Meeker and Renville counties, *West Central Tribune*, March 10, 2021
- Mid-Minnesota Development Commission

New inclusive walk audit guide available


“A walk audit is an activity in which community members and decision makers observe and identify opportunities to improve the comfort and safety of the surrounding environment.”

This document guides planners and communities on ways to include people with disabilities and to discover disability in walk audits.

The facilitator’s guide also includes tips for hosting inclusive meetings that are useful for any type of meeting.

More information:
- Download the [Inclusive Walk Audit Facilitator’s Guide](#) (PDF)
- “A New Engagement Resource for Mobility Managers: The Inclusive Walk Audit Facilitator’s Guide,” March, 22, 2021 guest post by Emily Smoak, Minnesota Department of Health, for the National Center for Mobility Management blog  

*Members of the Inclusive Walk Audit Facilitator’s Guide working group outside on a walk audit using assistive mobility devices.*

*Photo: Minnesota Department of Health*
Upcoming MCOTA Meetings

MCOTA usually meets bimonthly on a Wednesday from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. In accordance with recommendations from the State of Minnesota to help slow the spread of COVID-19, upcoming meetings will be remote only. The meetings are open, and members of the public are welcome to attend. Each meeting includes time for public comments. See the MCOTA website for more details.

- July 28, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
- September 22, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.