

**Monadnock Regional Coordinating Council
For Community Transportation**

Minutes

January 17, 2023

Present: Ellen Avery, Chair, *Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC)*; Charlie Pratt, Vice-Chair, *Home Healthcare, Hospice and Community Services (HCS)*; Sally Malay, *Keene Housing Kids Collaborative (KHKC)*; David Meader, *Citizen Member*; Chuck Weed, *Keene State College (KSC)*.

SWRPC Staff Present: Terry Johnson, *Senior Project Manager*; Andrew Smeltz, *Planner*.

Guests Present: Frank Dobisky, *Thomas Transportation*; Erika Alusic-Bingham, *Southern New Hampshire Services (SNHS)*.

I. Welcome

Chair Ellen Avery called the meeting to order at 9:12 a.m.

II. Approval of December 20, 2022 Minutes

Motion: To approve the minutes of December 20, 2022.

Motion by Charlie Pratt, seconded by David Meader. Approved by unanimous vote.

III. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report was deferred until the February meeting.

IV. Transportation Equity Project Update #1: Home Healthcare Hospice and Community Services Shopping Shuttle

Charlie Pratt provided an update on the Shopping Shuttle service operated by HCS. HCS received MRCC Transportation Equity project funding to add a Shopping Shuttle route to the Friendly Bus service for riders in Keene and North Swanzey. The Keene-Swanzey Shopping Shuttle runs one day per week between 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. The shuttle provides door-to-door round-trip service for riders from locations in Keene and North Swanzey, taking them to and from Walmart in Keene and Market Basket in Swanzey. Charlie Pratt indicated that the program is going well. Ridership has grown over the past eight months to an average of 25 to 30 riders per week.

In response to a question from Chair Avery, Charlie Pratt stated that the bus waits one hour for riders at the grocery store. In response to a question from Chuck Weed, he stated that the Shopping Shuttle picks up riders from any location in Keene.

Charlie Pratt said there is also a Shopping Shuttle that serves riders in West Swanzey and Winchester with service to Walmart in Keene and Market Basket in Swanzey. Since its launch in August 2022, the Winchester-Swanzey shuttle has experienced low ridership, averaging one or two riders per week. HCS has conducted extensive outreach to several housing communities on the route in an effort to boost ridership without success. Charlie Pratt stated that it is likely residents of housing communities located on this transit route are generally reluctant to give up their independence and are driving their own cars or getting rides from family or friends to grocery stores. Regardless of low ridership numbers, the bus continues to stop at

all housing communities on the route to attract ridership. The driver even parks directly in front of units where individuals have expressed interest in using the service. HCS would like to see the average weekly ridership grow to eight or nine individuals per week for the Winchester-Swanzey route.

Terry Johnson stated that he provided an overview of MRCC Transportation Equity projects during a recent presentation on community transportation to the SWRPC Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). TAC member Sara Carbonneau from Winchester spoke in favor of promoting the Winchester-Swanzey Shopping Shuttle. Terry Johnson reported that he provided Sara with information about the service so she could reach out to the Winchester Town Administrator and the RLMM Center for assistance with promoting the service. He said that during discussion following the presentation, Susan Ashworth of HCS reinforced Charlie Pratt's point that dependence on the personal automobile is a major barrier to people using transit services.

Terry Johnson posed the question, "How can the MRCC help overcome the culture of dependence on the personal automobile and promote the use of community transportation services?" He said that SWRPC's recently completed Transit and Shared Ride Feasibility Study includes a section on conducting community engagement and marketing activities before, during and after the launch of new transit services. Such an outreach campaign is important to ensure the public is aware of new or expanded services, both to make existing transit customers aware of changes to the system and attract new customers.

Chair Avery suggested that the bus be used for a promotional outing, such as a baseball game to raise awareness of HCS's transit services. She also said that the NH Charitable Foundation (NHCF) offers funding that supports general operating costs for organizations, and NHCF's grant awards span multiple years.

Chuck Weed suggested that the HCS transit services be used for outings such as trips to the movies at the Colonial Theatre Showroom in Keene. Charlie Pratt replied that HCS's federal funding source does not allow transportation for that purpose. Chuck Weed also stated that Cheshire County does not offer direct services for transportation because they do not have staff. He stated that it is important for towns to know that residents are using County services so that they see the value.

Erica Alusic-Bingham stated that funders want to support projects where the most possible number of people are helped; however, even when a small number of people are served, there can still be positive outcomes towards issues like food insecurity.

Chuck Weed asked whether HCS transit services can provide transportation to the dialysis center at Cheshire Medical Center (CMC) and if there is information available about air circulation in the vehicle for people concerned about COVID-19. Charlie Pratt replied that both the City Express and Friendly Bus provide service to CMC. He said that, while HCS does not have information available about air circulation on the bus, the bus is cleaned thoroughly at regular intervals. Masks are optional on the bus. He reported that ridership on the City Express has started to grow for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Current ridership levels are at 85% of pre-pandemic levels. He reported that ridership is also growing on the Friendly Bus. The Friendly Bus is a free transit service in Keene for seniors.

Erika Alusic-Bingham stated she is aware of many parents that remain concerned about their family's use of transit due to COVID-19.

V. Transportation Equity Project Update #2: Keene Housing Kids Collaborative Youth Programs Transportation

Sally Malay of KHKC provided an update on their after school enrichment transportation service that launched in September 2022. This program, which is in a pilot phase, provides transportation to after school enrichment programs for children living in Keene Housing properties or whose families are housing voucher recipients. KHKC has partnered with Thomas Transportation (TT) to provide rides. KHKC considered using taxi vouchers, volunteer drivers and other options but decided to use TT because it is the most reliable way to reserve drivers and vehicles. TT provides rides during a four-hour period after school to children who are registered in the program. The program is available to over 400 households with children ages 0 to 17 years old.

Sally Malay said that KHKC has had difficulties implementing the program. One problem is a requirement that children using the service be accompanied by a parent or an adult chaperone designated by the parent. Another problem has been that KHKC is charged for rides if a rider cancels. In addition, it is difficult for busy families to commit to long-term after school programs and, as a result, parents are reluctant to commit to using the transportation services. Twelve families indicated in a pre-program survey that they would benefit from the service, however, only one or two families per month have used the service since its launch. KHKC is concerned that program administration is time-consuming for only a small ridership impact. The cost per ride is high mainly due to administrative costs. The KHKC shuttle has not yet served the anticipated demand for ridership after four months of service.

Sally Malay stated that an attorney advised the board of KHKC to use the policy of having an adult rider accompany each child because their insurance policy requires it. Other organizations do not have the same policy. For example, HCS allows children over 12 years of age to use the City Express without a parent or guardian.

Chuck Weed asked whether the adult rider could be a volunteer. Sally Malay replied that they could if they were authorized by a parent to serve as a chaperone.

Frank Dobisky stated that TT is also contracted to provide rides to kids for school districts. If the district requires a chaperone, they provide it. He said that TT drivers are subject to a drug test and a background check.

Charlie Pratt suggested organizing an event to raise awareness for the service.

Erika Alusic-Bingham stated that it has taken a while for SNHS clients to return to after school programs since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sally Malay said that KHKC provided a van shuttle service for holiday events in the past that was popular. KHKC would like to provide the van shuttle service in the future for Teen Night Out at the Keene Family YMCA. Parents of the children who ride the shuttle unaccompanied will need to sign a waiver in advance.

Terry Johnson said that he learned that some adult riders using the KHKC service request transportation to and from home while children are attending the after school activity. This results in a total of four one-way trips for a child to participate in the activity. Charlie Pratt suggested that one way to reduce the number of trips is to ask the Keene Recreation Center to provide a computer that parents can use while their children participate in after school programs.

Erica Alusic-Bingham recommended that KHKC explore using a dispatcher to direct the shuttle to riders as rides are requested.

Chair Avery, asked how the Keene Recreation Center and YMCA transport kids in a van with regard to the adult chaperone requirement. Sally Malay responded that those organizations use a staff member to accompany kids on the shuttle. Chair Avery recommended that KHKC contact Judy Shanley from the

National Center for Mobility Management for guidance on youth transportation issues. Sally Malay said she had spoken with Judy Shanley during the developmental phase of the program. She said that she plans to speak with State Mobility Manager, Teri Palmer, as well as Alison Welsh of the Cheshire County Drug Court for advice on this issue.

A question was asked about the purchase price for a van such as is being used for the KHKC program. Frank Dobisky responded it is in the \$100,000 to \$120,000 range. A question was asked if Transportation Equity funds could be used for vehicle purchase. Terry Johnson replied that funds cannot be used for capital purchases. Frank Dobisky suggested that TT could purchase a van for use by KHKC and multiple other agencies with a multiple-year service contract executed by all parties. This would be more economical than individual agencies purchasing their own vehicles. Frank Dobisky said he would be willing to develop a proposal to include the cost of purchasing a van and a paid staff driver to provide the transportation service.

Chuck Weed recommended that the MRCC meet with Cheshire County Administrator, Chris Coates. The County may be interested in funding a community transportation service that is a shared resource among multiple organizations. David Meader suggested that the MRCC include the idea of a shared community transportation service on future meeting agendas. Chair Avery recommended identifying other organizations that may want to join in the proposal for a shared transportation service.

Erica Alusic-Bingham recommended that in addition to focusing on youth transportation, the MRCC focus on the green aspect of providing community transportation services.

VI. Transportation Equity Project Update #3: Community Volunteer Transportation Company Advancement

Chair Avery provided an update on transportation activities conducted by CVTC. CVTC used Transportation Equity funds to hire a new staff member to conduct outreach activities to achieve two objectives. One is to increase the number of volunteer drivers to address increased demand from riders using CVTC's volunteer driver program to access health care, food and other basic needs. A special focus has been placed on towns that do not currently have drivers actively providing rides. The second objective is to reduce the number of unmet rides which has been increasing due to more demand and lack of driver capacity. CVTC has recruited some new drivers and now has 59 active drivers. CVTC's goal is to reach 75 drivers. CVTC had high demand during the summer of 2022 for rides and many new ride requests. They recently recruited new volunteer drivers in Hinsdale and Winchester and the number of unmet rides in those areas have been reduced.

VII. Mobility Manager Update

Terry Johnson provided a brief update. He reported on an organization that previously expressed interest in submitting a proposal for Transportation Equity funding. The Walpole Foundation project would have extended an existing transit route operated by Southeast Vermont Transit (SEVT) into the Walpole village center. The proposal was pulled because SEVT was reluctant to take on a second federal funding source to support the existing service. Terry Johnson reported that the Walpole Foundation has since secured alternate funding and that the extended route is now operational.

VIII. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for February 21, 2023 at HCS.

IX. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Johnson
Senior Project Manager

Draft meeting minutes prepared by Andrew Smeltz.