

**Monadnock Regional Coordinating Council
For Community Transportation**

Minutes

August 15, 2023

Present: Frank Dobisky, Chair, *Thomas Transportation (TT)*; Jennifer Robinson, Treasurer, *Cheshire County*; Mary Jensen, Secretary, *Keene Senior Center (KSC)*; Ellen Avery, *Community Volunteer Transportation Corporation (CTVC)*; Kathy Baird, *Monadnock RSVP Volunteer Center (RSVP)*; Sally Malay, *Keene Housing Kids Collaborative (KHKC)*; Alison Welsh, *Cheshire County Treatment Court*.

SWRPC Staff Present: Terry Johnson, *Senior Project Manager*; Jason Cooper, *Planner*; Rich Clough, *Office Support Specialist*.

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

I. Welcome

Chair Dobisky called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. and introductions were made.

II. Approval of June 20, 2023 Minutes

Motion: To approve the minutes of June 20, 2023.

Motion by Ellen Avery, seconded by Sally Malay. Approved by unanimous vote.

III. Treasurer's Report

Jennifer Robinson presented the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) Enhanced Mobility financial report for the month of July 2023. She noted that NHDOT instituted a different formula for calculating administration costs which is reflected in the indirect line item. The change frees up more monies for operational use. The NH Department of Health and Human Services (NHDHHS) report will be completed and distributed to the MRCC following the receipt of all July invoices.

IV. Transportation Equity Project Proposal – Keene Senior Center

Mary Jensen provided an overview of the proposal on behalf of KSC. \$8,850 is requested to fund promotional materials and a part-time position. The purpose of the project is to conduct an outreach campaign aimed at increasing Cheshire Village at Home (CVAH) membership and volunteer drivers. The campaign is necessary to increase both membership and volunteer drivers who are typically recruited from the active membership. Mary Jensen noted that while the number of volunteer drivers has increased in the past year, the number of households served has increased at a faster rate. She reported that the number of miles driven had also significantly increased during the period. She noted that the proposed program would be targeted at new members, 50-60 years old, who are already providing rides and care for older family members. She stated that the funds will support the position of a service coordinator to manage the outreach campaign and attend outreach events. Funding will also support outreach activities and marketing materials including working with human resources departments of local businesses to include promotional messages with payroll distributions, placing advertisements in various newsletters, covering entrance fees for fairs and events, and placing yard signs. She stated that KSC hopes to share successful strategies and a library of materials with the MRCC. Mary Jensen reported that the campaign was already underway, having

started in July 2023. Chair Dobisky asked if KSC would prefer the funding period to be effective July 1, 2023. Mary Jensen replied in the affirmative.

Motion: To approve the Keene Senior Center request for \$8,850 in Transportation Equity funding, effective July 1, 2023.

Motion by Ellen Avery, seconded by Sally Malay. Approved by unanimous vote with Mary Jensen abstaining.

V. Volunteer Driver Program Study Results/Next Steps

Terry Johnson reported on a Volunteer Driver Program (VDP) study conducted by SWRPC. The study examines barriers and opportunities for improving VDP services in the Monadnock Region related to two strategic priorities identified by the MRCC: 1) expanding services to a broader cross-section of the population that would benefit from VDP services including area youth and young to middle-aged able-bodied low-income people; and 2) identifying programming innovations to address unmet need for older adults and people with disabilities. He noted that Phase I research provided a foundation for conducting Phase II activities to examine the readiness of VDPs to expand services as well as address unmet need ride requests. Phase II results were generated from conducting focus groups with Boards and leadership of the three VDPs that serve the Region. He stated that ridership data shows that VDPs serve as the backbone of the Region's community transportation system. During the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, CVTC and KSC volunteer drivers provided a combined total of 7,375 trips, representing 57.5% of all trips in the Region provided by Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 and NH Department of Health and Human Services funded transportation providers. Ellen Avery stated that CTVC is the only local VDP that serves all 34 communities in the MRCC Region.

Terry Johnson said the VDP Boards and leadership identified numerous challenges to expanding services. Key among them are limited financial resources; decreased volunteer driver capacity due to the Region's aging demographics; limited coordination of services with other transportation providers; difficulty attracting volunteers; lack of capacity to provide long-distance rides; and additional capacity needed to serve new populations could negatively impact service to existing clients. Challenges to addressing unmet need include lack of volunteer driver capacity; turnover of drivers; limited financial resources; and limited staff resources to conduct capacity and community partnership building. Terry Johnson said that all the VDPs expressed openness to expanding services. Two of the VDPs indicated that unmet need is not an issue for them. It is possible this viewpoint the VDPs expressed is a result of not fully understanding the definition of "unmet need". The VDPs identified many opportunities for expanding services including collaborating with local municipalities to expand coverage and secure funding; modifying driver and rider marketing materials to reach diverse audiences; approaching private foundations if ridership is expanded to new demographics; improving coordination among VDPs; and streamlining rider onboarding protocols across VDPs and other transportation providers. Opportunities to address unmet need include developing and implementing driver retention incentives programs; targeting marketing to younger drivers to increase capacity and offset loss of older drivers; and conducting outreach to community organizations, clubs and employers to promote driver recruitment.

Terry Johnson highlighted next steps that were identified to implement strategy recommendations. A slide deck, which includes detailed challenges, opportunities and strategies is included as a separate attachment.

The following points were noted during general discussion:

- Teri Palmer noted that VDPs lose money and supplemental funding is always needed.

- Ellen Avery reported that CTVC will do trips in a radius of two hours from the communities it serves and defers many local Keene requests to HCS. She said that CVTC does not do income and age checks on riders and serves all who call. She noted a need to shift marketing to younger adults and mothers and that CVTC had received requests to extend its service area to towns outside the MRCC Region. Ellen Avery also reported that CVTC has 67 drivers, typically with 47 active each month, and would need a pool of 75 to maintain an active roster of 55 each month.
- Alison Welsh stated that Cheshire County was paying a significant amount to provide same day rides for items like drug testing. Ellen Avery replied that CVTC can give rides if the riders are residents.
- Terry Johnson stated the need to recruit drivers outside of Keene. He also cited an example of a community transportation program in the Seacoast Region that has developed systems to effectively coordinate services across transportation providers, streamline rider onboarding, and establish a one call center that serves eight transportation providers.
- Teri Palmer noted the potential of unused municipal vehicles (typically Recreation Department vehicles), and that food insecurity presents a major need for transportation. She provided an example of a Meals on Wheels program that experienced a \$20,000 budget cut just when its need for services is increasing.
- Chair Dobisky noted that the Community Kitchen has also been experiencing more demand.
- Terry Johnson said that a mobile food pantry operated by The Community Kitchen is helping to address food insecurity in the Monadnock Region.

VI. Transit System Operating Model Project Launch

Terry Johnson provided an update on a new transit planning project being conducted by SWRPC. The project is a follow-up to the recently completed Microtransit and Fixed-Route Transit Study which produced a framework for expanding transit services in the Region. The project goal is to identify a transit operating model to support a more innovative, coordinated and resilient transportation system that could expand from Keene into other identified high transit need communities in the Region. The two-year project runs through June 2025. Among the prospective models to be examined are a municipally run transit system, county transit system, public-private partnership Mobility as a Service-based system, and non-profit agency managed system. Priority activities during the near term include conducting background research and interviews with experts familiar with different transit operating and governance structures, forming an Advisory Task Force (ATF) to serve as a sounding board for project activities, and identifying an expert consultant to conduct the evaluation of transit operating models. Terry Johnson displayed a list of prospective ATF participants and encouraged MRCC members to let him know if they are interested in participating.

Teri Palmer added that projects like this are meant to be a trial of ideas and provide different concepts to be experimented with. Ellen Avery asked what the cost will be to implement alternative routes identified in the Microtransit and Fixed-Route Transit Study. Terry Johnson said that a phased approach to implementing the alternatives is recommended. The first, which involves expansion of transit services in the Keene area, is estimated to cost between \$1.2 and \$1.7 million to operate. Ellen Avery asked what will happen when NHDHHS funding runs out. Teri Palmer stated that there are efforts underway to secure braided funding, and that some towns have unused American Rescue Plan funds. She added that there are efforts at the state level to find more funding. Terry Johnson said that Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds are a potential source for the future. He said all CMAQ proposals submitted to NHDOT during the last round were funded.

Teri Palmer noted that a significant role of a consultant is to guide laymen in the nuances of federal funding programs. Ellen Avery said there was a State Council on Aging funding proposal to the Governor's office to conduct a statewide community transportation needs assessment, the results of which would help make

the case for future funding. She said the proposal was initially not approved but is now being reconsidered. Teri Palmer added that the community transportation needs assessment is more likely to happen now, however, it is expected that Mobility Managers will be asked to help execute it.

VII. Partner Updates

Chair Dobisky stated that, because of the lack of time, partner updates will be first on the agenda for the September meeting. Teri Palmer reported that the NH Transit Association will celebrate Community Transportation Month in October in conjunction with CommuteSmart NH. She will share a calendar of events with the MRCC at the September meeting.

VIII. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for September 19, 2023.

IX. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 10:31 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rich Clough
Office Support Specialist