

RTAP Peer Roundtable Notes

Growing Ridership

5/15/2025 | 1:00–2:30PM | Online

Attendees

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Aaron Forstrom | 11. Jim Wolter |
| 2. Shelly Pflaum | 12. Kirk Kuchera |
| 3. Alan Hermann | 13. Bill Spitzer |
| 4. Kathy Schultz | 14. Allison Karau |
| 5. Eric Day | 15. Patrick LaCourse |
| 6. Lezlie Grubich | 16. Jaycie Kratky |
| 7. Christopher Belden | 17. Mariah Kathan |
| 8. Ted Nelson | |
| 9. Althea Kohler | |
| 10. Randy Jahnke | |

Roles

- Timekeeper: Jim Wolter
- Parking Lot:
- Conversation Encourager:

Biggest Challenges:

- Modernizing and getting more technology, looking to get a rider app and website
- Large agency, drivers, funds, and buses to scale up demand but is lacking the resources to make it more attractive and to help with the crowding issues on the buses
- Limitation, limited capacity to deliver rides based on personnel and heavy reliance on demand response service model, running empty buses between pick ups
- Human services coming back after covid, human services team wants to see more 1-1 type transportation instead of the bus where they were riding buses more in a community feel with human services riders.
- Demand is up and drivers are in low supply, struggling to meet current demand
- Meeting the needs in the real rural areas
- Looking to understand the challenges and how can MnDOT help

- Multi-faceted but largest is how do we get the personnel and capital to meet current need
- How do you break into different areas of riders?
- Being able to have the flexibility to alter routes, there is a lot of need for express runs between communities
- How do we get the word out there? You can see some buses in some places but helping get the word out that public transit is for everyone

Solutions:

Ridership/App: In the process of getting new dispatch software and looking to implement an app for phones to offer better availability to schedule rides vs emails or phone calls

Many consumers will find an app or text option preferable especially with language barriers

Duluth- Transit App, along with 10 different apps with open source, have their own mobile app as well, texting at where's my bus level, 4-digit codes specific to each stop. Transit app is advertised as preferred app. We have found other apps to be unavailable or unresponsive but can be a nice feature if they don't like the way an app is, but they are all linked to the same data so it appears it isn't an issue yet. Through tech provider and scheduling software and AVLs the data creates a feed that is on the website and there are links for general open-source data that anyone can access to help create and develop apps and they are used by various people to work to develop apps that consumers can use them

MnDOT is in the process of working with GTFS as a collective area that the public can access across the state. There is an article in the chat that will be added for reference. Looking for more partners in transit agencies as well. Reach out to Kathy if you are interested in partnering!

High Demand on Ridership: With fixed route service there is a large need for suburban and rural areas, we can't effectively serve them with limited resources and funding. We have the more urban areas where we have the current buses being overwhelmed with people already using the bus. Could offer rides every 7 minutes and still have large ridership. Long term goal is to keep adding buses and drivers.

One of our providers recently said they need to hire 25 or so more drivers in order to serve 80% of their ride demand, which is their goal.

Surveys are used to get a pulse on ridership and buses have rider count by route how many hours from bus stops and what stops have a lot of people boarding

OTP helps transit be an attractive option, passengers don't want to be late

Demand Response Models:

Who is looking for micro transit, looking at agencies and passengers who are nervous to ride with a group post covid either in fear or it being an unknown. 18–21-year-old transitions, looking to show people who are using the buses. There was a community built on the bus that is missing that isn't helping the isolation piece

Hard to have multiple rides when some rides take so long

Difficult with a spread out service area

How do we make the longer routes more financially feasible

Capital Resources:

Public Transportation, people either don't know it exists or think that it is only for certain people.

Public transit is for everyone!

Ridership is still down but rural areas are maybe doing better vs the urban areas and lost a bunch of people to remote work now part of the problem is not having drivers

Ridership is growing monthly but seems to be a new and expanding group, will hit their 100% before pandemic numbers

A separate issue in my region is the fact that the transit services are largely set up to serve those who do not work or who work in supported employment, in which case they can work around the bus schedule and availability. People with "regular" jobs often find it impractical if not impossible to use the bus, due to their work hours, etc.

Rural region but transit service ends by 6PM – if you work until 5 they may not be able to complete your ride before they have to be in the garage by 6.

Public service careers – people can be embarrassed about being in careers that are politicized. Is MnDOT going into schools to talk about the job opportunities in transit?

Employers seem to be reluctant to do anything than provide a job.

There is a lot of turn around right now so reminding them helps to increase visibility and reminding people that transit exists!

Wondering if transit companies have adequate incentives to increase ridership, from MnDOT, etc.? Transit always can use more help with funding and resources

Ask a Peer:

Growing EMT Providers – Paying private companies rather than public transit

What % of people getting EMT rides vs using DR for medical appointments?

Next Peer Roundtable: June 12th Budget and Operations Application