



## Transit Advisory Committee

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2025

June 18<sup>th</sup>, 10:00am

Austin; Zoom

Our mission is to provide safe, reliable, accessible and courteous public transportation services in response to the needs of our communities.

### Committee Members:

x	Kirk Kuchera – SMART	x	Larry Baker – Albert Lea City Council
x	Joanne Brackey – SMART		<del>Oballa Oballa – Austin City Council</del>
v	Garry Hart – CVS/SMART		<del>Dan Sparks – Mower County</del>
x	Chris Thompson – SMART		<del>Kari Hall – Mayo Health Systems</del>
v	Don White – SMART		<del>Bonnie Buchanan – Jefferson Lines</del>
x	Ashley Strand – SMART		<del>Waseca County – Commissioner</del>
	<del>Kevin Hemann – SMART</del>		<del>Kelly Sutlief – Waseca (passenger)</del>
	<del>Greg Krueger – Steele County</del>	v	Jim Wolter – MNDOT OTAT
	<del>Troy Klecker – City of Owatonna</del>		

### Review of scope and mission for TAC

Purpose: The purpose of a TAC is to provide guidance and advise transit staff in issues related to transit services, funding, marketing, service strategies, developing policy, special projects, and capital investments/projects. This committee/council is not a governing board, so do not have a legal authority to oversee the transit program, however, provide as a valuable resource to the transit program in developing and providing for transit services.

- Updates
  - Stats

### SMART Transit-Cedar Valley Services - 2024 Data

Data for all counties combined	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	YTD
<b>PASSENGERS</b>													
Albert Lea	5,568	5,452	4,861	5,891	5,118	3,585	3,728	4,511	5,378	6,335	5,173	5,086	60,686
Austin	11,028	10,348	9,060	11,049	9,754	4,164	4,472	4,991	10,013	12,059	9,537	9,465	105,940
Owatonna	4,097	4,018	3,483	4,118	3,844	2,305	2,341	2,403	3,400	4,314	3,350	3,224	40,897
<b>Blooming Prairie</b>													0
Waseca	1,387	1,318	1,271	1,372	1,281	1,155	983	825	1,371	1,638	976	1,548	15,125
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22,080</b>	<b>21,136</b>	<b>18,675</b>	<b>22,430</b>	<b>19,997</b>	<b>11,209</b>	<b>11,524</b>	<b>12,730</b>	<b>20,162</b>	<b>24,346</b>	<b>19,036</b>	<b>19,323</b>	<b>222,648</b>
<b>HOURS</b>													
Albert Lea	1,325	1,269	1,183	1,353	1,286	1,030	1,135	1,183	1,222	1,386	1,200	1,202	14,772
Austin	2,164	2,052	1,912	2,196	2,203	1,715	1,747	1,815	1,952	2,242	1,868	1,928	23,792
Owatonna	1,274	1,219	1,132	1,300	1,299	994	1,036	1,042	1,144	1,341	1,099	1,151	14,030
<b>Blooming Prairie</b>													0
Waseca	516	493	475	516	516	480	678	718	616	633	587	604	6,831
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,279</b>	<b>5,032</b>	<b>4,701</b>	<b>5,365</b>	<b>5,303</b>	<b>4,218</b>	<b>4,596</b>	<b>4,758</b>	<b>4,933</b>	<b>5,602</b>	<b>4,754</b>	<b>4,884</b>	<b>59,424</b>
<b>MILES</b>													
Albert Lea	15,366	14,967	13,725	16,332	14,905	11,943	12,725	13,591	14,016	16,750	13,089	13,415	170,824
Austin	22,813	22,195	19,851	22,533	21,884	17,738	19,351	19,187	19,176	22,965	19,271	19,711	246,675
Owatonna	14,052	13,552	12,266	14,370	13,958	10,879	11,880	11,567	12,735	14,639	11,923	12,382	154,203
<b>Blooming Prairie</b>													0
Waseca	4,280	3,854	3,634	3,869	3,820	3,478	3,801	3,806	4,013	4,205	4,158	3,976	46,894
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56,511</b>	<b>54,568</b>	<b>49,476</b>	<b>57,104</b>	<b>54,567</b>	<b>44,038</b>	<b>47,757</b>	<b>48,151</b>	<b>49,940</b>	<b>58,559</b>	<b>48,441</b>	<b>49,484</b>	<b>618,596</b>

- Some months saw growth while other saw a decline in ridership
- Reduced service due to staffing is still a challenge

2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
60,686	60,987	54,832	47,103	35,764	66,630	72,627	63,793	52,900	49,612	41,645
105,940	105,783	103,093	94,758	82,167	122,684	123,489	104,812	98,681	90,045	80,385
40,897	46,249	41,730	43,599	38,293	55,238	58,205	57,617	50,340	44,445	38,979
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,890	2,935	2,596	
15,125	18,305	20,502	18,944	14,710	24,246	23,417	21,035	18,519		
222,648	231,324	220,157	204,404	170,934	268,798	277,738	249,147	223,375	186,698	161,009
14,772	14,307	13,920	14,059	12,050	14,645	14,824	13,206	10,701	8,166	7,501
23,792	23,232	22,802	24,256	22,032	23,826	22,595	20,771	19,654	18,749	19,061
14,030	13,610	12,883	14,563	13,184	15,882	14,387	12,895	10,655	9,908	10,050
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	718	514	507	
6,831	7,170	8,867	8,523	7,420	9,436	9,409	9,744	8,112		
59,424	58,319	58,470	61,400	54,685	63,788	61,215	57,334	49,636	37,330	36,612
170,824	176,471	178,410	177,958	140,273	181,264	183,952	168,274	133,370.0	114,940	111,127
246,675	260,480	249,321	264,296	245,547	286,710	239,193	227,469	229,089.7	223,447	217,466
154,203	170,565	157,747	175,158	151,328	210,922	193,709	178,377	151,102.1	150,747	150,065
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,431	1,444.0	1,037	
46,894	55,420	63,711	62,249	47,366	73,630	70,488	60,808	45,875.0		
618,596	662,936	649,189	679,661	584,514	752,525	687,342	636,359	560,881	490,171	478,658

- Slight decline in ridership from 2023 to 2024
- Larger conversations taking place about ridership – some rides will never be coming back
  - Remote work has created a new norm in regards to transportation usage – this is more prevalent in urban areas, but still impacting rural areas some
  - Focus on importance of trips versus numbers – elderly people getting to medical appointments in rural settings, individuals getting to employment, etc.

#### SMART Transit-Cedar Valley Services - 2025 Data

Data for all counties combined					
	January	February	March	April	May
<b>PASSENGERS</b>					
Albert Lea	5,642	5,324	5,346	6,301	5,563
Austin	11,056	10,525	9,087	11,901	11,385
Owatonna	3,480	3,280	3,166	3,538	3,413
Blooming Prairie					
Waseca	2,025	1,641	1,428	1,542	1,413
TOTAL	22,203	20,770	19,027	23,282	21,774
<b>HOURS</b>					
Albert Lea	1,303	1,216	1,165	1,279	1,269
Austin	2,090	1,973	1,936	2,085	2,099
Owatonna	1,272	1,162	1,168	1,175	1,249
Blooming Prairie					
Waseca	679	658	660	625	676
TOTAL	5,344	5,008	4,928	5,162	5,292
<b>MILES</b>					
Albert Lea	14,696	13,498	13,359	14,602	13,698
Austin	22,327	19,992	19,965	20,862	20,813
Owatonna	13,609	12,105	12,103	12,255	12,863
Blooming Prairie					
Waseca	4,939	4,621	4,269	4,756	4,387
TOTAL	55,571	50,216	49,696	52,475	51,761

Slight increase from January 2024 to 2025

February saw a small decrease

Increases in March, April and May

- What's New
  - Comprehensive Review
    - SMART will be undergoing a Comprehensive Review by OTAT/MNDOT this summer
      - This is a statewide event with all agencies being reviewed
      - OTAT is hoping to complete these every three years
      - Consists of OTAT staff and consultants – will review policies, procedures, etc.
  - Community Engagement
    - CVS/SMART is partnering with local United Way organizations this summer to help collect items for their 'Success Closet' – an endeavor that provides people in need with essentials, from socks to lice kits, and shampoo to blankets.
    - This is part of the 'Connect Committee' that CVS/SMART has to help employees engage with the community efforts – the same group that coordinates the popular 'Santa for a Senior' event.
  - MPTA Bus Rodeo
    - Taking place next month in Virginia MN
    - SMART sending at least one driver and two judges
- SMART Functional Updates
  - Training / D&A
    - Will be preparing for a MNDOT audit on the Drug and Alcohol side of things later this fall
    - Been working on some new hires as of late
    - Working with existing staff on refreshers
    - Focusing on summer staff meetings / trainings
  - Albert Lea
    - Fully staffed!
    - Daycares have been calling in and setting up trips to various locations
    - Will have the annual Freeborn County Fair service this summer
    - Working on staff meetings with Joanne
  - Austin/Dispatch
    - Staffing is full for the first time in six years!
    - Austin does a lot of preschool during the school year so a little slower as well
    - Have partnered with Mayo to provide free trips to seniors in Albert Lea for medical appointments (on top of Austin which has been place for over a decade) – has been a great start with over 100 a month at times
  - Owatonna/Waseca
    - Waseca – Still low on staffing; have hired a few but they haven't worked out like we had hoped for
      - Some parents have scheduled trips for their children to summer school
    - Owatonna – Staffing has been more positive as of late
      - Have hired two part time drivers in the last week, and a full timer that started and is now fully licensed
      - Just expanded our South Run by an hour due to additional staff
      - Gearing up for PreK this fall
- MNDOT Update
  - Operating
    - Operating application now open through MNDOT – due June 30<sup>th</sup>
      - Update budget numbers as well as service levels (hours)
    - Will receive notice later this fall
  - Capital
    - Vehicles
      - Vehicle Replacement
        - 2023 Vehicle Replacement

- Requested eight buses for replacement, was approved for four (award letter)
    - Two buses in Austin, two buses in Owatonna
  - Ordered four buses in early November, 2023 – two with I State and two with North Central
    - Two buses received from I State in mid-January; two from North Central delivered May 21
- 2024 Vehicle Replacement
  - Requested eight replacement vehicles, was approved for three
    - One Albert Lea, two Austin
  - Ordered three buses in late January; hopefully receive them by year end
- 2025 Vehicle Replacement
  - Grant application submitted – requested six buses
  - Approved for one bus in Owatonna
- 2026 Vehicle Replacement
  - Application process is open now – closes at the end of June
  - Will request seven replacement vehicles
  - Notification from state expected in early 2026
- Vehicle Disposition
  - Disposing of older buses as new ones arrive
- Low-No Emission Grant – BETTER
  - Some challenges with the EV options available has led to two agencies dropping from the BETTER project – SMART and Prairie Lakes (Fairmont/Blue Earth) remain and are working with the state on options
    - Possibilities of additional buses may be an option due to agencies that dropped out; will know more in the coming weeks
- Facilities
  - Austin and Waseca facility approved through FTA grant (partnership with MNDOT)
    - Currently working through the NEPA process (federal requirement for projects)
    - Will be doing both projects with similar timelines
- Other
  - Submitted 2025 Technology Grant application for new routing software
    - Awaiting announcement of awards
  - Submitted Capital grant for staff support vehicle – possible approval in the near future
- Big Picture – Down the Road
  - Resume normal service hours
    - As SMART continues to hire more staff, we will evaluate our services and resume previously suspended services as we are able
  - Cedar Valley Services Update
    - Provides work service for people with disabilities in Austin, Albert Lea, Owatonna, and Faribault
    - Will be having summer picnics this summer
    - Continue to look at hiring more staff

#### 2025 Program Goals – Ideas?

- Continue to streamline and simplify process and policies
- Fill open staffing positions throughout agency and resume suspended services
- Any other goals/ideas?

#### TAC Members/Community Feedback from Last Meeting to Re-visit:

- N/A

#### NEW items from TAC Members/Community Feedback?

- Larry looks forward to working with SMART and assist in any way possible on behalf of the city of Albert Lea

**2025 Meeting Dates:**

Quarterly on 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, 10:00 am, rotating city each quarter (Zoom option available for all meetings)

~~Q1 = March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025 ... 905 E 16<sup>th</sup> St, Albert Lea, MN (In Person/Zoom)~~ — Canceled due to weather

Q2 = June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025 ... 2803 W Oakland Ave, Austin, MN (In Person/Zoom)

Q3 = September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025 ... 140 32<sup>nd</sup> Ave. NW, Owatonna, MN (In Person/Zoom)

\*Q4 = December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025 ... 303 South State Street, Waseca, MN 56093 (In Person/Zoom)

\* Held at Emergency Services Building – Waseca Community Room

\*\* All dates and In person opportunities for all meetings subject to change

**Thank you all so much for your continued support and advocacy on  
behalf of public transportation in our region!**