



Transit Advisory Committee

3rd Quarter 2025

September 17th, 10:00am

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

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 - 2025 Data

Data for all counties combined						no preschool		
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August
PASSENGERS								
Albert Lea	5,642	5,324	5,346	6,301	5,563	3,386	4,272	4,156
Austin	11,056	10,525	9,087	11,901	11,385	5,188	4,865	5,815
Owatonna	3,480	3,280	3,166	3,538	3,413	2,209	2,139	1,992
Blooming Prairie								
Waseca	2,025	1,641	1,428	1,542	1,413	1,365	1,019	978
TOTAL	22,203	20,770	19,027	23,282	21,774	12,148	12,295	12,941
HOURS								
Albert Lea	1,303	1,216	1,165	1,279	1,269	1,077	1,201	1,130
Austin	2,090	1,973	1,936	2,085	2,099	1,722	1,835	1,836
Owatonna	1,272	1,162	1,168	1,175	1,249	1,057	1,081	1,003
Blooming Prairie								
Waseca	679	658	660	625	676	686	702	690
TOTAL	5,344	5,008	4,928	5,162	5,292	4,542	4,819	4,658
MILES								
Albert Lea	14,696	13,498	13,359	14,602	13,698	11,899	13,139	12,773
Austin	22,327	19,992	19,965	20,862	20,813	19,085	19,569	19,498
Owatonna	13,609	12,105	12,103	12,255	12,863	11,085	11,556	10,694
Blooming Prairie								
Waseca	4,939	4,621	4,269	4,756	4,387	4,773	3,729	3,937
TOTAL	55,571	50,216	49,696	52,475	51,761	46,842	47,993	46,902

- Some months saw growth while other saw a decline in ridership
- Reduced service due to staffing is still a challenge
- ** Jim Wolter (MNDOT Transit Project Manager) noted some routes are nearing pre-COVID levels.
- What's New
 - Comprehensive Review Recap
 - Overall it went well
 - Few minor 'Findings' that will be adjusted on our end
 - Very proud of the work our staff do each and every day to make SMART successful transit agency – from day to day operations such as our drivers and dispatchers to the management of staff to fleet, everyone does a great job!
 - Comments by members of the TAC:
 - Jim Wolter noted it was an great review and that virtually all required updates have been completed (EEO not completed yet)
 - Garry reiterated the great work by SMART staff
- SMART Functional Updates
 - Training / D&A
 - Always ongoing with training – both new staff and refresher trainings
 - Have had some great new hires that we have been onboarding
 - Working through the testing process – road tests this week and next week
 - Having to test in other communities due to no availability locally
 - Seat Belt awareness coming up later this year to early this year
 - Preparing for drug and alcohol audit coming up next month
 - Owatonna/Waseca
 - Owatonna
 - Some really good staff that have come on board – one full time and one part; has done wonders for our schedule and flexibility
 - Doing PreK and it's going well; currently working with the preschools to deliver 82 students
 - Waseca
 - Have some new hires recently that have been brought on board – really solid staff
 - Looking to hopefully bring a bus on board that has been sitting for quite some time
 - A decent number of parents have reached out to assist with transporting their children to school and it has gone well
 - Austin/Dispatch
 - Austin
 - PreK has gone well so far – currently transporting over 180 students
 - Staffing has been good
 - Seniors are receiving free transportation for medical appointments and it has been going well (both Austin and Albert Lea)
 - Dispatch
 - Fully staffed and going well
 - Albert Lea
 - Participated in multiple community events that have gone really well
 - Age Friendly event at the local fire station that was well attending
 - Last night SMART participated in a community wide "Safety" event
 - PreK and ABE ridership is going well
 - Currently have an opening that we will be working to fill
 - Looking forward to a new bus coming soon

- MNDOT Update
 - Operating
 - Operating application was completed and submitted by the June 30th deadline
 - We should receive notice in the coming weeks
 - Capital
 - Vehicles
 - Vehicle Replacement
 - 2024 Vehicle Replacement
 - Requested eight replacement vehicles, was approved for three
 - One Albert Lea, two Austin
 - Ordered three buses in late January; should received one next month and other two before end of the year
 - 2025 Vehicle Replacement
 - Approved to order one bus – Replace 220
 - Will hopefully order this bus in next several weeks
 - 2026 Vehicle Replacement
 - Applied for seven buses
 - 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
 - Will be ordering two buses and plan to operate one in Owatonna and one in Austin
 - Will also include infrastructure upgrades to both sites and training for staff and mechanic (3rd party contractor)
 - 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 updates from MNDOT on this
 - Submitted 2025 Large Capital Grant Application for staff support vehicle
 - Awaiting updates from MNDOT on this
 - Submitting Large Capital Grant Application for replacement staff support vehicle in the future – due September 30th
- 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
 - Currently evaluating the new laws and regulations regarding ESST and the Paid Family Leave Act to ensure the organization is compliant with what is needed
 - Working with our health insurance provider for open enrollment this fall
 - Looking forward to the facility projects coming up
 - Executive Director is retiring – Will be replaced by Garry Hart

2025 Program Goals – Ideas?

- Continue to streamline and simplify process and policies
- Fill open staffing positions throughout agency and resume suspended services
- Review Owatonna route service (more below in 'Feedback' section)

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

- N/A

NEW items from TAC Members/Community Feedback?

- Discussion about Owatonna route service
 - Is there an evaluation of route stops and adjustment of stops?
 - Yes, each deviated route is analyzed each year in preparation for updated brochures; existing stops, demand for other locations, etc. are all reviewed; communication with drivers and dispatchers takes place to determine what is needed
 - Troy offered to assist in possible route updates by reviewing stops and data
 - SMART will provide Troy with information and conversation will continue

2025 Meeting Dates:

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

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

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

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

*Q4 = December 17th, 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!