



Transit Advisory Committee
4th Quarter 2025
 December 17th, 10:00am
 Waseca; Zoom

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

Committee Members:

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|---|--|---|--|
| x | Kirk Kuchera – SMART | | Larry Baker – Albert Lea City Council |
| v | Joanne Brackey – SMART | | Oballa Oballa – Austin City Council |
| | Garry Hart – CVS/SMART | | Dan Sparks – Mower County |
| x | Chris Thompson – SMART | v | Sue Loch – Mayo Health Systems |
| x | Don White – SMART | | Bonnie Buchanan – Jefferson Lines |
| x | Ashley Strand – SMART | | Waseca County – Commissioner |
| | John Simonette – SMART | x | Kelly Sutlief – Waseca (passenger) |
| x | Greg Krueger – Steele County | v | Jim Wolter – MNDOT OTAT |
| | 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													
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	YTD
PASSENGERS													
Albert Lea	5,642	5,324	5,346	6,301	5,563	3,386	4,272	4,156	6,019	6,426	0	0	52,435
Austin	11,056	10,525	9,087	11,901	11,385	5,188	4,865	5,815	11,704	12,469	0	0	93,995
Owatonna	3,480	3,280	3,166	3,538	3,413	2,209	2,139	1,992	3,427	4,044	0	0	30,688
Blooming Prairie													
Waseca	2,025	1,641	1,428	1,542	1,413	1,365	1,019	978	1,703	1,805	0	0	14,919
TOTAL	22,203	20,770	19,027	23,282	21,774	12,148	12,295	12,941	22,853	24,744	0	0	192,037
HOURS													
Albert Lea	1,303	1,216	1,165	1,279	1,269	1,077	1,201	1,130	1,289	1,392	0	0	12,318
Austin	2,090	1,973	1,936	2,085	2,099	1,722	1,835	1,836	2,078	2,228	0	0	19,880
Owatonna	1,272	1,162	1,168	1,175	1,249	1,057	1,081	1,003	1,039	1,129	0	0	11,333
Blooming Prairie													
Waseca	679	658	660	625	676	686	702	690	682	702	0	0	6,759
TOTAL	5,344	5,008	4,928	5,162	5,292	4,542	4,819	4,658	5,087	5,450	0	0	50,289
MILES													
Albert Lea	14,696	13,498	13,359	14,602	13,698	11,899	13,139	12,773	14,959	16,153	0	0	138,776
Austin	22,327	19,992	19,965	20,862	20,813	19,085	19,569	19,498	21,386	23,705	0	0	207,202
Owatonna	13,609	12,105	12,103	12,255	12,863	11,085	11,556	10,694	12,271	13,684	0	0	122,225
Blooming Prairie													
Waseca	4,939	4,621	4,269	4,756	4,387	4,773	3,729	3,937	5,247	5,630	0	0	46,288
TOTAL	55,571	50,216	49,696	52,475	51,761	46,842	47,993	46,902	53,863	59,172	0	0	514,491

- Overall, ridership is doing well this year – could possibly see numbers not seen since 2019 (pre-COVID)
- With additional services on the road right now, we should see ridership continue to grow
- What's New
 - Service Updates
 - Extended service throughout the agency
 - Due to increase in staffing these last couple months, SMART is bringing back services that have not been on the road for quite some time
 - Utilizing hours from evening routes to add to areas that have seen a greater need – including additional Demand Response hours in Austin (including going to 7:00pm) as well as Owatonna
 - Also adding another shuttle service between the cities of Albert Lea and Waseca
 - Updated brochures
- SMART Functional Updates
 - Training / D&A
 - Quite a bit of new hire training – everyone has passed their CDL which is great (has seen its challenges the last few years)
 - Doing some statewide training – was recently in St. Cloud doing a dispatch training
 - Working with DRB and MNDOT
 - Looking ahead to 2026, will be doing quite a bit
 - Recently had a Drug and Alcohol audit (MNDOT does these every three years)
 - Overall went well
 - Working on the recommendations that were provided
 - Owatonna/Waseca
 - Owatonna
 - Increase in the Owatonna route service – moving to 6:00pm (from 5:00)
 - Added OMC as a 'Request Stop' for the route
 - Added one additional hour of demand response service due to increase in staffing
 - Waseca
 - Excited to have our third demand response service on the road – first time in a long time
 - Will operate from 1:00 – 5:00pm each day
 - Shuttle service starting up tomorrow – Will bring passengers from Albert Lea to Waseca, doing three trips per day
 - Increase in staffing with some great candidates
 - Austin/Dispatch
 - Austin
 - Virtually all positions have been filled – great staffing levels
 - Preschool is doing well; nearly 200 students getting rides in Austin
 - About 4K trips last month
 - Adjustments to routes with construction ending on 4th Street bridge
 - Minor changes to published stops
 - Additional hours for demand response – these hours are from the evening hours of the Purple Route
 - Mayo Trips – 3,846 (over 1,100 from Albert Lea)
 - Free trips for seniors in Austin and Albert Lea
 - Will ensure drivers are documenting the trips accurately
 - Dispatch
 - All good – fully staffed
 - Albert Lea
 - Fully staffed with drivers
 - Have opened up a lead driver position
 - Excited for the shuttle transporting people to Waseca

- Minor changes to the route – added Aldi to the route
 - The Mayo trips for seniors is going well
 - MNDOT Update
 - Operating
 - 2026 operating is set – everything will be business as usual
 - 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; received one last month, and receiving one this week (third bus is facing recall – should see Q1 2026)
 - 2025 Vehicle Replacement
 - Approved to order one bus – Replace 220
 - Working through the ordering process right now
 - 2026 Vehicle Replacement
 - Applied for seven buses
 - Initial notice indicated six buses approved
 - Hopefully order these spring 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)
 - NEPA work has wrapped up – MNDOT will be submitting to FTA for approval
 - 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
 - Submitted Large Capital Grant Application for replacement staff support vehicle in the future – was submitted 9/30/25
 - Will be applying for Large Capital Grant in 2027 for replacement of Austin Support Veh.
- 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
 -

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:

- Owatonna Route service discussion
 - Troy Klecker indicated he would be willing to assist in evaluating route design for Owatonna
 - Troy provided feedback regarding OMC downtown – this has been added to brochure as ‘Request Stop’ – will analyze demand and can possibly move to regular stop if necessary

NEW items from TAC Members/Community Feedback?

- Greg – Great to see positive feedback from managers regarding staffing
- Sue – Really appreciate the partnership with SMART
- Jim – The changes with the routes are showing increases in ridership; partnerships SMART has are great; MNDOT is working on updating the vehicle replacement schedule

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

2026 Meeting Dates:

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

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