METRO REGIONAL QUALITY COUNCIL Minutes
Friday, September 13th, 2024 from 9-11am

The Regional Quality Councils shall:
1. Support efforts and initiatives that drive overall systems and social change to promote inclusion of people who have disabilities in the state of Minnesota
2. Improve person-centered outcomes in disability services; and
3. Identify or enhance quality of life indicators for people who have disabilities.

Meeting Attendance

Attendees: Mohamed, Lynn, Chelsea, Judi Marie, Amelia, Rod, Daironne, Wu, Cassie, Frank. Chris

Staff Attendees: JoAnn, Sophie, Caption, Kerri

Meeting Overview

1. Introductions @ 9:05am

We had 2 new members join the meeting. A warm welcome to Amelia, who works for Scott County as a case manager in Community Based Waiver Services, and Daironne, a parent advocate and works for Project for Pride in Living, a housing provider and advocacy organization.

2. Updates @ 9:15am

- **Staffing Shortage Workgroup Update (Sophie)**

  This workgroup is made up of different regional quality councils including the MRQC and is facilitated by Kerri. Its focus is on the staffing shortage for direct support professionals (DSPs) and other support staff. They are working on arranging a panel discussion of parents, service recipients and support planners to inform the public about Home and Community Based Services and other services.

- **Housing Workgroup Update (JoAnn)**

  They made a series of videos focused on housing and posted them on the MRQC Housing Workgroup page on the RQC website and MRQC YouTube page. They are now trying to promote their housing videos and also facilitate housing discussions.

  They are working on:

  1. Submitted a commentary essay about accessible housing for *Access Press* October issue.
  2. Trying to persuade MPR to host a radio discussion focused on accessible and affordable housing. Haven't heard back yet. Will continue trying.

3. Workgroups

- Culture of Safety Workgroup

  This workgroup meets separately outside of monthly council meetings. They meet the first Thursday of each month from 9-11am.
  The next meeting will be on **Thursday, October 3rd, 2024 from 9am-11am.**
  Join Zoom Meeting
  https://arcminnesota.zoom.us/j/81121977247?pwd=SDBmVW1RQWFlVHBHKy96a1JESElEUT09
  Meeting ID: 811 2197 7247
  Passcode: 678410

- Staffing (DSPs & PCAs) Shortage Workgroup (Kerri)
  This workgroup meets separately outside of monthly council meetings. They meet the fourth Thursday of each month from 11am-12:30pm.
  The next meeting will be on **Thursday, September 26th, 2024 from 11am-12:30pm**.
  Join Zoom Meeting
  https://arcminnesota.zoom.us/j/87154192462?pwd=aDE2YnBUcVR1S2dvc0NzOUpFWCt5dz09
  Meeting ID: 871 5419 2462
  Passcode: 266371

4. Other Things to Share & Reminders

- Next council meeting is on **Friday, October 11th from 9-11am.**

Employment Workgroup

Attendance:

Employment Resources Presentation Events

These events started in June 2024 and will end in December 2024. Since attendance is very low, we are reevaluating to determine if we want to continue next year or not. Most events are recorded and are available to watch on the MRQC YouTube page.

Schedule so far:

- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services
  September 9th, 2024, 5:30-7pm
- Rise – subminimum to minimum wage transition
  October 7th, 2024, 5:30-7pm
- Jerry Mellum, Microenterprises
  November 4th, 5:30-7pm
- Kaposia- employment services
  December 9th, 5:30-7pm

Employment Resources Website (JoAnn)

JoAnn is still working on this. Chris offered to lend a hand. Please share any ideas you have for the website. Also share any resources you think should be added.

Andy suggested adding Transit Link - Metropolitan Council (metrocouncil.org) as a resource within transportation and Lynn suggested adding Connect 700. Judi Marie can share her son's employment story so it can be added to the website.

NEW Transportation Workgroup

Attendance: Mohamed, Cassie, Amelia, Chelsea, Lynn, Judi Marie, Daironne, Frank

Guest Presenter: Andy Streasick from Metro Mobility

Andy works as the Consumer Services Manager for Metro Mobility. Metro Mobility is a service operated by the Metropolitan Council.

Metro Mobility (MM) Basics

MM is a public transport service similar to the city bus and was launched back in the late 1970's in Minneapolis. It goes to the same places the city bus goes and is a shared ride service. It is federally mandated under the ADA to provide paratransit in Minnesota and is the 4th largest of its kind. In actuality, its service are more expansive than what the ADA mandates. It is regulated federally by the DOT, DOJ and the MN State. Last year, it had 2 million riders. About 35k people are eligible to use it based on conditional eligibility but 19k actually use it and about half of those are waiver service users. It has almost 650 buses outfitted with lifts and 30 ambulatory SUVs. It tries to retire buses after 170k miles but recently due to struggling to get new buses, its mileage has increased to 275k and higher.

Agency Services Transportation

MM used to provide transportation to and from agency activities, such as Opportunity Partners and Life Works, but stopped this service in September 2024. Instead, Metro Move provides agency transportation. The Van Subsidy pilot program also provides agency transportation to participants of Lifeworks programs. Lifeworks leases the vans from MM and hire drivers to transport their participants. By doing this, it addresses the driver shortage problem. However, the subsidy pilot program will end this year due to many factors, such as not enough bandwidth or resources to manage it properly. Perhaps in the future, it will be reinstated again.

Booking Rides

Riders can book rides via phone, email, fax and online. Riders can bring a guest or support staff with them.

Service Map

The service map is divided into 3 zones which are operated by 3 different contractors and contracts. These contracts are effective till 2026 and 2027. The areas outlined in blue which are mandated by the federal government cannot be denied services

ADA Mandated Rides

Under federal law, riders are to be picked up within an hour of the time requested when booking rides. An example of this is, a rider books for a 12noon pick up time. The driver has from 11am to 1pm to fulfill the rider's request. Also, riders book at the time of the call request. At the time of the booking, riders will secure their negotiated ride time as soon as they hang up the phone.

Non-ADA mandated rides

Requests made outside of the ADA federally mandated blue areas, the time span is increased and riders might have to wait 2 to 3 hours for pick up. Also, riders' requests can be put on standby or even denied. Denial is not common but it is good to know rides are not guaranteed. There is an extra 75 cent charge added for rides that extend 15 miles outside of ADA boundaries.

Premium On-Demand

Is like a taxi service similar to Uber and Lyft. It take riders directly to their destination and riders don't share rides with others. The rider pays the first $5 amount of the ride and the next $20 is paid by Metro Mobility. Riders can book a trip on the same day as their trip. They can use the iHail app. However, there is no guarantee trips will be fulfilled 100% of the time. Also, drivers aren't required to escort riders to the door of their destination. Recent legislative action which started Sept 2023 and ends Dec 2024 wants to expand the operating service hours from the typical 6am-4pm to 10pm and 7am-11pm on weekends. However, late night trips need to be booked a day ahead. There was an 80% rise in usage from 2022-2023. There are some wheelchair accessible vehicles for riders who need them. This provides equal access for all riders. There is a push to increase the number of providers so no rider is ever denied. Currently, it contracts with just 1 provider but wants to increase its providers so the service can expand and more people can get rides. There will be a meeting later this month to evaluate the service. Many riders form bonds with their drivers especially if they end up with the same driver on multiple occasions. Because of this bond, drivers are motivated to fulfill rider's requests and get them where they need to go ASAP. Rides are paid using cash or credit card.

Metric Goals

For ADA rides, the goal to be on time for pickups is 90% of the time. On time means arriving within a half hour of the negotiated pickup time. An example of this is, a rider requests a pickup time of 8am, the driver has between 8am to 8:29am to fulfill the request. For arrival times, it is also 90% with 1 hour time span. An example of this is, the arrival is 10am. The driver gets rider to their destination between 9 to 10am and no later or earlier.

Non-ADA rides are to be on time for pickups 85% of the time. A goal of 95% is set for onboarding for both ADA and Non-ADA rides, and 0% for denials. It is a serious civil rights violation to deny ADA rides.

What affects fulfilment of Metric Goals?

Metrics are effected by several factors. For instance; the pandemic, ability to get buses, job market, ability to get drivers, wages of drivers, etc. are all contributing factors. Currently, drovers get paid $23 an hour which is comparable to what fived route drivers earn before their wage increase. It needs the Met Council to increase wages again so it can be comparable to fixed route drivers. To increase the number of buses, the Met Council purchased Canadian buses because at the time, Canadian buses had what they needed. However, no federal money can be used for these purchases because the buses are not made in America. Besides buses, SUVs with ramps are available for riders who use wheelchairs.

Metrics like the ones effecting onboarding and wait times for drop offs are affected by the type of route they are, the formulas they follow, and how they are overseen. Anything that is overseen federally has to be approved by the federal government. If any changes are wanting to be made, the feds have to approve it. Changing the formula or federal laws is difficult to do and requires congress to take action. Incentivizing drivers to perform better is much easier.

Right now, MM is meeting most of their target metrics even if they are not 100%. The focus isn't so much on how long a rider waits on the bus, but more if they make their destination on time.

Enable Metro Mobility Riders to Ride City Bus

There was legislation enabling riders to take the city bus and legislation to offer free bus routes like the 62 and 32. However, the free routes legislation didn't pass and free routes like the 62 and 32 will end this year.

Software

A software called Trapeze is used to manage bookings and the Pass app is used for online bookings. MM plans on using Driver Mate and Tablets with Google Maps to replace older more clunky equipment. MM also wants to implement EZ wallet which is an account based faring program that is linked to people's money accounts enabling them to pay for rides even if they don't have cash or their MM card.

Stakeholder Engagement

There's a newsletter that is published a couple times a year that gets sent to all riders. There are also community conversations held 4 times yearly with 2 groups and each group holding 1 virtual and 1 in person meeting.

Trainings Offered

MM have partnered with State Services for DeafBlind and The Arc MN to have them offer trainings to MM drivers and staff. For example, deafblind simulations were conducted with drivers and dispatchers. Advocates from The Arc MN and Brain Injury Alliance have stressed the importance of using plain language, patience and repeating things back with reservationists. The feedback received from trainings are incorporated into training PowerPoints for drivers.

Contact Information

Phone number is 651-602-1111. Call if you have questions.

Questions and Answers from Attendees

Q: Person needs to get to work at 12noon and doesn't have a set schedule and is told there is an hour and half time range for pick up. They might get work as early as 10:30am and have to wait at their workplace till their shift starts?

A: Pick up time is based on city bus operations. There is allowance for hour and half pick up window and other riders are being picked up and dropped off during the same trip. Drivers aren't allowed to drop off more than an hour before scheduled. This makes 11am the earliest time for drop off. With the new contract, drop off time will be shortened to a half hour drop off instead of an hour. There will be incentives for drivers to get riders to be dropped off closer to their requested arrival times.

Q: How can we simplify the documentation of eligibility? Requesting a ride as well as shortening the ride for the requester with the disability?

A: Ride times are not likely shorten due to it being comparable to the city bus and it's meeting its metrics. With regard to simplifying the ride request process, it is open to suggestions. Every 4 years, there is a riders manual for people being certified or recertified.

Suggestions for next steps and how we can help?

New ideas from Andy:

- Simplifying MM rider's manual to a 1 pager. Figure out what people actually need to know to help them navigate transportation. Metro Mobility Tips For New Riders (metrocouncil.org)
- Continuation of specific city bus routes free to use. Legislation supporting this failed to pass last session. It will discontinue starting next year. Riders who get MM pay $1 to ride the city bus. Add the total cost for rides and it can become a large amount over a month.
  MRQC can help by contacting legislators and urge them to support this. MRQC can also recruit people to share their stories to legislators.

Previous Ideas:

- Create promotional material like a video to educate the public about transport options and have a TCAPs (they are county coordinators in charge of transportation services) appear in a video or consult with.
  We can add captions to the video.
- Create useful materials like grids, maps, charts for the public to use showing services provided, options, maps with county lines, etc.