

# East Central Regional Development Commission

100 Park Street South  
Mora, MN 55051  
Phone: 320-679-4065



## 2020 Annual Report



Serving Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties



Greetings East Central Minnesota!

Each year seems to be filled with new and exciting regional projects at the Commission and fiscal year 2020 was no exception. The following annual report covers the fiscal year July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020. It showcases some of our more notable accomplishments and provides a summary of the current programs and services provided by

the Commission.

Among the highlights were the completion of a Corridor Management Plan (CMP) for the newly established Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway. The CMP is not only important in guiding the future work of implementing the Byway but it is also a critical first step in pursuing designation as a National Scenic Byway which can bring increased awareness to the area. We are proud to have partnered with the many stakeholders around Lake Mille Lacs for this accomplishment!

Having established the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC), the Commission started an implementation phase which focused on such things as launching a Transportation Management Coordinating Center, improving volunteer driver opportunities, and generally exploring new and better ways of providing transportation to folks in our region.

Our Economic Development department began the year with an ambitious work schedule making visits to several of our cities to discuss potential projects and economic development initiatives. We also continued the Inventors and Entrepreneurs Club working with employers in the region to connect valuable resources and mentorship to emerging new businesses. The Commission also participated with the Minnesota Department of Transportation in developing a freight plan that takes longer term look at how our region's transportation system can better meet the needs of our industry and manufacturing sector.

The month of March, however, brought about new challenges with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of our region's businesses faced significant financial losses or temporarily closed. The Commission shifted their focus toward identifying resources to help businesses and communities survive the economic injury and become more resilient for the future. To this end, the Commission pursued federal CARES Act funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to establish a new revolving loan fund to help businesses injured as a result of the pandemic. Other federal funding will allow the Commission to add additional staff to assist businesses and communities identify and coordinate federal, state, and other resources as well as develop plans to be more resilient going forward.

The Commission is committed to adapting to the rapidly changing economy in East Central Minnesota. As always, our goal is to be a valuable resource to the region by identifying programs and services that can improve prosperity and quality of life for our citizens.

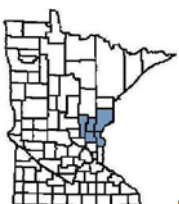
Yours most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert L. Voss".

Robert L. Voss  
Executive Director



*EDA City Meeting*





## MISSION OF THE EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

The mission is to provide leadership and direction through creative problem solving. We do this by initiating projects and programs that lead to creative solutions to regional problems, providing technical assistance and identifying and developing available resources. We serve in a leadership role as an advocate for East Central Minnesota to bring about positive change.



## WHO IS THE EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION?

The East Central Regional Development Commission (ECRDC) is a public agency serving a variety of constituents within Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties. Other constituents include various state, federal, and local governmental bodies.

The board members are represented by officials appointed by county boards, townships, municipalities, school boards and citizens at large.

The ECRDC is funded through a local tax levy and planning/program grants and contracts from state agencies, federal agencies and foundations.

### ECRDC Annual Meeting

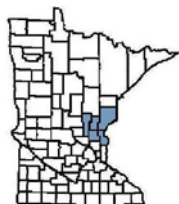
*Front l-r : Robert Voss, Ben Montzka, Loren Davis, Jeannette Kester, Tom Lawlor, Genny Reynolds, Diane Larkin  
Second l-r: Kevin Stenson, Dave Dillan, Linda Evans, Bob Bollenbeck, John Mikrot, Richard Hansen, and Robert Hoefert.*

### ECRDC BOARD MEMBERS

First Name	Last Name	Represents
Ben	Montzka	Chisago Co. Commissioner
Kevin	Stenson	Chisago Co. Municipalities
Tom	Lawlor	Chisago Co. Public Interest
Diane	Larkin	Chisago Co. Townships
Terry	Turnquist	Isanti Co. Commissioner
Tish	Carlson	Isanti Co. Municipalities
Loren	Davis	Isanti Co. Public Interest
Richard	Hansen	Isanti Co. Townships
Kathi	Ellis	Kanabec Co. Commissioner
Gordon	Gullixson	Kanabec Co. Municipalities
Bob	Bollenbeck	Kanabec Co. Public Interest
Dave	Patenaude	Kanabec Co. Townships

### ECRDC BOARD MEMBERS

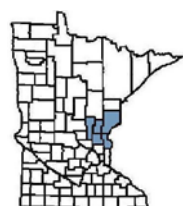
First Name	Last Name	Represents
Genny	Reynolds	Mille Lacs Co. Commissioner
Dave	Dillan	Mille Lacs Co. Municipalities
Linda	Evans	Mille Lacs Co. Public Interest
Robert	Hoefert	Mille Lacs Co. Townships
John	Mikrot, Jr.	Pine Co. Commissioner
Peter	Spartz	Pine Co. Municipalities
Jeannette	Kester	Pine Co. Public Interest
Glen	Williamson	Pine Co. Townships
Scott	Moe	Northern School Boards
Carri	Levitski	Southern School Boards
Carla	Dunkley	Native American Tribal Rep
Jim	Swenson	10000+ Population



**Serving Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties**

ECRDC Board Members

# Financials and Budget



	FY 2020 ADOPTED BUDGET	FY2020 UNAUDITED PRELIMINARY PRIOR TO CLOSE OF YEAR	FY 2021 ADOPTED BUDGET
<b>AGENCYWIDE REVENUES (by source)</b>			
County Tax Levy	328,384	349,465	328,384
Grant Revenues	332,028	352,485	347,268
Local Contract Revenues	54,812	58,799	32,500
Various Other Sources	16,940	4,012	18,240
Revolving Loan Fund	60,098	112,641	54,800
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>792,262</b>	<b>877,402</b>	<b>781,192</b>
<b>AGENCYWIDE EXPENDITURES (by program)</b>			
General Fund	150,854	259,133	170,426
Economic Development	140,000	154,614	143,190
Transportation / Safety	370,640	385,013	383,605
Revolving Loan Fund:			
Administration	7,620	6,491	10,075
Loans Disbursed	45,000	105,458	45,000
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>714,114</b>	<b>910,710</b>	<b>752,296</b>
Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2020 (unaudited)		General Fund Increase	33,308
Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2021 (Projected)		General Fund Increase	29,172

Fiscal Year 2019 Audit was conducted by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, Brainerd, Minnesota.  
The auditor's report expresses an unqualified opinion on the General Purpose Financial Statements of the East Central Regional Development Commission.



*Regional Transportation Coordinating  
Council Public Stakeholder's Meeting held  
in Mora.*



Minnesota has significant economic opportunities all across the state. Regions throughout Greater Minnesota share many qualities and challenges, but lack the intentional alignment needed to take advantage of shared priorities and maximize the use of resources. The lack of alignment has led to a limited voice in crafting effective development policy based on regional priorities. DevelopMN helps identify needed alignment and documents a broadly supported strategy for creating shared prosperity.

**DevelopMN has identified four cornerstones for strong regions and communities:**

**Foundational Assets**

Greater Minnesota communities require proactive and collaborative approaches/strategies to address infrastructure needs in a cost-effective manner. Managing the access to, maintenance, replacement, and growth of these assets is key to preserving and maintaining communities as well as providing for growth opportunities. Foundational Assets include above-ground and below-ground infrastructure including transportation, utilities, and water.

**Revolving Loan Fund (RLF):**

The ECRDC RLF provides gap financing for businesses looking to open, expand or relocate to Mille Lacs, Pine, Isanti, Chisago & Kanabec Counties. The ECRDC employs the RLF as a tool in recruiting new businesses, maintaining and expanding existing ones, creating and retaining good paying jobs and strengthening the economic base of East Central Minnesota.

Currently there are 11 active loans to small businesses in the region and approximately \$100,000 is still available to lend. Loan amounts typically range from \$10,000 to \$60,000 with terms up to 10 years. Informational brochures were recently updated and signs promoting the RLF program are often placed at benefitting businesses. Applications for the RLF are available on the ECRDC website at [www.ecrdc.org](http://www.ecrdc.org).

**Human Capital**

It is clear that prosperity in the 21st century will be driven by a combination of Human Capital and Innovation. In a world that is constantly shrinking, people with knowledge and skills are becoming ever more mobile and have multiple choices of where to live, work and play. Growing, retaining and attracting talent, and then maximizing its potential, are critical for Greater Minnesota.

**Economic Competitiveness**

Making Greater Minnesota an attractive environment for growth is critical to creating jobs, raising living standards and financing necessary public services. Economic prosperity requires that communities link all assets of the community to generate new knowledge, new businesses, and transform existing businesses into thriving 21st century companies.

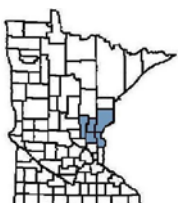
**Community Resources**

Greater Minnesota communities seek to maintain our rural heritage while creating amenities that in return offer sustainable populations and become defining pillars of our culture.



*Revolving Loan Fund Loan made to Braham Hardware*

Economic Development



**Serving Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties**



### **Administrators City/County Clerks, & Economic Development Professionals Meetings:**

The ECRDC organizes City / County Clerks / Administrator & Community / Economic Developers meetings approximately quarterly to discuss mutual key issues occurring in the Region 7E communities. Past topics include financing opportunities for local units of government and businesses, customized training and workforce needs, business recruitment and expansion initiatives, entrepreneurship, and regional marketing initiatives. These meetings have evolved into a best practices approach to city economic development. Issues and speakers are selected that provide insight that will assist local governments and communities.



*The ECRDC held quarterly meetings with City / County Clerks/ Administrators & Community / Economic Developers.*



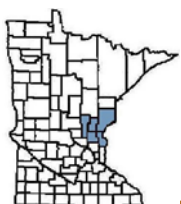
*Opportunity Zone marketing event.*

### **Opportunity Zones**

We continue to market Opportunity Zones in East Central Minnesota. Our region is home to ten Opportunity Zones, with at least one in each of our five counties. Investment in qualified Opportunity Zone projects can provide a variety of tax benefits. For more information, please see our website: [www.ecrdc.org](http://www.ecrdc.org) or call us at (320) 679-4065 #29.

### **Local Planning Projects**

The East Central Regional Development Commission is assisting the City of Rock Creek with updating their Comprehensive Plan, the City of Rush City with developing an Economic Development Strategic Plan, and Pine City Township with updating their Comprehensive Plan.





### GPS 45:93 Collaboration:

The ECRDC continues its economic development partnership with the GPS 45:93 in attracting high technology firms to Region 7E.

GPS 45:93 is a regional economic development consortium strategically located along Interstate 35 between Minneapolis/St. Paul and Duluth. This makes it an ideal location for those companies serving the Twin Cities and Duluth area.

The mission of GPS:45:93 is to better position the region to attract high wage, technology based jobs, collaborate on business retention and expansion and encourage entrepreneurial activity. GPS 45:93 is working with Chamber of Commerce, banks and other local partners to support businesses in the region.

GPS 45:93 is dedicated to growing and attracting businesses with high-paying jobs to the 5-county region of East Central Minnesota. It takes its name from the point of latitude and longitude at which the four original counties in the partnership meet.

The Mission Statement of GPS 45:93 is: Collaborate to strengthen regional economy by:

- Providing a regional approach to workforce development, business attraction, retention and expansion
- Acting as a conduit for members and the region to access resources and educational opportunities.



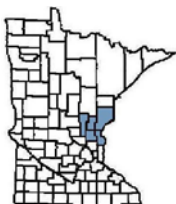
*GPS 45:93 meeting—Kate Ferguson present at the Duluth Port Authority meeting.*

### Inventors & Entrepreneur Club

The ECRDC partnered with East Central Energy and GPS:45:93 to hold events to focus on supporting local entrepreneurs and encouraging them to start and grown their business here in the region. The advisory team is working to develop this club and promote a monthly gathering for individuals that are seeking to share ideas and get more information about the first step or next step in starting their business.

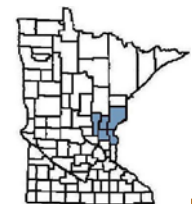


Economic Development



**Serving Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties**





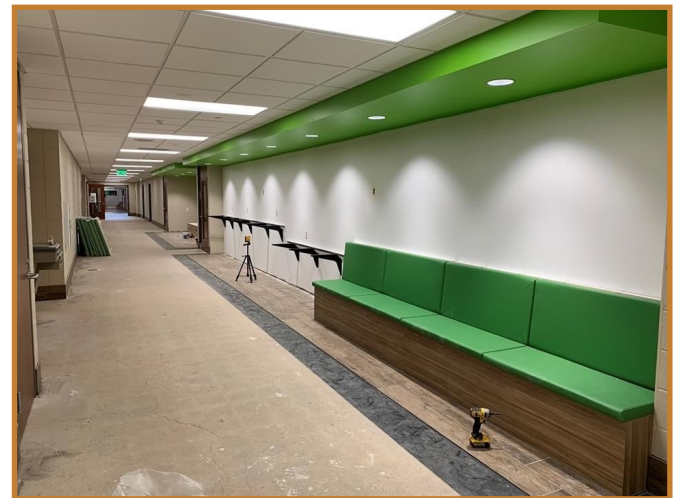
### **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS):**

The ECRDC has been implementing their five-year CEDS completed and adopted in 2017. The CEDS tracks the region's demographic trends and economic conditions, identifies weaknesses and threats, and identifies strategies that have the potential to help mitigate roadblocks to the region's prosperity. A valuable planning process for regional economic development takes place in the development of a CEDS. An approved CEDS is required to maintain East Central Minnesota's designation as a federal Economic Development District. The current CEDS can be found on our website at [www.ecrdc.org](http://www.ecrdc.org).

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are eligible to apply for various funding opportunities available through U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). For example, the ECRDC accesses the Partnership Planning grant to develop and implement the regional CEDS. More importantly, our local units of government may include regionally significant projects in the CEDS. Eligible projects may apply for federal funding through EDA's Public Works grant program on a competitive basis. The Public Works program seeks to empower distressed communities to revitalize, expand, and upgrade their physical infrastructure to attract

new industry, encourage business expansion, diversify local economies, and generate or retain long-term, private sector jobs and investment.

In 2019 the US Department of Commerce / Economic Development Administration awarded Pine Technical & Community College in Pine City a \$1.1 million grant for campus upgrades. Construction work is nearing completion at the time of this writing.



*Pine Technical and Community College renovations.*

### **Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Business Surveys**

The East Central Regional Development Commission, along with other regional planning organizations from Minnesota, have been partnering with Ron Wirtz with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis to conduct semi-annual surveys of businesses to help the Fed better understand not only our regional business economy, but Greater Minnesota. Mr. Wirtz's boss, Neel Kashkari, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, sits of the Fed's Federal Open Market Committee, which sets benchmark interest rates in the United States.



*Kanabec County EDA Conference  
held at the Grant Events Center  
in Mora*



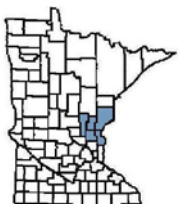
## Scenic Byways

The ECRDC and the Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway hosted the statewide Scenic Byway Workshop at Eddy's Resort near Vineland, Minnesota in October, 2019. Approximately 100 people attended the two-day event conducted annually by MnDOT and the Minnesota Scenic Byway Commission drawing scenic byway stakeholders from around the state. Presenters provided scenic byway education related to tourism and hospitality, scenic byway sustainability, and Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe cultural history.

MnDOT invested \$75,000 toward the development of a Corridor Management Plan (CMP) for the Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway. The ECRDC researched, authored, and produced an in-depth document providing guidance for the byway on a wide-variety of areas of interest to the byway stakeholders. Beyond the written document, the Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway Council developed initial organizational marketing materials, and mapping that creates a foundation for future work on behalf of the byway. The completed CMP reached MnDOT in May, 2020.

ECRDC staff worked with the Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway Council and MnDOT to submit all documents related to Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway's application for designation as a 'National Scenic Byway' via the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The completed CMP and a wide-range of other information formed the application submitted in May, 2020.

ECRDC staff completed a variety of administrative tasks that includes submittal of the annual report to MnDOT and coordination of organizational activities such as meetings and events for both the Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway and the Veteran's Evergreen Memorial Scenic Byway. Training opportunities for all three scenic byways within Region 7E—Lake Mille Lacs, Veteran's Evergreen Memorial, and St. Croix were offered by the ECRDC.



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Transportation

**Minnesota's Safe Routes to Schools** program, administered by the Minnesota Department of Transportation provides funding for planning, infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects. Isanti County, Minnesota. The ECRDC

participated in the Safe Routes to School planning process with the City of Rush City, Minnesota in Chisago County. Who undertook this planning initiative, completed in the spring of 2020, in hopes that infrastructure and non-infrastructure funded projects will follow as a natural progression.

Since its inception, SRTS assists communities in tackling unique challenges and taking full advantage of opportunities specific to individual schools and neighborhoods. Nationwide trends common to most communities include things such as: 1) declining rates of physical activity for school age children; 2) increasing rates of childhood and adolescent obesity and related health problems; 3) increased automo-

bile traffic congestion around schools and on nearby roadways; and 4) continued land use patterns that focus development further away from already developed areas. The Rush City Safe Routes to School Plan explores each of these.

Flourishing Safe Routes to School projects see remarkable changes in the way students and parents choose to travel to and from school. These projects succeed by including each of the "Six E's" of Safe Routes to School to ensure that their project is a well-rounded, multi-prong and time-tested approach to getting students safely walking and bicycling. The Six E's of Safe Routes to School are: 1) engineering; 2) education; 3) encouragement; 4) enforcement; 5) evaluation; and 6) equity.

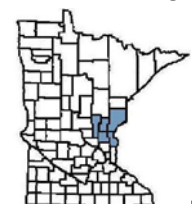
In 2020-2021 the ECRDC will conduct a SRTS planning process on behalf of the Hinckley-Finlayson School District for their Finlayson Elementary School located in Finlayson, Minnesota along MN18.



### Transportation Alternatives and Surface Grant Funding

Federal funding available through these two primary sources continue to be applied for by communities and/or counties in the East Central Regional Development Commission five county area, and administered through three Minnesota Department of Transportation Districts (1, 3, and Metro). Work related to the solicitation, application, review, and selection processes were completed in 2018 and 2019 as an on-going work effort from the ECRDC.

In 2019-20 each of the three MnDOT Districts recommended funding for both transportation alternative and surface grant funding within Region 7E for future projects in each of the five counties of Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, and Pine counties.





### District 3 Freight Plan

The ECRDC staff assisted the Minnesota Department of Transportation's District 3 (D3) in developing a regional freight plan to analyze long term freight needs of the region's transportation system. This included highways, roads, railroads, and air cargo. The plan will directly link outreach efforts from the manufacturers' perspective to build relationships with key stakeholders.

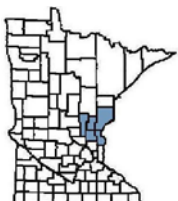


### Safe Roads/Toward Zero Death Coalitions

In 2019-2020 the ECRDC moved from the coordination role to partner role in the Mille Lacs County Safe Roads Coalition similar to the role in Kanabec, Chisago and Isanti County. The discontinuation of direct funding from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety to Mille Lacs County followed the trend in Kanabec County where crash data showed marked improvement, removing those counties from grant eligibility. Both Kanabec and Mille Lacs Counties acknowledge this as good work recognized by quantitative progress. In all cases, the existing coalitions remain with dedicated commu-



nity members that utilize the four E's in addressing safety issues. The E's represent Education, Enforcement, Engineering, and Emergency Services. Examples of projects implemented this past year include awareness campaigns for law enforcement mobilizations, and mock crashes. They operate under the Transportation Program of the ECRDC. The traffic safety issues facing counties include distracted driving, speed, seatbelt use, and impaired driving. Safe Roads/Toward Zero Death Coalition processes inform MnDOT funded projects in Region 7E.



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Transportation

## East Central Regional Transit Coordinating Council (RTCC)

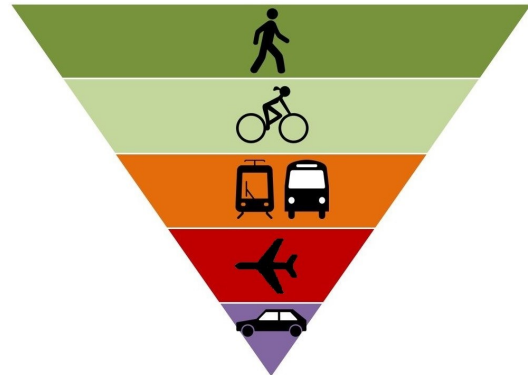
In July of 2018, the Minnesota Departments of Transportation (MnDOT) and Human Services, in collaboration with other state agencies, worked with the Metropolitan Council and other local governments and organizations to create Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCCs) throughout Minnesota. Currently there are 12 RTCCs which are positioned throughout greater MN. Within the metro area, Transportation Coordination Assistance Projects (TCAPs) are working on similar programs.

The ECRGCC moved into the second phase of Implementation on July 1, 2020. The ECRGCC Advisory Board, established in the 2018 – 2019 Planning phase, is represented by aging, workforce, healthcare, human services, transportation, Tribal, Veteran, and a variety of pertinent governmental agencies.

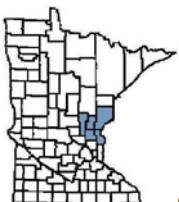
In June of 2020, the ECRGCC was notified by MnDOT that the Phase three application was approved for funding to begin implementing the plans determined through the 2019-2020 Implementation phase. The East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils' (ECRTCC) focus is to provide transportation solutions for the residents of Region 7E.



The majority of RTCC councils are now into their third year, continuing their goals to improve coordination between transportation providers and service agencies, to fill transportation gaps, provide more service with same or fewer resources, to streamline access to transportation and to provide customers more options of when and where to travel. The focus is particularly driven to improve mobility for the transportation disadvantaged such as older adults, individuals with disabilities, lower income individuals and/or military veterans.



*East Central Regional Transit Coordinating Council Board meeting.*



**Serving Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties**





Covid 19 has now bludgeoned us with distancing and contact issues. Transportation is obviously affected – hit hard – and from the onset groups have been

working through the pandemic, developing creative solutions and ways to prepare moving forward. Volunteers, teachers, faith organizations, counties, community action groups, transit services and others have stepped up to deliver food, pharmacy supplies, books, school items – and it's been called Reverse Transportation. Isolationism is most certainly a problem with seniors and disabled. So much awareness has come to the fore. As far as transportation units, barriers have been built in vehicles, advanced disinfecting techniques put into place, vehicle entry has been modified. Unfortunately, volunteer drivers are leaving the field, as most of them are the vulnerable adults that the virus affect. The ECRTCC has been discussing all of these variables with other RTCCs and MnDOT and are working with our subcommittees to stay abreast and help where we can best serve.

Moving forward, the focus will be on these five ECRTCC Implementation tasks for the 2020 – 2021 fiscal year:

1. Transportation Management Coordination Center Development
2. Volunteer Driver Program Development, Coordination and Training
3. Policy Action
4. Ongoing Transportation Exploration

Please visit the ECRDC website for more information about our program, tasks, boards. <http://www.ecrdc.org/regional-transit-coordination-council/>.



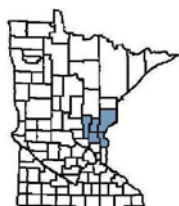
Our Facebook page is looking for LIKES:  
EastCentralMNTTransportationCoordination.

If you would like to get involved, please contact Karen at [karen.onan@ecrdc.org](mailto:karen.onan@ecrdc.org).

To coordinate the provision of multimodal transportation services to assure that transportation is convenient, affordable, & will benefit those residents facing transportation barriers throughout the East Central Minnesota Region 7E.

<u>Staff</u>	<u>Email</u>	<u>Phone</u>
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Brenda Hughley Finance Officer	Brenda.hughley@ecrdc.org	320-679-4065 x26
Karen Onan, Regional Transportation Coordinating Council Director	Karen.onan@ecrdc.org	320-679-4065 x32
Trish Rydlund, Office Manager	Trish.rydlund@ecrdc.org	320-679-4065 x25
Penny Simonsen, Transportation Director	Penny.simonsen@ecrdc.org	320-679-4065 x23
Jordan Zeller, Economic Development Director	Jordan.zeller@ecrdc.org	320-679-4065 x29

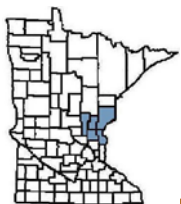
ECRDC Staff



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**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**  
**100 PARK STREET SOUTH**  
**MORA, MN 55051**  
**JUNE 30, 2020**



**Serving Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties**

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