



# EAST CENTRAL

Regional Development Commission

ECRDC.org • (320) 679-4065

100 Park St S, Mora, MN 55051

## ANNUAL REPORT FY2022





# EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD MEMBERS



I'm pleased to present the 2022 annual report for the East Central Regional Development Commission. You'll see in the following pages that the Commission celebrated many successes during the past fiscal year. For starters, the Revolving Loan Fund Committee lent \$500,000 in CARES Act funding to businesses in the region that were impacted by the COVID pandemic months ahead of schedule. So popular was this program that the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) recently authorized additional revolving loan funds to the Commission through the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) increasing our capacity to make loans by some 30%. We

also commissioned a study to determine childcare needs in the region and learned much about the extent to which it was affecting worker's ability to enter or re-enter the workforce. It is our hope that this will be a useful planning resource for our communities as they formulate economic development strategies around workforce. Finally, our economic development staff worked extensively with our local units of government to complete the region's next 5-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) allowing the Commission to continue its designation as a federal Economic Development District.

The transportation planning staff had a busy year also. Staff worked closely with transportation providers and stakeholders to complete a Regional Local Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan (LHSTCP). The LHSTCP is completed every 5 years and identifies strategies to improve access to transportation resources for our residents. A Corridor Management Plan for the Veteran's Evergreen Memorial Scenic Byway was also completed earlier this year. This corridor extends from Banning Junction approximately 50 miles into the Arrowhead Region along Hwy 23 and this plan will help guide local decisions on how to best manage and promote this beautiful corridor. Scenic Byway efforts also included the development of an Interpretive Plan for the recently designated Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway. The interpretive plan provides strategies that can bring increased awareness and educational opportunities of the area's intrinsic qualities for visitors around Lake Mille Lacs.

Overall, we're proud of our accomplishments during the past fiscal year. The Commission is especially grateful for our partnerships at the federal, state, and local levels. Those partnerships are critical in supporting our mission. As always, I want to say thank you to the entire ECRDC Board, our advisory committees, and staff for your ongoing guidance, support, and hard work in making the Commission's success possible.

Yours most sincerely,



Robert Voss, Executive Director

**Gene Anderson**  
Kanabec Co. Commissioner

**Aaron Berg**  
Southern School Boards

**Bob Bollenbeck**  
Kanabec Co. Public Interest

**Carolyn Cagle**  
Chisago Co. Townships

**Tish Carlson**  
Isanti Co. Municipalities

**Loren Davis**  
Isanti Co. Public Interest

**Dave Dillan**  
Mille Lacs Co. Municipalities

**Carla Dunkley**  
Native American Rep

**Linda Evans**  
Mille Lacs Co. Public Interest

**Richard Hansen**  
Isanti Co. Townships

**Robert Hoefert**  
Mille Lacs Co. Twps

**Jeannette Kester**  
Pine Co. Public Interest

**Tom Lawlor**  
Chisago Co. Public Interest

**Carri Levitski**  
Southern School Boards

**Jeremy Miller**  
Kanabec Co. Municipalities

**Scott Moe**  
Northern School Boards

**Ben Montzka**  
Chisago Co. Commissioner

**Dave Patenaude**  
Kanabec Co. Townships

**Genny Reynolds**  
Mille Lacs Co. Commissioner

**Peter Spartz**  
Pine Co. Municipalities

**Kevin Stenson**  
Chisago Co. Municipalities

**Jim Swenson**  
10000+ Population

**Terry Turnquist**  
Isanti Co. Commissioner

**JJ Waldhalm**  
Pine Co. Commissioner

**Glen Williamson**  
Pine Co. Townships

# FINANCIALS

| <b>AGENCYWIDE REVENUES (by source)</b>      | <b>FY 2022<br/>ADOPTED<br/>BUDGET</b> | <b>FY2022 UNAUDITED<br/>PRELIMINARY<br/>PRIOR TO CLOSE</b> | <b>FY 2023<br/>ADOPTED<br/>BUDGET</b> |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| County Tax Levy                             | 333,310                               | 330,977  | 333,310                               |
| Grant Revenues                              | 597,134                               | 649,105  | 362,351                               |
| Local Contract Revenues                     | 8,000                                 | 5,019  | 50,000                                |
| Various Other Sources                       | 18,240                                | 15,868   | 18,240                                |
| Revolving Loan Fund                         | 122,600                               | 135,528  | 622,600                               |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                       | <b>1,079,284</b>                      | <b>1,136,497</b>   | <b>1,386,501</b>                      |
| <b>AGENCYWIDE EXPENDITURES (by program)</b> |                                       |  |                                       |
| General Fund                                | 71,801                                | 97,508   | 126,126                               |
| Economic Development                        | 352,649                               | 543,798  | 182,738                               |
| Transportation/ Safety                      | 407,179                               | 368,109  | 452,628                               |
| Revolving Loan Fund:                        |                                       |  |                                       |
| Administration                              | 33,383                                | 41,009   | 10,402                                |
| Loans Disbursed                             |                                       | 230,000  |                                       |
| <b>Total Expenditures</b>                   | <b>865,012</b>                        | <b>1,280,424</b>   | <b>771,894</b>                        |

Fiscal Year 2021 Audit was conducted by CliftonlarsenAllen LLP, Brainerd, Minnesota.

The auditor's report expresses an unqualified opinion on the General Purpose Financial Statements of the East Central Regional Development Commission.



*The regional Inventors & Entrepreneurs (I&E) Club, co-founded by the ECRDC, returned from it's summer vacation with an event in-person on Tuesday, September 28th at East Central Energy in Braham. This event was held in a hybrid format – both in person and online via Zoom. The theme of this event was selling a business. Speakers were Marv Soldner, a business Broker with TransWorld Business Advisors, and Al Quarntstrom, owner of WCMP AM/FM in Pine City & KBK in Mora.*



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



## GPS 45:93

The ECRDC continues its economic development partnership with the GPS 45:93, a regional public / private economic development focused non-profit, in attracting high technology firms to Region 7E. This makes it an ideal location for those companies serving the Twin Cities, St. Cloud 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.



Photo above: Loren Davis, owner of Diversified Bronze & Machining in the Braham Industrial Park & Heidi Steinmetz with Kanabec County EDA speak on opportunities in East Central MN.



September 28th Inventors & Entrepreneurs Club event at East Central Energy in Braham.

## Inventors and 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 grow their business here in the region. These events went online this past year because of the pandemic. The advisory team is working to develop this club and promote a monthly gathering for individuals seeking to share ideas and get more information about the first step or next step in starting their business.

## Local Planning Projects

The East Central Regional Development Commission assisted Mission Creek Township (Pine County) with creating a Comprehensive Plan, and are now in the process of updating their land use ordinances. We've also worked with several other local units of government to provide technical assistance on a variety of other planning and development projects.

Photo right: Mission Creek Township's Planning Commission works on their Comprehensive Land Use Plan.



East Central Regional Development Commission  
FY22 Annual Report

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Federal EDA

The ECRDC concluded the implementation of their 2017 five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and began work to create a new five-year CEDS, which was adopted in April, 2022, and work on its implementation began immediately. 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).

Federal EDA 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.

Through the EDRDC's designation as a Federal EDA Economic Development District, several applications to the Federal EDA were fostered by the ECRDC, including projects in Isle and Sandstone, and the Mille Lacs



Photo above: ECRDC Staff facilitate a meeting between Beth Gruber with MLCV and Darrin Fleener with the Federal EDA.

Band of Ojibwe / Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures, which received federal funds. Several other applications were submitted by our local units of government that are still waiting a decision by the Federal EDA or were not selected for funding due to the competitive nature of the program.

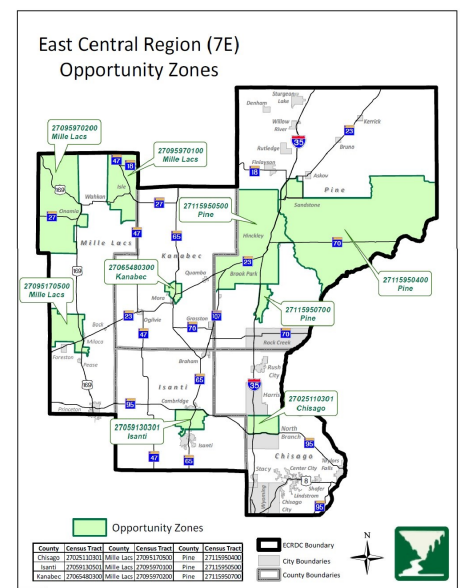
The ECRDC applied for and received \$400,000 to capitalize a new small business Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) to assist our region's ML businesses.

## Opportunity Zones

We continue to market Opportunity Zones in East Central Minnesota. Our region is home to nine 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.

## 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 surveys of businesses to help the Fed better understand not only our regional business economy, but Greater Minnesota, and the Pandemic's effects on it.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



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 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.

## **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, 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.

Work has begun on updating the state DevelopMN plan with our sister regional development organizations. We anticipate having an updated plan in 2023.



## **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. These meetings are held in both online and in-person formats. 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.



*Photo above: Participants at the July 16th ECRDC "City / County Clerks / Admins, Community / Economic Developers & Partners" meeting.*



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## RESILIENCY PLANNING: Technical Assistance

### *Building Stronger Businesses for 2021 and Beyond*



East Central Regional Development Commission wrapped up its three-part series, 'Building Stronger Businesses for 2021 and Beyond' in August of 2021. This series of three workshops was developed in partnership with SBDC and WBA and was well received by the business community. The last two workshops were completed in FY 2022:

'Finders Keepers: What You Can Do to Find and Keep Employees' looked at regional statistics to understand what is happening with employment demands and labor force participation, our region's labor shed, and where to look for untapped labor pools. 75 registrants participated in this workshop.

'Smart Strategies: Understanding Your Business Finances' provided information that focused on how to read and interpret key financial statements including Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss and Cash Flow, how to use financial statements to set growth goals, and how to calculate and analyze which products/services offer the biggest opportunities to drive

profits. 93 participants registered for this session.

Included in this project was the creation of an online **business resource library** housed on the ECRDC website creating easy access to additional business-related topics, webinars, books, etc.

Federal EDA asked for permission to showcase this business training series to their internal partners and other audiences through a monthly report and newsletter as well as share it with their Public Relations department for external communication.

## Revolving Loan Funds

**CARES/COVID RLF: Total original loan amount = \$500,000 | Loaned by grant deadline = \$523,550**

The ECRDC COVID loan program has had wide appeal across our region as funds have been applied for and are distributed to a broad range of business industries, locations and types.



Photo: Cheryl Minx (left) and Cindi Naumann of C&C Consulting closing on their loan.

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Glockenspiel/Deutschland Meats (Lindstrom) | \$ 25,000 |
| Dunham Run Bar & Grill (Sturgeon Lake)     | \$ 30,000 |
| Pizza Pub (Braham)                         | \$32,500  |
| Betabfit Personal Training (Princeton)     | \$ 30,000 |
| All Mac (Stacy)                            | \$ 41,050 |
| Cambridge Bar and Grill (Cambridge)        | \$ 40,000 |
| Veritas Academy (Chisago City)             | \$ 40,000 |
| Central Fence (Isanti)                     | \$ 30,000 |

|                                       |                  |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Siya Hotels/Quality Inn (Finlayson)   | \$ 60,000        |
| Woods Edge Vet (Hinckley)             | \$ 40,000        |
| Loban Home (Pine City)                | \$ 15,000        |
| Titan Forestry (Grasston)             | \$ 40,000        |
| Farmaste Animal Sanctuary (Lindstrom) | \$ 30,000        |
| Herman's Bakery and Deli (Cambridge)  | <u>\$ 30,000</u> |
| Total Loaned by Grant Deadline        | <u>\$500,000</u> |



## Broadband—Regional Access



Photo above: Regional Broadband Conference held on October 6, 2021 at the Braham Event Center.

### **Broadband Feasibility Study**

Through robust Broadband Taskforce engagement and presentations, the Kanabec County Board approved \$25,000 from their ARPA funds to be used as 50% match for an updated Broadband Feasibility Study. Blandin Foundation awarded the other \$25,000 needed for this study. HR Green was selected by the Broadband team. Work included GIS mapping, data and infrastructure analysis, market assessment, review

of information collected by the Kanabec County Blandin Foundation Accelerate Team, providers were engaged, and funding options were identified.

As a point of interest, community outreach provided by the Taskforce resulted in 26 resolutions of support from 2 school districts, 3 cities, 13 townships, and 8 organizations.

At this point recommendations from the Broadband Taskforce, in consultation with HR Green, provided to Kanabec County are:

1. Wait until Sept. when ECE finds out if they received their funding or not
2. To do a RFI in the meantime to allow other providers to propose project ideas
3. Earmark \$1 million in ARPA funds

### **Broadband Conference**

A Regional Broadband Conference was held on October 6 at the Braham Event Center. This event was one of six broadband related conferences held state-wide. The East Cen-

tral conference was open to the public and was well received as 112 residents, elected officials and local business owners attended in-person or online. East Central far outpaced other regional events with the most interested parties joining the session. Included was a panel discussion of professionals representing fields of education, health, local government and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe; a presentation of county level activities, a discussion with Diane Wells from the Minnesota Office of Broadband about efforts at the state; and a report from Nancy Hoffman explaining progress Chisago County has made in affordable broadband efforts. Announced at the end of the evening by Justin Jahnz, President/CEO of East Central Energy (ECE) utilities co-op, was ECE's plans to address broadband in East Central Minnesota. Funding options are being researched and a feasibility study has begun. The ECE Board of Directors is expected to make an announcement regarding a final decision in September 2022.

## Roundtable discussion with Senator Amy Klobuchar

March 31, ECRDC staff participated in a meeting that provided an opportunity for Senator Klobuchar's office to hear from ECRDC and other regional leaders on the workforce challenges, needs, opportunities, and successes within our region and communities. A robust discussion opened the door to highlight barriers preventing Minnesota residents from getting back into the workforce, conversation developed constructs such as apprenticeships, skills training, child-care, and making two- year college more affordable.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Regional Childcare

|   | State | Chisago | Isanti | Mille Lacs | Pine | Kanabec |
|---|-------|---------|--------|------------|------|---------|
| Total family providers                              | 7071  | 58      | 30     | 31         | 32   | 27      |
| Average length providers are in business            | 14    | 12      | 8      | 11         | 12   | 11.19   |
| How long current providers plan to stay in business |       | >10     | >10    | <5         | >10  |         |
| Number of centers                                   |       | 9       | 10     | 4          | 7    | 5       |

The goal of this collective Child Care Study, piloted in Pine County, is to help identify the size and scope of child care needs and challenges in our region and to recommend solutions to empower and support each county as they address these challenges.

### Child Care Survey and Data Compilation Reports

Chisago, Isanti, Mille Lacs, and Pine Counties' reports are complete. They have been presented to each County EDA and will be presented in full at the ECRDC Board Meeting held August 2022. The reports outline the child care challenges identified in their respective communities and the proposed solutions. A thorough investigation and analysis was conducted to uncover the factors con-

tributing to the shortage through individual interviews, surveys with a multitude of stakeholders, and various other methods of research and data collection.

### Supply and Demand Gap Analysis Shortages identified:

- Chisago County: 1449—infant/toddler need is 40% of total
- Isanti County: 1031—infant/toddler need is 50% of total
- Mille Lacs County: 459—infant/toddler need is 53% of total
- Pine County: 300
- Kanabec: 178

### Moving Forward

General recommendations for solutions to the shortages are common throughout all counties:

1. Explore multiple opportunities

to add additional child care programs across the county, especially infant and toddler care.

2. Pursue a multi-pronged approach that includes expansion of existing family child care and center-based programs and encourage/assist startup of new programs (which could include encouraging existing providers in other areas to open a program in our region).
3. Investigate the Pod Model.
4. All expansions and start up programs should work with a First Children's Finance Business Development Specialist to make sure their project is financially viable. This service is free of charge to providers.
5. Continue existing and/or create new support systems for child care providers.

Child care by the numbers (in years) helps to understand the intricacies of each solution based on the number of child care providers and their turnover.



### Launch MN— Innovate218

ECRDC continues its economic development partnership with Innovate218 to collaboratively assist in accelerating the growth of startup businesses in the region. Staff participate in developing innovative programming through task force membership including strategic planning, free lean business canvas classes, and new business/product pitch competitions. The first pitch competition was held in Duluth on December 14 with 10 entrepreneurs pitching their new ideas for a \$5,000 first place prize.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Regional Tourism

## Harnessing the Power of the St. Croix Valley Watershed, Economic Impact Taskforce and Congressional Support

ECRDC has been named to the Economic Impact Taskforce for this collaboration of economic and community development groups, local businesses, and non-profit organizations exploring how the natural, cultural, and historic resources within the St. Croix watershed can be leveraged for economic and community development. This group has been granted permission by the National Park Service to apply for National Heritage Area status. An Economic Impact/Opportunity Assessment for National Heritage Area Designation study has been completed with help from the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. A meeting was held with Congressman Pete Stauber to discuss his potential co-sponsorship of legislation that has been drafted and needs congressional support to be submitted.

## Regional Tourism Conference

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, area economic and community development groups representing the entire St. Croix River watershed were gathered for the Second Annual 'Harnessing the Pow-

er of Our Watershed 2022' conference to explore ways regional identity can foster economic opportunity.

The conference presented: new resources available through Minnesota and Wisconsin tourism; update on National Heritage Area designation efforts, results of the UofM's Carlson School of Management Economic Impact Study; possibilities for joint marketing of recreational opportunities, cultural and historical sites, businesses, non-profits, and the arts; and strategies and tools to be used to highlight the Watershed's events/resources.

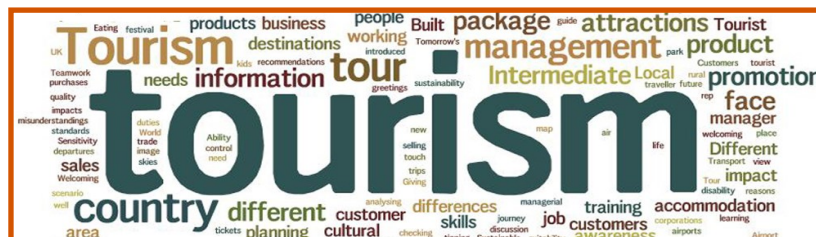
## AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation Grant

The ECRDC was encouraged by Federal EDA to apply for a competitive Travel, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation grant from the American Rescue Plan Act. ECRDC staff met with economic development leadership from our five counties (the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe was invited but unable to join us), CMJTS, and other regional leaders.

Based on input from these collaborative partners, we developed and submitted an application that included the development of strategies



and an implementation plan, reflective of our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), that would address and help improve the regional economy and local business climate in areas of focus that included but were not limited to workforce training, broadband, business acumen, resiliency, and diversification. The goal - to restore East Central Minnesota business vitality and increase workforce numbers as well as wages. While the application not selected for funding, the ECRDC intends to continue its work promoting tourism through our work with the Scenic Byway program and the CEDS .



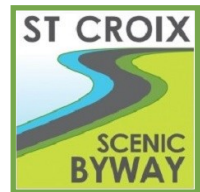


# TRANSPORTATION

## Veteran's Evergreen Memorial Scenic Byway and Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway

The ECRDC continues its role as administrative host for two State of Minnesota designated scenic byways, Veterans Evergreen Memorial Drive Scenic Byway in Pine County and Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway in Mille Lacs County, with the byway meetings conducted remotely during the past year.

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 remain available to the byways by the ECRDC and its partners.



*The Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway held an Interpretive Tour around the lake on September 29, 2021. Photo left was taken at the Garrison Concourse.*



*Photo right: Father Hennepin Park Ranger giving history about the park.*

## 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 as an on-going work effort from the ECRDC.

In 2021-22 the ECRDC assisted in the facilitation of solicitation and selec-

tion of Transportation Alternatives funding for counties in MnDOT Districts 1 and 3, and for surface grant funding in MnDOT Districts 1 and Metro within Region 7E for future projects.

*Soo Line Trail bridge in Onamia. This overpass aims to provide a safer passage over Hwy. 169 in Onamia*



# TRANSPORTATION

## Minnesota's Safe Routes to Schools



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 automobile traffic congestion around schools and on nearby roadways; and 4) continued land

use patterns that focus development further away from already developed areas. The Finlayson 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 Es of Safe Routes to School are: 1) engineering; 2) education; 3) encouragement; 4) enforcement; 5) evaluation; and 6) equity.

The ECRDC offers outreach and training related to the opportunity

to apply for Safe Routes to School funding (planning, infrastructure, and non-infrastructure) projects. Within the region, the ECRDC has completed Safe Routes to School Plans in each of the five counties for Hinckley Elementary, Finlayson Elementary, Taylors Falls Elementary, Isanti County

Schools including Braham School District and Cambridge-Isanti School District, Kanabec County Schools including Mora School District and Ogilvie School District,



Education



Encouragement



Enforcement



Equity



Evaluation

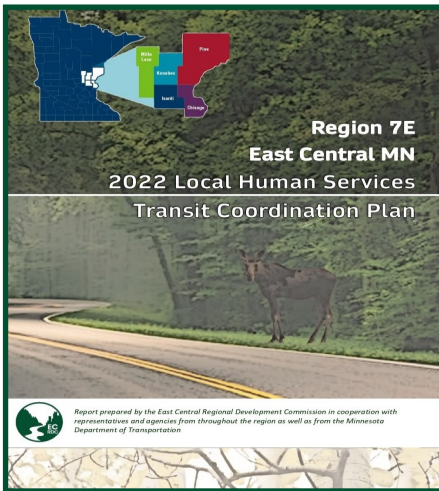


Engineering





## Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan



The ECRDC the project management for the development of the 2022 Regional Transit Coordination Plan for East Central Minnesota, a comprehensive planning process led by a steering committee made up of leadership from services for individuals with disabilities, older adults, persons with limited incomes, public transit providers, and private trans-

portation entities. The Minnesota Department of Transportation Office of Transit provided technical assistance, oversight and funding to complete the plan. The strategies and projects identified in this plan came about through collaboration to address the major needs and concerns of transit in the next five years across the region.

The following are the priorities that emerged from the Plan:

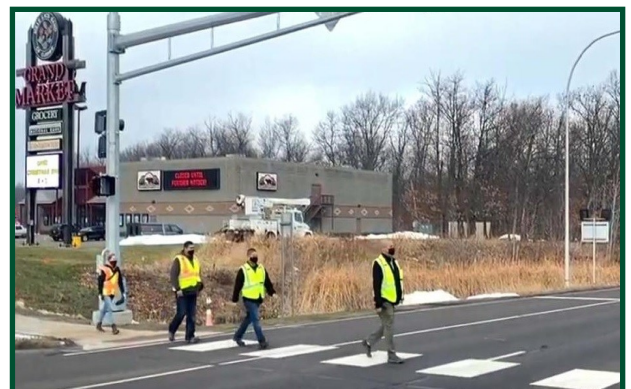
1. Develop Transportation HUBS to establish connectivity of service providers which should include a variety of modalities. Destination Or Transfer Station (Connecting the DOTS)
2. Unified Multi-Regional Mobility Management Coordination (Center)
3. First and Last Mile program dev. (Vehicle Sharing program)

4. Prepare infrastructure to facilitate the induction of Ride Share Program(s) – LYFT, UBER, WAZE, CarePool
5. Oversee adoption of insurance policy/procedure adjustments and re-evaluation of current FTA/MnDOT/Federal/State regulations
6. Modify FTA's restriction on the purchase of small vans utilizing 5310 funding
7. Align with regional counties for broadband infrastructure
8. Universal Payment Structure to begin in our region with expansion in mind
9. Vehicle Donation Program
10. Travel Training
11. Transportation Involvement in EMS Preparedness Planning

## Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and Statewide Transportation Planners Meetings

A group of invested stakeholders convenes regularly each year to support state and federal transportation initiatives. The ECRDC staff coordinate the work of this group made up of MnDOT staff, county and city engineers, state, regional, and local bike and pedestrian staff. The Region 7E TAC provides the review mechanism for the review and recommendation of several sources of funding. Additionally, the meetings act as a conduit for federal and state resources directly related to roadway improvements.

Quarterly meetings of transportation planners from all regional development organizations (RDOs) with the Minnesota Department of Transportation supports the contractual relationships between the RDOs and MnDOT with a wide and varied agenda. ECRDC staff attend these meetings and bring agenda content to the meeting.



*Photo right—HAWK crosswalk installed near Grand Casino and Grand Market.*



# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council



The ECRTCC, East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council, focus is to provide transportation solutions for the residents of Region 7E. To solve this issue, there must be improved coordination between transportation providers and service agencies, filling transportation gaps, providing more service with same or fewer resources, streamlining access to transportation, and providing 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.

The ECRTCC continues to make progress, developing strategies to improve transportation access. The following tasks were determined through the Implementation Phase.

- Transportation Guidance and Consultation  
Goal: *Inform people in the community about existing services*
- Vehicle Sharing  
Goal: *To maximize utilization of existing vehicles used by organizations including FTA Section 5310 providers*
- Private Non-Profit and For-Profit Engagement  
Goal: *To engage private for-profit and non-profit organizations as stakeholders*
- Staff Training  
Goal: *RTCC staff gain expertise as a regional transportation resource*
- Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan  
Goal: *To identify viable projects FTA eligible (capital projects)*

- Staff Training  
Goal: *RTCC staff gain expertise as a regional transportation resource*
- Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan - or LCP  
Goal: *To identify viable projects FTA eligible (capital projects)*
- Volunteer Drivers Programs  
Goal: *To have supportive resources to develop and sustain volunteer driver programs*
- Emergency Preparedness Facilitation  
Goal: *To facilitate networking with all emergency response units and all transportation providers within the region*



Photo left:  
Kanabec County Fair Booth  
shared with Timber Trails  
Transit



Photo right - Electric vehicle  
charging stations in Region 7E.  
This charging station is located  
at 800 Main St. S, Pine City, MN  
55063 next to Family Pathway  
Thrift Store.

## **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.

## **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.



## **ANNUAL REPORT EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION 100 PARK STREET SOUTH MORA, MN 55051 JUNE 30, 2022**

