



# EAST CENTRAL

Regional Development Commission



## ANNUAL REPORT FY2023

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ECRDC.org



# FORMATION OF THE EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



STATE OF MINNESOTA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
ST. PAUL 55155

WENDELL R. ANDERSON  
GOVERNOR

September 14, 1973

It is my pleasure to announce that local governments, representing a majority of the population in Region 7E, have submitted resolution requesting the formation of a regional development commission. In accordance with Minnesota Statutes 462.387, Subdivision 2, I hereby take the action necessary to form a Regional Development Commission in Region 7E of the State of Minnesota.

The Regional Development Act, as amended, provides that the State Planning Officer shall assemble local government officials to select members of the Commission. I have asked the State Planning Agency to arrange these meetings, and that office will notify you very soon about the details for these meetings.

I am pleased that local government officials in Region 7E have requested the formation of a regional development commission. Let me assure you that state government will make every effort to assist you with the important work of this new regional development commission.

With the formation of your commission, regional development commissions now exist in each development region in the state. Local governments have reached a milestone in their ability to work with state and federal agencies. The formation of regional development commissions provides the means for strengthening local government. I look forward to working with you in your effort to insure continued strong local government in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wendell R. Anderson".

Wendell R. Anderson  
GOVERNOR



# EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD MEMBERS



The Commission will observe 50 years of existence on September 14<sup>th</sup>. It was on that date in 1973 when Governor Wendell Anderson signed the official letter establishing the East Central Regional Development Commission (ECRDC). Governor Anderson's action to create the ECRDC was authorized under the Regional Development Act of 1969 but became possible only after a majority of our local units of governments petitioned for its creation.

The Regional Development Act acknowledged that problems of growth and development often transcend boundary lines of local government units making intergovernmental cooperation an important part of any solution. The

Commission was formed with this in mind and launched several new projects and initiatives over the years helping many communities flourish throughout east-central Minnesota. Tangible examples of the Commission's work include industrial parks, road and bridge projects, trails, public infrastructure, transit, housing, arts, aging programs and more. Many of these projects involved federal and/or state funding made possible, in large part, by the efforts and leadership of the Commission and staff.

We've been truly blessed to have had dedicated and talented members from both public and private sectors on our governing board and advisory committees who recognized the importance of working together for the common good. It's also important to mention that Commission's success would not have been possible without the relationships we have with our local units of government combined with the wonderful partnerships we have with various state and federal agencies, foundations, and others.

The Commission's programming and work has evolved somewhat over the years in order to stay relevant to the emerging needs of the region but continues to hold true to original principles for which it was founded. Please take a moment to peruse this year's annual report to see what new and exciting things we've been up to here at the ECRDC.

Thank you for stopping by and congratulations on 50 years of progress and success!

Yours truly,

Robert Voss

Front row l-r: Jeanette Kester, Ben Montzka, Robert Voss, Genny Reynolds, Loren Davis;  
Back row l-r: Tom Anderson, Dave Dillan, Sara Treiber, Glen Williamson, Dave Patenaude, Alan Duff, Kevin Schieber, Nate George, JJ Waldhalm, Peter Ripka, Scott Moe, and Tom Lawlor.



### ECRDC Board Members

**Tom Anderson**  
Isanti Co. Townships

**Jill Anderson**  
Southern School Boards

**Carolyn Cagle**  
Chisago Co. Townships

**Loren Davis**  
Isanti Co. Public Interest

**Dave Dillan**  
Mille Lacs Co. Municipalities

**Alan Duff**  
Isanti Co. Commissioner

**Carla Dunkley**  
Native American Rep

**Nate George**  
Isanti Co. Municipalities

**Robert Hoefert**  
Mille Lacs Co. Townships

**Jeanette Kester**  
Pine Co. Public Interest

**Tom Lawlor**  
Chisago Co. Public Interest

**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 Ripka**  
Kanabec Co. Commissioner

**Kevin Schieber**  
10,000+ Population

**Sara Jayne Treiber**  
Kanabec Co. Public Interest

**JJ Waldhalm**  
Pine Co. Commissioner

**Dave Waldoch**  
Chisago Co. Municipalities

**Glen Williamson**  
Pine Co. Townships



# ABOUT THE ECRDC

## 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.



ECRDC Staff	Program	Email	Phone
<b>Bob Voss</b>	Executive Director	robert.voss@ecrdc.org	(320) 679-4065 x22
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<b>Darcy Rylander</b>	Finance	finance.director@ecrdc.org	(320) 679-4065 x26
<b>Karen Onan</b>	RTCC	karen.onan@ecrdc.org	(320) 679-4065 x32
<b>Trish Rydlund</b>	Office Administrator	ecrdc@ecrdc.org	(320) 679-4065 x24
<b>Penny Simonsen</b>	Transportation	penny.simonsen@ecrdc.org	(320) 679-4065 x23
<b>Jordan Zeller</b>	Economic Development	jordan.zeller@ecrdc.org	(320) 679-4065 x29



*Photo: Northspan’s Non Traditional Lender Forum on June 7th in Duluth.*



# FINANCIAL REPORT

Agencywide			
Revenues (by source)	FY23 Adopted Budget	FY23 Unaudited Prelim	FY24 Adopted Budget
County Tax Levy	\$ 333,310	\$ 335,392	\$ 348,029
Grant Revenues	\$ 362,351	\$ 402,447	\$ 416,905
Local Contract Revenues	\$ 50,000	\$ 34,355	\$ 26,241
Other Sources	\$ 18,240	\$ 3,834	\$ 9,440
Total Revenues	\$ 886,501	\$ 776,028	\$ 800,615
<b>Expenditures (by program)</b>			
General Fund	\$ 126,126	\$ 201,495	\$ 243,041
Economic Development	\$ 182,738	\$ 208,854	\$ 151,967
Transportation/Safety	\$ 452,628	\$ 411,957	\$ 333,356
Other Grants			\$ 57,924
Total Expenditures	\$ 761,492	\$ 822,306	\$ 786,288
Revolving Loan Fund			
Revenues	FY23 Adopted Budget	FY23 Unaudited Prelim	FY24 Adopted Budget
Principal Repaid	\$ 105,800	\$ 164,624	\$ 148,486
Interest/Other Revenue	\$ 16,800	\$ 19,152	\$ 30,845
	\$ 122,600	\$ 183,776	\$ 179,331
<b>Expenditures</b>			
Administration Expense	\$ 10,402	\$ 11,649	\$ 11,487
<b>FY2023 Loans Disbursed</b>			
Isanti County	\$ 25,000.00		
Kanabec County	\$ 60,000.00		
Mille Lacs County	\$ 65,000.00		
Pine County	\$ 155,000.00		

## GPS 45:93 - East Central Economic Partnership

The East Central Development Partnership, an economic development group formerly known as GPS 45:93, is re-branding itself and developing a new version of its website. As the organization launches into a new era with a new name and updated model for programming, a new logo and updated web presence will better convey its mission, role in supporting economic development, and its dedication to growing and attracting businesses with high-paying jobs in the five-county region of East Central Minnesota.

In fall 2022, ECRDC staff as a member of the group's executive committee, assisted in the development of a new strategic plan and included the exploration of a new name and website in its operating plan for 2023-2024. The GPS 45:93 name required a long explanation and did little to convey the group's location or purpose. Following a survey and a discussion of its full membership, the group selected the name East Central Development Partnership as a new name in March 2023.

Members chose "East Central Development Partnership" as the new name because it reflects where the group is and what it does. The group's new branding will guide and reflect the new name.



Photo: GPS:45:93 Familiarization Event in Princeton.

## 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.

## 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.



Taste of the Region at the MADO conference provided an opportunity to showcase several of our local businesses. The Day Fish Co., Braham, was showcased by providing samples of their well-known pickled herring. Also served was the delicious Heggies Pizza, Milaca, which was a great success!

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## DevelopMN identified four cornerstones for strong regions and communities:



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.

### 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.

## 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: An ECRDC Administrators City/County Clerks, & Economic Development Professionals Meetings.

## Local Planning Projects



Photo: Mission Creek Township's Planning Commission works on their plan.

The East Central Regional Development Commission is in the process of assisting Mission Creek Township (Pine County) with 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.

The ECRDC has begun implementation of their 2022 five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs), which was adopted in April, 2022. 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 competi-

tive 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.

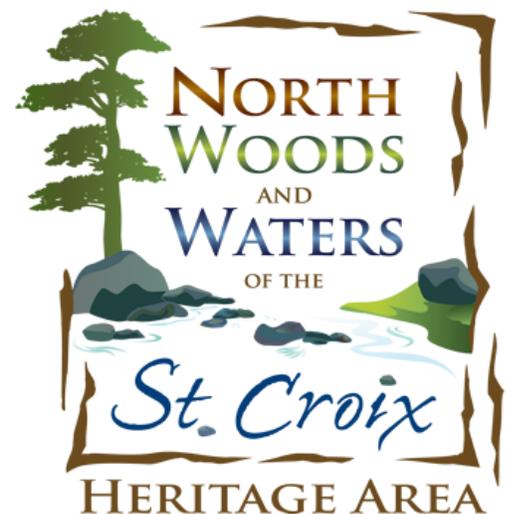
Through the EDRDC's designation as a Federal EDA Economic Development District, several applications to the Federal EDA were fostered by the ECRDC, including projects in Isle and Sandstone, and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe / Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures, which received federal funds.

The ECRDC applied for and received \$99,900 from USDA Rural Development to capitalize a new small business Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) to assist our region's businesses.

## Economic Impact Taskforce of the St. Croix Valley Watershed

The third annual *Harnessing the Power of Our Watershed* was held in early 2023.

Focus was once again on ways to work across traditional boundaries to foster economic vitality. The conference coupled practical information participants can put into use immediately with the opportunity to forge a vision for the future. Joint marketing efforts and examples were highlighted by a panel discussion, and Julie Fox from Travel Wisconsin and Michael Hernandez from Explore Minnesota discussed both state's programs and how to take advantage of what's available.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Assisting Businesses in our Region

### ECRDC Revolving Loan Fund

ECRDC’s Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) lent \$305,000 to seven businesses in our five-county region during this last year.

The ECRDC has leveraged financing to assist regional companies maintain, pivot, or grow their business and diversify the local and regional economy. This work has also helped to retain or create hundreds of jobs. In addition to providing funds, technical assistance and other valuable business resources are also offered as support. ECRDC continues to market and have success with our revolving loan portfolio that includes three programs: Historic, CARES/COVID, and APRA. These funds have had wide appeal across our region as funds have been applied for and are distributed, helping to create and retain many full and part-time jobs.

	Receivable	Available Funds
Historic RLF	234,769	74,721
CARE/COVID RLF	414,342	93,307
ARPA RLF	201,180	301,614
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>859,291</b>	<b>469,642</b>



Photo: The ECRDC Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) can provide financing for new, expanding or relocating businesses in Region 7E.



Total receivables | **\$859,291**  
 Loans in portfolio | **29**  
 Available to lend | **\$469,642**

## Northern Lights Express Passenger Rail

Northern Lights Express (NLX) Passenger Rail Alliance meeting in Pine City where they discussed (and celebrated) the Minnesota Legislature’s approval of \$194.7 million in funding for the new high speed passenger rail project. This amount represents 20 percent of total cost but will unlock an additional 80% in federal funding. The existing BNSF railroad will be utilized with the purchase of some newly needed train cars. Four daily round trips are expected with tickets for a one-way trip costing approximately \$35. Construction on this project, which includes building a new and remodeling an existing building for station stops in Hinckley and Cambridge (respectively) and improving the existing rail, is expected to begin in about a year. Complete estimates are four to five years.



Photo: Northern Lights Express (NLX) Passenger Rail Alliance meeting in Pine City

# 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.

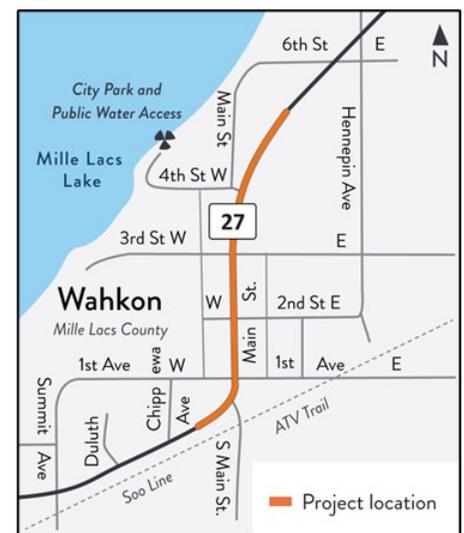
## Transportation Alternatives and Surface Grant Funding

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 selection of Transportation Alternatives funding for counties in MnDOT Dis-

tricts 1 and 3, and for surface grant funding in MnDOT Districts 1 and Metro within Region 7E for future projects.



Map above: Reconstruct and improvement of Hwy 27 (Main St.) from east of Chippewa Ave. to east of Fourth St. W. in Wagoner.



## Minnesota's Safe Routes to Schools

# SafeRoutes



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 develop-

ment 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, and Princeton Schools.



Photo left: SRTS photo at the Isanti Primary School.

Photo right: SRTS photo at the Isanti Middle School.



## 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.

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## Child Care Across the Region

ECRDC continues to partner with Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties to work through strategic supply plans that address the shortage of child care being faced across the region.

ECRDC supported the development of child care teams/committees for each county where they are working to increase child care slots in their county. These teams have conducted brainstorming sessions around community resources, developed goals, and are working through implementation plans in support of both new and existing providers.

Tactics being utilized by these teams include community open houses/resource fairs, grant applications, new business marketing efforts, free provider training opportunities, early childhood education tuition reimbursement, and planning with cities, counties, non-profits, businesses, architects.



- Free training has been identified and will be offered fall 2023.
- Multiple counties have sent and collected surveys—each of the counties addressing these surveys as part of their own research for specific county goals.
- Grants have been awarded to Isanti for \$13,500 to focus on marketing efforts and to Chisago for \$15,000 for grants to local start-ups—\$2,000 each for the first 6 providers—plus marketing costs for Child Care Business Resource Fairs.
- Multiple meetings have been scheduled with Cities, Counties, and private businesses to discuss possible child care solutions, funding, and tours of potential buildings. Both family and center-based options are being reviewed.

### Highlights of planning efforts:

- Child Care Super Saturday Conference and Training event for all providers in the region is scheduled for September 2023. This event is designed as a way to show support for existing providers as well as attract new providers.



*Photo above: Child care providers were invited to a focus group and discussion designed to collect information regarding current barriers and challenges and to generate ideas that can support local providers.*



*Photos: Veritas Academy's North Branch church location may need only minor adjustments to make the space ready for children.*



# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



## East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating

Since its inception in 2018, the ECRTPCC has developed into a driving force to improve transportation access for those in East Central Minnesota, especially focusing on those who are transportation disadvantaged.

Each year has marked a new phase of building and coordination and in 2022, a Logic Model was developed to clarify processes and help understand progression. Utilizing the logic model and recognizing its inherent accountability, each one of the ECRTPCC's tasks has become more focused. The Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan which was completed in 2022 has also contributed to the significance of the ECRTPCC's tasks.

Through the work of the ECRTPCC Advisory Board, Public Outreach and Staff, the tasks and details below are developing into projects that have been or will be considered for completion over the next few years as possible.

### Transportation Guidance and Consultation

Goal: To inform people in the community about existing services

- The East Central Minnesota Transportation Provider Directory is published online, printable and is distributed as hard copies. It also includes information about park and ride lots as well as regional car charging stations.
- The website: <http://eastcentraltransit.com/> includes helpful and relevant information that answers questions for riders and potential new riders. Provider links are available.
- The ECRTPCC has been branded with a recognizable design, to assist with marketing efforts of the ECRTPCC.
- Continued collaboration with RTCCs throughout the state, networking by sharing relevant and current information online through email, Zoom meetings, in-person, Facebook and Instagram.
- Participation in statewide events including Operation Community Connect, Senior Fairs, Age Friendly events and a large Health and Human Services Conference.
- Bi-Monthly updates to ECRTPCC Board Members.
- To remain top of mind, ECRTPCC continues to reach out to the public through radio (KBK 95.5fm), the Kanabec County Fair (2021, 2022, 2023) and through other local/regional expos/events/fairs, local news media.



### Vehicle Sharing

Goal: To maximize utilization of existing vehicles used by organizations including but not exclusively, FTA Section 5310 providers

- The ECRTPCC is gathering data investigating a possible vehicle sharing program in the East Central area, where volunteers would drive shared vehicles rather than utilizing their own. There would be no compensation in this scenario. Enterprise Commute is an avenue being explored for shared vehicle utilization.
- The Greater MN Shared Mobility Program has been established under the Twin Cities Shared Mobility Program due to the involvement of the RTCCs. ECRTPCC has membership in this Steering Committee.
- Continued advocacy for smaller vehicles available through 5310 funding.
- Continued advocacy for insurance coverage/policy changes/options for vehicle sharing.



East Central Regional Development Commission  
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# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council

### Private Non-Profit and For-Profit Engagement

Goal: To use mobility management for cultivating partnerships, creating or joining collaborative efforts that include transportation providers, planners and other community stakeholders.

The importance of a well-rounded Advisory Board for the ECRTCC is paramount throughout all phases of the ECRTCC processes. Individuals or entities are encouraged to participate if they have any interest in regional transportation whether they are transit providers, schedulers, or users of transportation. As the ECRTCC has gained momentum and notoriety, there has been more interest and several new individuals have become involved.



Mobility as a Service (MaaS) technology has been formulated as a MnDOT pilot program in southern and western MN including, from our region, Tri-CAP

Transportation. MaaS will allow for scheduling by phone, real-time route information, access to easy payment. Once the pilot program is concluded, more advancements will be made to enlarge the MaaS area. ECRTCC is staying abreast of these developments to be sure we are considered for participation in the next phase – especially with developments from Tri-CAP.

An established taxi service within the region was sold then purchased by a couple very interested in working with the ECRTCC. This opportunity has availed itself as a fortuitous option to the lack of transportation options within the region.

ECRTCC will facilitate the SafeRides Program moving forward. This opportunity will lend us an entrance to private transportation services which wasn't previously available. Gaining these contacts will not only be positive for the

SafeRides program but also allow for other avenues of conversation to overcome many other transportation obstacles.

ECRTCC's involvement with MCOTA (Minnesota Council on Transportation Access) allows RTCCs to voice the needs and obstacles witnessed, to this greater organization which has the ability to bring solutions to those who can change laws and reduce barriers.

The Northern Lights Express Passenger Rail System has gathered speed and is now on the way to establishing station locations in our region (Cambridge and Hinckley). ECRTCC involvement in the process has been consistent and will continue with open communications with NLX, and city/county officials.



ECRTCC has been conducting a survey that will run through the end of November 2023 in order to sample a well-rounded population within the east central region. Staff meets one on one with the population most in need at attended events to present the survey and gain true results. The information strived for is whether there is a need for transfer stations to connect the region's public transportation systems and where they should be located. This information will then be presented to the public transportation systems to develop pilot programs with assistance from MnDOT.



## East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council

### Volunteer Drivers Programs

Goal: To have supportive resources to develop and sustain volunteer driver programs

- Currently, all of the volunteer driver programs in the east central region exist within the three Public Transportation programs. Each public provider recruits through their own channels.
- The ECRTCCs outreach coordination is in part driven by the need to assist in recruiting volunteer drivers. The vehicle sharing concept may help alleviate some of the problems in finding volunteers.
- The Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) Volunteer Driver Work Team includes ECRTCC staff. The work team developed webinars with panelists and presentations by professionals in October 2022, February, March, May, and July of 2023, the last four have become Lunch and Learns – one hour presentation over the lunch hour. <https://coordinatemntransit.org/events/volunteerdriverforum/2022-23>
- With the success of this forum series and the training/information readily available for use by anyone (housed on the MCOTA website) the work team is planning for more Lunch and Learns in the future.
- Strong participation with MCOTA (MN Council on Transportation Access) meetings which is the driving force for much legislative adjustments. [www.coordinatemntransit.org/MCOTA/](http://www.coordinatemntransit.org/MCOTA/)
- RTCCs throughout the state stand with the Volunteer Driver Coalition as the group is currently focused on changing the Volunteer Driver reimbursement rate to follow the business reimbursement rate. Representative Stauber has created a bill called the “Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act of 2023” in order to move his endorsement forward. Because this is a federal issue with the IRS, many states in the union have signed onto supporting this bill.
- Consistent recruitment efforts for Volunteer drivers, through radio (KBK 95.5fm), fairs, events, expos, social media and local news media.



Photo: Ladies on TriShaw ride.

### Staff Training and Education

Goal: RTCC staff develop and share expertise as a regional transportation resource

- ECRTCC staff will stay up to date on the latest and greatest information on all transportation modalities, connectivity, technology, through webinars, conferences, networking, meetings, and trainings – many of which are suggested through MnDOT, MCOTA and other RTCCs.
- ECRTCC staff is working through the two-year EasterSeals Mobility Management Training program.

### Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan

(updated every five years)

Goal: To identify viable projects FTA eligible (capital projects)

- Final Report: <http://eastcentraltransit.com/east-central-mn-transit-coordination-report/>

### Emergency Preparedness Facilitation

Goal: To facilitate networking with all emergency response units and all transportation providers within the region

- ECRTCC staff is building a network of EMS providers.

The East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils' (ECRTCC) 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 was approved by MnDOT to move into 2023/2024/2025 as the first half of a two-year grant cycle beginning on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023. Before each phase, the workplan is reevaluated, and reconstruction takes place to adjust the focus and tasks. The LCP priorities have become the focus of the ECRTCC work now and continuing into the future.



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