

Otter Express Joint Powers Board Meeting Minutes

January 20, 2026

The Otter Express Joint Powers Board Meeting was called to order by Chair Anthony Hicks at 1:04pm on Tuesday January 20, 2026. Attendance was as follows:

Board Members	Representing	Present	Absent
Hicks, Anthony Chair	City of Fergus Falls	X	
Bucholz, Dan	Otter Tail County	X	
Kvamme, Scott	City of Fergus Falls	X	
Lahman, Bob	Otter Tail County	X	
Sandbakken, Stephanie	Wilkin County	X (Teams)	
Sjostrom, Deb	Otter Tail County	X	
Smith, Jonathan	City of Perham	X	
Staff in Attendance	Representing	Present	Absent
Groothius, John	MnDOT	X	
Sullivan, Kayla	Otter Express	X	

Approval of Agenda

A motion and second were made by Bob Lahman and Dan Bucholz and unanimously carried to approve today's agenda.

Approval of Minutes

A motion and second were made by Dan Bucholz and Scott Kvamme and unanimously carried to approve the minutes from the December 1, 2025 meeting.

Board Assignments

Chair Hicks offered for anyone to volunteer to be the Board Chair for 2026. No board members volunteered. **Chair Hicks volunteered to be the Chair for 2026. Scott Kvamme was appointed by Chair Hicks to be the Vice Chair for 2026.** Committees were also decided. **Personnel committee** members are: Scott Kvamme, Dan Bucholz, and Stephanie Sandbakken. **Finance committee** members are: Jonathan Smith, Deb Sjostrom, and Bob Lahman.

MnDOT Update

John Groothius explained the MnDOT and Federal payments, and discussed the fleet transfer. The remaining fleet transfer (batch three) is at the federal level and it is unknown

when they will be released. John will also give the board dates for the upcoming grants at a future meeting.

Executive Director Update

Health Insurance. Kayla asked Austin Rund (North Risk Partners) to attend to explain why the employees are not covered in January and will be covered beginning in February. He explained that is was because Medica will not accept the payroll report because it stated Productive Alternatives. The board then discussed how to handle any employee needing any medical services in January. The discussion ended on that it might be best to pay for all medical claims in January rather than having employees take out Cobra.

Interviews, Hiring, Staffing. Kayla Sullivan discussed the interview process and hiring for the new agency. There were two staff from Productive Alternatives that were not hired onto Otter Express JPB. There is a job offer out to a dispatcher and can still hire one full time driver.

IT and CPA. Kayla gave an update on the CPA and IT, both are going well. There was an issue where Productive Alternatives (PA) thought Park Region transferred PA data. Kayla had a discussion with Park Region staff that was implementing the new computers and networking and they explicitly said they did not do anything with PA data. Kayla informed Steve Skauge (PA) that Otter Express had no PA data. Kayla will bring in the monthly financials from the CPA to the board meetings.

PERA. Kayla discussed that it is challenging to get answers as how to enroll employees in PERA. Jonathan and Stephanie will check if any of their staff has knowledge on this.

Credit Cards/App. Kayla discussed the fees that are associated with our credit card processor and the App. Jonathan mentioned he would research to see if we can add processing fees to the rider fee.

Marketing. Kayla discussed she will set up a Facebook account. The current account is under Productive Alternatives and that account has been a good marketing tool.

Federal Drug/Alcohol Audit. Kayla will be completing an audit with MnDOT staff for the 2023-2025 federal drug/alcohol program. It is tentatively scheduled for sometime this summer.

Service Levels. Battle Lake, Pelican Rapids, and Barnesville are communities where we are trying to get ridership. We have been trying for over a year and that includes newspaper and radio advertising, Facebook marketing, Otter Express website, and going to locations in person handing out brochures. Kayla informed the board that the four entities currently on the board contribute to the local share, and the three communities (mentioned above) do

not contribute to the local share and that the board will need to make a decision to continue as is or discuss with them about a local share, or some other decision. Jonathan verbalized to keep it as is as the county (Otter Tail) is paying the largest local share.

Bylaws. Kayla discussed having bylaws created as there are no bylaws currently. Chair Hicks mentioned getting some examples and starting from there and having the MnDOT consultants work on that.

Bus Transfer. We have two 500 series buses in our fleet. These were mainly used to transport riders from group homes to DAC (Day Activity Centers) and we longer offer do that transportation. The proceeds from the sale would go into our reserve fund. We could sell one or two to CCT (Community Central Transit based in Willmar) as they are in need of one. We will need to get two appraisals per MnDOT. The board agreed to sell one 500 bus.

Volunteer Driver Program. Kayla discussed a desire to create a volunteer driver program at Otter Express. This program would fill the gap where the buses do not drive (service levels). Deb S. also explained how the volunteer driver program started and the history up until today. Kayla will work on getting this program started with the understanding this will take some time to implement.

Service Vehicle. We were utilizing a service vehicle (pick up) from Productive Alternatives. We had to give that back at the end December to Productive Alternatives. Productive Alternatives informed Kayla that they have no use for that vehicle and Kayla asked to get me a price. Productive Alternatives said the price is \$15,000. The board made a motion and a second unanimously to purchase that vehicle (or another one if sold) from Bob Lahman and Scott Kvamme.

Employee Appreciation. A discussion was held to appreciate the employees that stuck with the transition into the new year. An employee appreciation lunch will be held on Feb. 18, 2026 starting at 11am. Kayla will order food (not purchased through MnDOT funds) and any board member that is available will come. This will be held at Otter Express, 1225 N Tower Rd., Fergus Falls.

Future Board Meetings. All meeting will be held on the second Monday of each month at 1:00pm at the Otter Express office (1225 N Tower Rd., Fergus Falls, MN).

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00pm.