

Otter Express JPB Meeting Minutes

April 13, 2026

The Otter Express JPB meeting was called to order by Chair Anthony Hicks at 1:00pm on Monday, April 13, 2026. Attendance was as follows:

Board Member	Representing	Present	Absent
Hicks, Chair Anthony	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	Wilking County	X (Teams)	
Sjostrom, Deb	Otter Tail County	X	
Smith, Jonathan	City of Perham	X	
Staff in Attendance	Representing	Present	Absent
Kraft, Adam	DRB Consulting	X (Teams)	
Sullivan, Kayla	Otter Express	X	

Approval of the Agenda

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

Approval of Minutes

A motion and a second was made by Scott Kvamme and Jonathan Smith and unanimously carried to approve the minutes from the March 9th, 2026 meeting.

MnDOT Consulting Services

Adam from DRB Consulting spoke about the project he will be the lead on for Otter Express. Adam discussed how he will research our service areas to include traffic patterns, traffic flow, populations, etc. Kayla and staff will work with Adam to ensure this will meet our community needs. Kayla and staff will get Adam requested information such as previous rides pre & post Covid. The first task is a planning study, and the second task is the marketing approach to implement those services. Adam will utilize a subcontractor (AECOM) to coordinate the project together. The second step is evaluating the data which includes the analysis. They will identify service gaps, studying key data points to determine future demand, and new service needs. A study of routes, types of services, frequent stops, & tie that back together to a cluster of housing, jobs, & services. In addition, they will look at the existing

services and stakeholders. Then they will look at the existing services and stakeholders and those would be business centers that provide service, nursing homes, and so forth, just any sort of transportation services that are provided in those areas. Then, they will look at coordination of those services and connectivity. Adam will also identify some key partners, natural allies, & key audiences. One final step is we will look at what the available budget is and resources that Kayla has. The results will be ranked low to high and there will be discussions with Kayla and her staff about prioritizing. The next step will be the marketing plan. A marketing plan may include some local riders & their story on why they use public transportation, & a targeted media plan. A discussion was held on contracted services (for example, DHS clients) on how Otter Express can get some of those contracts. Any DHS contract (DAC facilities) would help us to receive higher bus fares to help with our reserve account. Other service areas were discussed for the purpose of including or not including them in the study by the consultants: Highway 210 from Henning to Fergus Falls (or Breckenridge), New York Mills, and Parkers Prairie.

Deb S. asked Kayla about the progress of Health Plan contracts. Kayla said she has an agreement with Medica. The process with BCBS (BluePlus) has been time consuming and frustrating and she feels like that process has not been beneficial or a good use of time. The BluePlus riders are 10 and this is only for medical rides. There was a concern from Deb and Bob that those 10 riders can't afford \$2.00 bus fare. Kayla spoke and said they do pay that bus fare on the bus. The discussion was for any future DHS clients to secure a contract for a higher contracted rate (higher than our base \$2.00).

By-laws

The by-laws were reviewed by attorney Justin. Scott has a few items to address with the by-laws. Under membership there is a part about alternates. The city of Fergus Falls didn't recall hearing about that nor announcing alternates. The joint powers agreements that we signed allow you to have an alternate, which would be designated at the same time that your board designates. It's just the bylaws are just saying that you can have an alternate and they have those same limits. There was a concern under section 4 regarding officers from different entities that currently there are some officers from the same entity. Section 5 states location of meetings and the board unanimously agreed to let the Chairman change the location if need be. The 5th section is regarding per diems, and Otter Express does not pay any per diems to

board members. This section was suggested to clean up. Section 6 regards to gifts. We cannot accept gifts and the question was what about giving gifts. It was suggested to remove this sections as they are addressed in the code of conduct section. Section 9 is about board orientation. It was discussed to have an orientation in the first quarter. In this section it talks about hiring and the board discussed hiring the executive director and then that position will hire for all other positions. The other comment was on the dates for the budget. It was decided to leave them as is. The board agreed to revisit the by-laws.

Finance

Adam (CPA) could not join due to tax deadline season. Kayla mentioned budget to actuals were requested and we received that in a monthly form. Kayla will request that. We did sell the bus and received payment of \$60,000. Those funds were put into the checking account as we are running low on funds and need to meet payroll. Kayla discussed that with Chair Hicks and John (MnDOT). We have not received our second quarter state payment yet. A request was made to have the CPA give a report on all funds to include the checking and savings. A motion and a second to approve the financials were made by Jonathan and Dan. Kayla spoke about the possibility of the local share going up to 15%. This could happen in 2028. One way to help with that is to increase bus fares. That was discussed so that the board can think if that is the direction we want to take. Kayla discussed bus fares had happened once in 17 or 18 years, they went from \$1.50 to \$2.00. Now they are based on miles starting at \$2.00 & go up from there. We also started charging an additional dollar for rides on the same day. A lengthy discussion ensued with bus fares and the fares that are charged for DHS clients. A discussion was held regarding current county riders that another agency is providing that transportation and if those riders are receiving state dollars (for clients that are on waivers) why can't we be doing that transportation. The current provider is taking in those bus fares and that could benefit Otter Express to build up our reserve fund. The board discussed how to build up the reserve fund so that some tax levy dollars wouldn't need be used. Kayla did speak to the manager of the Wilkin County DAC regarding bus fares and that there will likely be a change, most likely not this year but for 2027. Kayla mentioned a scenario where other public transit agencies charge by the hour for DHS clients. A suggestion was made to increase fares to \$3.00 & others suggested

waiting on that as they want to increase ridership first.

Service Levels

Kayla discussed the route being created due to the exit on I94 in Fergus Falls closing. If this is successful, then we can look at doing something similar in other communities. Jonathan mentioned that Kayla said a route like this wasn't possible. Kayla responded that at the time it was not in our plan and now we are a new organization where MnDOT is giving us some leeway. This route will have set stops and times. Kayla discussed the bus fare of this route. It will need to be cheaper as there will be no other advantage to taking this route as opposed to calling in and requesting their exact date and time. A motion to approve the bus fare as \$1.00 for the route was made and a second by Dan and Bob and the board unanimously approved. Kayla and her staff will get marketing materials out asap, as well as any social media communications.

March Stats

The March stats were discussed to include a second bus in Perham. If there are more than 30 riders per day, then it is nice to have an additional bus. Typically, one bus can handle all the Perham riders daily. Otter Tail County has offered garage space to store a bus in Perham. Kayla spoke about staffing issues to make that happen and is working on it. Jonathan requested staggering of shift times in Perham to perhaps an earlier start and a later end. Kayla mentioned she will try again and indicate the job location is in Perham.

Denials

Kayla spoke about denials and that there will always be denials as people call in for an 8pm ride and we don't operate at that time so that is a denial.

Staffing

Kayla gave an update on current staffing numbers. There is a job description for an Administrative Assistant. Kayla feels she doesn't want to move on as the Operations Manager and Dispatch Lead can take on additional duties once the staffing levels get adjusted.

Dispatch Software (CTS)

Kayla discussed the auto responder calls that are an addition to the software. The calls are not working as we would like them to so I am requesting to get that removed and will be a reduction of approximately \$3,400.

Service Vehicle

Kayla provided a couple of service vehicles (pickups) that the Fleet Manager located. They are around \$14,000 with one new addition of around \$8,000. With all the fees the total price could exceed \$15,000 (which was a previous board approved amount). Kayla asked to be approved for \$17,000 for a service vehicle. Kayla mentioned that the Fleet Manager and Mechanic are using their personal vehicles to pull out buses, and she does not recommend that. A motion and a second was made by Bob and Scott to increase the approved amount to \$17,500 and approved unanimously by the board.

Travel

Kayla spoke about MnDOT is very supportive of education, conferences, etc. and that these are in the budget. There is an annual CTAA conference in May, DC Fly In in Sept, and MnDOT Spring Workshop in May. Kayla gave a suggestion to approve out of state travel 2 – 3 times per year and then Kayla picks. Kayla mentioned she likes coming to the office and likes her home and sees the value in the conferences and networking. A motion and a second was made to approve travel for MnDOT Spring Conference and DC Fly In by Dan and Deb and unanimously approved by the board.

Upcoming Dates

Kayla offered to change the board meeting dates in May and June due to the budget. The board discussed to keep them the same other than possibly having the finance committee meet prior to the end of June.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:53pm.