Otter Express JPB Meeting Minutes
June 8, 2026

The Otter Express JPB meeting was called to order by Chair Hicks at 1:00pm on Monday, June 8, 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	Wilkin County	X	
Sjostrom, Deb	Otter Tail County	X	
Smith, Jonathan	City of Perham	X (Teams)	
Staff in Attendance	**Representing**	**Present**	**Absent**
Brisk, Deb	DRB Consulting	X (Teams)	
Ebert, Jason	Otter Express	X	
Groothuis, John	MnDOT	X	
Lauinger, Adam	Condit CPAs		X
Sullivan, Kayla	Otter Express	X	
Tomhave, Ben	MnDOT	X (Teams)	
Terhaar, Zach	Otter Express	X	

Approval of the Agenda

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

Approval of Minutes

A motion and a second was made by Scott Kvamme and Bob Lahman and unanimously carried to approve the minutes from May 11, 2026.

MnDOT Consultant Services

Ben Tomhave from MnDOT presented information on service planning and the various types of rural services that Otter Express can provide with funding from MnDOT. Ben spoke with Kayla and staff to identify key goals, visions, or priorities for the communities we operate in. A topic that rose to the top is maximizing ridership (in existing communities or adding additional communities or connecting communities). Ben and staff would like to get a sense of preliminary goals or priorities are and then look at our existing conditions to know where the strengths are currently and where are there potential opportunities to further improve upon or where there are gaps or other unmet needs. Once that is in place then with input from Otter Express, board, and community we will start to identify potential alternatives either for refinement or additional service. MnDOT has many tools to assist with this project (software, data, & historical numbers). There are typically two types of service in rural MN (demand response – which Otter Express has typically operated, and deviated routes). Typically, demand response is more flexible. A discussion followed describing the differences of each type of route. Ben discussed the traffic patterns and where trips are going now, demand times, and average riders per hour in all communities. He also discussed denials in that less than 1% of requests are denied which he said is great.

Finance

Adam could not attend the meeting. Kayla spoke that she figured out the fuel tax refund and has submitted for the first five months. A question on the AccountsWorld was asked and that is the software the CPAs use for payroll processing. A request was made to add what is being paid or purchased and Kayla will implement that. Kayla informed that the federal payment should be coming in June.
A motion and a second was made by Stephanie Sandbakken and Dan Bucholz and unanimously carried to approve the financials.

Operating Grant 2027

Kayla discussed some items for the grant. A resolution was signed by Chair Hicks. Kayla will send out a sample resolution to each entity for the local share.
Kayla disclosed the conflict of interest (sibling is an operator, spouse is a county Commissioner, and a child cleans the facility). We can apply for $2,575,000. MnDOT is being flexible with us this year and is allowing us to make some adjustments after submittal. John and Kayla mentioned that the budget for 2028 will be formula based. A discussion was held regarding the current main building in the lease. The lease from the landlord is increasing for 2027. A discussion was held on the future of our facilities.
A motion and second was made by Scott Kvamme and Bob Lahman to proceed with the resolution and was unanimously carried to have Chair Hicks sign.

Staffing

Kayla mentioned that she will work on the Volunteer Driver program after the budget is submitted. Kayla spoke with current staff to gauge their interest in assisting getting the program going and then hiring a staff. Jason & Kayla gave an update on the operators.

We have 8 FT and 6 subs. We have one FT dispatch lead, one FT dispatcher, and one PT dispatcher.

Garage Facilities

Jason, Kayla, & Zach went to look at the Otter Tail County garage located in Perham. We will have two buses in the garage (one daily and one back up). We will start that service on July 1 in Perham.

Stephanie mentioned the facility in Wilkin County will be cold storage.

Stats & Denials

The ridership went down in May. There were 71 rides on the Express Loop in Fergus Falls since it started. Jason mentioned there has been quite a few days of zero riders. A discussion was held on bus service versus Uber or Taxi. Kayla mentioned that we are not a taxi service and we are continually educating our riders on that. Kayla and Jason also spoke about how we do our best to get more than one rider on the bus at a time.

Fleet

Kayla discussed that we could sell one more 500 and a 400. The 500 would have to be transferred to another public transit agency and the 400 we could sell. The 500 is too large and we do not drive it. Zach spoke on the issues that can happen when a vehicle is not driven. The 500 is too large for many destinations that we service. The City of Winona may be interested in the 500 bus. The board requested to carry this over to the next meeting.

A motion and second was made by Bob Lahman and Dan Bucholz and carried unanimously to sell the 400 bus.

Misc Discussion

Deb Sjostrom mentioned the term of the lease for the main building/garage. Kayla said she will bring it back to PAI to change. Kayla discussed the expense section for board awareness. The lease has a sign section. Kayla will also bring that back to PAI for clarification. Kayla will send the lease to OTC attorney for review.

By Laws

A short discussion was held and will carry over to future board meetings.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45pm.