

AVIATION AND TRANSIT COMMISSION MINUTES
Tuesday, September 1, 2020

The Aviation and Transit Commission met in the Administration Conference Room at the Billings Logan International Airport on Tuesday, September 1, 2020. Those in attendance included:

Aviation and Transit Commission Members

Peggie Gaghen, Chair
Dan Farmer, Vice Chair
Ken Behling
Ron Spence
Mark Astle
Chuck Tooley
David Hummel, Jr.

City Staff and Guests

Kevin Ploehn, Director of Aviation & Transit
Shane Ketterling, Assistant Director of Aviation & Transit
Rusty Logan, Transit Manager
Bill Cole, Mayor

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

A public comment period was offered. No public comments were received.

ALPINE HANGAR/BUSINESS PARK ENHANCEMENTS

Mr. Ploehn began by informing the Commission about some of the history and background of Alpine Aviation. He pointed out that Alpine is based in Provo, Utah and operates over 100 cargo routes in the U.S. with hub operations in Billings, Denver, Sioux Falls and Salt Lake. Alpine primarily hauls freight for UPS and mail for the Postal Service, and operates around 400 flights per month just out of Billings. Mr. Ploehn noted that since cargo operations have continued to grow, Alpine is interested in building a 20,000 square foot hangar with some office space to complement the operations that currently exist at the hangar they lease from the Airport. Mr. Ploehn provided a layout of the Airport's Business Park and pointed out where the hangar could potentially go. He also noted the need to relocate sewer and electrical lines to accommodate this expansion. Additionally, he felt the road infrastructure would need to be enhanced in the future as well. Mr. Ploehn felt this could be the first of a number of Alpine buildings and wanted to set the stage for any future development by getting the water, sewer, electrical, and road infrastructure planned out now.

NORTHWESTERN ENERGY LEASE DISCUSSIONS

Mr. Ploehn provided the Commission with the background on recent discussions with NorthWestern Energy regarding their interest in leasing some of the Airport's land at the very east end of the Airport along the Highway going to the Billings Heights next to their existing substation property. This lease would be for just under 15 acres and would be used to construct another substation that would improve reliability and provide additional capacity for the Billings area. He pointed out that the lease would be for 40 years, includes significant environmental language, requires NorthWestern Energy to have its own storm water pollution prevention plan, a perimeter fence for the public's safety, and additional insurance coverage above the City's standard requirements. Mr. Ploehn noted that he would be doing a work session with the Billings City Council next week to inform them of this pending lease and to answer their questions.

AIRPORT AND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATIVE/OPERATIONS REPORTS

- ▶ Mr. Ploehn announced that the Airport had been notified that the FAA was providing an additional grant to the Airport for the Terminal Building construction. The grant consists of \$4,026,476 of Discretionary AIP funding, \$261,849 of Entitlement AIP funding, and \$476,480 of CARES Act local matching funds for a total grant of \$4,764,805. The Airport had received an earlier grant for the Terminal Construction of \$2,352,628 for a total for this fiscal year of \$7,117,433.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn told the Commission that the Airport had applied for a grant with the State Department of Environmental Quality for \$25,500 to offset the cost of installing three dual headed electrical vehicle chargers. This grant is part of the Volkswagen Settlement that the State of Montana received for offsetting combustion engine pollution with green sustainable energy. This project would allow six electric vehicles to be charged at the same time. He identified a location in the Express Parking lot where the chargers would likely be placed.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling showed the Commissioners a short PowerPoint Presentation with pictures highlighting the different phases of construction on the Terminal Project, specifically related to the following:
 - Groundbreaking Ceremony on September 23, 2019 starting the Terminal Remodel Project.
 - Demolition of the old west stairwell and construction of the new commuter stairwell for the Cape Air ramp.
 - Demolition of the old Gift Shop and Holdroom for United Airlines.
 - Removal of the concrete air carrier ramp in order to make way for construction of the new A Concourse, Great Room, and TSA Screening Area.
 - Removal of old underground utilities, dirt work, and installation of new utilities.
 - Explanation of the aircraft parking plan, reflecting the use of the remote ramp and how aircraft parking may work during the next phase of construction.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling explained that the Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFF) Division conducted the FAA mandated Triennial Full-Scale Disaster Exercise on August 27, 2020. The ARFF Supervisor spent the past six to nine months planning this simulated air carrier accident that typically involves many local mutual aid agencies fire, police, ambulance departments, and both hospitals. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, this exercise was extremely difficult to accomplish and although the FAA granted us a ninety-day extension to complete the drill, they did not provide us with any direction on how to fulfill the requirements given the extremely unusual circumstances. We had very little participation from local agencies who we would normally rely on during a mass casualty accident. Specifically, both hospitals did not attend due to pandemic protocols, which limited the ability to test all aspects of the drill. Fortunately, staff was very creative and developed a scenario that simulated and tested all procedures, which successfully fulfilled all FAA requirements. Commissioners asked if someone from the FAA attended the exercise. Mr. Ketterling explained that the FAA Inspector does not typically attend the drill, but during the annual FAA Inspection, he will look at documentation showing that it did take place. On that note, Mr. Ketterling explained that the FAA Inspection, which was originally scheduled for May, did not occur. Due to the virus, the FAA Inspector is unable to travel; therefore, it was rescheduled until August. Last week, the Airport was notified that the Inspection has now been postponed indefinitely.
- ▶ Mr. Logan unveiled the new MET Transit logo, which the City had requested a redesign of to increase synergy with the new City of Billings logo. While MET Transit will utilize the City of Billings logo in secondary locations on signs and vehicles, the MET logo will continue to be the primary branding of the system. Distinct branding will continue for the system in order to maintain ease of identification and impression for consumers. The logo is currently in use on the MET Transit Website and will be rolling out on new vehicles in October.
- ▶ Mr. Logan updated the Commission regarding ongoing technology projects at MET Transit including the rollout of the new paratransit dispatching software and the forthcoming electronic

fare system. Mr. Logan indicated these items would be reviewed in depth at the October meeting.

- ▶ Mr. Logan provided updates on the progress made to support students returning to school during the COVID-19 health crisis. He indicated the MET mechanics, with assistance from Airport mechanics, were able to address a number of significant fleet issues to prepare an adequate number of vehicles for service. Mechanics also accomplished the install of acrylic driver barriers in each vehicle, providing an extra layer of separation between operators and passengers while in service. Extra vehicles are being utilized on popular "school tripper" routes in order to maintain vehicle passenger loads that allow for social distancing. He also indicated MET Transit is continuing to require the wearing of masks for all passengers and continues to make masks available on board for distribution to the public.
- ▶ Regarding ridership, Mr. Logan indicated overall fixed-route ridership was down approximately 35%, but that MET is seeing an uptick in numbers due to the return of students. As of the end of August, ridership from students is at approximately 50% of the typical student load but this number may have been effected by students not wishing to purchase a monthly pass for the few days of transportation they would need in August. Mr. Logan anticipated student ridership would increase in the coming months. Regarding paratransit, ridership continues to show a significant reduction in demand, but has stabilized at approximately 60–70 rides daily. MET anticipates this trend will continue throughout the majority of the Fall, as many area group homes and day programs have made no indication that they intend to reopen during the COVID situation.

ITEMS FROM THE COMMISSION

There were no items from the Commission.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

KP:mdb

cc: Aviation and Transit Commission
Chrono
City Administrator
Mayor
City Clerk