

**AVIATION AND TRANSIT COMMISSION MINUTES**  
**Tuesday, October 6, 2020**

The Aviation and Transit Commission met in the Administrative Conference Room at the MET Transit on Tuesday, October 6, 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  
Lindsay Gran, Transit Supervisor

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

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

**MET TECHNOLOGY UPDATE AND DEMONSTRATIONS**

- ▶ Transit Manager Logan explained to the Commission that the intent was to have a bus with the installed technology available for the Commission to see, but due to a number of current bus breakdowns, the bus with everything installed on it was in service and unavailable. Mr. Logan indicated that they would use screen shots to discuss and provide a demonstration of the TouchPass system that MET is currently installing on all of the buses. He indicated that the MET was shooting for a kickoff date of November 1, 2020. He continued by providing an overview of how the TouchPass system worked. Some of the highlights included:
  - The system significantly increases passenger convenience by allowing passengers to purchase and store fare media (day passes, monthly passes, cash balances) on their smartphone; it also allows for the purchase of passes via a Website accessible from a PC or other Web connected device.
  - The system also allows MET personnel or authorized vendors throughout the community to issue both temporary and permanent fare cards to individuals who may not have a smartphone.
  - Both of the above features remove the need for Transit drivers to sell paper passes on the bus, allowing the driver to fully focus more on operation of the vehicle and customer service. This also significantly decreases MET Transit office staff workload related to reconciliation of driver pass sales.
  - The system allows MET to continue to track passenger metrics by passenger type based upon fare category without requiring manual tracking by the Transit driver.
  - The system allows MET to implement a new "Fare Capping" policy. This policy provides further value to passenger fares by automatically upgrading the individual's account to an eligible pass when they have paid fares equal to the pass value. For example, a senior rider who normally pays a \$1.00 fare for a single ride would automatically be upgraded to a senior unlimited monthly pass upon paying for twelve one-way rides, which is the same cost as the \$12.00 monthly pass for seniors.

He concluded the demonstration by showing how the TouchPass reader would read the QR code on a person's phone or paper ticket, or if someone did not have a smartphone, they could use a preloaded proximity card.

- ▶ MET Supervisor, Lindsay Gran, provided the Commission with a demonstration of how the new Ecolane Paratransit Dispatch Software System worked. The demonstration of the software was very impressive and was a significant improvement over the previous dispatching software. Ms. Gran pointed out a number of features of the system, including:
  - Run utilization, which provides dispatch with a visual representation of each vehicles capacity for a given day.
  - On time performance that allows dispatch to monitor performance, by the hour, for all vehicles in service.
  - Driver and run skill levels, which allow a supervisor to adjust a skill level in training situations.
  - Trips feature, which allows a dispatcher to see any trips that may not fit into the schedule. This information helps to determine whether another route is needed for additional ride availability.
  - Google Map automatic vehicle location capabilities, as well as individual trip maps. Dispatch can use these tools to track Ecolane recommended routes vs. operator chosen routes. Miles per hour and vehicle heading can also be tracked via Google Maps.
  - Mobile app and self service feature for clients. Ms. Gran gave a ride booking demonstration with the mobile app and showed how information passes between the mobile app and dispatch facing software.

The Commission was impressed with the new Ecolane Software and the overall demonstration.

## **AIRPORT AND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATIVE/OPERATIONS REPORTS**

- ▶ Mr. Logan updated the Commission on the recent bus orders, indicating El Dorado had moved the delivery date a month into the future, so MET now anticipates the buses to begin arriving in May of 2021. He continued by stating the existing fleet continues to be difficult to maintain due to the age of the buses, but MET fleet maintenance staff have done a commendable job at keeping the vehicles operating and on the road. MET has put contingency plans in place to utilize extra paratransit vehicles in support of fixed-route operations and this has helped to alleviate some of the issues caused by the older vehicles.
- ▶ Mr. Logan also provided a brief reminder of the various technology enhancements that will be present on the new vehicles, including the TouchPass payment system, automated passenger counters, on-board infotainment screens, automated voice annunciation of transit stops, on-board Wi-Fi for passengers, and enhanced camera systems for both on-board surveillance and driver assistance systems.
- ▶ Mr. Logan indicated MET had recently hired an individual into the Transit Administrative Support III position vacated by Lynne Arnold's retirement. Sarah Graham, who has multiple years of experience in the automotive finance field, will begin employment with the Department on October 26, 2020.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling updated the Commission on the Terminal construction progress. The contractor is currently working on pouring the concrete footings and walls. The weather has been holding and the contractor is working to get as much concrete poured as possible ahead of Winter. He promised the Commission that he would have updated construction pictures at the next meeting.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling noted that the Airport came up with a walkway solution for the passengers that will need to ground load this Winter. He noted that the Airport would be purchasing a number of portable carport type tents that would be attached together. This would keep the walkway dry from snow and ice and reduce the need to do snow removal for the passengers to get to the aircraft. This turned out to be a very cost effective solution.

- ▶ Mr. Ploehn addressed the impacts of COVID-19 on the airline and airport industry providing some recent news articles that discussed the airline furloughs of tens of thousands of airline employees. He thought there was only a slim chance of a second Federal package to assist the airlines and keep over 30,000 folks working now that the President had called off all stimulus negotiations until after the election. He continued that the airlines are now cutting the majority of their flight schedules in half as early bookings for the Thanksgiving and Christmas Holidays have not materialized. As examples, he pointed out that Southwest Airlines had cut nearly 90,000 flights and American Airlines had cut around 86,000 flights. Mr. Ploehn feared that all of this was going to make it tougher for the industry to recover very quickly since once planes and people are sidelined for an extended period, the aircraft need to be recertified and the staff has to go through a retraining process. He indicated that this would be very tough economically on the airlines as well as a number of airports around the country.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn noted that the Montana airports are doing significantly better than the majority of the airports around the country. He pointed out that the national average for TSA screening is just now approaching 35% of last year's numbers, while in Billings, the number for September was 57% and for the first five days of October, it was 62%. He said that September screenings for Glacier International outside Kalispell was at 80% of last year's numbers, while Bozeman was at 66% and Missoula was at 55%. Subsequently, in Billings the airlines are actually hiring staff with very little flight reductions. He noted however that with the flair up of COVID-19, Billings could also see a drop in flights as the airlines try to hang on until next Spring and Summer.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn reminded the Commission that the November meeting falls on Election Day and asked if they wanted to skip the November meeting to watch the election. The Commission wanted to meet next month so it was decided the next meeting would be on Wednesday, November 4, 2020.

#### **ITEMS FROM THE COMMISSION**

Chairwoman Gaghen noted that the American Airline statistics reflected some impressive gains year over year. Mr. Ploehn noted that some of that was related to American adding a second flight from Dallas to Billings. However, he noted that he has been impressed with the load factors for those flights, as they have been running in the 80% range, which is high, compared to the other airlines.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

KP:mdb

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