

AVIATION AND TRANSIT BOARD MINUTES
Tuesday, May 4, 2021

The Aviation and Transit Board met in the Administration Conference Room at the Billings Logan International Airport on Tuesday, May 4, 2021. Those in attendance included:

Aviation and Transit Board Members

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

City Staff and Guests

Kevin Ploehn, Director of Aviation & Transit
Rusty Logan, Transit Manager

The Board began with a tour of Cape Air's new aircraft, the Tecnam P2012 Traveller. Cape Air Manager, Bill Callahan, provided a comprehensive background of Cape Air and how the Tecnam P2012 was a joint effort between Cape Air and the Italian company Costruzioni Aeronautiche Tecnam. Mr. Callahan discussed the improvements this aircraft provides over their fleet of Cessna 402s. The Board was allowed to sit in the new aircraft to demonstrate its comfort.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

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

RECAP OF RECENT AIR SERVICE AIRLINE MEETINGS

Kevin Ploehn advised the Board that the Airport's Air Service Consultant, Trina Froehlich, and he meet with the airlines annually to get a feel for what they are doing and promote Billings for additional air service. This year's visit was the first time using a virtual meeting format. He then shared with the Board what they talk about in these meetings, pointing out that they go over the following topics:

- Population Comparisons of Montana and Wyoming
- Economics/Demographics
- Major Employers and Corporate Headquarters
- Oil and Gas Industry
- Health Care in Billings
- Education in Billings
- Tourism - Montana's Trailhead and Access to Unspoiled Nature
- Media Accolades
- Airport Features
- Existing Air Service
- TSA Throughput Numbers
- High Fares and Strong Demand
- Forward Looking Schedule
- Revenue Air Seat Mile (RASM) Performance - how they determine the profitability of an aircraft flying from Billings to a destination
- Seat Comparison in Montana

- Market Opportunities

The Airlines reported some of the following items:

- Alaska Airlines will be keeping three daily flights to Seattle.
- Allegiant has no schedule adjustments and remains happy with their performance in Billings.
- American stated the Dallas Fort Worth service is very successful and want to see how Chicago performs seasonally before deciding year-round service to Chicago.
- Delta's primary concern is pilot availability. They have two daily Minneapolis and four daily Salt Lake City flights planned for the Summer. The Minneapolis load factors are around 60% with similar loads to Salt Lake City. Overall, Billings had higher load factors and Delta was excited about that. Atlanta could be a, weekends only, service addition in 2022-2023.
- United has four daily flights to Denver and after the COVID restructuring, they are trying to rebuild their Denver hub service again. As the number of Denver airline banks return, United could develop future service to Billings.

Overall, the meetings were fairly positive.

AIRPORT AND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATIVE/OPERATIONS REPORTS

- ▶ Mr. Ploehn informed the Board on recent news regarding:
 - A lot of unruly passengers on planes. Prior to COVID, there were around 100 complaints per year and so far this year it is up to 1,600.
 - Delta stopped leaving the middle seats vacant in May.
 - Mask mandate was extended to September 13.
 - U.S. travel and tourism industry lost \$766 billion in 2020.
 - On May 6, Allegiant starts direct service to Portland and the second Dallas flight starts up again.
 - The Request for Proposals (RFP) for the gift shop and restaurant are on hold as staff is having a hard time trying to make all of the numbers work out.
 - The Mayor is asking for input on City Code 2-510. The presiding officer of each Board, Commission, or Committee is to report annually to the Mayor and City Council either in person or in writing. If in person, at a work session scheduled by staff. Mr. Ploehn passed out a draft of a possible written report format for the Board Members to look at and comment on at a later date.
- ▶ Mr. Logan advised the Board that they are currently down to two vacant operator positions, but this number will increase to three in the coming month due to a retirement. Hopefully with changes to the unemployment practices in Montana we will see more applicants.
- ▶ Mr. Logan informed the Board that MET promoted operator Sahil Sharma to a dispatcher position. MET opted to fill a vacant dispatch position because Touchpass digital fares added a number of additional responsibilities; dispatch is now also responsible for fixed-route radio traffic to allow supervisors to focus more on training and implementation of the Public Transit Agency Safety Plan.
- ▶ Mr. Logan stated that MET is exploring options for electronic fare vending machines for the Transfer Centers and other potential locations. This would allow reloads of both phone app and cards with cash at the machine, as well as the option to purchase paper passes for day pass, 10 rides, etc.
- ▶ Mr. Logan stated that paratransit rides are now down only 44% from last year and fixed-route ridership only down 29%. Compared with April 2019, ridership is only down 45% for paratransit and 26% for fixed-route.
- ▶ Mr. Logan informed the Board that they are continuing to see a surge of ridership on the paratransit side with 169 scheduled for tomorrow, with an influx of State of Montana Developmental Disabilities clients coming back.

ITEMS FROM THE BOARD

- ▶ Vice Chair Spence asked about when Governor Gianforte signed in the new concealed carry law what did it do to the Airport? Mr. Ploehn said the first thing we did was take the "No Guns" signs down. There are still some questions between the two bills on this law that the City Attorney needs to weigh in on.
- ▶ The question was asked about Southwest Airlines flying into Bozeman. Mr. Ploehn stated that our Air Service Consultant, Trina Froehlich, said that Southwest is not taking any calls at this time. Therefore, he was unable to discuss anything with Southwest during the recent airline meetings. He noted that due to the location of Bozeman to Yellowstone and Big Sky, Southwest was looking to boost its leisure travel passenger numbers and picked Bozeman. As things begin to normalize post-COVID, it will be interesting to see whether Southwest continues with their seasonal destinations or goes back to their standard schedule.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

KP:mdb

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