

AVIATION AND TRANSIT BOARD MINUTES
Tuesday, December 7, 2021

The Aviation and Transit Board met in the Administration Conference Room at the Billings Logan International Airport on Tuesday, December 7, 2021. Those in attendance included:

Aviation and Transit Board Members

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

City Staff and Guests

Kevin Ploehn, Director of Aviation & Transit
Shane Ketterling, Assistant Director of Aviation & Transit
Rusty Logan, Transit Manager
Mike Yakawich, City Council Member
Mark Evangeline, Airport Facilities Superintendent

TERMINAL CONSTRUCTION TOUR

The meeting started with a tour of the Terminal Concourse Expansion project. Joining the group for the tour only, was City Councilman Mike Yakawich. The tour started in the basement where Airport Facilities Superintendent, Mark Evangeline, explained the construction that was going on down there and what construction was planned for after the first of the year. The group moved up to the main floor of the new concourse so that everyone could see the progress that had been made. Aviation and Transit Director, Kevin Ploehn noted that construction progress had been slowed down due to a majority of the lighting not showing up until mid-January. While he indicated that he would like to see this space opened by the first of March, the contractor was not sure they could be ready by then.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

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

RESTAURANT/LOUNGE & GIFT SHOP CONCESSION UPDATE

Mr. Ploehn began with the background on the Request for Proposal (RFP) processes that took place for the Restaurant and Gift Shop Concessions and thanked the Board Members that participated in the selection process for both RFPs. Beginning with the Restaurant Concession, he pointed out that the Airport had received three proposals on time and a fourth that arrived late due to shipping issues. Of the three proposals, one had a concept that was by far the most exciting. That Concessionaire was Sky Dine out of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. They teamed up with Mountain Mudd Espresso and Stacked, A Montana Grill, both local favorites and will also include the national brand, Cinnabon. Mr. Ploehn then showed the Board the concept drawings for the new Concession and pointed out how things would be laid out within the concession spaces. He then updated the Board on the Gift Shop RFP and noted that the Airport received four response. While all the proposals were good, the concept and financial guarantee to the Airport put Sky Gifts over the top. Sky Gifts and Sky Dine have the same owner/operator, Dustin Sejnoha, and for the Gift Shop operation, Mr. Sejnoha partnered with Patti Nash who owns and operates the gift shop in the Sioux Falls Airport.

Mr. Ploehn noted that the Restaurant Concession would go before the City Council for approval on December 13, 2021, and the Gift Shop on December 20, 2021.

AIRPORT AND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATIVE/OPERATIONS REPORTS

- ▶ Mr. Ploehn discussed the current pilot shortage and how it is starting to impact the service levels at Billings Logan International Airport. He noted that Alaska would not have any Portland service until the Summer of 2022, and the Seattle service would only be two flights per day next Summer; however, on a positive note, Alaska was going to replace the Q-400 turbo prop aircraft that they have been using in Billings with the E-175 regional jet in mid-January. He continued that Allegiant would not offer any seasonal service this upcoming Summer terminating Los Angles, San Diego, and Portland. American has now moved the Dallas flights to one per day until May 2022 and Frontier is pulling out of Billings altogether. Finally, Delta at this time is only showing two daily flights to Minneapolis next Summer as well. Mr. Ploehn then began referencing some news articles that reflected how many employees the airlines are trying to hire. Of interest was an article that the FAA had given approval for students who want to be a pilot the opportunity to earn a restricted airline transport pilot certificate, allowing them to be in the right seat as a co-pilot at 1,000 hours versus the 1,500 that the FAA normally requires. He was going to send this to Dan Hargrove, the Director of the Rocky Mountain College aviation program, and see if he knew about this and had any additional insight. Board Member Hummel asked what was Alaska up to since they are adding direct flights out of Missoula and reducing flights in Billings. Mr. Ploehn responded that they are refocusing their fleets into leisure destination areas and thought in Missoula's case, an access to western Montana and Glacier Park. Mr. Ketterling added that in Frontier's case they just announced a bunch of flights into the Caribbean. Mr. Ploehn added that with the very slow return of the business traveler, the airlines would continue to seek revenue opportunities in the leisure markets.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn updated the Board on the land deals that the Airport had been working on. He noted that the City Council had approved the land sale to NorthWestern Energy and the Airport is now working to get the FAA to sign off on the land transfer. However, to even begin the discussion with the FAA, the Airport hired a consultant to do a cultural resource study of the site so that information could be used as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) action needed for the FAA review. He pointed out that the City Council had also approved the 73-acre land purchase north of the Airport for a noise buffer from the Alkali Timbers group that is looking to develop the area with residential properties. He thought the closing might happen before Christmas.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling noted that the Airport had a demonstration with the new Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers in the paid parking. They showed Airport and SP+ staff how the chargers worked and how the user would need to use the EvGateway mobile app to logon to the system and begin charging. He noted that we were working with the Mayor to find a date for the ribbon cutting and that the Board Members would all be invited.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling announced that Winter was here and the snow crews had to really battle the ice that formed on the runway once the snow was plowed off. With warm pavement and cooling temperatures resulted in a flashing of the moisture into ice, the snow crews had to use deicing, sand, and constant brooming to get the runway to a point that it was safe to land. Unfortunately, the Sunday morning flights were all delayed about two hours.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling pointed out that the Airport is down one custodian and one Airfield/ARFF position. The custodian opening is a nighttime position and has been vacant for the better part of two years.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling said the Airport is in the process of doing an RFP for Terminal Seating with the proposal deadline set for Wednesday afternoon. This will give us the information needed to select all the new Terminal seating for the expansion project. Board Members Hummel and Tostenrud volunteered to be on the selection team. Mr. Ketterling informed the Board that there were two more RFPs on the horizon for the Terminal, one for a Wi-Fi provider and one for the FIDS (Flight Information Display System) provider.

- ▶ Mr. Ketterling informed the Board that in January, our new addition to the Aviation and Transit team, Amanda Skewis, the Department's Marketing and Advertising Coordinator would come to the meeting and show the Board some of the items she is working on.
- ▶ Mr. Logan began by showing the Board some pictures of one of the new buses decorated up for the Christmas parade and the costumes that were worn by some of the staff, including himself. MET won the best costume prize.
- ▶ Mr. Logan also showed some pictures of a travel training event with students from Skyview for their "Life Skills Class."
- ▶ Mr. Logan noted that MET ridership is up just over 14% from this time in 2020 and providing nearly 1,300 rides per day. A question was asked if ridership spikes up when the weather is bad. Mr. Logan confirmed that student ridership does go up when we have bad weather or it is really cold. As for other riders, he has not noticed a big difference.
- ▶ Mr. Logan provided that MET is finishing up the National Transit Database (NTD) reporting that is required each year by the FTA. This is a time consuming process and the newer staff is beginning to understand how to respond to some of the more difficult reporting requirements.
- ▶ Mr. Logan let the Board know that they have only one more bus left to receive of the 17 new ones being delivered. The last unit is supposed to be delivered next week. The drivers are reporting that the new buses handle very well in the snow and ice and staff is happy with the new vehicles. Only a few warranty items have cropped up so far, which the manufacturer has been responsive to correcting.
- ▶ Mr. Logan noted that they are only down one driver position at the moment, but unfortunately, one of their supervisors, Keith Adams, took a position with the school district. He noted that the Board might remember him from the presentation given at MET in September on the training program that MET was putting in place. Fortunately, the program that Keith set up will be able to continue to meet MET's training requirements.
- ▶ Mr. Logan discussed how he was part of a group that was working on the development of the Skyline Bike Trail that runs on the edge of the Rims from Zimmerman Park to the roundabout in front of the Airport. The City was awarded BUILD grant funds for this project and it is possible that some sort of Transit stop area will be considered so folks can use the MET to get their bikes on top of the Rims to start their bike ride.
- ▶ Finally, Mr. Logan discussed that MET was kicking off the start of a Transit Development Plan, which will be the roadmap for MET over the next few years. The kickoff meeting with the consultant and the development plan committee is next week and as the plan develops, he will have more to share on this topic in the months ahead.

ITEMS FROM THE BOARD

There were no items from the Board.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

KP:mdb

cc: Aviation and Transit Board
Chrono
Via E-mail: City Administrator
Mayor
City Clerk