

AVIATION AND TRANSIT BOARD MINUTES

Wednesday, August 2, 2023

The Aviation and Transit Board met in the Administration Conference Room at the Billings Logan International Airport on Wednesday, August 2, 2023. Those in attendance included:

Aviation and Transit Board Members

Dan Farmer, Chair
Ken Behling, Vice Chair
Chuck Tooley
Steve Tostenrud
Barbara Schneeman
Allison Corbyn

City Staff and Guests

Jeff Roach, Director of Aviation & Transit
Shane Ketterling, Assistant Director of Aviation & Transit
Rusty Logan, Transit Manager

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

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

Essential Air Service

Jeff mentioned that the USDOT received three proposals and the five EAS communities in Eastern Montana recommended that Cape Air continues service. If Cape Air is chosen they plan to use the same aircraft and level of services. Another EAS proposal involves West Yellowstone and Butte Airport and they would receive service from Skywest, going to Salt Lake City and Denver. The new EAS contract period takes effect on January 1, 2024.

Small Community Air Service Development Grant

The application was submitted in April and the decision should be made by the end of October or early November.

FAA Reauthorization

Every 5 years Congress passes a Bill to reauthorize funding for the FAA. The house version has been approved and the Senate version is still being worked on. Once approved it will go to the conference committee. One of the proposals from the House version was complete elimination of the Essential Air Service program, which did not survive. One proposed change to the small community air service program was to require airports to pay the local match funding for their service. Jeff, Airport staff, and Cities Lobbyist submitted information to the delegation and the committees working on FAA reauthorization. Barbara asked if this had anything to do with the Airlines having their own security checks. Jeff mentioned it is actually separate to this and that it is a TSA National Amendment. Jeff currently is in the process of working on a petition for reconsideration. There are a couple of ways to have this reconsideration done, either through Congress or a lawsuit. There was a lot of discussion about why TSA is doing this and that BIL is fighting this and submitting a petition. Jeff also stated that usually the FAA reauthorization is not approved in a timely matter.

Award of FAA Grants

Jeff announced that the FAA Grants are coming through, one at a time. The most recent was for the Midfield Service Road, which is a \$1.1 million grant. A total of about 3 Million came in throughout this year, which is for reimbursement of past projects and construction that is currently taking place.

Monette Farms Request for Customs

Jeff mentioned that all of the City Council members and some of the board members should have received letters from Monette Farms. Jeff stated that he has tried to set up a meeting with them and they have cancelled four times. Jeff explained what Monette Farms is, it's a collaborative agriculture company out of Canada that has three farms in Montana, east of Billings. They are looking for a way to reduce their cost for transportation of their goods, without having to go to Kalispell. Jeff mentioned that it is expensive to add Customs. Jeff has talked to Bozeman about how they handle Customs and they stated that it is difficult and costly. A board member stated that he talked to Monette Farms and suggested that they contact the Chamber of Commerce or Air Service Committee including the refineries or hospitals who could possibly help with this cost. Jeff explained that Bozeman has three entities who divide the cost. Bozeman stated that they would need to have 200 aircraft operations per year to break even. There was ongoing discussion on the process and possibility of re-establishing customs at the BIL Airport. Shane stated that after Sept 11, 2001, Customs no longer existed at the Billings Airport due to a number of new requirements. Jeff is talking to different airlines from Canada about possibly having direct flights from Canada that have US Customs Free Clearance.

Airshow Update

Shane talked to the Board members about where to park on Friday, August 10, 2023 and when the bus will leave to take everyone out to the airshow site. Shane discussed how many tents were being put up, and that the terrain is rough. There will be approximately 40 chalet style tents with seating, shade, and food available from vendors. Shane showed a map of the site to the Board. He reported that there are over 10,000 tickets sold for Saturday's show and the ticket sales for the Sunday show have not been released at this time. Shane explained that for the Practice Show on Friday we are expecting approximately 1,000 people. And he is working with the Airlines to adjust their flights on Friday to accommodate the practice show. The rims will be closed and the Airport staff is working with BPD and other law enforcement agencies to assist with traffic control.

Airport & Transit Administrative/Operational Reports

Shane talked about the number of construction projects currently taking place. Unfortunately, Sletten Construction identified that the terminal remodel may not be completed until April /May 2024. Due to this new information both Shane and Jeff will be meeting with Sletten Construction on August 28th to follow up and keep them on schedule. Shane did confirm that the B Concourse will be completed by May. Shane mentioned that Sletten is having staff issues, scheduling issues, and some sub-contractor and material delays. There was also discussion about the screen protection in front of the fire place. Other areas of construction include the roof over the new lobby, bathrooms, and the second floor to the TSA screening area. The Midfield Service Road project is going well and moving forward. Another project that is taking place is the replacement of a section of aircraft parking ramp for the new B Concourse. Kniferiver finished paving that area and will start to put up forms for the 16" of concrete. Shane mentioned that Admin and the Airport Operations Departments are fully staffed, and an Assistant Mechanic has been hired. Fortunately, City Council approved the additional Police Officer position; however, 2 Police Officers recently left. They interviewed for the open position and hope to hire that person soon.

Rusty reported that MET went live for the Passio Bus Tracking System, everything seems to be working well, and the accuracy has improved significantly over double map and tracking the metrics. Rusty discussed the integration options.

Rusty reported that the ticket vending machines are up and running at the transit areas. \$1,100 worth of sales in the past month. Most sales are from the daily passes. Rusty talked about the Simulator project. Unfortunately, the project was delayed until August 14th when the simulator will be delivered and training will begin. Rusty will be traveling to California to meet with Gillig. The FTA requires that you assess the sight with these large purchases.

Facility remodel project will be having their first meeting with Morrison and Mairle after the Airshow.

MET is down 3 drivers, there are several applicants that they will be interviewing on Friday. Rusty stated that they are currently advertising for a Transit Advertising and Marketing Specialist position.

Rusty stated that they are seeing lots of vandalism at the Downtown Transfer center. Rusty is working with the BPD to see if they can come up with some solutions to maybe increase patrol.

Rusty reported that they are on track for the Service rollout, with 200 bus stop signs installed and 265 left to install. The service map is complete and working on integrating schedules for public distribution.

Rusty stated that they are planning a Marketing blitz mid to late part of August that will be sent out to the public. He stated that there are some complications, one thing being the Intermountain Health construction and how that is going to impact the downtown circular route that wraps around that property. Having some miscommunication with Rimrock Mall and traveling through their parking lot, which is causing rerouting down 24th Street W.

Schools have been notified that some routes have been cancelled and suspended.

Google maps integration is in the preliminary stage for citizens to start to use that system.

Rusty reported that they had the FTA review at the end of June. Jeff acknowledge that Rusty and his staff did an outstanding job. Rusty and his team had three deficiencies out of a possible 370. Rusty is currently making a plan to fix the issues. The board would like to have this posted to the community, Rusty will talk to Victoria Hill, Public Information Officer.

Jeff stated that the MET Transit team is going to be adding bus stop shelter advertising. Rusty stated that there will also be bus wrap advertising.

Rusty stated that they are currently going through the process of Unified Planning Work Program, with the Highway side of planning with the city that is done annually and is submitted to Montana Public Transportation. The planning grant is wrapped up every year, and has to go through the approval process. There was a significant increase in planning money available, it will be utilized this year. Rusty stated that this will be the last year that there will be an increase on the planning grants due to the other two urban areas coming online, both Helena and Bozeman, which will cause the over wide state allocation to be split 5 ways instead of 3 ways. Rusty wants to take advantage of the increase amount of money this year, to put towards planning. He wants to impose completing sustainability in government study for Met Transit, to review if the current model is sustainable for the growth that is being experienced in the urban area.

Another study that Rusty discussed the Paratransit Eligibility and Assessment Processes. With the changes among the state and the Nursing Homes closing in the small communities, there has been an influx of services in the larger communities, including transportation.

There was an increase of Ridership from the previous June at 8.4%. Fiscal year end of total Ridership was 367,583, an 8.9% increase from last year. Rusty stated that overall growth drop slightly from previous year. He hopes that with the new roll out there will be more of an increase to report.

Rusty did mention that the MET Transit did participate in the Strawberry Festival. It was busy and they had lots of swag to give out. It was a great public event for Met Transit.

Items from the Board

There was a question and discussion about food vendors and having food available for flights that are delayed late into the night. A Board member also brought up that there should be reading material available at the gift store. Jeff will talk to concessions.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

jm

cc: Aviation and Transit Board
Chrono

Via E-mail: City Administrator
Mayor
City Clerk