

## **AVIATION AND TRANSIT BOARD MINUTES**

### **Wednesday, September 6, 2023**

The Aviation and Transit Board met in the Conference Room at the Met Transit Facility on Wednesday, September 6, 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  
David Hummel Jr.

#### **City Staff**

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

#### **Guests**

Steve Domino- Airport Consultant w/Intervistas  
Josh Cohn- Airport Consultant w/ Intervistas

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

Dan Farmer called the meeting to order at 4:02pm.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

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

#### **Informational Items**

##### **Staff Introductions**

Rusty introduced MET staff: Jena Kline, Advertising & Marketing Outreach Coordinator; Eva Pickett, Administrative Assistant; Lindsay Stoltz, Road Supervisor; Josh Smith, Fleet & Facilities Manager; Michael Pope, Road Supervisor; Sahil Sharma, Road & Paratransit Dispatch Supervisor; Sarah Graham, Planning & Development Coordinator

##### **New Bus Route Implementation Plan**

Rusty explained that 450 bus stops and signs are all in place; all new bus stop signs will have a distinct stop ID number and list the routes served. The system will integrate with Google Maps and Apple Maps. Operator training has begun this week, operators will need to learn turn-by-turn directions, maps, all stops, and routes. "Paddles" – a common transit term, but new to MET drivers, will be printed for drivers each day to show the daily work routine, routes, buses, report time, etc.

Rusty displayed the new route and schedule map designed by staff, instead of the more expensive booklet that MET has previously used. The map was made in-house with the help of City of Billings GIS. He demonstrated how to read the new schedules, explained peak versus non-peak service, showed the new routes. The Marketing push will begin the week of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Jena will work with television and radio to issue a press release to promote the changes. Rusty explained that MET will use vacant advertising benches to advertise a 30-minute bus service arriving to an area.

Board member asked about a QR code being added to the map/schedule. Rusty replied that one will be added. Rusty showed the new 50-Anniversary logo and the new bus stop sign displaying the Stop ID and routes served. Rusty and Sarah will be applying decals to each of the 450 bus stop signs.

Board member asked if increased traffic effects on-time bus performance. Rusty confirmed and explained that it depends on the time of the day. Rusty showed the Facebook page updates that Jena has been completing.

Rusty explained the new bus tracking/dispatch software and app, Passio Go. Passio Go tracks all buses in real-time; as well as which route and what employee is on each bus. He showed the features of the software, including on-time performance, passenger load, dispatch and operator assignments, integration with Umo digital fare system, ridership metrics, reporting, automatic passenger counters on each bus, and fleet logistics. MET mechanics are installing the equipment on each bus and should be finished at the beginning of next week. Board member asked if MET receives updates about street closures, water-line breaks, and planned construction. Rusty explained that most of the time MET is notified. Rusty also explained that operators will not need to count passengers anymore and will only need to manually count bike and ramp deployments going forward when the system is fully live. Board members asked about capacity and how many more people could fit on the buses.

Rusty showed a short video about how the new Transit Vending Machines work. The two machines, located at each Transfer Center, have generated \$2,500 of revenue in two months, and have taken some of the demand for pass sales away from the Finance Department. The majority of passes sold are one-ride and one-day passes. He answered questions about change tickets from the machine, the cost of bus fares, the portion of the budget covered by bus fares, and the reason fares are charged. MET staff members are emptying cash out of the machines and performing maintenance, as needed. He showed the TVM interface, including transactions and cash balance.

Lastly, Rusty told the board that MET had the kick-off meeting with Collaborative Design about the METroplex remodel, including repairing and opening the existing skylight, adding a larger lobby and conference room, more centralized operations area, and dedicated training and simulator space. MET is currently in the process of making sure existing holding ponds are sufficient. A board member asked about the funding source of the remodel funds. Rusty explained that it will be paid for by a competitive grant that MET was awarded in 2021 at an 80 Federal/20 Local match level. The completion date goal for A&E is end of year 2024 with the hopes to go out to construction bid in January or February 2024, with construction to begin Summer 2024. He explained that the largest obstacle will be maintaining operations and housing employees during construction.

MET has 3 operator vacancies. Jeff explained that MET fixed route service is up 6.7%, and 3.4% for paratransit. He explained that service was removed from the Alkali Creek area due to low ridership. School District 2 will now be running a bus in that area.

### **Transit Tour**

Rusty provided a tour of the new Bus Simulator, located at the METroplex and showed some of the administration areas that will change during the remodel.

### **Airport Operational Reports**

#### **Airshow Recap**

Shane said for the most part, the airshow was a large success. Between Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, 36,000 people attended, not including staff or vendors, making the total close to 40,000 people in attendance during the 3-day event. Debrief with airshow committee has been completed. The committee had a \$2 million budget and broke even or maybe lost a little money, based on expenses. He continued with that comments were very positive from the community, and people are already asking about future airshows. Shane emphasized the amount of work that went into the airshow. He said that there may be future airshows, but it will not be for a few years due to airport and runway construction. Issues that were identified included traffic and parking, and he confirmed the exit strategy was better than the entrance strategy. The VIP entrance gate and parking worked better

than the general admission entrance. He concluded that the show, weather, and performances were all fantastic. Jeff stated that only a few noise complaints were received.

The board members were all very complimentary. Board members discussed how far people traveled to attend. Sunday attendance was over 15,000, with additional tickets being added at the last minute. Jeff stated that Shane and the committee will be recognized by the Chamber of Commerce for their hard work and efforts at their next meeting.

### **Airport Staffing**

The airport hired one police officer and is still short two, along with two building maintenance positions. Paul Totten, Operations Supervisor, is retiring at the end of November and the search will begin for a replacement.

### **Construction Update**

Sletten Construction has been delayed, Jeff and Shane met with them last week to communicate the importance of deadlines and closing in the building before winter. The goal completion date has been moved to March.

Shane continued to explain that most walls are built for Concourse B, base floor will be poured this week, steel starts going up next week, and the lobby area skylight should go in next week. In the next 2-3 weeks work will begin in the lobby, with the escalator, elevator, and stairs installation.

Knife River will have six of the nine pads poured. Fly ash is delayed (required for sustainability of concrete) due to closure of coal mines. Knife River may not finish the last two pours, but hoping for end of the year if fly ash is available. Mid-field service road is done, lighting just needs to be finished on taxi-way.

### **FAA Certification Inspection next week**

Jeff explained that they filed a petition with an attorney related to the new Aviation Worker Screening requirements. TSA responded with a 14-page letter that denied the petition; they are allowing one year to get a plan in place and will require milestones be submitted throughout the next year. Jeff said that the airport, together with other airports, will be pushing for changes through courts and legislation. Montana congressional legislation have all sent letters to TSA asking for revocation of law. It cost the airport \$1600 to file a petition for reconsideration. The first part of court action will include six airports and will cost \$10,000 for the first steps.

He explained that the airport must demonstrate progress as they move forward. A board member asked if the government shuts down, what it will look like for Airport operations. Jeff explained that they are not typically willing to shut down the National Airspace System and Air Traffic Control. Rusty explained that it was all moved to National Highway Trust Fund in BIL so transportation shouldn't be affected.

Jeff continued that enplanements are up 12.3%, on track for 830,000 passengers this year; the airport saw 788,000 last year. There is a significant increase this year; in addition, he explained the national average per enplanement is \$7.00, and the airport was significantly below last year at \$5.18. Even though it will increase this year, it will still be under national avg of \$7.00.

Jeff shared these statistics: Sky Dine revenue at \$332,000 for July 2023 versus July 2019 at \$166,000. Sky Host at \$113,500 in July 2023 versus \$98,000 in July 2019.

Board members asked if we are on track to reach 2019 numbers, and Jeff stated the airport is not back to that level yet.

Jeff explained that the airline's focus is currently on tourism destinations, as there are not as many business travelers since Covid-19. Jeff will meet with Sun Country this month, who is looking to expand from Minneapolis market and add six to eight new destinations in 2024.

Jeff will be attending the Montana Rendezvous in Missoula in October and anticipates nine to ten airlines will be in attendance.

Board member asked if Global Entry program interviews would be available at the airport, so travelers do not have to travel to the Sweet Grass Canadian border crossing for a 5-minute interview and photo. Shane and Jeff explained that they continue to ask U.S. Customs, but it is not cost effective at this time, and they will continue to ask and offer airport space in the future.

Jeff is touring the Bozeman airport on September 15<sup>th</sup> to look at the facility and see what a user-fee airport could look like. He clarified that the airport could accept people from Canadian airports from nine locations. He also explained that air freight is on a downward trend in the US, and in Billings, but Billings is not down as much as many. This is due to ground transportation taking over as much as it can due to cost. The airport is moving forward with a fifth cargo pad to plan for the future.

Board member asked about grant status that would add direct flights to San Francisco and/or Los Angeles. Jeff explained that he has not received a response from USDOT yet, as they are behind. He hopes to hear by the end of September.

Cape Air was awarded the essential travel contract for the next five years. Southern Airways Express will be at MT Rendezvous, and Jeff plans to meet with them to discuss air service, even though they were not chosen as the essential air service provider.

Jeff noted that he will not be at the next meeting, as he will be at the Montana Rendezvous in Missoula to talk to airlines.

### **Items from the Board**

None

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:48.

sg

cc: Aviation and Transit Board  
Chrono

Via E-mail: City Administrator  
Mayor  
City Clerk