

AVIATION AND TRANSIT BOARD MINUTES

Wednesday, September 4, 2024

The Aviation and Transit Board met in the Administration Conference Room at the Billings Logan International Airport on Wednesday, September 4, 2024 at 4:00 pm. Those in attendance included:

Aviation and Transit Board Members

Chuck Tooley
Steve Tostenrud
Allison Corbyn
Denis Pitman

City Staff

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

Guests

CALL TO ORDER

Steve called the meeting to order at 4:01 pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

None

COURTESIES

Shane and Jeff presented a STAR award to Jenny Mockel. Recognizing her for being the representative for the Airport on the Air Service Communication Committee, which is a subcommittee to the Air Service Committee.

Informational Items

• Montana Air Service Rendezvous Review

Jeff gave a quick review to the board of how the Montana Air Service Rendezvous turned out. He stated that it was a great success with all the events, tours, activities, and Skyline Reception. He wanted to share some of his takeaways after meeting with the Air Carriers. Many of the Air Carriers have enough pilots but not enough aircraft, which is making agreements difficult for the future.

Unfortunately, Sun Country did not do as well as expected during their first seasonal year at BIL. Jeff and the representative discussed some complications that could have occurred. One issue was getting the Sun Country name out to public; very few people recognized Sun Country. Another issue was the dates of travel, only Tuesday and Saturday. Sun Country did mention that they are having a challenge next year as well with one of their main air cargo carriers, Amazon Air. Amazon Air has increased their aircraft requirements of Sun Country from twelve to twenty. BIL could lose Sun Country temporarily until Sun Country meets their requirements with Amazon Air.

Delta is extremely happy with both the Minneapolis and Salt Lake City service. Both services are meeting their expectations. They are open to explore additional opportunities, possibility to Seattle, LAX, or Atlanta. Jeff will be providing Delta with additional information.

West Jet was a new registry to the Montana Rendezvous; West Jet is based out of Calgary. West Jet is an ultra-low cost carrier, and Calgary is a preclearance location. West Jet is interested in coming to BIL; however, it will be at least two years due to their Q400 pilot shortage.

Allegiant is satisfied with their Mesa and Las Vegas flights. They stated that the new service to LAX did not go as well as they had anticipated.

Southwest is still having financial issues. They are struggling to be able to add new service at this time. The soonest they can consider to add new service is possibly in 2026 or even 2027.

United is happy with their passenger numbers with adding the fifth day to Denver, they have agreed to continue the five flights a day until the end of the year. United also talked about adding a seasonal direct flight to Chicago O'Hara in 2025.

Cape air reported that they have lots of pilots but a shortage of aircraft. They did talk about the possibility taking on some at risk routes around the region, for example to Missoula or Kalispell; however, they would need to get different aircraft that are pressurized.

Southern Airways Express also Bid on the EAS contract with Cape Air. They are good with pilots but have a shortage on aircraft. Surf Air bought out Southern Airways Express, Southern Airways Express is now a subsidiary of Surf Air. Their main footprint is Southeast US, Northeast US, and EAS service out of Hawaii.

Jeff informed the board that he is looking at some of the top Airline Headquarters visits for the Fall. He is looking at going to Delta and Avelo.

Jeff suggested to have the October A&T Meeting cancelled, as both Jeff and Rusty will be out of the office. The Board members agreed to cancelling the October A&T Meeting.

Jeff explained one of the charts that the Board receives in their monthly packets. He pointed out that in July/August 2021 and July/August 2024 there were the same number of Commercial Air Service Operations; however, the enplanement numbers during that same period shows an increase of seats from 45,000 in 2021 compared to over 55,000 in 2024, more seats available. A lot of that is the transition of larger aircraft. This is due to profitability; the larger the aircraft available more profitable it tends to be, a lot of cost is in personnel expenses.

Jeff informed the Board that the 2023 preliminary National Airport rankings came out and BIL is ranked 143rd busiest Passenger Service Airport, as well as moving up to 55th from 63rd for Air Cargo.

Denis wanted to make the Board members aware that BIL is nominated for USA Today's Best Airport. He encouraged everyone to vote and to inform family and friends to do the same.

- Burn the Point Impact on Transit Service**

Rusty discussed the impact of the recent Burn the Point parade on MET fixed-route bus service. He displayed a map of the Burn the Point (BTP) route, which encompassed the Downtown Transfer Center. Rusty indicated he worked with the Chase Hawks group in the past years to come up with a route that works for the parade while maintaining access for buses to the Downtown Transfer Station. This year was a little different due to the most recent route rollout but the plan was adapted to consider the expanded service. Buses were operating during the entirety of the parade and one travel lane was kept clear for buses to enter and exit. The MET Transit Management staff primarily helped direct traffic with limited assistance from the BTP committee. Rusty is attending a debriefing meeting between the Chase Hawks group and City Admin, and he will discuss some of his concerns.

Denis asked Rusty if ridership numbers increased during that time, and Rusty reported that between the hours 5-7 pm MET completed 222 rides across the system, which is typical during that period.

The Board brought up a suggestion to advertise next year that they can ride the bus to and from the BTP, indicating it might decrease traffic in that area as well as bring in additional revenue for MET.

- Construction Update**

Shane and Rusty both updated the board on the construction projects that are happening at the Airport and MET.

Shane informed the Board that the finishing touches on the terminal remodel and expansion project are taking place. Pierce Flooring will install the rest of the carpet in the new lobby and the bathrooms on B Concourse should be finished by next week. The exterior siding still needs to be installed around the skylights and at the roof level before winter arrives. The exterior terminal painting and repair project is close to being finished and the Aviation Place Road rehabilitation is paved and will be fully opened by the end of the week. The contractors will be striping the road next and then Telnet will work on running the fiber optic cable to the automatic security gates.

Shane announced that the Cargo Ramp project is completed and available for operations.

Rusty informed the Board that the MET Facility project is on track and moving forward. He showed the board updated pictures of the progress. The Contractors are currently framing inside, installing insulation, and forming up the structural steel on the outside.

- **Airport Administrative/Operational Reports**

Shane is working with Morrison & Maierle (M&M) on next year's construction projects. In 2025, the large airfield project will consist of rehabilitating and lengthening our crosswind Runway 7/25 and is estimated to cost approximately eight-million dollars. Shane is also working with M&M on hiring an architectural firm to begin designing the next phase of the terminal remodel that will include the ticket counters, replacing the four revolving doors, updating the exterior front of the building and improving the baggage claim area. All of this work hinges on funding and Jeff is hopeful that we will receive FAA AIP Discretionary money for the runway project and BIL funding for the terminal remodel.

Jeff explained to the Board about the Discretionary funding and how the FAA prioritizes the projects. Jeff stated that BIL gets Entitlement money, which means we are entitled to receive a certain amount, but the FAA holds back some Discretionary money, that the FAA prioritizes the projects per region. The Regional Director/Administrator of the FAA makes the recommendations. The FAA is requesting that the runway gets fixed, that project is ranked #7 on the list. The decision about the Discretionary money should be made by October 31st.

Steve asked which states or airports are in our region; Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Alaska, and Oregon.

Shane was thrilled to announce that the FAA inspection went very well, with only one minor discrepancy that was corrected before the Inspector left.

- **Transit Administrative/Operational Reports**

Rusty discussed that congress is currently working through financing bills and he is waiting to hear what they do with the budget; there is uncertainty about whether they will pass a funding bill, or if transit will be partially funded with a continuing resolution for a portion of the upcoming Federal Fiscal Year. The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) report regarding the proposed House bill showed a significant decrease in transit funding within capital investment grants for large-scale projects but essentially maintained the levels of formula operating and capital funding established by the Bipartisan Infrastructure bill.

The new route updates were rolled out to 10-Southside and 19-Midtown, with no issues reported; ridership appeared to maintain typical levels on the affected routes.

School is back in session and the ridership numbers increased by 200 riders on the first day of school.

Rusty reported that the Roadside Supervisor position vacancy was filled with an internal employee, Jonathan McRae. MET is down to one driver vacancy.

Rusty mentioned that there was a quarterly Human Services Coordinated Transportation meeting; the meeting unfortunately had low attendance. MET is currently trying to put together ideas for different projects because of MET receiving additional Competitive Grant money that will be utilized for paratransit vehicle replacement. Most of the needs brought up during the meeting had to do with missing sidewalks and crosswalks in some popular areas.

Rusty and Josh will be in California in October to inspect the Electric Buses at the Gillig Factory.

Rusty went over the ridership numbers with the Board; August was up 51% total from last year. Paratransit had a 0.8% drop in ridership, overall ridership showed a 57% growth over the year. The new Paratransit Vans are currently on the street.

Rusty informed the Board that the electric charging stations will be installed in the next couple of months. Chargepoint did reach out to Rusty to let him know about the possibility of a temporary-use mobile charger stations for the buses. Rusty will look into them.

Items from the Board

Steve inquired about the parking situation during these peak times of travel at the airport. He has noticed the lot getting full and with the possibility of the Airport growing, that might be an issue. Jeff informed him that parking is part of the Master Plan Upgrade, but overflow parking west of the ATC Tower will be used during peak periods until a permanent solution is developed

Steve also inquired about the Electric Charging stations, and the usage. Shane said that there being utilized.

There was a small discussion between Rusty and Denis about a situation between the Fire Department and the Heights MET drivers. Jeff will be talking to the City Leadership team about the situation.

Denis talked to Rusty about getting together with Job Connections to do a Travel Training day. Rusty will reach out to them.

Denis gave a heads up to the Board that the USS Billings crew will be coming to Billings, October 6th -13th, which is Navy week.

Steve adjourned the meeting at 5:15 pm

jm

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