

## AVIATION AND TRANSIT BOARD MINUTES

Wednesday, August 6, 2025

The Aviation and Transit Board met in the Administration Conference Room at the Billings Logan International Airport on Wednesday, August 6, 2025, after a tour of Edwards Jet Center. Those in attendance included:

### Aviation and Transit Board Members

Steve Tostenrud  
Barbara Schneeman  
Denis Pitman  
Ron Spence  
Allison Corbyn  
James Mariska  
Megan Bostrom

### City Staff

Paul Khera, Assistant Director of Aviation  
Rusty Logan, Assistant Director of Transit  
Jennifer Mockel, Parking Division Adm Sup.

### Guests

No Public Present

### CALL TO ORDER

Chair Steve Tostenrud called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm.

**Courtesies** – Paul introduced himself stating that he came to Billings from Juneau, AK, after a career in airports, airlines, and an FBO earlier in his career. He said he's worked 20 years in airlines and 17 years in airports – all in Juneau. He had all airports in southeast Alaska, doing operations first and then planning. He also was a pilot in rural Alaska but had not flown the Aleutian chain that has the worst weather in the world. When asked by a board member, he said he was not in the military. When asked how he liked Billings, Paul said he is getting accustomed to the heat and it's nice to go to a store and they have things in stock. Paul noted that Jeff is in Calgary this week and this meeting is basically his first rodeo with the board meeting.

**Public Comment Opportunity** – there were no public speakers.

### Informational Items

- Airport Master Plan (AMP) Update Status – Draft chapters 1-4 are on the website under the Document Center. In May, the citizen and technical advisory meetings were held. Morrison-Maierle, the Master Plan consultant, is now working on chapter 5, Alternatives. The open house for the public comment meeting is tentatively planned for September 9, 3:30 – 6:30 PM at the Airport Operations Center. There will be displays and briefings on each display, and time for questions.
- Airport Authority Update – the Governance Analysis Transition Plan RFQ was advertised; seven firms requested a copy of the RFQ. A selection committee will be appointed to score the responses and make a recommendation to the City Council on the recommended proposer; a contract will go to City Council on September 8 for the award. Dennis said he personally would like to see the proposal and responses first, and have it channeled through

the Board first before going to city council. Ron asked that this item be placed on the Board's September 3<sup>rd</sup> agenda. Allison asked if there are firms that specialize in this kind of work. Paul said there are firms that assist airports with the transition, adding that airports generally make that transition when they move from non-hub to small-hub status. Rusty said there are pros and cons to being an authority. It is a matter of governance; a board would govern the airport instead of the city council. Allison asked if being an authority would help the airport's bonding ability. Rusty noted that having a governing board would provide focused governance specific to the airport. However, the airport authority would not have the benefits of the city's resources. Other things would have to be reviewed and negotiated such as employee benefits, longevity, retirement and the bargaining agreement with the Teamsters. Ron added the airport authority concept should have come to this Board as an advisory board before going to the city council, noting the city council indicated they wanted to move ahead with the RFQ.

- Airport Update (include construction project status)
  - FAA Inspection. Had no deficiencies were identified and only a few recommendations noted. These are comprehensive inspections that follow a checklist Form 5280 and include inspecting runways, markings, lights, intersections on the runways, firefighting response time, inspection reports, training records, wildlife management, ARFF equipment, emergency plan, all the things that keep an airport safe. This is conducted on an annual basis. The form is on the FAA website for review. The new Aero Simple program has been very helpful in both online reporting and tracking.
  - Billings #7 of 10 Top Domestic Airports. Travel and Leisure Magazine named BIL as #7 of the Top Ten domestic airports, identifying the travel experience through the airport as stress-free and user-friendly.
  - TSA had increased their security threat assessment fees to the airport for badge holders, so the airport will be increasing their STA fee by \$7 effective September 1. This will be paid by badge holders.
  - BIL is hiring for vacancies for Airfield Supt, ARFF maintenance worker, and Administrative Assistant.
  - An RFP was advertised for a general contractor for the ticket counter remodel. Four responses were received and are being evaluated at this time; interviews are scheduled for August 11<sup>th</sup>, with a September 2<sup>nd</sup> deadline to identify a firm and make a recommendation. The anticipated start date is winter/spring of 2026. The TSA baggage screening equipment will be moved behind the wall. The number of ticket counters will be increased to allow room for new airlines. The current airlines are asking for their own scales at each position at their counters, so they don't have to share a scale to eliminate bag tagging errors. This will be a lengthy, involved project due to the new infrastructure involved.
  - Runway 7/25 project is slightly delayed due to a fire at the factory that makes the oil for the asphalt for the project. The contractor has enough asphalt for the intersection of 7/25 and 28L/10R and will proceed with that so that the smaller runway can be reopened.

- Overlook Drive. Finishing up inspections and finalizing completion of that project with remaining crack seal repairs.
- ARFF Trucks. The specs for the new ARFF trucks are being finalized and will be sent to the Helena FAA District Office for final approval before going to bid.
- Statistics. Fiscal Year Enplanements are up over the previous year by 11% with a total of 1.1 million passengers, approximately ½ of which are enplanements; vehicle parking is up 13%; aircraft operations are up 6%. The Master Plan update is looking at the overall parking needs and a parking garage, which is not eligible for funding under the federal Airport Improvement Program (AIP).
- MET Transit Update.
  - RFP for funding the governance study. Rusty said 2 responses were received – one from SRF, the firm MET worked with on the transit development plan for the fixed route overall, and the other from Kittleson, a firm the city does a lot of work with on surface transportation planning. The award went to SRF, as the value on the scope of work presented, which included an analysis of the ROI on transit investments. MET is in the data gathering phase for that project.
  - Study Review Committee. Rusty said he is soliciting participation in this review. He has reached out to Lockwood and Laurel for participation; Laurel has a transportation operation that is a subrecipient of federal funds. They run in conjunction with Allies in Aging, formerly the Adult Resource Alliance, who provides the drivers for that operation. He has also reached out to the city council for participation and welcomed participation from the Board. Rusty noted he also has briefed the County and the MPO. The Board asked about an opportunity to include a service for a commuter bus into Billings, or if it is jurisdictionally bound by county lines. Rusty said there is an opportunity for whichever model MET ends up with, to enter into an interlocal service agreement with another entity for service. Recent legislative changes provided for this opportunity. As a City department right now, MET only offers service within city limits as MET is funded by city taxpayers.
  - Electric buses. The board asked how the new electric buses are working out. Rusty said the buses are performing pretty well; however, they are experiencing some issues with the charging units. With the bus manufacturer and charger manufacturer pointing fingers at each other, staff is trying to determine what is going on. With a full charge, at the end of the day a bus will have about 30% charge remaining during a typical operational day.
  - The Unified Work Plan was adopted by the PCC in July, and they are now waiting for comments by the FTA and federal highways.
  - Planning activities for the year include fare analysis, paratransit eligibility improvements, review application process for paratransit service and possibly have the assessment done in-house, a new contract with Allies in Aging for a senior rides program, more in-depth look at a rapid downtown connection to Stewart Park transfer

center to reduce the connection time. The board asked what the barrier is to a shorter transfer time for this transfer; Rusty said it is primarily a funding issue.

- Fully staffed at MET at this time.
- Bid closed for the bus wash rehabilitation. It came in higher than budgeted. MET budgeted approximately \$500K; there were 2 bids – Langlas at slightly under \$600K and Cucancic at over \$550K.
- Fiscal year 2025 end ridership totaled 576,933, a 34.3% increase over the previous fiscal year. July ended up with 45,780 in fixed-route ridership, up from 36,996 last July. This was surprising as MET usually sees a drop in ridership once school ends for the summer. The board mentioned several projects that have the potential to impact ridership, like the large apartment complex off 32<sup>nd</sup> street with what appears to be about 1,000 units. Rusty said it's hard to tell if those types of developments will contribute to riders; they usually see students utilize the MET service. He also said with the new recreation center going in at Amend Park, they are looking at options where they might be able to capture the student after-school ridership to that area, noting that they do not have the funding to support expanded weekend service. Rusty also noted there has been some growth in ridership from employees of the hospital since that new construction project is underway and has displaced some employee parking.
- Two-way street conversion. When asked how the two-way street conversion has impacted MET, Rusty said there is some silver lining to that project because they are cutting off about 15K miles/year as they don't have to drive around circles to get to where they want to go and help with the timing on routes. Third Avenue is tight with the bike lane on it now. MET is experiencing a problem from 27<sup>th</sup> turning onto 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North when northbound. They are discussing the temporary striping with Engineering to try to widen that lane. He said overall it is working well if they can get that one turn area addressed, noting that it makes people drive slower.
- MET Training Lot. Rusty said the lot is back in full use for CDL training for new hires as all construction equipment has been removed.
- Construction is wrapping up with punch list items.

- Heights Task Force Meeting Report

- Dennis requested that Rusty speak to the Heights Task Force about the proposed MET transfer center in the Heights. Currently transfers are occurring on Lake Elmo Drive which creates congestion and safety concerns due to the driver speeds on that street. MET has been looking at utilizing park land in the Heights, with the original site on Cody Drive northwest of Lake Elmo and Wicks Lane. The Parks Dept. suggested Lutheran Park instead, an undeveloped 1-acre park north of Wicks Lane and Lake Elmo. MET would utilize the bottom 1/3 of that parcel for a small transfer

center that would accommodate 4-5 buses and also outfit the park with some recreational equipment and public restrooms to provide some amenities for the neighborhood. The task force response was positive. MET is now doing some internal planning as land transfer and rezoning would be involved to proceed with this project. MET would utilize some of its capital reserves to fund the project so it could be completed in approximately 1-1.5 years. Neighborhood comments will also be requested. Dennis said he thought this was a good move for the MET and the Heights.

### **Items from the Board**

- Dennis wants to see the first five spaces in the short-term parking lot marked for compact cars only. They are loaded with trucks and he has difficulty driving into the lot with a large vehicle.
- Dennis said he is also a mortician and met with the Montana funeral directors last month, and the topic of shipping out human remains is still a hot topic. Airlines are shipping human remains into Billings, including full casketed remains, but there is no opportunity to ship human remains out, and he seems to have run into a dead end. It's been a frustrating issue for funeral directors. He said they are still driving human remains to either Salt Lake City or Denver to get them onto airlines, as there are no human remains shipments out of Montana right now. It's a huge financial burden to the family, as it costs \$3/mile for the travel.
- Paul said he has copies of the RFP for the GC for the Terminal project and asked if a member of the Board would like to be on the committee to review/score the proposal. Steve volunteered for the review/scoring.

Ron made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Allison. Motion passed; meeting adjourned at 5:44 PM