

## AVIATION AND TRANSIT BOARD MINUTES

Wednesday, October 1, 2025

The Aviation and Transit Board met in the Administration Conference Room # 217 at the Billings Logan International Airport on Wednesday, October 1, 2025. Those in attendance included:

### Aviation and Transit Board Members

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

### City Staff

Paul Khera, Assistant Director of Aviation  
Rusty Logan, Assistant Director of Transit  
Jeff Roach, Director of Aviation and Transit  
Raya Logan-Jackson, Administrative Support

### Guests

City Councilman- Mike Boyett  
Mr. Lem Robinson

### CALL TO ORDER

Chair Steve Tostenrud called the meeting to order at 4:02PM

### MINUTES – June 4<sup>th</sup> & Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> Minutes

Jeff explained that the June minutes had not been approved because there was no meeting in July. Barbara made a motion to approve June 4, 2025, and September 3, 2025, minutes, seconded by Ron. Motion was unanimously approved.

**Courtesies** – Jeff introduced new staff member Raya Logan-Jackson the new administrative support, Councilman Mike Boyett said he was attending to discuss volunteer appreciation dinner, Mr. Lem Robinson introduced himself.

**Public Comment Opportunity** – The item from the board Tresspass memorial letter was moved up to public comment opportunity to allow Mr. Robinson to speak first instead of waiting for the end of the meeting, Mr. Robinson declined to speak and said he was there to listen to the discussion regarding his memorial.

#### • **Trespass Memorial Letter – Mr. Lem Robinson**

- Mr. Robinson previously received a letter from the city regarding an unapproved memorial installed near the airport in honor of his daughter, who passed away in a motorcycle accident.
- The memorial was partially constructed on airport and Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) property without prior approval.

- The MDT has since approved the installation of a standard white roadside cross, which meets current policy.
- Mr. Robinson has requested the larger, original memorial be allowed to remain.

### **Discussion Highlights:**

- The City and Airport are bound by **City Code 22-407**, FAA Grant Assurances, and Airport Use Policies that prohibit non-aeronautical encumbrances on airport property.
- Allowing this structure to remain would set a precedent that could be used as an example for future requests.
- The unauthorized memorial must be respectfully removed by the Robinson family or airport personnel.

### **Board Discussion & Response:**

- Board members discussed the timing of the memorial's construction, road hazard concerns, and other potential memorial locations.
- Jeff Roach reiterated that white crosses are the only approved memorials for MDT property, and airport property is restricted for aviation-related use only.
- Jeff confirmed that City Administrator Chris Kukulski offered to help the Robinson family by connecting them with legislators regarding highway safety, liability, and policy changes.
- The board suggested assisting in exploring alternatives for memorial placement as public art. Councilman Boyett noted that the City's bipartisan art committee should be the initial contact for reclassifying the memorial as an art installation.
- The board requested that airport staff assist Mr. Robinson with respectful removal and provide contact information for the city art committee for possible alternative placement.
- The memorial must be removed by October 17, 2025.

### **Informational Items**

#### **Airport Governance Update:**

- The City Council approved a contract with **Steven Baldwin Associates (SBA)** to conduct a **governance study** on transitioning to an **airport authority**. Budget for project w

- **Study Phases:**
  - **Phase I:** Governance analysis and recommendations (18 months)
  - **Phase II:** Legal and procedural transition steps (resolution, board formation, FAA approval)
  - **Phase III:** Post-approval implementation and support (12 months)
- SBA was the only respondent to the RFQ; others cited lack of staff or time.
- The transition is aimed at improving efficiency, decision-making, and operational focus.
- Only Billings has not transitioned to an airport authority among Montana's commercial airports.
- City services (IT, HR, Finance) currently cost the airport ~\$350,000/year; future decisions on continuing or internalizing these services would be made by the new board.
- A Port Authority model that includes both airport and transit remains under consideration, though it is premature to discuss specifics.

### **Service Updates:**

- **MT Rendezvous:** Met with 10 airlines; feedback was positive.
- **United Airlines:** Hired new station manager Josh Lee. Very satisfied with Chicago service (95% load factor); returning in 2026.
- **American Airlines:** Will return second Chicago service next year.
- **Delta:** Considering reinstating second Minneapolis flight for summer; not yet confirmed.
- **FedEx:** No longer handling air mail contracts but continues air freight shipping.
- **Mead-Hunt Conference** – air service development conference in spring 2026 will be next opportunity to get feedback from airlines.
- National Trend: Domestic air freight declines in favor of ground transport.
- **FAA Data:** Billings ranked 56th in air cargo freight for 2024.
- Community Meeting with Chamber of Commerce – Scheduled for January 20, 2026.

### **Master Plan Update:**

Strong turnout for public meeting, government officials, agency representatives, stakeholders, and neighbors. We received comments and feedback and are incorporating them into our decision.

Next opportunity for public comment will be when we present our final alternative draft options. For each component of the airport: airfield, terminal, parking we will finalize one alternative option and present it. All comments are gathered by our consultant Morris-Maierle. After the final public meeting we will develop a project development list and fiscal plan.

## **Airport Operations**

- **Runway 7-25 project:** is progressing on schedule; GM contract signed with Martel.
- **9/26- Accident report:** we had an aircraft lose control on landing and leave the runway. Marchetti with 2 pilots, no injuries, they hit a distance to go sign, significant aircraft damage, our crew was able to load it onto a trailer and move it into a hanger.
- **Holiday Parking Plan:**
  - Cell phone lot will be used as an overflow parking area and discussion is underway about creating a new cell phone lot or multiple lots east and west, possibly in the viewing area.
  - We will have a shuttle; lights and cameras will be set up and installed.
  - We anticipate 350 more spots will be needed.
- **New Staff:**
  - We have approval for a new custodial position and are conducting interviews.
  - Looking at adding 4 autonomous cleaning machines to allow for more productivity of maintenance staff.
  - We hired a new Police officer.
  - A new Operations manager has been hired to assist Mick; they will be starting October 15<sup>th</sup>.
- **Montana Aviation Conference**
  - Feb. 26-28 will be held here in Billings. Brings together general aviation aircraft operations, and smaller airports supported by the state of Montana division of aeronautics. The Montana airport managers association and mechanics association hold their meetings in coordination with this event. Around 500 participants are expected. We have been tasked with finding a registration gift.
- **Insurance Audit:** All requests met or justified.
- **City Council:** Two fire trucks and leases were approved. We are putting together a capital improvement plan to take to council.
- **Federal Shutdown:** No immediate impact; essential staff (ATC and TSA) will continue to work (unpaid) and receive back pay after shutdown is completed.

## **MET UPDATES**

- **Facilities:**
  - Bus wash contract approved by council on 9/22/25 (lead time: 30–60 days).
  - Transfer Center camera to be replaced and additional camera being added at Stewart Park.

- **Damages:** 3 panes of broken glass downtown; estimating \$8,000 each to replace. Exploring wind screens for protection.
- **Crosswalk Improvement:** MDT said First Ave South does qualify for a crosswalk installation. Discussing with engineering department potential installation of a rapid flashing beacon.
- **Governance Study:** Multiple models under review: port authority, urban transit district, partnership with Laurel. Final report expected Dec 2025–Jan 2026
- **ATC recertification:** completed for automated passenger counters. Waiting on review and reauthorization. Federal shutdown may impact wait times.
- **Federal Shutdown Planning:** Preemptively drew available funds through month's end. Should still be able to draw on existing operational grant funds.
- **Personnel:**
  - One driver transferred to Solid Waste: position on hold for 30 days. Will begin advertising in next two weeks.
  - New Fleet and Facilities Maintenance Supervisor: Dan McCarthy hired; highly experienced
- **Ridership:**
  - September 2025: **49,444 rides** (+15.2%)
  - Air Transit: **33,498** (+6.2%)
  - Overall month increase: **14.54%**
  - Year-to-date ridership nearing **150,000**
- **Volunteer Appreciation Dinner:** Councilman Foyett invited all our board members to the Volunteer appreciation dinner October 29<sup>th</sup>. The library will be giving a presentation at the dinner.

## **ITEMS FROM THE BOARD:**

**Transport of Human Remains:** Board Member Pitman raised concerns about a local resident transporting human remains long distances due to lack of airline service. Jeff explained that Delta currently flies remains into Montana. No carriers offer outbound services for remains from Montana. Closest service hubs: Salt Lake City or Denver. Issue was raised with airline network planners, but no changes are expected currently.

Meeting adjourned 5:38PM.