



**AVIATION AND TRANSIT COMMISSION MINUTES**  
**Tuesday, December 1, 2020**

The Aviation and Transit Commission met in the Administration Conference Room at the Billings Logan International Airport on Tuesday, December 1, 2020. Those in attendance included:

**Aviation and Transit Commission Members**

Peggie Gaghen, Chair

Dan Farmer, Vice Chair

Ken Behling

Ron Spence

Mark Astle

David Hummel & Chuck Tooley attended via Zoom

**City Staff and Guests**

Kevin Ploehn, Director of Aviation & Transit

Shane Ketterling, Assistant Director of Aviation & Transit

Rusty Logan, Transit Manager

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

A public comment period was offered. Mr. Ploehn took the opportunity to thank Chairwoman Gaghen for her eight years of service to the Commission and presented her with a plaque from the Aviation and Transit Department.

**SECURITY REQUIREMENTS UPDATE**

Mr. Ploehn told the Commission that it received a memo from the TSA that proposed to amend all airports' security plans to require each airport to begin screening those airport employees that require access to the secure areas of the airport. He noted that this would first require the airport to do a vulnerability assessment within 60 days of the amendment and then follow up that effort with a mitigation plan. Mr. Ploehn noted that this was the TSA's effort to address the insider threat issue. Vice Chair Farmer asked if there had been any instances regarding insider threat. Mr. Ploehn and Mr. Ketterling explained that there had been a couple of minor instances, but the layered approach to security that is now in place has usually been able to thwart any major issues. Mr. Ploehn explained that there is a significant operating difference between the very large hub airports and the smaller airports that are located in Montana and elsewhere around the country. The main difference is that at the small airports, most airlines use the same person at the ticket counter to also load the aircraft and take the tickets at the gate, whereas at a large airport the employees are usually sent to a designated location and stay there for the day. Hence, once you screen them they will not have to be screened again, whereas in Billings that person may have to be rescreened continually throughout the day. Mr. Ploehn continued that the airports would be required to establish an employee screening point or do random location screenings. Mr. Ploehn pointed out that at smaller airports this would be a problem because of the way the terminals are built, usually long and linear without a lot of depth to provide a space for a screening point without taking out a ticket counter. The biggest concern is the requirement to search a worker's personal items like purses, lunch boxes, coats, etc. Additionally, within one year the airports will be required to implement explosive detection technology (EDT). Mr. Ploehn thought that implementation at Billings would require four or five new employees, training requirements, and the purchase of the EDT, estimated at \$500,000 for each unit. Other concerns included potential liability concerns leading to additional insurance costs and the possible violation of the Montana Constitution regarding an illegal search. He noted that the TSA is Federally protected and their searches are

considered administrative for the safety of the general public. The airports of Montana would not have that protection.

Chair Gaghen asked if the process could be amended for the smaller airports. Mr. Ploehn noted that there was a public comment period and maybe the TSA would consider that, but past experience with regard to TSA rule implementation was that they implemented the change to all airports so there would not be a weak link in the system. Mr. Ploehn noted that the position of the Airport, and for that matter the other Montana airports, is that screening is, and has always been, a TSA function. It appears that TSA is cost shedding their responsibilities on to America's airports and that this is a classic example of an unfunded mandate. Mr. Ploehn asked for the Commission to approve a motion to allow the Commission Chair to co-sign a letter with him to our Congressional delegation asking that language be inserted into upcoming funding bills that will require the TSA to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking; so that everyone can understand the full impacts, costs versus benefits of their proposal on the airport and aviation industries. Commissioner Spence made the motion that was seconded by Commissioner Tooley. The motion was passed. Mr. Ploehn told the Commission he would proceed to get the letters drafted and sent.

Commissioner Spence asked if the TSA could just require these changes without Congressional approval. Mr. Ploehn replied that after the events of September 11, 2001, Congress passed legislation removing the security requirement from the FAA and started up the Homeland Security Department, of which TSA is a part of. That legislation gave Homeland Security and subsequently TSA broad discretion to implement aviation safety; so based on that, the answer to Commissioner Spence's question was yes. In the past, TSA used Aviation Security Directives that airports would need to follow. The airports also had to have a Federally approved Airport Security Program (ASP). The TSA eventually started requiring some of the Security Directives to be adopted into all airport security programs. Those were rules already in place so it was less of an impact to airports. This is the first time that a major change was being required to be placed in the ASP without going through a rulemaking procedure; hence, the resistance from the airport community. He also noted that besides our Congressional letter, the Montana Airport Managers Association (MAMA) was also providing a similar letter.

### **UPS PEAK**

Mr. Ploehn pointed out to the Commission that every December the freight/cargo haulers ramp up for the Christmas Peak. This year the COVID-19 pandemic has helped push freight numbers up for what will surely be another record freight year at the Airport. Mr. Ploehn thought the Commissioners might find it interesting to see how the number of cargo aircraft operations will increase for this December's Peak. First he showed the weekly UPS aircraft operations for November, which totaled 39 landings and take offs. For December, he showed that the weekly landings and take offs jumped to 80, with operations starting at 2:45 a.m. and continuing throughout the day. He then showed the Commission last December's UPS operations, which were at 60 per week. So we are seeing a 25% increase for this December. Mr. Ploehn noted that FedEx increases were also significant. Last November and December, FedEx had 22 weekly operations, whereas for this December it would be 26 or an 18% increase.

### **AIRPORT AND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATIVE/OPERATIONS REPORTS**

► Mr. Ploehn showed the Commission the number of screened persons by the TSA and the numbers actually reported for passengers enplaning an aircraft. He noted that screening activity for October and November had exceeded 60% for the first time since everything started to collapse in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed out that the actual number of passengers was a couple percentage points less, due to flight crews and others that were not paying passengers. October's 58.4% of last year's passenger total was the best since March and

he thought November would be very close to that. He noted that many airports are only in the 30 to 35% range so he was happy with this, all things considered. He then continued by showing the Commission the freight tonnages beginning with March and with the exception of May, all months have reflected an increase in activity with October really standing out, with a 36.3% increase. He figured the year would end with a total over 10% from last year.

- ▶ Mr. Ploehn then continued with a discussion on how the Airport Concessions were fairing. He reminded the Commission that last March and April, he was doing a lot of head scratching trying to determine what the Airport revenues would look like given the drastic change in activity that occurred during the six weeks from mid-March through April. Therefore, he compiled a chart that reflected the FY 20 budget, which ended June 30, and the FY 2021 budget that will end next June. The chart pointed out that in FY 2020 the total for the concessions was off by almost \$1 million. He noted that when looking at the prorated budget versus actuals for FY 2021, the actual revenues were coming pretty close to the budget with the exception of the car rentals, which were about twice as high as the budget. He explained that while business traffic fell off almost completely, the tourism still was fairly solid, and that probably fueled the better than expected business for the car rentals (see chart below).

**AIRPORT CONCESSION COMPARISON TO BUDGET  
JULY THROUGH OCTOBER 2020**

<b>CONCESSION</b>	<b>BUDGET FISCAL 2020</b>	<b>ACTUAL FISCAL 2020</b>	<b>BUDGET FISCAL 2021</b>	<b>PRORATED BUDGET</b>	<b>YEAR-TO-DATE REVENUES</b>
GIFT SHOP	\$145,380	\$117,842	\$80,000	\$26,640	\$17,518
RESTAURANT	160,271	159,697	100,000	33,333	35,693
PARKING	2,302,923	1,779,782	1,100,000	366,300	329,396
CAR RENTALS	1,965,261	1,542,507	900,000	299,970	627,908
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$4,573,835</b>	<b>\$3,599,828</b>	<b>\$2,180,000</b>	<b>\$726,243</b>	<b>\$1,010,515</b>

- ▶ Vice Chair Farmer asked how the fuel flowage was impacted. Mr. Ploehn said that for the first few months the numbers were off just like everything else. However, since June, the numbers have jumped back and have been as high or higher than last year, which was a nice surprise.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn pointed out that at the last meeting Commissioner Spence asked how much the essential air service (EAS) markets had been impacted. Mr. Ploehn compiled the year-to-date information for passenger boarding for all of the airports, and all airports were down some. However, while Billings was down 46%, Butte was down 52%, Bozeman 42%, Glacier/Kalispell 38%, Great Falls 53%, Helena 61%, and Missoula 52%, the EAS markets were actually off less than the larger airports. Glendive was down 38%, Glasgow 35%, Havre 40%, Wolf Point 29%, and Sidney 29%.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn informed the Commission that the Department had three items on the City Council's last meeting of the year on December 21. The NorthWestern Energy lease of Airport land to rebuild the Rimrock Substation, MET's Federally required Transit Safety Plan approval, and the Airport's required approval of the contractor's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise goals for the next few years.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling told the Commission that there is now an updated presentation of the Terminal expansion pictures that Business Manager, Marita Herold, and he put together for folks to see the construction progress. The presentations reflect the various phases of construction. He walked through the steps to find this on the Airport's Webpage and encouraged the Commission to let others in the community know about it. He then went through one of the presentations showing some of the Concourse A work. Commissioner Hummel recommended that the slides be dated and everyone thought that was a great idea. Mr. Ketterling noted that the contractor

was anticipating the steel package to start showing up very soon, as the schedule reflects that the steel subcontractor was going to start installing steel right after the first of the year.

- ▶ Mr. Ketterling reminded the Commission that the Real ID was supposed to be implemented last October 1. Since it was delayed one year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the State is doing a new set of commercials to promote getting the Real ID this year. The new commercial will have a tie to the previous Lewis and Clark commercials, but some will include Evil Knievel on a motorcycle as well. He promised to show the final results at a future meeting.
- ▶ Mr. Logan informed the Commission that MET Transit had made the decision to suspend service on the 3-Crosstown route for the duration of December. MET experienced a high number of operator absences due to COVID related issues and continued to have difficulties filling operator vacancies. Due to these issues, MET would have been unable to consistently achieve full service daily and chose instead to fully suspend a route. The Crosstown route was chosen due to the redundancies of the service area in which the route operates. Riders who regularly use the suspended route were able to find alternative options on other MET Transit buses; overall ridership did not appear to be impacted by the suspension. Mr. Logan anticipated Crosstown would once again be operating in January.
- ▶ Mr. Logan reported MET Transit had "soft launched" its electronic fares system with TouchPass in late November. The initial launch focused on getting students setup to utilize the system via their smartphones or the smartcard option. This included setting up area middle schools and high schools as vendors to be direct points of sale for the electronic fare cards. MET also setup and trained staff at City Hall to provide an alternate point of sale for passengers to utilize. In the MET Transit office, a number of structural and procedural changes were made in order to support the new fare system, including procedures to enable over the phone support and sales of fares. Further, the MET Transit Website was also modified to allow the purchase of fare products, as well as expand options for passengers to apply and verify eligibility for reduced fare programs. Full electronic fare system implementation and the cessation of on-vehicle paper pass sales were anticipated to occur on January 1, 2021.
- ▶ Mr. Logan reported fixed-route ridership for October was down 40% from numbers reported for October of 2019; however, year-over-year ridership was slightly higher than the single month numbers with an overall decrease of 36%. Paratransit continued to see a significant reduction, down 54%, but is slowly gaining more ridership back as the COVID health situation continues.
- ▶ Mr. Logan reported the addition of two new Transit Supervisors who replaced positions vacated by the resignation of John Bell and the retirement of Dan Montoya. MET was fortunate to find two very qualified candidates for these positions. Keith Adams has multiple years of experience as an operations supervisor with Jefferson Lines bus service, as well as multiple years of direct experience as a bus operator. Sam Lind comes to MET Transit after spending approximately 15 years in the City of Billings Communications Center (which handles 911 and City/County Dispatch duties) as both a dispatcher and a supervisor. The qualifications and experience of both these individuals will assist the Transit Division in its continued growth and development.

#### **ITEMS FROM THE COMMISSION**

- ▶ Commissioner Behling asked about protocol for close contact with COVID. Mr. Logan said that they go through a test and quarantine procedure until they get negative results or they have been quarantined for 14 days. Mr. Ketterling noted that there have been very few cases at the Airport, one in the Administration office and three in the Police office. Most, if not all, were contracted outside the work place.
- ▶ Commissioner Spence noted that he has seen bus drivers driving without a mask. Mr. Logan identified that it was okay when driving, as the passengers are beyond the buffer zone toward the back of the bus, plus the drivers are behind a plexiglass barrier. If they are interacting with a passenger, they are supposed to put on their mask.

- ▶ Commissioner Spence asked if the Airport was fully staffed. Mr. Ketterling said that the Airport was only down one employee in the custodian ranks.
- ▶ Vice Chair Farmer reminded Mr. Ploehn to discuss the Aeronautics Board openings. Mr. Ploehn thanked him, and noted that there would be some openings on the State Aeronautics Board and encouraged the Commissioners to apply. One position is for members of the Montana Airport Management Association and there was also an at-large position. The main duties are to help the State determine funding requests from the smaller airports and to participate in the selection of the annual State Aviation conference. He committed to send out info regarding the submittal process.
- ▶ Chair Gaghen noted that she has enjoyed her time on the Commission and thanked everyone for the experience.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

KP:mdb

cc: Aviation and Transit Commission  
Chrono  
City Administrator  
Mayor  
City Clerk