



AVIATION AND TRANSIT COMMISSION MINUTES
Tuesday, February 2, 2021

The Aviation and Transit Commission met via virtual video conferencing on Tuesday, February 2, 2021. Those in attendance included:

Aviation and Transit Commission Members

Dan Farmer, Chair
Ron Spence, Vice Chair
Ken Behling
Mark Astle
Chuck Tooley
David Hummel, Jr.
Steve Tostenrud

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. No public comments were received.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS AND COVID TESTING

Kevin Ploehn showed a PowerPoint presentation to the Commission regarding the latest on COVID testing and mask mandates. Referencing the Presidential Executive Order promoting COVID-19 safety in domestic and international travel, with key items addressed on immediate action requiring mask wearing on certain domestic modes of transportation, and to implement additional public health measures for domestic travel. The mask mandate impacts both MET and the Airport. Mr. Ploehn stated that there is a lot of uncertainty involved in international travel, as travelers are required to produce proof of a negative COVID-19 test prior to entry into the U.S. and comply with other applicable Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines concerning recommended periods of self-quarantine after entry. Some of the major issues involve availability of testing in foreign countries, valid testing sites, returning home if you test positive, and mandatory quarantine once you return. The Presidential Order was followed by a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Security Directive mandating the wearing of masks in transportation hubs and during travel on commercial airlines, transit, or rail. The Security Directive also gives TSA employees authority to enforce.

Mr. Ploehn stated that the Department sent out a Media Release along with a memo to all Airport Terminal Building employees this morning regarding the Airport and MET enforcing the Federal and CDC mask requirements. Kevin noted that additional information regarding the CDC Order and the requirements for masks are available on both the Airport and MET Transit Websites: www.flybillings.com and <https://ci.billings.mt.us/2885/MET-Transit>

Mr. Ploehn then discussed a mask complaint received last week from a local attorney about the number of customers in the Airport not wearing masks and how she did not feel safe. Stating, "As someone with asthma, I am now afraid to be in the Billings Airport and will need to drive to Bozeman or Sheridan to catch a flight for business." Mr. Ploehn provided the Commission with a

copy of the complaint along with his response; pointing out that in his reply he stated, "our staff has been on the job since day one, ensuring the Airport remained operational. No one on our staff has worked from home because these are front line jobs that must continue so that the facility you are using can remain clean, sanitized, and safe, each and every day. It is frustrating because these same front line women and men have experienced what you experienced, every single day since last March."

TERMINAL EXPANSION UPDATE

Shane Ketterling presented the Commission with many pictures of the Terminal Expansion progress completed from January to date. He also stated that they are ahead of schedule, noting that the good weather we have been experiencing has helped immensely in the progress. The Concourse A walls and floor are in place, along with the steel beams for the roof section, and the work continues on the Great Room area. Mr. Ketterling stated that with the good weather, the contractors have been able to continue with the concrete pours by keeping the areas heated from beneath and covering them. He also stated that the area beneath the Great Room area would be utilized by the airlines to store some of their ground equipment out of the weather, which has made them very happy.

Chair Farmer mentioned that he has noted the price increases on building materials and questioned if the Airport would experience price increases on this project as well. Mr. Ketterling stated that the prices were locked in up front and supply orders placed as soon as possible; nothing regarding price increases has been brought forward as of yet.

AIRPORT AND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATIVE/OPERATIONS REPORTS

- ▶ Rusty Logan updated the Commission on the following:
 - Ridership has pretty much remained consistent, with fixed route down 35% and paratransit down 54% -56%.
 - A recent interview regarding MET TouchPass, with information regarding the program is available on MET's Website.
 - Paratransit had a day reporting 100 rides.
 - Finalizing the Coordination Plan.
- ▶ Mr. Logan stated that they received a good surprise from Helena with extra funds available for the purchase of one more paratransit van.
- ▶ Commissioner Tostenrud asked if the drivers had all been vaccinated. Rusty stated that some had, but that they were not considered front line employees.
- ▶ Shane updated the Commission on the following projects:
 - Four bids were received for the Rimtop Drive Overlay Project and will be awarded at the February 8 City Council meeting, with the project set to be completed in June.
 - Fiber Optic Installation. The staff worked with the State to combine the project with the North 27th Street project to include additional fiber line to connect the Airport and the City's IT Department. This project will finish installing the remaining conduit and fiber optic lines from the roundabout into the Terminal Building. This project was put out for bid and staff will update the Commission in March.
 - Ramp work to be done and bid the end of February with work to start after July 4.
 - NorthWestern Energy is finishing electrical work at the airbase on the power feed for the new Alpine hangar. Alpine is ready to build their new hangar in the near future.
 - Three proposals were received for the Passenger Boarding Bridges. They have requested a one-week extension and will update at the next meeting.
 - Montana/Wyoming Systems was the successful bidder for the Access Control Security System with the Terminal Remodel. They have begun running wiring to the new data room on second floor.

- The Airport staff is trying to get FedEx and UPS a consolidated cargo facility. Staff has been working with each company independently, and has worked with a consultant to provide a quote to do a small master plan and present a proposal to staff for a cargo needs forecast for future years and to look at a concept for a permanent facility that would work for UPS, FedEx, and the Airport.
- ▶ Commissioner Astle asked about the substation lease with NorthWestern Energy (NWE). Mr. Ploehn explained that City Council wanted the lease to reflect a number of additional items and it has now been moved up to the Vice President of NWE who wants an easement not a lease. Mr. Ploehn will be contacting the FAA to see if they will sell the property to NWE. He stated that moving down that path, from lease to sale, is in the best interests for NWE and the community. Once you release Airport land that was purchased with Federal funds, it all has to go through a Federal registry for comment, which will delay the project, but NWE is okay with that if they can eventually purchase the land.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn read an article regarding Federal officials imposing civil penalties of \$15,000 and \$7,500 against two airline passengers that caused trouble on a flight, allegedly interfering and assaulting flight attendants regarding wearing face coverings.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn informed the Commission that the airlines have released their annual profit loss figures with the airlines reflecting the following losses: Southwest Airlines – \$3.1 billion, American – \$8.9 billion, JetBlue – \$1.4 billion, Hawaiian Airlines – \$511 million, Delta – \$12.4 billion, United – \$7.1 billion, and Alaska – \$1.3 billion.
- ▶ Kevin then read a few highlights from an article in *The Washington Post* on January 21 by Carl Fincke of Virginia Beach, Virginia regarding his 17-day fly-fishing trip to Montana and Wyoming during the pandemic. Kevin committed to sending the article to them and noted that this article is very good press for us as it mentions that he flew into Billings, Montana and then took the scenic route south on the Beartooth Highway, designated "the most beautiful drive in America" by roving CBS correspondent Charles Kuralt.

ITEMS FROM THE COMMISSION

- ▶ Chair Farmer asked about how they would meet for next month's meeting, in person or via virtual video conferencing. Everyone was okay either way with the exception of Commissioner Tooley who stated he would do virtual video conferencing. It was decided that they would do both.
- ▶ Commissioner Hummel asked if they could do a tour of the construction site. It was decided that it was a little early for a tour and one would be scheduled for a future meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

KP:mdb

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


The background is a light blue gradient with several realistic water droplets of various sizes scattered across it. The droplets have highlights and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The text is centered in the middle of the frame.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS AND COVID 19 TESTING



JANUARY 21, 2021
PRESIDENTIAL ACTION

EXECUTIVE ORDER ON PROMOTING
COVID-19 SAFETY IN DOMESTIC AND
INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL



KEY ITEMS THE EXECUTIVE ORDER ADDRESSED

- IMMEDIATE ACTION TO REQUIRE MASK-WEARING ON CERTAIN DOMESTIC MODES OF TRANSPORTATION.
- ACTION TO IMPLEMENT ADDITIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES FOR DOMESTIC TRAVEL
- INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

- POLICY OF THE ADMINISTRATION TO THE EXTENT FEASIBLE, TRAVELERS SEEKING TO ENTER THE U.S. FROM A FOREIGN COUNTRY SHALL BE:
- REQUIRED TO PRODUCE PROOF OF A RECENT NEGATIVE COVID-19 TEST PRIOR TO ENTRY;
- REQUIRED TO COMPLY WITH OTHER APPLICABLE CDC GUIDELINES CONCERNING INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL INCLUDING RECOMMENDED PERIODS OF SELF-QUARANTINE OR SELF-ISOLATION AFTER ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES.

MAJOR ISSUES

- AVAILABILITY OF TESTING IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES.
- VALID TESTING SITES.
- RETURNING HOME IF YOU TEST POSITIVE.
- MANDATORY QUARANTINE ONCE YOU RETURN? THIS REMAINS A RECOMMENDATION.

DOMESTIC TRAVEL

- SOME EARLY DISCUSSION REGARDING REQUIRING A NEGATIVE TEST TO TRAVEL ON DOMESTIC FLIGHTS.
- NO DECISION YET BUT MANY FEEL IT IS JUST A MATTER OF TIME.
- COULD CAUSE FURTHER ECONOMIC DAMAGE TO TRAVEL AND AIRLINE INDUSTRIES.

MASK MANDATE

- WAS INCLUDED IN THE EXECUTIVE ORDER.
- CDC ISSUED FURTHER GUIDANCE TO THE TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY.
- IMPACTED BOTH MET AND AIRPORT.
- TSA ALSO ISSUED A SECURITY DIRECTIVE FOR AIRPORTS TO FOLLOW. TSA WORKERS NOW HAVE AUTHORITY TO ENFORCE.



MEDIA RELEASE

February 2, 2021

AIRPORT AND MET TO ENFORCE FEDERAL MASK REQUIREMENT

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) issued an Order on January 29, 2021 mandating the wearing of masks by individuals utilizing public transportation. This requirement was issued to implement and enforce the January 21, 2021 Presidential Executive Order on promoting measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by travelers in the U.S. The CDC Order pertains to both employees and members of the public. Masks, which completely cover both the nose and mouth, must be used while awaiting, boarding, disembarking, or traveling in either the Airport Terminal or MET Transfer Center, or in the aircraft or bus.

For those passengers that are not following the new mandatory requirement at either the MET facilities or the Airport Terminal, they will be offered the choice to properly wear a mask or to leave the facilities. "While this issue is not necessarily popular with everyone, the majority of the traveling public in Billings is already complying with wearing masks and we do not foresee a lot of issues with this at the MET or the Billings Logan International Airport," said Kevin Ploehn, Director of Aviation and Transit for the City of Billings. "If you are planning to ride a bus or board a commercial aircraft, the mask will be needed at our facilities and for those that do not have a mask, one will be provided. We want to make this as painless as possible for the travelling public, but we also want to ensure the safety of everyone in our facilities. Hopefully the vaccinations available for Billings and the surrounding region will pick up so we can get one step closer to the end of having to worry about masks," said Ploehn.

Ploehn noted that additional information regarding the CDC Order and the requirements for masks are available on both of the Airport and MET Transit Websites: www.flybillings.com and <https://ci.billings.mt.us/2885/MET-Transit>



PLEASE POST FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

MEMORANDUM

February 2, 2021

TO: ALL AIRPORT TERMINAL BUILDING EMPLOYEES
FROM: KEVIN PLOEHN, AIRPORT DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: FEDERAL MASK MANDATE FOR TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) issued an Order on January 29, 2021, mandating the wearing of masks by individuals utilizing public transportation. This was followed up with TSA Security Directive 1542-21-01: Security Measures – Face Mask Requirements. These requirements were issued to implement and enforce the January 21, 2021 Presidential Executive Order on promoting measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by travelers in the U.S. The CDC Order and the Security Directive pertain to both employees and members of the public. Masks, which completely cover both the nose and mouth, must be used while awaiting, boarding, disembarking, or traveling on commercial aircraft. Further, all individuals are required to wear masks while visiting the Airport Terminal. This applies to everyone, including passengers, visitors, contractors, airline and concession employees, and airport employees.

As a Public Transportation Facility, we are required to use best efforts to ensure all individuals wear a mask. Additionally we are responsible to:

- Allow entry only to individuals who wear masks.
- Instruct individuals that wearing a mask is a requirement of a **Federal Order** and not complying with the requirement is a violation of said Order.
- Monitor persons in the Airport Terminal to ensure mask compliance.
- Remove any person who refuses to wear a mask.

The following categories of people are exempt from the requirement to wear a mask:

- Children 2 years of age and under.
- A person with a disability who cannot wear a mask *for reasons related to the disability*.

Please note that face shields, goggles, scarves, ski masks, balaclavas, shirt collars, and bandanas **DO NOT** fulfill the requirement for mask use.

Employees must wear masks at all times unless eating for a **brief period**, communicating with hearing impaired individuals, or during brief removal of the mask for identification purposes. Please be aware mask wearing is **not optional** and masks must be worn while performing your job, in all facility areas (including break rooms), and while in the Airport Terminal. Individuals are not required to wear masks if they are alone in a room or office. **Employees who refuse to comply with masking requirements will be required to leave the Airport Terminal.**

Like many of you, I have mask fatigue, but for the greater good of public health, I ask that you join me in complying with the CDC Order and TSA Security Directive to get us to a point where hopefully the vaccination process will allow us to go back to some sort of normal. Thank you for continuing to be flexible and doing an outstanding job.