



**AVIATION AND TRANSIT BOARD MINUTES**  
**Tuesday, March 2, 2021**

The Aviation and Transit Board met in the Administration Conference Room at the Billings Logan International Airport and via virtual video conferencing on Tuesday, March 2, 2021. Those in attendance included:

**Aviation and Transit Board Members**

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

**City Staff and Guests**

Kevin Ploehn, Director of Aviation & Transit  
Shane Ketterling, Assistant Director of Aviation & Transit  
Rusty Logan, Transit Manager  
Mark Evangeline, Airport Facilities Superintendent  
Keith Adams, Transit Operations Supervisor  
Sam Lind, Transit Operations Supervisor  
Joel Simmons, Beacon Air

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

A public comment period was offered. No public comments were received.

Keith Adams and Sam Lind introduced themselves as MET Transit's new Operations Supervisors and each spent a few minutes providing a bit of history about themselves.

**PASSENGER BOARDING BRIDGE UPDATE**

Kevin Ploehn informed the Board that there were three responses received on the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Passenger Boarding Bridge Project; JBT AeroTech – \$5,442,545, Aero Bridgeworks - \$5,965,645, ThyssenKrupp – \$6,165,203. All three proposals were very impressive and it came down to pricing with the RFP awarded to JBT AeroTech. Discussion was held regarding the pricing for new opposed to refurbished, with new at \$5.5 million and refurbished at \$5.2 million. JBT will try to see if any smaller airport could use the old bridges. Before the project can start, there is concrete work that needs to be completed. Board Member Spence asked if there was any upside to keeping an old one as a spare. Mr. Ploehn stated that there was not, as it would need to be refurbished and then stored, and may never actually be used.

**TERMINAL PHASING PLAN AND REROUTING OF PASSENGERS**

Kevin Ploehn had Mark Evangeline, Airport Facilities Superintendent, cover this topic as he has the most direct involvement. Mark showed a presentation to the Board and explained that there are many challenges as there are a lot of moving parts. The presentation showed drawings of the new areas and where/how they would be moving things around in order to accomplish the phases of construction.

- They will be moving the airlines overnight to the new Concourse A.
- Mr. Ploehn mentioned that the Airport would need to do RFPs for both the Restaurant and the Gift Shop, and have the new or existing concessionaires on board by July, hoping to have the new Restaurant and Gift Shop up and operating by Thanksgiving.
- In this phase, the screening function will remain in the same spot to access the new Concourse A.

- An RFP will need to be completed to move the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) equipment as the TSA uses certified contractors to move and recalibrate their equipment.
- In Phase 3, the existing elevator, stairs, escalator, and flooring will be torn out, and for a period of time, passengers will access the new screening area by going through the restaurant.

Board Member Spence asked about passenger lines in screening during the move. Mr. Evangeline pointed out that there is plenty of room to move things around in this area to address longer lines if needed.

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

- ▶ Mr. Ploehn informed the Board of the following:
  - Southwest Airlines announced that they were providing Summer seasonal service to Bozeman.
  - American announced seasonal Chicago service this Summer. Dallas and Phoenix service has been very popular, with some of the best load factors of all the airlines flying out of Billings.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn stated that the Airport had received a new grant offer from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), basically CARES Act II, for \$3.6 million in additional funds. There is \$8 billion more in Coronavirus relief aid being discussed in a new legislative bill in the Senate for airports. The first CARES Act was for \$12 billion and the Airport received \$12.7 million. The Federal Aviation Administration has imposed a three-year time limit to spend the money and the Airport has drawn down \$4.5 million from the first grant so far this year, which covers payroll, with approximately \$8 million left. Mr. Ploehn stated that the Airport could also use this for debt service. There are a lot of items to sort out so that it is handled correctly and to take full advantage of the dollars. Board Member Spence asked if the funds could be reallocated to the City, by City Council for other projects. Mr. Ploehn stated, "Not legally."
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn mentioned that the Department of Transportation released information regarding the number of flights dropped in the United States last year; the airlines went from 7.94 million flights per year to 4.7 million, which is a 40% drop in flights. Definite impact to the industry.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn advised the Board that there are two bills at the State Legislature, HB 102 and HB 439, regarding guns. Both of these end up allowing guns in our public area. Board Member Spence mentioned what it states at the end of HB 102, that at the discretion of businesses they can say no guns allowed. Mr. Ploehn stated that HB 439 takes away some of those rights and until the final bills come out, it is really hard to know how to react.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn informed the Board that the Airport is at 50% of enplanement numbers so far this year and predicts that we will be at 70–75% by Summer.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn mentioned that a Harvard Study stated that the chances of you getting sick flying in an aircraft are significantly less than going to the grocery store and that it is basically safe to fly.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling advised the Board on the following projects:
  - 2021 Fiber Optic Installation. Only one bid was received. Yellowstone Electric's bid of \$150,000 came in significantly higher than the engineer's estimate. The Airport asked Yellowstone Electric why, and it was stated that it was due to all of the boring through the rocks to get to the Airport. Due to the high bid, the sole bid was rejected and the project will be re-advertised in March or April.
  - Commercial Apron Construction. The prebid was today with the bid opening next Tuesday.
  - Car Rental Agreements expire this June and the Airport will put out an RFP soon.
  - The three-year Union Contract ends in June, and some of staff will be involved in negotiations.
  - Staff met the new Air Traffic Control Tower Manager, Scott Miller. He came from Denver, but is originally from Colstrip, Montana.
  - Airport staff helped out with the massive pileup on I-90 last Saturday with the use of the Airport bus to transport individuals from the wreck area to MetraPark.
- ▶ Mr. Logan informed the Board that the American Rescue Plan (ARF) included \$30 billion for transit; CARES Act included \$24 billion, while CRSSA included \$15 billion. MET Transit received \$5.3

million from CARES; it did not qualify under CRSSA. Mr. Logan is hopeful that we will get an allocation in the ARP.

- ▶ Mr. Logan then updated the Board on the status of the fleet. MET is working to keep fleet on the road, but difficult to do so. MET is still using an Airport Mechanic fulltime while waiting for the new buses. El Dorado Nation, the company manufacturing the buses, is in California, which is still under significant restrictions, so build on the new buses is delayed until July for the first eight and the second batch of nine is most likely October. MET Transit is using two of the vans previously sold to the Airport as a contingency fleet and are looking at a few solutions for emergency fleet procurement. Staff is talking with the FTA about potentially picking up a few minivans for paratransit use, allowing MET to use full size paratransit vehicles for fixed route.
- ▶ Mr. Logan informed the Board that they are still struggling to find qualified applicants and training for new hires is a four to five week process. Staff is brainstorming new possibilities with recruiting. They are still directly recruiting via Facebook and Indeed, but looking for new avenues to advertise the positions.
- ▶ Mr. Logan stated that MET saw small improvements in March ridership with fixed routes at 35% down where they had previously been hovering around 38%; paratransit pulled above 50% of normal ridership where it had previously been down 56%. Paratransit had 133 rides scheduled for March 3, which it had been quite a while since paratransit had given over 100 rides in a day. Increases are primarily from the Alliance Senior Rides program as well as general ridership for trips to vaccination centers.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn mentioned that Yellowstone Electric is busy installing the new Security and CCTV System and running cable all throughout the building. The main system will soon be ready to go and turn on in the existing Terminal area while the new concourse is being completed.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn updated the Board on the NorthWestern Energy (NWE) substation. He explained that NWE was not interested in doing a lease and he was now exploring selling the land to them. The FAA has sent a long list of things to do to accomplish this; including to first make a request to sell the land, which would start a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review to determine whether an environmental assessment needs to be done, and that assessment would be a one-year process.

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

- ▶ Board Member Spence asked about Alpine Air's new facility. Mr. Ploehn said that they had hired an architect and they were moving along.
- ▶ Chair Farmer provided books for everyone about a Montana family story, which happens to be a local family that owns Pepsi-Cola Bottling.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

MDB

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