



**AVIATION AND TRANSIT BOARD MINUTES**  
**Tuesday, January 4, 2022**

The Aviation and Transit Board met in the Administration Conference Room at the Billings Logan International Airport on Tuesday, January 4, 2022. Those in attendance included:

**Aviation and Transit Board Members**

Dan Farmer, Chair  
Ron Spence, Vice Chair  
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  
Amanda Skewis, Marketing & Advertising Coordinator

**COURTESIES**

Aviation and Transit Director, Kevin Ploehn, introduced the Department's newest member, Amanda Skewis, who is the Department's Marketing and Advertising Coordinator. Amanda introduced herself and gave a brief background on her work history. Mr. Ploehn pointed out that Amanda would be providing a presentation on all the great things she is doing and responsible for.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

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

**ANNUAL ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

A motion was made and seconded that Board Members Farmer and Spence continue in their respective roles as Chair and Vice Chair. The motion passed unanimously.

**PRESENTATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA, ADVERTISING AND MARKETING CAMPAIGN FOR THE AVIATION AND TRANSIT DEPARTMENT**

Recently introduced, Amanda Skewis, provided a presentation that reflected all of the interesting items she is working on for the Airport and Transit including putting in place a strategic plan to follow as the Department moves forward with its marketing. Additionally, she discussed branding, expanding the social media presence of the Airport and Transit, enhancing the Websites, increased community engagement, and new and updated advertising options. She showed the Board some of the recent highlights that have been accomplished including a larger presence in the City Link, a City newspaper insert that goes out two or three time per year. The Board responded enthusiastically to the presentation and the discussion moved toward educating the local public about the benefits of using the Billings Airport and how that message could be conveyed in the future.

**AIRPORT AND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATIVE/OPERATIONS REPORTS**

- ▶ Mr. Ploehn discussed the recent travel woes that many faced during the holidays. He noted most of the issues were the result of weather and staffing shortages, which has been compounded by the Omicron variant of COVID-19. He noted that from December 24 through today, over 20,000 domestic flights had been canceled, with the majority of those on the eastern half of the country. But even in Billings, the majority of the local airlines had some

cancellations. He pointed out that with most flights already overbooked, many passengers either could not make their trip or were stranded at a hub airport for an extended period of time. Mr. Ploehn read a quote from Ben Baldanza, former CEO of Spirit Airlines, *"Airlines just have a tough time not putting planes in the air when they see there is demand. And sometimes the schedule planners, the people who design the schedule and how much to fly, aren't as well connected as they need to be to the operations team who knows how many people they have, how many pilots and flight attendants they all have, how many gates they have at airports and things like that . . . as we've gotten now to the Christmas - New Year's holiday, you realize they have not linked those operations up with schedule planners quite well enough yet."*

- ▶ Mr. Ploehn followed up by showing the Board an article that he saw in mid-December, the headline broadcasted **"American Airlines plans to hire 18,000 people next year for travel rebound."** He noted that every airline is scrambling to hire thousands of employees and that this is one of the reasons the industry is unable to operate well. Mr. Ploehn observed that now that we are past the holiday traffic and moving into January and early February, typically the slowest travel times for the airlines, the airlines would have a chance to catch up with their hiring needs and regroup before the next big travel bump, Spring Break.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn explained that there has been a lot of discussion as of late between Verizon Wireless, AT&T, the FCC, and the FAA on the impacts of the 5G cellular networks to the reliability of radio altimeters in aircraft. This has resulted in the delay of the 5G networks being implemented by Verizon and AT&T. On January 3, the FAA reached an agreement with Verizon and AT&T to delay the 5G C-band networks by two more weeks and to adopt some additional mitigation measures to reduce the potential impacts of 5G interference on the National Airspace System. Initially, this will impact 50 airports, mostly on the eastern side of the country where exclusion zones around the runway areas will be established for at least six months. The FAA will be issuing NOTAMs for airports where radio altimeters are unreliable due to 5G wireless. Mr. Ploehn noted that Billings is not on the FCC list of airports where this might be a problem.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn provided an update on the Request for Proposal (RFP) processes that the Airport has been doing for the past few months. Both of the RFPs for the Restaurant and Gift Shop are completed and the selection of the new concessionaire was approved by City Council during December. He pointed out that the RFP for new Terminal Seating is just about wrapped up as well. However, there are two more RFPs that the Airport is working on, the first is for a Wi-Fi provider, and that will be followed up with an RFP for a new Flight Information Display System (FIDS). Both systems are needed for the new Terminal addition. Shortly thereafter, the Airport will also need to do an RFP for the general engineering contract that comes up every five years.
- ▶ A question was asked about the new Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers. Mr. Ploehn informed the Board that the EV chargers were operational and in fact have had some use. However, he noted that as luck would have it, the cellular coverage in that area is not very good and since the EV Chargers connect via a cellular link to an app on the user's phone, there have been some issues with dropped connections. Subsequently, the Airport is exploring options to remedy this issue.
- ▶ Finally, Mr. Ploehn told the Board that the Airport will be receiving and estimated \$3.7 million in additional grant funds for the next five years, courtesy of the Infrastructure Bill. These additional grant funds are in addition to the regular grant funds that are normally received, providing around \$7 million for projects in each of those five years. He thought that possibly the next two years could go toward the Terminal Expansion project.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling provided a construction update on the Terminal Expansion project. He noted that it is becoming easier to see the progress being made now. The lights and HVAC diffusers are going in after some head scratching on how to make the two components, which are supposed to be side by side, actually fit and look decent. After a number of meetings on alternative fixes, a solution has been determined and the install is now moving along. Mr. Ketterling said the tile work in the women's section of the restrooms was complete and the tile work in the men's would be finished up shortly. Mr. Ketterling then told the Board that the big difference would be

the install of the new Passenger Loading Bridges (PLBs). The installer will be showing up tomorrow and begin the install of the first two PLBs. They will set them on the foundation bases and then the following day put two more in place. Once they are set in place by the crane, the trucks will depart and the installer, Skycon, will spend the next month hooking everything up and making them operational.

- ▶ Mr. Ketterling mentioned that we were also working with TSA on the final layout for the screening area and that it has been a bit of a challenge, as they have provided layouts that are almost as long as the total space being built. Staff will continue to work on this with the TSA.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling said that the Airport would be going out to bid for the second time for the Rimtop Drive Pavement Rehabilitation project. He noted that last year the contractor closed shop the Friday before they were supposed to start. Staff is hopeful that this time around things will go better.
- ▶ A charter will be operating on Gate B-1 for a trip to Frisco, Texas for MSU Bobcat fans going to watch the Bobcats play in the NCAA FCS National Football Championship game.
- ▶ Finally, Mr. Ketterling informed the Board that Frontier Airlines would be removing all of their equipment and signage this week.
- ▶ Mr. Logan discussed that after replacing 17 buses with new equipment, MET will start advertising the sale of 15 of those old busses, of which ten are good enough to drive away. Five of the buses are not that great and may have to be scrapped. The Airport is purchasing the other two busses to replace the old ones they have been using.
- ▶ Mr. Logan told the Board that MET ridership continues to improve, with fixed route ridership up 7.7% over last December and overall up nearly 14% for the year. Paratransit continues to get busier and is regularly hitting or exceeding 180 rides daily.
- ▶ Mr. Logan informed the Board that MET has two items on the City Council agenda for approval on January 10. The first item is an amendment to the Department's base agreement with Morrison-Maierle for the design, bidding, and construction administration for the driver training lot that will go out for bid in late February or March. The second item is the update to the Public Transit Agency Safety Plan, which is required by the FTA anytime the plan is amended.
- ▶ Mr. Logan announced that the Transit Development Planning effort kicked off with the consultant team and they are gathering all sorts of data, which is keeping staff busy.
- ▶ Mr. Logan told the Board that there was no news on the allocation of the Infrastructure Bill funds since Congress has not passed the apportionment bills for Transportation. He was still anticipating a 20-30% increase in the first year. Also, a lot of money will be available for the competitive grant programs, especially for low emission vehicles.

### **ITEMS FROM THE BOARD**

- ▶ Vice Chair Spence wanted to let everyone know about the outstanding effort that two of the Airport Police Officers performed for him. He had inadvertently left his truck window down and flew out of town. Officers Keith Edgell and Jeff Jones noticed this and covered his window with plastic to keep some of the snow out of the vehicle. He was very grateful.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

KP:mdb

cc: Aviation and Transit Board  
Chrono

Via E-mail: City Administrator  
Mayor  
City Clerk