



**Missoula Urban Transportation District
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes
February 8, 2023**

APPROVED

Members Present

Don MacArthur, Chair
Jesse Dodson
Amy Cilimburg
Jason Wiener
Sebastian Strauss

Members Absent

Doug Odegaard
Andrea Davis

Staff

Corey Aldridge, G.M.
Jennifer Sweten, Ops Dir.
Mary Hanson, Fin. Dir.
Colin Woodrow, Proj. & Pln. Mgr.
Dan Stone, Transit Planner
Vince Caristo, P.S.
Michele Erickson, Admin. Assist.
Jason Struppler, Operator

Guests

Aaron Wilson, MPO, Infrastructure & Mobility Planning Manager
Ben Weiss, Senior Planner, Bicycle/Pedestrian Program

Call to Order and Roll Call

Don MacArthur called the meeting to order at 11:04 AM. Roll call was taken.

Aaron Wilson arrived at 11:05 AM.

Changes or Additions to the Agenda

Woodrow recommended to the board that the order of agenda items be changed. Discussion item 5.2 was moved to 5.1, and discussion item 5.1 was moved down to 5.2.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

None

Action Items

4.1 Minutes of October 20, 2022, and November 9, 2022

Cilimburg made a motion to approve the minutes of November 9, 2022, and October 20, 2022. Strauss seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Discussion items

5.1 On-Demand RFP 11:10 AM

Caristo reviewed the release of the RFP (request for proposal) for an on-demand transit feasibility study on January 26, 2023. The study is made possible by the funding of \$60,000 from MDT. One of the items from the 2018 Strategic Plan that still needed to be addressed was the possibility of on-demand transit to complement the fixed route services.

Ben Weiss joined the meeting online at 11:14 AM.

Proposals are due by February 23rd, with approval for the RFP by the Board in March. The project needs to be completed by the end of the year, so the consultants will need to have the results back by September. The study aims to specifically explore areas not served directly by fixed route services or have a low frequency of service. The four areas the study will consider are Grant Creek, Target Ranch, Mullan Rd area, and Linda Vista area. The goals defined for the study are to assess the potential to:

- Increase geographic coverage
- Expand overall hours of service
- Increase ridership
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Increase productivity (cost per trip)
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions

The study would help identify whether on-demand transit services are appropriate for the area. Part of the study will include asking the chosen consultants to review five other areas comparable to Missoula, Montana, and how they have utilized on-demand transit. The study should also provide an operational outline for what transit could be, how it would work, and where it would fit best. The expectation is that the conceptualization of the study would lead to implementation if the results were favorable. There will be a financial plan and a recommended set of performance measurements to evaluate and track the project.

MacArthur requested that the RFP be sent around to the Board Members. He also wants the Board to keep in mind the politics behind the areas that are being studied. Strauss requested that words like 'unserved' not be used in the RFP. Caristo explains that the language in the RFP is 'not currently served or underserved, by fixed-route transit.'

Weiss asks for clarification on why the areas were specifically chosen. Weiss pointed out that the areas in the Rattlesnake and Northside seem to him to be more favorable as on-demand transit areas. Caristo explains that this is due to the cost restraint of the project.

5.2 Higgins Avenue Corridor Presentation 11:34 AM

Wilson gives the Board an update on the Higgins Avenue Corridor project. He starts by letting the Board know the City Council met on Monday, February 6th, and voted in favor of the project. Wilson is optimistic they will also receive a letter of support from MDT after their meeting on Monday. Wilson intends to include the Higgins project in their RAISE Grant application, due at the end of February, along with Front St./Main St. two-way restoration and the Riverfront Trail/Caras Park access improvements.

MacArthur asks Wilson to walk the Board through the draft of plans to integrate bus transit into the changes they plan to make to Higgins Avenue Corridor.

Wilson shared images of the specific outline of changes to the Higgins Avenue corridor, along with pedestrian access, bicycle right of way, and bus transit stops. One of the areas of concern was the Senior Citizen Center. The plans so far are to maintain the existing bus stop outside the Senior Citizen Center and have a protected bike lane share the space. Caristo brought up the possibility of creating a shelter for the Senior Citizen Center. If the Senior Citizen Center closed one of the driveways, it would make room for a bus shelter. Wilson explained that one issue raised by businesses in the corridor was their desire not to have parking negatively affected. Wilson does not believe the Senior Citizen Center would allow the closure of one of the driveways to make room for a bus stop.

MacArthur asked if the plan would eliminate the limitations on left turns during specific times of the day. Wilson clarifies that the new plans would have a dedicated left turn signal at those intersections, whether a flashing yellow or a timer set with a green arrow.

Weiss points out that an important part of the new plan for bicyclists is the new dedicated path with room for a bike to wait at an intersection in better view. Rather than behind the bus, the dedicated path would put the cyclist up front next to the bus.

Sweten reviews that the bus stop at the Senior Citizen Center will cause the most disruption. It is already a tight space and the need for the use of ramp deployments and door-to-the-door service for ADA riders could cause much longer lags in running time.

MacArthur puts forward the idea that Mountain Line would benefit from having plans already in place for the service we would like to provide in types of corridors throughout the city. For example, having a best standard to put forth to Wilson about the ideal options for bus stops in a multi-modal pedestrian bicycle high-intensity corridor and what goals would be in place if there is a limited right of way.

Stone replies that creating a single perfect design has been difficult due to the different perimeters at each stop. A one size fits all approach has not been possible.

Woodrow explains that although there is not yet a generic bus stop goal being used, there is a future plan to create a shareable document that would outline Mountain Line's goals for best bus stop and shelter plans.

Wilson agrees that a bus stop standard would be preferable when planning new corridors and updating existing streets. The ability to design around transit needs rather than trying to squeeze them in after plans have already been set, would require more collaboration and planning.

Strauss questions Wilson about how the plans can proceed if Mountain Line does not receive the RAISE Grant. Wilson replied that they would look at other Federal Grant money. Federal Funding will be necessary to begin the Higgins Avenue Corridor.

Wilson left the meeting at 12:18 PM.

Caristo left the meeting at 12:18 PM.

5.3 MOAB Update 12:18 PM

Woodrow begins to give an update on the land purchase. The Prolo family is now the owner of the land. The initial land Mountain Line was interested in has since become more expensive. So, a decision was made to pull away from the parcel facing W. Broadway and purchase an area of land set more inside towards Flynn. The land does not create any issues with service delivery but is more affordable. Woodrow anticipates there will be more growth of street expansion after the new building is in place, but in the meantime, Whipporwill is the street that Mountain Line would most likely use. The plans are still in the conceptual phase, with the goal of this building lasting until 2060.

Ben Weiss left the meeting at 12:24 PM.

The subcommittee consisting of Jesse Dodson, Andrea Davis, Don MacArthur, Corey Aldridge, and Colin Woodrow has evaluated how to get past the subdivision review, which is currently taking about a year. Woodrow explained Dodson found language in the Montana Code Annotated, which would allow Mountain Line to proceed without subdivision review.

Strauss asked if it would be best to get another proposal for the land acquisition as real estate prices seem to be falling. Woodrow replied that commercial real estate has not seen a dip in value and in some cases, prices have risen. Woodrow also reviews the Grant Creek realignment flows through that area. Traditionally federal funds are not awarded to areas that are in a floodplain. And the MOAB land is located on a floodplain. There is funding going towards the area however it is not set to complete until 2024, and no construction can begin until that is taken care of. Grading and electrical could begin around 2025.

Strauss asked about potential growth during the wait for the MOAB project to complete in 2029.

Aldridge explains that there is currently no space. There is no room for more buses to park at the Shakespeare location. Sweten adds that even adding Paratransit vans would be pushing space. Sweten said there is no ability to broaden the area Mountain Line serves, but there may be a small ability to provide a little more frequency.

Strauss asked if Mountain Line is still legally obligated to stay with Northwestern Energy for our services, or if there is any possibility of working with Missoula Electric Coop. Aldridge explained that the State of Montana does not allow the change of electric providers even if Mountain Line were to move to a new location.

MacArthur called the question to refocus the meeting on the MOAB site and the discussion about the land being on a floodplain. MacArthur would like to know how Woodrow feels the likelihood of the Grant application is to succeed. Woodrow does believe the FTA may provide funds to projects in a floodplain. Woodrow's recommendation is to continue with the Grant application and continue with the land acquisition. MacArthur is concerned about getting the funding and being sure the planning reflects the project's cost as inflation changes over the six years from estimation to payment.

Dodson asked about the floodplain work and what the timeline is for the project. Woodrow explained the Grant Creek realignment plan may take until 2025. Woodrow mentions the ability to have three rounds of grant applications may be a positive takeaway from the timeline.

Hanson left the meeting at 12:51 PM.

MacArthur would like to know if the agency is being realistic in asking for \$40 million and if other agencies of Mountain Line's size are receiving that amount of funding. Aldridge explained there

was an award of \$40 million to a larger agency, but historically, the numbers have been all over the place. Aldridge reviews the need to come at the project with a phased approach. Woodrow is optimistic that accurately phasing the project will help with the grant application this time around. MacArthur also asked if the project is six years out, what does that mean about serving the community? Aldridge said there are other options, such as housing buses off-site and bringing them back to base and vice versa. However, it would pose many challenges for security and staff. MacArthur asked if the agency could get \$10 million in funding, would that be enough to do something with? Aldridge reiterated the need for space being the primary concern. The current facility at 1221 Shakespeare can not hold any more buses. Woodrow added that there may be room to push electrification for the Paratransit fleet, but it would be tough on Operations. MacArthur is concerned about not being able to grow the service to the public until 2029. He proceeds by offering the idea of attaining less land, possibly from the city over on Scott Street, and building more for a 10-year plan rather than the big 60-year plan with the 18 acres over by Whipporwill. MacArthur brought up the idea of smaller incremental expansion.

Strauss brought up wanting to see what the phases look like after the agency brings it all together.

Cilimburg left the meeting at 1:10 PM.

MacArthur has concerns about the agency not getting the funding for the RFQ (request for qualifications) and not having the next steps. Woodrow says he can get together with DJ& A and look at the agency's other options if it does not receive the expected funding. MacArthur agrees that the RFQ should be the priority for now and focus on trying to get the best funding available. However, he would like to start planning for other ways to grow if the agency does not receive the funding they are hoping for.

Wiener left the meeting at 1:14 PM.

Sweten brought up new technology being used by large companies to keep their electric fleets moving and operating, such as large batteries housed on trailers. She agrees these ideas could be possible, but with Mountain Line embracing electrification, there are long-term needs to keep the buses moving.

Strauss has concerns about how the Board communicates and works with the public about the agency's need to grow.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:18 PM.

Submitted by Michele Erickson