



**Missoula Urban Transportation District
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes
June 14, 2023**

DRAFT

MEMBERS PRESENT

Don McArthur, Chair
Sebastian Strauss
Jesse Dodson
Amy Cilimborg
Jason Wiener

MEMBERS ABSENT

Andrea Davis
Josephine Hazelton-Boyle

STAFF

Corey Aldridge, Gen. Mgr.
Mary Hanson, Finance Dir.
Olga Kreimer, Comms. Spec.
Dan Stone, Transit Planner
Vince Caristo, Proc. Spec.
Darlene Craven, Exec. Asst.
Jason Struppler, Operator
Spencer Starke, Assoc. Planne

Guests

None

Call to Order and Roll Call

Don MacArthur called the meeting to order at 11:03 a.m. Roll call was taken. Corey Aldridge welcomed the new staff – Spencer Starke, associate planner and Darlene Craven, executive assistant.

Changes or Additions to the Agenda

None

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

None

Action Items

4.1 Minutes of May 10, 2023

Amy Cilimborg made a motion to approve the May 10, 2023, meeting minutes. MacArthur seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Discussion items

5.1 On-Demand Transit Feasibility Study – 11:05 a.m.

Caristo updated the committee on the ongoing progress of the study being facilitated by Via Strategies/Via Transportation. The study has been focusing on three main tasks, with the bulk of

the work focusing on the second task, a peer review, that involved interviewing six comparable transit agencies in the Mountain West region. Caristo stated the review yielded a great deal of good information. Task three will analyze the agency's current service and develop a service plan.

In response to MacArthur's question about the information learned, Caristo found the experience of the transit authority in Boise, Idaho, to be interesting. Funding for the fixed-route service was reduced, resulting in a different passenger demographic that aligned with the on-demand model, aimed at extending service to those who are not well-served by fixed routes. Other information gathered focused on how rides are being requested, revealing that many passengers still call in, requiring operators and dispatchers. Agencies utilizing software applications for ride requests recommended ensuring its full functionality from the get-go.

Caristo further elaborated that these agencies are employing the on-demand model in diverse ways, and the data acquired will be invaluable for shaping fixed-route programs. The most common way was to choose a specific service area. The data collected has been useful in assessing and establishing fixed routes. Caristo advised that the study team will make a trip to Missoula to meet with the board and community stakeholders.

Strauss asked if an on-demand program would compete with already existing ride options such as Uber, and whether it was brought up by the peer agencies. Caristo replied that some agencies combined on-demand with paratransit services to improve productivity and efficiency. MacArthur asked if any of the peer agencies were fare free. Starke replied that none were. Caristo said the final report needs to be completed by the end of September 2023.

5.2 Advertising Contract Update and Discussion – 11:25 a.m.

Kreimer reminded the committee that the agency's contract with Missoula Broadcasting will expire in October 2023. Kreimer added that MUTD has not been getting the full value of the contract since FY2022, that stipulates 35% of the advertising sales, with a minimum payment of \$4,800 per month. Kreimer also stated that the broadcasting agency hasn't been providing thorough reporting regarding those payments. The contract is ambiguous, and maximizing its value would necessitate additional staff oversight, contradicting the goal of minimizing staff involvement. Despite all advertising spots being sold out, the agency is only receiving the minimum payment. Kreimer said the agency is getting \$57,000 annually.

Kreimer put forward two possibilities: either put an end to all advertising or initiate a Request for Proposals (RFP) for continued advertising following the end of the contract with Missoula Broadcasting in October. Kreimer suggested that letting the contract expire could provide an opportunity to explore better options and develop an advertising program aligned with the agency's mission, vision, and values statement, due to be completed in October. A temporary cessation of advertising would allow the agency to determine the aesthetics of the advertisements, reevaluate pricing, and improve its interactions with the business community. Lastly, Kreimer pointed out that the time to reset the program is now since the agency is no longer operating in crisis management as it was during the pandemic. Communicating large projects to the public is now a priority.

MacArthur asked whether the committee needed to decide at the meeting. Aldridge said it would be on the board meeting agenda and the board would decide then. Aldridge stated a hiatus would provide the agency an opportunity to explore what other agencies are doing to capture the full value of potential advertising space.

Strauss asked if the impact on ridership could be quantified. Kreimer replied that the Windfall survey didn't address this aspect and observed that the public's perception of the buses is the big unspoken piece. Strauss noted that riders likely wouldn't be put off by the messaging, but wondered to what extent the messaging may increase ridership. MacArthur reinforced that getting people back on the bus was the priority. MacArthur recommended taking the hiatus to reevaluate advertising and will look to staff for guidance on the RFP.

5.3 Strategic Planning Lookback & 2024 Overview – 12:11 PM

Aldridge said that strategic planning had been discussed at the August 2022 planning committee meeting and it was time to update the plan started in 2016. The big question is how to use the existing plan. There is a need to calibrate the plan that accounts for what has changed along the way.

Caristo gave a presentation depicting the internal schedule that will help develop a larger and more complex RFP for August 2023. It will be designed to save money on consulting fees and represents an opportunity to shape a transportation plan for Mountain Line to play a bigger role in the area's transportation network. The schedule calls for finalizing contracts in December 2023 and work beginning in 2024 in compliance with the Metropolitan Planning Organization's statutory requirements to update the plan in 2025. MacArthur asked what the budget was for this project. Hanson responded that \$160,000 of state CARES funds would be used, with a local twenty percent match, adding that the funds don't expire unless obligated.

Strauss asked if the scope was within the allocated amount. Caristo responded that the plan cost \$150,000 in 2018 and that \$200,000 would be enough for a good plan now. MacArthur asked if the agency would be able to pay more if required, noting that a complete retooling wasn't required, and that the agency didn't have the funds for a deep dig.

Caristo continued, observing that ridership was the key to the 2018 plan, focusing on a high frequency network. He explained that the strategic plan sets Mountain Line's place in the community and advised the group that three phases (zero-emission vehicles, bus stop improvements and the MOAB) of the short-term network have now been implemented, resulting in significant progress in planning and policy recommendations. Other challenges are the on-demand transit study, the Brooks Street project, and taxing district. Externally, Caristo added, the city and county have updated their land use and zoning policies with the new focus on the Sxwtpqyen area. He stated the update cannot tell the same story and that it must redefine the metrics and measures for success and how to use the resources for serving the community.

MacArthur advised that the agency must figure out the next move and how much money it would take to do it. He didn't think asking for another mill levy would be appropriate. The focus should be on what Mountain Line is trying to achieve and communicating those goals to the community through the plan.

Aldridge brought up the BRT study, stating while a RAISE grant award would provide funds to build, it would not provide operating funds. The agency could be forced to ask the city for those funds. MacArthur pointed out that was a separate timing effort and didn't want to present a plan that created more investment. MOAB will be the big effort over the next five years.

Kreimer left the meeting at 12:45 p.m.

Kreimer returned at 12:48 p.m.

Caristo stated that the plan will be one of the primary inputs for the MOAB. In addition, the agency will have to continue reviewing where the service is going. If the plan's predictions are realistic, going forward won't be that different. The agency has a fiscal responsibility to look at interim solutions without the big jump to the MOAB.

Cilimburg left the meeting at 1:05 p.m.

Adjournment

MacArthur closed the meeting at 1:07 p.m.

Submitted by Darlene Craven