



**Missoula Urban Transportation District
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes
October 9, 2024**

APPROVED

MEMBERS PRESENT

Don MacArthur
Jason Wiener
Amy Cilimburg
Sam Oliver
Sebastian Strauss

MEMBERS ABSENT

STAFF

Jordan Hess
Jen Sweten
Olga Kreimer

Call to Order and Roll Call

11:01 a.m. – MacArthur called the meeting to order and asked for roll call.

Changes or Additions to the Agenda

No changes or additions to the agenda.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

None

Action Items

4.1 Minutes of September 11, 2024, Meeting – Cilimburg requested a revision noting the correct adjournment time was 1:28, not 2:28 as stated in the draft minutes. She motioned for approval with that revision, Oliver seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Discussion Items

5.1 Communications Update & Workshop – Kreimer explained that the focus was to get the committee’s input for further developing the marketing communications plan. She has been meeting with different departments to determine how to integrate communications effectively across all departments and to the public. The chosen marketing agency will make ADA accessibility best practices and target-centric messaging that tells a relevant story a priority. It is important to align internal messaging with external materials that are on brand.

Another component, Kreimer added, is an ongoing effort to show measurable and intentional community partnerships efforts. Short-term goals focus on accessibility changes and branding and taglines updates. Medium and long-term goals break down into informational communications, press relations and strategic community partnerships.

Kreimer solicited the board for input on past successful communications. Cilimburg said the communications about electrification and its benefits have been well received. MacArthur said the “Mountain Line Benefits Us All” campaign was good, coherent messaging. He added that the agency has a core group of supporters who need to know that Mountain Line is being managed well. Wiener said the weapons policy external messaging went as smoothly as could be expected. He added social media as a communications channel seems to be working well. Sweten said being direct and open about the weapons policy made the most impact all around. Strauss said visibility is a key element to enticing people to ride the bus.

Kreimer then asked for input on what had not worked so well in the past few years. Wiener brought up the recent articles about changing bus routes that were not accurate and premature. MacArthur said any changes had to be presented thoughtfully and carefully. Cilimburg said it was important to convey that transportation is an integral part of community building. MacArthur suggested addressing the perception that unhoused people are the only riders. He added that proactively building the messaging ahead of any changes will make a difference. Always attracting more riders should always be the priority. Strauss noted that messaging to attract more riders may not be clear to the general public. MacArthur said the messaging should tell the story that transit can bridge the gap to maintain affordability for those with fewer resources. Oliver said individual stories as media pieces can be very impactful. Kreimer said that rider and operator profiles will be part of future messaging. Strauss suggested incorporating a lessons-learned element into the communications plan.

Kreimer asked for feedback on how marketing should drive ridership. MacArthur suggested offering some kind of incentive to increase ridership. Wiener said he would be interested in approaches that incorporated alternative travel in addition to the bus and investigating how MUTD can use available data from the parking commission to target downtown commuters about taking the bus instead of paying for parking. Hess said a targeted behavior change advertising campaign could be a viable option. MacArthur suggested a pilot program for downtown employers to entice employees to ride.

Kreimer highlighted the need for identifying target audiences for messaging related to usage, training programs for new riders and incorporating bus education into school curriculums. MacArthur pointed out that there is a target group of transit supporters who are not riders but need to know how and what the agency is doing. MUTD needs to focus on the bigger groups who could be converted to using the bus while maintaining the support of those supporters who care about sustainability and community.

Kreimer said convenience is the motivator and knowledge barriers often inhibit potential new riders. Efforts will focus on informational messaging about how and where to ride. MacArthur suggested implementing a program that takes a bus to where potential riders are to educate them about riding the bus.

MacArthur requested a presentation on the communications plan actionable items, targeted groups and messaging when it is ready. Strauss stated the board will want to provide input on the potential need for an additional staff member and show how the funds will be used to achieve the agency’s goals. MacArthur said MUTD does not want to lose the community’s ongoing support regardless.

5.2 Transit to Recreation Sites – Hess explained that prior to his role at MUTD, he was retained by the parties who purchased Marshall Mountain to conduct a feasibility study to review costs and demand for transit service to open space and recreation sites in the Missoula area, recommend

transit service options, and draft a pilot program. He researched a number of peer communities offering recreational shuttle service to find out what worked and what did not. Boulder, Colorado and Bend, Oregon were the two most similar communities to Missoula offering transit to trails services. Convenience is the most prominent driver for the Boulder shuttles that operate with local and state funds. Another local service is operated by private contractors who provide all the turnkey operation services. Bend has four shuttles operated by the local transit district that travel to a U.S. Forest Service trailhead, the ski area and Deschutes River access points. The transit agency has a partnership with the city that in turn, contracts with local tube rental vendors to sell fare wristbands to the recreators. Funding from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) was used to purchase vehicles through the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP). One hundred percent farebox recovery means that there is no Federal Transit Administration (FTA) operating support. The ski area has a major employer pass program contract with the transit district and employees ride free.

Santa Fe has been operating a 365-day mountain trail service for the last ten years to the local ski area. The city applied to the FTA for funding and now gets half its funding from the FTA and half locally. Santa Fe's biggest challenge is matching drivers to vehicles depending on CDL status and the affordable housing market.

Helena's program was challenged by devoting a single dedicated bus to its shuttle service that often was inoperable. The service was canceled after local businesses could not fund it through COVID.

Hess related initial pilot options based on user volume and parking challenges: Blue Mountain, Pattee Canyon and the Rattlesnake. Some of the areas are administered by multiple land managers. Some land managers were interested in the Deer Creek Loop as a potential first effort. MacArthur asked if the funding partners were interested in funding a pilot program and what MUTD's commitment as a partner would entail. Hess replied the scope of MUTD's participation is a board-level policy decision. MacArthur said MUTD could potentially grow into providing this service because it is a community benefit. Cilimburg added that it requires more research into the logistics of operating such a program. Strauss pointed out that helping those with fewer resources in the city is the biggest priority but working with another shuttle service could potentially work as long as the messaging focuses on supporting the core goal of delivering transit to Missoula. Sweten said she believes Mountain Line could consider directly operating the service or contracting with another provider.

The consensus was that the premise is a good one worth pursuing because it is beneficial to the community. MacArthur suggested adding a scope change to the strategic planning contract to research the transit to trails opportunities. Hess said the two determining factors for moving forward are what MUTD has the capacity to support and what the project partners want from the agency. A possible scenario is acquiring dedicated vehicles through the FLAP grants and operating funds from donations.

1:06 – Wiener left the meeting.

Strauss requested the presentation materials before the meeting for reviewing and posing targeted questions.

Adjournment

1:08 p.m. – MacArthur adjourned the meeting.

Submitted by Darlene Craven, Board Clerk