



**Missoula Urban Transportation District
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
November 21, 2024**

APPROVED

MEMBERS PRESENT

Don MacArthur
Eva Rocke
Sam Oliver
Sebastian Strauss
Lisa Sheppard

MEMBERS ABSENT

Jason Wiener

STAFF PRESENT

Jordan Hess
Colin Woodrow
Allison Segal
Olga Kreimer
Heather Halter
Jen Sweten
Garin Wally
Spencer Starke

1.0 Call to Order and Roll Call

12:00 p.m. – MacArthur called the meeting to order and asked for a roll call.

2.0 Changes or Additions to the Agenda

None.

3.0 Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

None.

4.0 Discussion Items/Reports/Comments

4.1 General Manager's Report – Hess said the legislative lunch was scheduled for December 4, 2024. Staff plans to discuss property taxes, the urban transportation district statute, and give a tour to incoming legislators. Efforts to reach out to Senator-elect Sheehy are also continuing.

Administrative Services/Human Resources/Finance – Halter said the maintenance union did not approve the maintenance contract so negotiations would resume.

Operations – The New Flyer buses are out of service and a field repair representative is expected to repair them. The new chargers have been commissioned. The fleet is still running at fifty-five percent electric. The operator pool is near seventy and after the training class in January 2025, the agency will be fully staffed. Rocke asked if the fifty-five percent represented fleet proportion or miles operated. Sweten confirmed the benchmark depicted fleet proportion. When the new buses are commissioned in March 2025, the fleet will run ninety to one hundred percent electric buses.

Marketing & Communications – Kreimer said onboarding the new marketing contractor who is focusing on crafting a full communications plan continues. Showcasing staff and riders as part of the storytelling has garnered a positive response.

The “Bus-Tober” initiative sponsored by Missoula in Motion reported that between October 13 and October 31, 55 participants logged 569 transit trips for 35 errands and 534 commutes. The self-reporting group included nine first-time trip loggers. The recruitment communications meeting with the recruiting staff and the marketing contractor was productive.

Projects/Planning/Procurement/IT – Woodrow said the transfer center project needs additional scoping and the architecture and engineer contractor (Wendel) sent over a proposal. The agency is finalizing details with the engineering firm (DJ&A) and the construction firm (Quality Construction) for raising the roof.

The city received twenty proposals for the Grant Creek realignment project. Work on the shared infrastructure piece of the new facility land acquisition continues (Project B) and should be presented for the board’s approval at the December meeting. The required conditional letter of map revision (CLOMR) is expected in February 2025 and the administrative settlement from the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) should follow that. The December planning committee meeting will review the thirty percent design from Wendel. Quality Construction will submit a draft cost estimate at the end of January 2025. The project will seek LEED Gold certification; the required sixty-five points will be addressed in the thirty percent design. The LEED certification will require hiring a commissioning agent.

The bus stop at the Veterans’ Administration (VA) is now open and the VA has indicated it will pay MUTD for the installation. The staff will submit a proposal for two more chargers at the December board meeting. Strauss asked how many additional chargers are needed to accommodate the ten new electric buses. Woodrow replied that one more charger is needed now. The staff will present an update on the Brooks RAISE project at the December planning committee meeting. The automatic passenger count certification is anticipated at month end. A plow for the new service truck was purchased. The electric trolley is undergoing required testing and should be delivered in June 2025. Strauss asked if the trolley contract contained a delay provision. Woodrow responded that it did. The digital signage project continues as well.

Sweten addressed Strauss’ question at the October board meeting about buying used service vehicles. Because the agency purchases basic trucks that are used heavily, the fancier traded-in trucks are not practical and usually cost as much as a basic new one.

4.2 Strategic Planning Update – Kreimer said the strategic plan’s goal is to improve service delivery and use existing resources wisely and responsibly. According to current riders, the emphasis should be focused on additional frequency and convenience where it is most needed. The plan will also emphasize that existing coverage will continue, and any changes would enhance service, not eliminate it. Another point is optimizing limited agency resources. The plan will show near-term and long-term visions that emphasize a positive direction through a series of phases. Showing responsible stewardship of existing public funding will also be included.

MacArthur said responsible stewardship leveraging limited resources to best serve the community should be the biggest message. He said it was important to tell the whole story from the top down. Kreimer said the messaging would be responsive and directed to all stakeholders through a variety of methods and media.

12:31 – Cilimburg joined the meeting.

MacArthur observed that service changes would be more palatable by explaining the data behind the decision to make changes. Testing by ridership and equity measures are the way to make responsible decisions and changes.

Starke said the strategic plan would be accessible and demonstrate the intersection between mission and vision of providing service to those who need it most. MacArthur stressed the need to depict the agency's larger goals of equity and service in very specific language. The plan should emphasize rider numbers, transit-dependent riders and equity.

Kreimer said Hess would write guest columns for the Missoula newspapers in early January 2025 and a press release will be issued for a virtual public event in mid-December. Social media is a great forum for showing human-interest storytelling. Hess said the guest columns could also be helpful in addressing the property tax narrative by focusing on efficiency. Strauss said it is important to humanize the statistics with individual stories.

Sheppard said the older adults who ride the bus and use paratransit are not addressed in the documentation. She would like to see a section highlighting the critical role transit plays for older adults and their independence. Hess said serving the elder population is something the agency takes pride in and should be represented in the final plan. MacArthur said the paratransit service is essential to MUTD and it is worth emphasizing how much the service has grown to accommodate that community in need. Starke said showing how accessibility has been expanded should be stated in the plan. Kreimer said the paratransit office's ninety-nine percent accuracy rate should be celebrated as well.

MacArthur asked if the public had commented on the suggested route realignments. Starke responded that the public had expressed little concern. Kreimer said the messaging will focus on improvements in service frequency and the importance of serving high-density areas.

4.3 Ridership Report – Wally presented the updated ridership report, noting a 15.5 percent increase in demand response ridership, with a thirty percent increase in weekend ridership. The average weekday ridership is up thirteen percent. Paratransit trips averaged around 198 over a three-month period from July to September. Though trips are still down post-COVID, they increased ten percent over last quarter. Strauss suggested measuring all the trips against a larger-scale, long-term goal set by the Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Sheppard said the steady increases indicate a change in demographics that points to spending resources to attract riders who really need the service. Montana is now the fifth oldest state in the country and the fastest growing age group is the 75 plus age bracket. Sweten pointed out that because worker travel patterns have changed, service should target where the riders are rather than hoping the previous ones will come back.

Wally said nationally, Missoula is following the post-COVID ridership recovery trends at about 78 percent. Sheppard asked to see an overlay of how much transit service was delivered in 2016 versus now in revenue levels next to the ridership levels. Wally showed a chart depicting how much MUTD put into serving a route versus the ridership reward from that route. The weekend service delivers a good amount of ridership for the number of revenue hours. Rocke noted that peak ridership occurred in mid-afternoon, instead of at conventional commuter times. MacArthur suggested adding frequency to the mid-day runs in response to the increasing ridership during that time. He added there is always going to be a low-performing route but the agency cannot eliminate those routes.

Hess asked for feedback on the proposed 2025 calendar and added that the staff is proposing a board retreat on January 8 to discuss how to align strategic goals with the pro forma, analyze various property tax implications and future service assumptions. He also wanted to get input on how the general manager report is presented. MacArthur said the meeting reports could be more high level. Strauss suggested relating the most critical activities at the board meetings. Sheppard stressed the need for sharing and Rocke added it was good to associate staff members with their scopes of work.

5.0 Action Items

5.1 October 24, 2024, Board Meeting Minutes – Oliver moved to approve the meeting minutes, Rocke seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

5.2 October 21, 2024, Special Board Meeting Minutes – Strauss moved to approve the meeting minutes, Oliver seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

5.3 September 2024 Financial Statements – Strauss stated that expenses are below budget and that trend is expected to continue depending on staffing levels throughout the year. The investment interest income is still lower than expected and the staff is pursuing details about the investment portfolio with the county administrators.

1:37 p.m. – Cilimburg left the meeting.

Strauss said the finance committee held earlier in the day did not have a quorum, but he would recommend approval of the financial statement at the board treasurer. Oliver seconded Strauss's recommendation, and it passed unanimously.

5. 4 MPO Redesignation Letter – Hess explained that the MPO is the legal entity that receives federal funding and manages federally related transportation planning. The city and county planning boards are going to separate in compliance with the Montana Land Use Planning Act, eliminating the MPO. The redesignation letter requests the governor to redesignate the MPO to sever the formal link between the MPO and the planning board. Rocke moved to authorize MacArthur as the board chair to sign the redesignation letter, Sheppard seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

5.5 HDR Contract Amendment (Connect Brooks/Transform Midtown Project) – Hess explained that the project required a scope change that was beyond staff purchasing authority and required board approval. Strauss moved to approve the contract amendment, Oliver seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

5.6 Shop Truck #5 & Bus #248 Disposal – Sweten explained that the rear suspension on this bus model is starting to fail and there is no way to get replacement parts. A bus rebuilder has offered to buy this bus at fair market value for parting out to other agencies still using the model. The sale price is approximately five thousand dollars. The bus has over 570,000 miles on it, more than expected for a bus that is fifteen years old. Strauss asked if any preventative measures could be taken on the other nine buses to keep them running until they can be replaced with the electric buses next year. Sweten responded that it was not possible, and the parts are only meant to have a 12-year useful life span. Sheppard moved to approve the disposal of both vehicles, Strauss seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Hess asked if the board would be open to a policy that allowed the staff to dispose of vehicles past their useful life benchmark without board approval. MacArthur requested that future bus disposals be included in the general manager report for tracking which buses are going away and what is coming in.

1:56 p.m. – MacArthur adjourned the meeting.