



**Missoula Urban Transportation District  
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes  
November 13, 2024**

**APPROVED**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Don MacArthur  
Jason Wiener  
Amy Cilimburg  
Sam Oliver  
Kerri Levin  
Sebastian Strauss

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

**STAFF**

Jordan Hess  
Colin Woodrow  
Olga Kreimer  
Spencer Starke  
Allison Segal

**GUESTS**

Thomas Wittmann, Nelson\Nygaard  
James Zhang, Nelson\Nygaard

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**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 October 9, 2024, Meeting** – Oliver motioned to approve the October 9, 2024, planning committee meet minutes, MacArthur seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

11:04 a.m. – Cilimburg joined the meeting.

**Discussion Items**

**5.1 Strategic Planning Update** – Starke explained that the service expansion alternatives presented today were designed to be cost neutral. The goal is to establish a recommended alternative for presenting to the full board. That recommendation will establish a baseline for starting phase three of public engagement. MacArthur asked for clarification on the purpose of the supporting materials that were sent to the committee. Starke responded that the information

will inform the final plan draft. The issues are whether to increase frequency on Route 3 and 4, implement a new Route 15 and/or launch on demand service.

MacArthur said he wanted to see a draft of the strategic plan document that will be presented to the public. Hess stated the goal is to show the changes in a positive light and show that the agency is providing service where it is needed and managing taxpayer funds responsibly. MacArthur pointed out that the public perception loses sight of the benefits of change. Hess said the messaging would be vetted. MacArthur responded that it was vital to finalize any public facing documents quickly. Woodrow said there is a specific project timeline and punch list.

Wittman stated that the alternatives defined potential financial impacts beyond revenue hours and the benefits to the community for the short- and long-term. Alternatives reflecting public input without impacting the budget include restructuring Route 8, reducing frequency on Route 12, and increasing frequency on Route 3. The top priority is improving service in East Missoula, followed by adding 30-minute weekend service on Routes 1 and 2. A third priority is adding service to the expanding developments along Mullan Road. Though it would cost more, the population density indicates that property taxes could adequately fund a route expansion. The last short-term priority is on-demand service though it would generate significantly lower ridership than improving fixed-route service.

Wiener asked if there was any desirable season for changing service. Wittmann replied that the university schedule would be a driving factor and suggested that August would be optimal. The service expansion in existing routes should take precedence over adding another route. MacArthur noted that if transit can influence development to be more transit friendly, then it might make sense to consider rapidly developing areas. A priority should be supporting diverse, lower socioeconomic areas.

Woodrow said the planning committee is pursuing a SWOT analysis regarding districts that are receiving planning services but not paratransit services. MacArthur said if the developing areas on Mullan Road generated enough property tax revenue, providing service without a mill levy would be feasible. Hess said understanding the correlations between tax base and rider frequency was worth researching. Strauss said having a tool to understand potential threats to the district's revenue would provide the necessary risk management. Woodrow said this analysis would be presented to the board this winter.

Wittmann presented long-term preferred network alternatives that considered the new facility, a southern terminus and the bus rapid transit (BRT) along Brooks Street. The challenge is serving and supporting smart growth. Replacing Route 7 with the BRT service (15-minute headways) adds significantly to the operating budget. If and when the BRT is running, a southern transit center at Southgate Mall will be essential and Routes 1 and 6 would require adjustments. The minimum amount needed to implement the changes and create a southern terminus is approximately one million dollars. MacArthur asked how the BRT corridor would be funded. Wittmann responded federal funds would pay for only a portion of the capital costs.

Wittmann said increasing frequency from north Reserve Street to downtown would be a priority as well as increasing 30-minute service to Route 11. Eliminating Route 2 and reallocating the ridership would also be a consideration. Additional buses would be needed, adding another million to the operations and maintenance budget. MacArthur asked if there was an alternative to focusing only on acquiring federal funding for the BRT. Wittmann replied that BRT was not needed to accomplish the other suggested long-term goals. The main priority would be a southern transit center. Route 7, given the redevelopment potential along Brooks, does not warrant additional

service. MacArthur observed that a two-terminus network will provide better service everywhere and serve the community better than the BRT. Hess said he was working with the Missoula Economic Partnership to model a southern terminus in a mixed-use setting.

MacArthur asked how the agency would serve the westward growth pattern when Missoula's population reaches two hundred thousand. Woodrow said the staff was considering alternatives such as a park and ride location or localized service for the Wye. Cilimburg asked if the area was in the MUTD planning district. Hess said much of the Wye area was not in the agency's taxing district. Wittmann said a third terminus could be a future consideration, but the southern terminus should be a priority.

Wittmann said the agency should make extending Route 3 via the Roseburg property a priority as it fits in with continuing growth on the north side. The agency should also consider increasing frequency on Route 6. On demand in the most appropriate area rounds out the list of long-term priorities as it relates to serving areas where taxpayers are paying into the district but not within the paratransit boundaries.

Strauss asked how many riders would be lost if parts of Route 12 in the South Hills were eliminated and replaced with on demand. Wittmann replied that on-demand service paid for a large portion of the Route 12 realignment, but educating the riding public on benefits would be vital for the service to be successful.

Levin said frequency on Route 6 needs to be increased at specific times of the day. Mid-day service on Route 12 could be eliminated as it is mostly commuter driven. Russell Street is already too congested to add north-south service.

Wittmann said increasing service on Route 7 to 30-minute headways on weekdays is the first step, followed by increasing Route 6 service frequency to every 15 minutes given the large amount of high-density housing in the area. The big unknown is how the Brooks Street corridor redevelopment would affect ridership. Woodrow said improving frequency depends on the timing of underlying zoning and housing development in midtown.

MacArthur asked about the route configuration along Mullan Road and three routes potentially going west from downtown. Wittmann responded that the "lollipop" configuration allows a bus to turn around in higher density area. He added that suggested western and northern routes would offset at 15-minute intervals to complement each other in that corridor.

Strauss said more detailed trip data would better inform future planning efforts in determining what routes to split up or eliminate. Wittmann said understanding origin and destination is crucial to gather data for pinpointing travel patterns. Land use is the determining factor for ridership numbers. MacArthur asked whether the southern transit center is the key to transitioning the downtown hub model. Wittmann replied that adding frequency eliminated the need for time transfers and higher frequency facilitates necessary transfers. MacArthur asked if a southern transfer center would provide for more flexible routing. Wittmann said downtown would remain as the priority destination.

Levin said passengers already think the mall is a second hub because the pace is less tense than traveling on city streets that have become very crowded. She said allocating funds to serve the Mullan Road and East Missoula neighborhoods would be a great way to expand service.

Cilimburg suggested referring to the alternatives as near-term plans to avoid a perception of applying quick fixes. MacArthur said the first three alternatives represented high priorities and the long-term vision was sensible. On-demand service is the remaining issue for both near-term and long-term scenarios. He suggested putting on-demand service in its own category as a pilot program without a specific launch timeframe. Kreimer suggested framing on-demand service as supporting the needs of a given area. Strauss advised that using the same language with intentional messaging and keeping it simple for the general public is crucial. MacArthur said that any public messaging should contain the four guiding principles of what the community expects of the agency. The strategic plan should respond to the community's concerns. Wiener said the plan gives the community what it wants while delivering the most value for the services MUTD provides.

**5.2 Federal Policy & Funding Landscape and Montana Legislative Session** – The staff will be tracking Federal Transit Administration funding by collaborating with industry trade associations. Hess asked for input on how involved the board wants to be in this process. He plans to conduct a site visit with the Senator Elect Sheehy where the focus would be on how MUTD serves diverse members of our community, including veterans and business owners. In addition, a lunch and tour with the local state legislative representatives is scheduled for the first week in December. MacArthur said he would participate in any meetings and suggested that the midtown group would be a good liaison for meeting with the Montana congress members. Wiener said protecting the mill levy funding through leveraging the city and county lobbying efforts at the Montana legislature might be productive. MacArthur added it would be prudent to have a response ready should the legislature act against transit funding. Hess said transit is broadly popular across the county, noting that out of the 62 ballot measures across the country, 52 of them passed. Cilimburg warned that the agency needs to prepare for major changes in federal funding from the incoming administration. Hess said the agency is attempting to obligate the allocated funds for the new facility as quickly as possible. The city and county will inform the agency about potential negative bill drafts. Most of the Missoula delegation is favorable to transit.

### **Adjournment**

1:07 p.m. – MacArthur adjourned the meeting.

Submitted by Darlene Craven, Board Clerk