



**Missoula Urban Transportation District  
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes  
February 12, 2025**

**APPROVED**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Don MacArthur  
Jason Wiener  
Amy Cilimburg  
Sam Oliver  
Sebastian Strauss  
Eva Rocke

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

**STAFF**

Jordan Hess  
Colin Woodrow  
Olga Kreimer  
Spencer Starke  
Jen Sweten

**GUESTS**

Thomas Wittmann, Nelson\Nygaard

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**Call to Order and Roll Call**

11:03 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 December 11, 2024, Meeting** – Cilimburg moved to approve the minutes, Oliver seconded, and the motion carried.

**Discussion Items**

**5.1 Strategic Planning Update** – Starke explained that today's update would present recommendations based on the revised timeline established and would be presented for approval at the March board meeting.

Wittmann provided insights into current ridership trends, indicating a recovery to approximately 84% of pre-pandemic levels, particularly highlighting growth in paratransit services. He discussed feedback from community outreach, emphasizing the demand for increased service frequency and expansion, especially in developing areas like Sx<sup>w</sup>tpqyen (the area north of Mullan Road) and the Sawmill District (along the Clark Fork River by the ballpark). The need for improved weekend service was also noted, along with key investment priorities based on community input.

Wittmann presented four main recommendations for improving transit services as follows: update and streamline the route network to reflect current travel patterns, expand bus service to growing areas and invest in capital projects to enhance speed and reliability. He stressed the importance of maintaining service coverage while planning for future growth.

Wittmann outlined several recommendations for optimizing service such as reducing Route 12 to 60-minute headways and revising Route 8 to enhance connections from the Sawmill District to downtown. Additional improvements include increasing the frequency of Routes 3 and 4 to every 60 minutes during peak hours and making minor alignment changes to Routes 11 and 7 for better reliability.

Wittmann highlighted the importance of evaluating the Sx<sup>w</sup>tpqyen expansion for paratransit services, suggesting that market testing is necessary for informed decision-making. Strauss asked what the estimated service costs were. Starke replied it was difficult to determine but the costs would range from 10% to 15% of current costs. Wittman said it will take time for new areas to recognize available paratransit services.

Wittmann reviewed the key components of the long-term transit plan, including the development of a new hub at the southern terminus transfer center and enhanced bus rapid transit services. He noted the need to adapt to changing origin-destination patterns and rising housing costs, which impact low-income residents. The plan aims to improve access to transit and jobs while addressing the anticipated increase in paratransit costs.

Wittman said the strategic plan is close to a final product. MacArthur expressed appreciation for the document and asked whether there would be further revisions. Hess said that the document would be circulated to various stakeholders such as the relevant city and county departments and other agencies. The planning committee will address implementation steps and the initial service changes at the March meeting, followed by further revising to incorporate community and stakeholder feedback, and preparing a final version for grant approval. MacArthur requested a review of the Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization's long range transit plan that is being prepared in conjunction with the agency's own strategic plan to compare and determine how both plans align.

MacArthur requested clearer graphic representation of transit routes and improvements alongside ridership data. Wittmann acknowledged the difficulty of conveying complex information on paper and proposed an online story map as a potential solution. Kreimer mentioned that the staff are investigating various digital tools to facilitate user engagement with the data, and this will be further discussed at the next planning committee meeting.

Starke and Wittmann mentioned the difficulties in understanding ridership changes, with a particular emphasis on the relevance of small numerical changes at high traffic stops. Wittmann explained that while percentages can illustrate significant changes, they may not always provide a clear picture. Additional maps may be needed to enhance understanding and the importance of correlating ridership changes with social service providers and local developments.

Wiener asked where the charts showing frequency contrasts between the near-term and long-term scenarios were. Wittman said they could be inserted back into the report because they tell a compelling story. He added that including detailed ridership numbers in a public report can cause misconceptions. Wiener said expanding service to Sx<sup>w</sup>tpqyen would make a huge impact on positive community perceptions.

Wittmann analyzed the performance of routes 3, 5, 8, 9, and 12, noting that despite Route 3's low ridership, it has high productivity on weekdays. He discussed the strategic approach to service reductions for routes 8 and 12 due to service duplication, while emphasizing the importance of clearly communicating the rationale for proposed changes in the report to address public concerns.

Recommendations were made to enhance data presentation, including the use of stacked bar charts for clearer comparisons and specifying the years for various figures. Strauss expressed concerns about relying on 2022 data in a report initiated in late 2024, and requested more current information. Additionally, he noted that development costs charts did not address inflation which makes it difficult to grasp future cost development.

Don raised concerns about the sustainability of paratransit as it currently represents a significant portion of operating costs. Thomas noted the difficulty in making accurate projections due to fluctuating ridership patterns and suggested that a strategic plan should incorporate these uncertainties.

Strauss said projecting paratransit needs would be impacted if the assumption that the need will double over the next five years. MacArthur concurred that paratransit could face significant pressure. Fixed-route service could be compromised if paratransit needs continue to increase. Cilimburg said the issue merits a deeper discussion.

**Adjournment**

12:54 p.m. – MacArthur adjourned the meeting.

Submitted by Darlene Craven, Board Clerk