

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY BOARD OF PLANNING

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May 9, 2012

Mayor and City Council
City of Billings, Montana

Re: Rail Traffic Impacts Planning Study

Mayor and City Council:

The Yellowstone County Board of Planning has discussed, at its last two meetings, the need for a planning study to address the impacts on Billings and Yellowstone County of the potential increased rail traffic; especially through the downtown rail corridor. As you are aware, there is considerable interest in the potential impacts due to anticipated increases in export coal shipments. We are aware that the County Commissioners and the City Council have declined the request to seek participation in the EIS process related to the proposed port in Whatcom County, Washington. The Planning Board, however, believes that the elected leadership should support a rail study for Billings and Yellowstone County and that it should be a priority project to provide current, balanced information for planning purposes. The need for this work is echoed by Big Sky Economic Development, the Billings Chamber and other interested organizations who already have initiated a process to move forward with an analysis. See attached correspondence.

The Planning Board should be involved in the study as we are the recommending body regarding planning items for the governing bodies.

We are requesting the Policy Coordinating Committee place this item on its June 12, 2012 meeting agenda for discussion and action.

Regards,



Paul Gatzemeier, President
Yellowstone County Board of Planning

Attachment

From: [Beaudry, Candi](#)
To: ["Steve Arveschoug"](#)
Cc: ["Paul Gatzemeier"](#)
Subject: RE: April 2nd Train Meeting Follow-up
Date: Thursday, May 03, 2012 3:17:52 PM

Steve,

Thanks for the follow up. The County Planning Board has been discussing potential coal train impacts as well and agreed to send a letter to all local governments and the state emphasizing that this is an important planning issue and the impacts need to be studied. Our Planning Board President, Paul Gatzemeier, may be interested in attending future planning discussions. I have copied him on this email. Thanks.

Candi Beaudry, AICP

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Billings, MT 59101*

406-657-8249

From: Steve Arveschoug [mailto:SteveA@bigskyeda.org]
Sent: Thursday, May 03, 2012 2:30 PM
To: Beaudry, Candi; 'lharmon@downtownbillings.com'; Greg Krueger; 'Bruce MacIntyre'; zak.andersen@bnsf.com; Ranf, Barbara A. (Barbara.Ranf@BNSF.com); Nicholson, Molly M. (CPE) (Molly.Nicholson@cldpk.com); LFrost@mtrail.com; sstreeter@mt.gov; 'sjonutis@mt.gov'; 'msmith@mtrail.com'; Ed Bartlett (edbartlett@q.com); Ronquillo2, Jim
Cc: Volek, Christina; Bill Kennedy ; Steve Arveschoug; Patty Nordlund; Sara Hudson; Dianne Lehm; Allison Corbyn; John Roberts ; 'Rick Leuthold' (rleuthold@sandersonstewart.com)
Subject: April 2nd Train Meeting Follow-up

Follow-up to our April 2nd Discussion of the Opportunities and Challenges Trains Bring to Billings:

Frist, thank you all very much for committing the time to meet April 2nd (a month ago) to discuss the opportunities and challenges we all share with Billings' rail infrastructure. I thought it was a very productive start to the on-going work on the issues and opportunities related to increasing rail traffic in our community.

Here's a list of the key discussion points and a proposed set of next steps:

Discussion Points

1. Very important to get the "facts" out, including: the economic impact of our rail infrastructure in the Billings region; a profile of the current rail traffic through Billings; realistic projections of the future train traffic; tax revenue generated from our rail infrastructure; studies or other background information on coal dust; pertinent regulations that govern the rail transportation industry;
2. It would be helpful to look at other communities that have faced similar

challenges (Olathe, Kansas); maybe even do a field trip or invite their community leaders to Billings;

3. We have an existing “partnership” in place to help lead the discussions toward near-term and long-term solutions—the Downtown Billings Partnership, which includes the DBA, property owners in downtown, the City, BSED, the county, and others;
4. There may be workable solutions to traffic management challenges; that will require discussions among the DBP, City Traffic, the DOT, and Montana Rail Link; Greg Krueger volunteered to lead these traffic management discussions;
5. There will be an increase in train traffic through Billings; with forward planning there should be effective affordable solutions to manage the added traffic;
6. We don’t want to in any way diminish the value of our rail transportation infrastructure; it sets us apart from our regional competition;
7. As discussions move forward it is important that the following groups be added to the discussion: Southside Neighborhood Taskforce; Business Improvement District; local users of the rail system; the EBURD; MDU and NW energy; and, a representative of NPRC or local community representative (maybe Riverstone Health); and
8. The Montana Coal Board should be encouraged to understand the challenges that are ahead for Billings and participate in solutions.

Next Steps

1. Greg Krueger will facilitate the traffic management/near-term solutions discussions;
2. Lisa Harmon should facilitate the larger group discussions (Lisa was not at the meeting to argue this point), and they should meet on a routine basis. The Chamber and BSED will provide support for these larger-group discussions.;
3. Industry groups and Montana Rail Link should begin work on a fact-sheet (as outlined in Discussion Point No. 1, above); and
4. The group should consider a forum that would focus on the economic facts associated with rail transportation in our region, and include information or even representatives from communities that have successfully managed their train traffic challenges and opportunities.

Please let me know if I have missed any of the key discussions points or next steps that we discussed.

I will work with Lisa Harmon on arranging our next meeting and setting an agenda.

Anything else?

Steve