

POLICY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes of August 20, 2024

NOTICE

Public comments will be taken only during the Public Comment periods as indicated on the agenda. Comments may be sent to Planning Staff via email before 10:00 AM on the meeting date. All e-mails received prior to this time will be read into the record for the public hearing.

Member Participants: Commissioner Mark Morse (acting Chairman), Board of County Commissioners; Woody Woods, Yellowstone County Planning Board President; Mayor Bill Cole, MDT District Director Mike Taylor.

Staff Participants: Anna Vickers, Planning Division Manager; Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator; Brenda Berns, Planning Clerk; Rusty Logan, MET Transit Manager.

Call to Order: 12:00 PM

Chairman Morse called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone in attendance.

1. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Public Comment/Communication from the Audience

a. Comments on items not on the agenda and requests to add items to future agendas.

b. Comments on items on the Non-public and Public Agenda Items

Don Vanica, 2225 N. Echo Dr, Billings – Mr. Vanica asked about the three-lane bridge over the river on the interstate, mentioning a recent inspection and a notice that restricts overweight vehicles. He wanted to understand the reason for this restriction. Mark Morse acknowledged the question but explained that, since it wasn't on the agenda, it wouldn't be addressed at that meeting.

3. Motion. Approval of the Minutes of April 16, 2024 & August 7, 2024

Motion was made by Woody Woods, seconded by Bill Cole to approve the April 16, 2024 meeting minutes as submitted. The motion was carried with a unanimous vote.

Motion was made by Woody Woods, seconded by Mark Morse to approve the August 7, 2024 meeting minutes as submitted. The motion was carried with a unanimous vote.

4. Old Business: There is no Old Business.

5. New Business

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5a. 2025 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Action. Submitted by Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator.

Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator and Rusty Logan, MET Transit Manger gave a brief overview of the 2025 Unified Planning Work Program.

Ms. Mattox outlined the funding sources, which include Planning Department Fees from both the City of Billings and Yellowstone County, the Yellowstone County Mill, and Federal PL Funds. She noted a general decrease in federal funding but an increase in local funding.

Ms. Mattox outlined the 2025 priorities, which include completing the 21st Street Underpass Feasibility Study, finalizing transportation elements for neighborhood plans, updating the MPO LRTP project list and boundary, enhancing the Mobile Trail Application, revising the Complete Street Progress Report, updating the Bike Share RFP, meeting FHWA's 2.5% set-aside requirement for transportation planning, and refining the Travel Demand Modeling.

Rusty Logan informed the committee that the 2025 transit priorities include completing the Transit Sustainability and Governance Study, which was deferred from FY24. The priorities also involve assessing the feasibility of a rapid transit line connecting the Heights, Downtown, and West End to reduce travel time and explore additional transfer locations. Additionally, the plan includes evaluating and upgrading bus stops to meet ADA requirements and align with the Bus Stop Master Plan, as well as adjusting routes in response to the conversion of downtown one-way streets to two-way streets.

Discussion

Chairman Morse asked the Board if there were any questions or discussion.

Woody Woods, Yellowstone County Planning Board President, requested a reminder of the transit usage numbers. Rusty reported a significant rise in ridership over the summer, with an 80% increase in June and a 90% increase in July compared to last year. He attributed this surge to the fixed-route system implemented in 2023.

Woody mentioned that there has been interest in serving the Lockwood area and asked about the timeline for when this might occur. Rusty responded that it depends on the findings of the feasibility study.

Motion

Mayor Cole made a Motion, seconded by Woody Woods to approve the 2025 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) as submitted. The motion passed unanimously.

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6. Other Business

6a. Metropolitan Planning Organization Process Review. Presentation by Lora Mattox

Lora Mattox presented a review of the Metropolitan Planning Organization conducted by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) for the Billings MPO. The review covered processes and provided recommendations for improvement and enhancement.

The review indicated that the Billings MPO, the largest in Montana, might need to adjust its boundary to encompass the entire urbanized area as defined by the census. Noteworthy aspects included the effective planning and operation agreements, the Public Participation Plan, significant public engagement beyond the required scope, a strong emphasis on non-motorized transportation and its integration with transit, solid stakeholder relationships, and a strong partnership between MET Transit and the MPO.

The recommendations include first updating the financial plan and project lists in the 2023 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) to meet fiscal constraints. Next, ensure that the following LRTP update aligns with regulations on performance measures, targets, and system performance reports. Additionally, improve the TIP narrative to clearly describe investment priorities and performance targets. Review and adjust the metropolitan planning boundary to include both current and future urbanized areas by the end of FY2025. Finally, due to staff turnover, it is essential to document all processes, including TIP updates, UPWP development, and RFP writing.

Mayor Bill Cole inquired about federal funding being split among five entities. Ms. Mattox explained that while the total amount of funding remains the same, it is distributed proportionally based on population. As the planning boundary expands, there is a potential for increased funding, but if Billings MPOs receive more, it could reduce funding for other MPOs statewide. Mayor Cole asked if federal funding ever increases for the entire state. Lora replied that it depends on what new federal transportation policies are put into place.

7. Future Agenda Items

ADJOURNMENT: 12:23pm

Brenda J Berns, Planning Clerk