

POLICY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes of April 15, 2025

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 onto the record for the public hearing.

Members: Commissioner Mark Morse (acting Chairman), Board of County Commissioners; Roger Gravgaard, Yellowstone County Planning Board President; Mayor Bill Cole, MDT District Director Mike Taylor.

Staff Participants: Wyeth Friday, Planning & Community Services Director; Anna Vickers, Planning Division Manager; Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator; Elyse Monat, Transportation Planner; Rusty Logan, MET Transit Manager; Brenda Berns, Planning Clerk

Attendees: City Councilman, Mike Boyett; Kurtis Schrieber, MDT; Sarah Graham, MET; John Ostlund, County Commissioner

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.
 - a. **Election of Chairperson** – Bill Cole made a motion to nominate Roger Gravgaard as the new Chairman. The motion was seconded by Roger Gravgaard. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.
2. **Public Comment Period** – There were no members of the public in attendance.
 - b. Comments on items not on the agenda and requests to add items to future agendas. There were no comments.
 - c. Comments on items on the Non-public and Public Agenda Items. There were no comments.
3. **Motion.** Approval of the Minutes of August 20, 2024

Motion was made by Mark Morse, seconded by Bill Cole to approve the August 20, 2024 meeting minutes as submitted. The motion was carried with a unanimous vote.

3. **Old Business:** There is no Old Business.

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5. New Business

a. Board Discussion and Action: Request to add Grand Avenue from 41st Street West to 62nd Street West to the local Federal Funding Priority.

Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator, provided a brief overview of the proposed project. The existing roadway is currently a two-lane county road. The proposal would upgrade it to a three-lane city arterial, consisting of two travel lanes and a center-turn lane. The project includes a multi-use path on one side of the roadway and a sidewalk on the other, incorporating Safe Routes to School (SRTS) elements identified in the SRTS Plan. Additional improvements include the installation of streetlights, a traffic signal at the intersection of Grand Avenue and 56th Street West, and enhancements to the stormwater infrastructure.

Staff recommends PCC take final action on this item and submit a formal letter to MDT with the PCC signatures.

Motion

Motion made by Bill Cole to formally approve the proposal on Grand Avenue, seconded by Mike Taylor. The motion was carried with a unanimous vote.

b. Board Discussion and Action: Approval of the Billings MPO FY24-28 Transportation Improvement Program Amendment 2.

Lora Mattox, Transportation Coordinator stated this is the construction funding that is allocated to the MPO. The TIP is periodically updated and will see another one in June 2025.

Projects Added:

- Grand Avenue
 - City of Billings sponsored project
 - Reconstruction of Grand Avenue from 41st West to 62nd Street West
 - Federal funding sources for this project include Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) and Surface Transportation Program Urban (STPU)

- King Avenue & 48th Street West
 - MDT sponsored project
 - Construction of a roundabout
 - Federal funding sources for this project include Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) and Carbon Reduction (CR)

- Southern Riverfront Park Trail and Trailside Education Signs: This is a placeholder for potential Recreation Trail Program grant funds applied for by the City.

- New projects are identified in red in the TIP Tables, modifications are noted in green, these modifications include cost and project status.

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Transit Projects –

- 5307
 - Updated amount with actual apportionment for 2025
 - Updated project amounts for maintenance, paratransit,, and operations
 - Updated the Program of Projects table to match project amounts
- 5339
 - Updated formula fund projects and funding amounts to reflect adopted CIP and ERP projects as well as other planned activities including transfer center updates, technology updates, and equipment
 - Updated competitive fund amounts and projects to reflect received competitive grant for paratransit vehicle replacement and equipment
- 5310
 - Updated tables with actual apportionment amounts
 - Updated projects table and amounts to reflect prioritized funding including vehicles for COR, funding for Big Sky Senior Services, and MET Transit bus stop improvements
- TransADE
 - Updated with actual apportionment amounts

Discussion

The board discussed the scope of the Grand Avenue project and expectations for its phasing. The City is considering a phased approach, with construction anticipated to begin in the summer of FY25. The initial phase will likely cover a one- to two-mile segment. Future TIP amendments will reflect updated funding allocations.

Motion

Bill Cole made a motion to approve the MPO FY24-28 Transportation Improvement Program Amendment 2, seconded by Mark Morse. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

c. Board Discussion and Action: Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan Update.

Elyse Monat, Transportation Planner gave a presentation of the Billings area Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan. The original Bikeway and Trails Master Plan was completed in 2017. An update to the plan was proposed in the 2023 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), in response to outdated information, impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, and evolving design guidelines. Following a recommendation from governing bodies, the FY23 UPWP was approved by the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC), which directed the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to proceed with the plan update. Due to funding being allocated across two fiscal years, the project continued into FY24 UPWP.

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A consultant was selected to lead the update, with a total project budget of \$116,935, fully funded by Federal MPO Planning (PL) funds—no local funds were used. The plan update has been carried out over the past two years.

Today, the PCC is scheduled to vote on whether to adopt the updated plan, based on recommendations received from the participating local governments.

The MPO review process includes five key meetings with the following bodies: the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Planning Board, City Council, County Commissioners, and the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC).

It is important to note that a recommendation to deny the plan—or a lack of action—from any or all of these bodies does not halt the review process. Even if all reviewing bodies recommend denial, the plan must still proceed to the PCC for a final determination.

While the County is part of the MPO and therefore included in the review, the majority of the plan is City-focused and aligns with City goals. However, if implemented, the plan could offer regional benefits, such as providing connectivity between the Lockwood system and Billings through potential County linkages.

Goals of the Plan –

The infographic consists of five rows, each with an icon on the left and text on the right. The background is a light green color.

- Icon:** A square with four circles at the corners connected by lines.
- Section Header:** **Make useful connections**
- Bullets:**
 - To transit
 - To schools
 - To commercial and civic destinations
 - To parks, trailheads, destination trails (e.g., Marathon Loop), and recreation areas
 - Close gaps between facilities

- Icon:** A circle divided into three segments, with a person walking in the center.
- Section Header:** **Serve a wide variety of people**
- Bullets:**
 - The overall network should include a connected all-ages-and-abilities network that everyone from young children to seniors feel comfortable and safe using
 - Infrastructure should be clean, easy to understand, and accessible (ADA & PROWAG compliance)
 - The system should benefit both recreational and commuter/utility trips
 - Emphasis should be placed on demographics that rely on active transportation for their daily needs

- Icon:** A heart shape with a person walking inside.
- Section Header:** **Increase the safety and health of the community**
- Bullets:**
 - The system should enable physical activity as part of everyday life
 - Improvements should contribute to a reduction in the number of crashes involving bicyclists and pedestrians and aim to make streets safer for all roadway users
 - The system should increase awareness and visibility of pedestrians and bicyclists
 - The system should contribute to improved air quality and a healthier environment

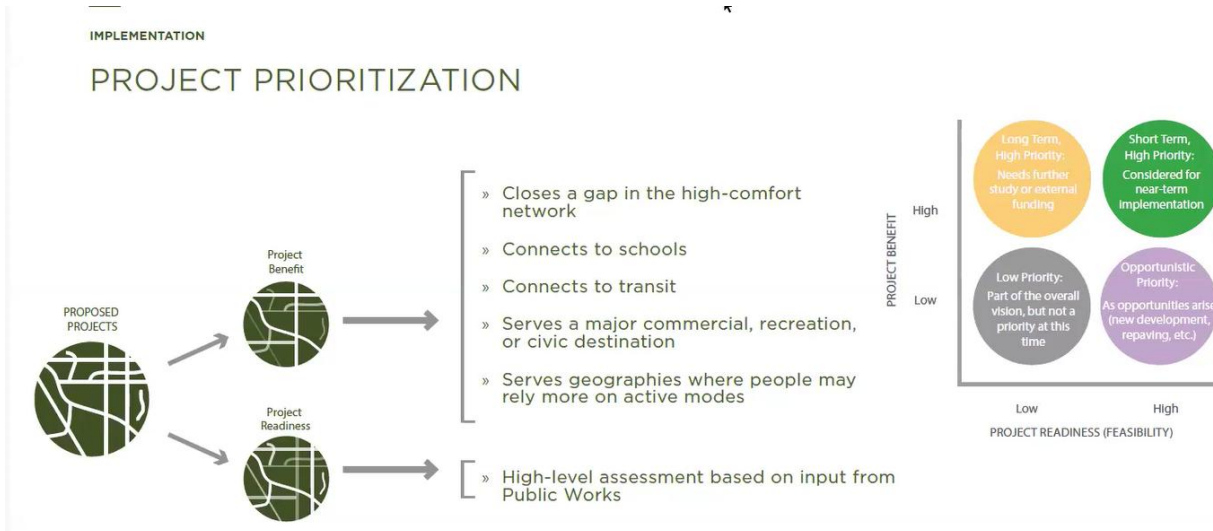
- Icon:** Two interlocking gears.
- Section Header:** **Enable efficient and sustainable implementation**
- Bullets:**
 - Policies and initiatives should allow the City and MPO to build the pedestrian/bicycle network at a faster rate than in previous years
 - The network should be expanded in a way that can be successfully maintained based on local resources

- Icon:** A car, a bus, and a person walking.
- Section Header:** **Expand transportation choices**
- Bullets:**
 - The system should reduce reliance on motor vehicles
 - The system should contribute to an increase in walking and bicycling mode share

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Project Prioritization –



The updated plan categorizes projects into four groups: high-priority short-term projects, high-priority long-term projects, opportunistic projects or low-priority projects.

Compared to the 2017 version, the 2025 plan offers greater flexibility by not specifying facility types, which may lead to more shared-use paths and fewer traditional bike lanes. The updated plan emphasizes inclusive design, focusing on infrastructure that accommodates people of all ages and abilities.

This approach also supports Safe Routes to School (SRTS) efforts by making students feel more comfortable using these routes. The plan promotes smarter investments by prioritizing facilities that are likely to see higher use, shifting the focus from broad coverage to the creation of higher-quality, more impactful infrastructure.

Board Discussion

The committee discussed the proposed Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan Update. One member noted that the project had been tabled by City Council, which prevented them from participating in a vote, though they expressed general support for the project’s intent. Another member referenced a previous vote by the Board of County Commissioners against the plan, citing concerns over low usage of bicycle trails, lack of dedicated maintenance funding, and anticipated reductions in federal funding. These concerns led to questions about the overall return on investment and the justification for continued development.

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Another committee member inquired about potential alignment with the Billings Transportation Master Plan and whether that plan's long-term vision could be integrated into the current effort.

Planning staff provided an overview of the upcoming City Council review of the Transportation Corridor Analysis (formerly called the Transportation Master Plan) scheduled for April 28, 2025, which includes a decision on a consultant contract. The plan is intended to be a long-term initiative, with Phase I focusing on arterial and collector roadways, incorporating public outreach and alignment with future land use planning. The plan is described as data-driven and planning-level, with no spending authority. Traffic data showed a preference for multi-use paths, and detailed design work is expected in Phase II, projected to begin in one to two years.

It was noted that the Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan could inform future transportation corridor analysis, especially in relation to high-comfort corridors. There was also discussion emphasizing the plan's focus on safety, particularly related to school routes for children beyond walking distance. Observations were shared that recent infrastructure additions, such as multi-use paths, have been more frequently used.

When a motion to approve the plan was called, no second was received. Clarification was provided that without a motion and second, the plan would not move forward. It was confirmed that the process would follow normal protocol: a motion, a second, then a vote. Without majority, the item fails and is passed to the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) for consideration. It was also confirmed that MDT is not bound by the committee's recommendation and may vote independently.

A motion was later made to deny the plan update, followed by a suggestion to table the vote until further direction is received from the City Council or Board of County Commissioners. It was noted that the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) met its planning obligations and that if the plan is denied, the current 2017 plan would remain in effect, without affecting ongoing projects.

An MDT representative clarified that the MPO fulfilled its federal planning responsibilities. Regardless of the committee's decision, the outcome does not affect future federal planning obligations or the reimbursement of funds already used for the project.

Motion

Motion made by Committee member Morse to deny approval of the Bicycle Pedestrian Master plan update, seconded by Chairman Gravgaard. Vote 2:1 to approve the motion of denial. Mark Morse and Mike Taylor voted for the motion. Roger Gravgaard voted against the motion. Bill Cole abstained from the vote. The motion to deny carries.

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6. Other Business – There was no Other Business

7. Future Agenda Items

a. Action: Billings MPO FY25 Unified Planning Work Program Amendment.

Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator, stated staff has been asked to look at the impact and analysis in doing multi-modal complete streets and how it impacts anything financial moving forward. In the most recent UPWP, there was a project for a bike scooter RFP contracting with local industry to bring bike share or scooters in. Staff decided now is not an appropriate time to proceed with this project as community goals have changed in what their priorities are. Staff are in the middle of updating the City's complete streets report and looking at the impact of the transportation network, and as a result the UPWP needs to be updated. Staff will be moving forward with that next week and at PCC in May

ADJOURNMENT: 12:57 pm

Brenda J Berns, Planning Clerk