



**TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE AGENDA  
CITY OF BILLINGS AND  
YELLOWSTONE COUNTY  
April 10, 2025  
MEETING TIME: 10:30 AM**



316 N. 26<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Beartooth Conference Room

<b>Committee Members</b>			
Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator, T.A.C.	1	Katie Potts, FHWA	V
Monica Plecker, Director YC Public Works Dept.	1	Wyeth Friday, Director Planning and Community Services	1
Debi Meling, Public Works Director, City of Billings Engineering	1	Mac Fogelsong, City Engineer, City PW Engineering,	1
Rusty Logan, MET Transit Manger	V	Sarah Graham, MET Transit Planner	V
Samantha Woods, Urban Planning Section, MDT	A	Clark Snyder, Environmental Health RiverStone Health	1
Kenn Winegar, Urban Planning Section, MDT	V	Jay D. Anderson Deputy PW Director, YC Public Works	V
Kurtis Schnieber, MDT	A	Emma Belmont, Region 8, FTA	A
Zach Kirkemo, MDT	A	Kyle Shuck, Project Engineer, MDT	V
Mitch Buthod, Urban Planning and Statewide Supervisor, MDT	V		

**Call to Order:** Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator, called the meeting to order at 10:34 am

**Introduction of Committee Members and staff.**

**Staff in Attendance:** Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator; Elyse Monat, Transportation Planner; Brenda Berns, Planning Clerk

**Participants:** Leslie Cook, Rimrock Neighborhood Task Force

**Public Comment:** Leslie Cook, from the Rimrock Neighborhood Task Force, remarks she is here to learn and is advocating for safety improvements along Rimrock Road. The Rimrock Neighborhood Task Force is also interested in the Highway 3 Corridor Study from MDT.

**Approval of the minutes:** March 13, 2025

**Motion:** Rusty Logan, MET Transit Manager, moved to approve March 13, 2025, meeting minutes as submitted by staff. Clark Snyder, Riverstone Health, seconded the motion. The motion carries unanimously.

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

## New Business

a. **Discussion. Recommendation: Billings Federal Fiscal Year 2025 Unified Planning Work Program Amendment**

Lora Mattox, Transportation Planning Coordinator, shares the MPO request to amend the work program to eliminate one project proposal, and move funding to another project.

### Background – Unified Planning Work Program

- **Billings Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP):** A key transportation planning document for the Billings metropolitan area
- **Developed by:** The Billings Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), in coordination with local, state, and federal agencies
- **Purpose:**
  - Outlines transportation planning activities
  - Identifies planning tasks, funding sources, and study schedules
- **Focus Areas:**
  - Roadways
  - Public transit
  - Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure
  - Overall transportation system improvements
- **Compliance:** Ensures adherence to federal transportation planning requirements

• **Long-term Vision:** Supports regional long-range transportation goals

### Amendment Details

- **Why Amend the UPWP?**
  - Periodic updates are needed for project changes, funding shifts, and schedule adjustments
  - Aligns with changing local project priorities
- **FY25 UPWP Amendment Highlights**
  - Proposed changes detailed in Elements 302 and 700
  - Adjustments include project scope and financial allocations
- **Project Shift**
  - Original plan: Issue RFP for a bike and scooter share program
  - Updated plan: Redirect resources to an economic analysis of the City's Complete Streets initiatives
- **Planning Process**
  - Follows MPO's Transportation Planning procedures
  - Ensures public participation and review opportunities
- **Purpose of the Economic/ROI Analysis**
  - Supports strategic, data-driven transportation planning
  - Informs investment decisions and policy development
  - Aims to build a more efficient, sustainable, and economically viable transportation network

Lora mentions it has been a while since an amendment was done for the UPWP. Funds will come from element 302 in the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), which is for planning studies, and element 700, which is contingency (unobligated) funds. Element 302 originally had \$20,000 to develop a bike and scooter share RFP. Due to changing local priorities, staff suggest using the UPWP amendment to move the \$20,000 to an economic analysis of Complete Streets.

Lora mentions that people often ask about an economic analysis/return on investment analysis of Complete Streets. Staff propose moving \$20,000 originally allocated to the bike/scooter share RFP to the Complete Streets Policy economic analysis. Combined existing funding, this will bring the budget to \$45,000. This is intended for hiring an expert to be able to do a breakdown of the economic analysis/return on investment.

As usual, this amendment will go through the local transportation planning process from TAC and move through the county and city, and ultimately to PCC.

## Review Schedule

Technical Advisory Committee (recommendation)	April 10 <sup>th</sup>
Planning Board (recommendation)	April 22 <sup>nd</sup>
City Council (recommendation)	April 28 <sup>th</sup>
County Commissioners Discussion	April 23 <sup>rd</sup>
County Commissioners (recommendation)	April 29 <sup>th</sup>
Policy Coordinating Committee (final action)	May 20 <sup>th</sup>

The Montana Department of Transportation has been sent the information and is okay with the amendment to the UPWP.

### Questions and discussion

Rusty Logan asks if the intent is to have help building a process to use moving forward.

Lora Mattox responds yes, that it provides basic knowledge to use the number and anticipate benefits on various projects. For the most part, it would be for the Complete Streets project.

Rusty clarifies if it is for many projects or for a significant multi-modal project. Lora states it should be functional for more projects and able to overlap.

Monica Plecker, Director YC Public Works Department, asks if this is an adaptable formula.

Elyse Monat, Transportation Planner, responds that based on the example seen, numbers would be developed for a handful of projects that had been implemented. Seeing the value of a handful of historical projects would be beneficial to apply to multiple cases, as Rusty asks.

Debi Meling, City of Billings Public Works Director, asks how the cost is calculated as an ROI. Elyse mentions one method is seeing the commercial corridor having sales increase since the implementation of a route.

Debi asks about things that are not numbers, and asks how the less tangible benefits could be factored in. Elyse states the MPO can work with the consultant to evaluate health benefits, pollution changes, congestion, etc.

Debi asks about the use of accident history in the data. Lora mentions this is where a consultant's help is beneficial. Looking at which factors come in is helpful, because they are not economists and are not certain how to capture each concern.

Debi asks if there is an example or case studies. Elyse notes there are, and they can be shared.

Monica mentions the difference between tangible and intangible factors. She provides the example of not knowing how to put a dollar value on feeling changes. She mentions this is a harder topic to evaluate and is interested to see the methodology used for the community.

Wyeth Friday, Planning and Community Services Director, mentions when the downtown 2-way discussion was going on, there were many case studies that were presented and shared with the community. They often showed if you do these things, good things will happen and account for less conflicts with traffic and increases revenue from retail sales. He states that these are studies that have been done often but is new to Billings.

Debi mentions that the City Council body has had studies like these presented, but does not always believe them and she believes that this will be an easy study to poke holes in. Rusty suggested looking at this based on value added rather than return on investment since the government does not make money on public roadways.

Mitch Buthod, Urban Planning and Statewide Supervisor, MDT, asks how much public involvement will be included and suggests that the public could help weigh in on the more intangible benefits. Lora agrees having public perspective is valuable and that the MPO could work with the task forces.

Debi offers the idea to tag team this with a master plan, which Lora agrees with, and Elyse remarks the timing is a consideration as the two studies may not line up. Lora mentions the timeline to spend the funding ends October 1<sup>st</sup>, and it sounds like outreach for the Transportation Master Plan/Transportation Corridor Analysis will be started in this timeframe.

Monica suggests separating out different types of routes like the neighborhood bikeway, bike lanes, and shared use paths on arterials. She feels the County is more supportive of destination-based routes rather than commuter routes.

Rusty worries about assigning specific dollar values to specific facilities. Lora said she understands the concerns, but that it is important to show the governing bodies that staff are listening to their concerns.

Wyeth mentions the importance of case studies in the review process. He also mentions maintenance, and how the most expensive thing to maintain is the roadway, but that some of the multimodal facilities get specifically called out as not having enough maintenance funding, although they are part of the whole corridor. Debi adds it will take a lot more to maintain a five-lane road with shared use paths than a two-lane county road and she thinks the governing bodies want to know if these facilities should be added.

Debi mentions that she thinks the Council will ask at their meeting on 4/28 how this effort and the transportation corridor study go together.

### **Motion**

A motion was made by Monica Plecker and seconded by Wyeth Friday to recommend that the governing bodies approve the Billings Federal Fiscal Year 2025 Unified Planning Work Program Amendment. The motion carries unanimously.

a. **Discussion: MPO Redesignation from the Planning Board to the Policy Coordinating Committee**

Lora brings up that because of the new Land Use Planning Act, by May 2026, the MPO needs to be designated to a new body.

The current transportation planning process is laborious with the Technical Advisory Committee, two meetings at Council, two meetings at the County Commissioners, and the Policy Coordinating Committee meeting.

The standard operating procedure with MPOs is they have a Technical Advisory Committee and then they have a Policy Coordinating Committee. TAC would have more of a role in the transportation planning documents. The MPO would not go to every board and commission for a vote.

Lora also mentioned that this year, the MPO will be meeting with the County Commissioners and likely with the Legislative and Local Affairs Committee of the City Council to get more input on what the FY26 UPWP should focus on. The goal is to avoid getting the UPWP approved, but having a governing body say later that they don't want to do one of the projects in the UPWP.

TAC membership will likely stay very similar, but the Policy Coordinating Committee membership may change. Voting membership on PCC could be offered to MET Transit, County Public Works, City Public Works, and City/County Planning. This will expedite projects and help the MPO to be more efficient.

Wyeth adds that the Billings MPO is generally in need of updating structurally for the long term and short term. With Billings growth and county growth, adapting is important. Responsibility at PCC will be greater with the new model.

Monica mentions that the feeling of a loss of control from the governing bodies will be a challenge. She says right now it is simple because now each governing body votes, so the representative knows what decision to bring forward.

Debi asks if it is legal for the Mayor to decide on behalf of the Council without their vote.

Mitch responds that a lot of communities have a vote on who represents the governing body in MPO decision making which gives the representative authority to vote on their behalf.

Wyeth mentions that it pushes governing bodies to develop clear policies which would guide votes at PCC.

Monica suggests that during the transition, staff still bring presentations about topics to discussion meetings to show this is not an effort to cut out the BOCC or the Council. Lora responds that this is why the one-on-one meetings will be so important to hear concerns and priorities. Staff will still provide updates on projects at discussion meetings, but the approval process will be more efficient.

Rusty asks if the TAC meetings will be held more often to discuss, as a working group, and if governing bodies should be attending TAC more often to gather information in the approval process. Lora responds that TAC will be more like a working group. MPO staff will still share informational updates with the governing bodies.

Wyeth adds that PCC meetings could be held more often, and include more discussion, rather than just action items. Mitch adds that more frequent PCC meetings gives the members of the PCC time to learn about an issue, bring it back to their body for a vote, and return next month with a decision from the body. Rusty states that he likes the idea Mitch presented as it puts the responsibility on the representative at PCC to report back to their body governing, rather than having Elyse and Lora take on the responsibility. Katie Potts, FHWA, adds that this process would also help with public involvement and could improve the whole of the MPO by having issues discussed in a public forum.

Wyeth states that to Mitch's point, staff can look at the processes for the MPOs in Helena and Bozeman. Mitch says he can follow up and show methods they are using. It seems they are following a draft round and final action around on their items.

As an example, Mitch asks about how the timeline for this UPWP amendment would be shortened if this new structure is implemented. Lora remarks that if it is going from TAC to PCC, it may be 30 days instead of 60 days.

Wyeth agrees the time would be reduced, and number of meetings would also be reduced. Mitch remarks that it is a benefit for all parties. Projects pending TIP approval have to be put on hold with the current extensive process, but the structure change would help.

Monica mentions that for most items in TAC, it would be easy to present the following week at the PCC unless there is a lot of debate on the topic.

Lora hopes that updated UPWP development process will be helpful so that the governing bodies feel more involved in advance.

**Other Business:**

a. **MET Transit Update –**

Rusty is in the new MET facility, but it is not yet open to the public.

He mentions at City Council Meeting on Monday that there was discussion about the airport moving to an airport authority and there was discussion about getting a scope of work developed to get a consultant on board for this effort. There was also discussion about a Transit Authority.

The MET Funding Sustainability and Governance study RFP will be published next week. Getting someone on board and selecting best models will be reviewed soon to see possibilities to expand transit service.

Bills moving forward include House Bill 764 which passed the senate reading as amended. This supports municipalities like Billings to operate transit services more than 8 miles outside of their city limit boundaries if supported by federal/state funding or an interlocal agreement for service. This provides more opportunity for MET to reach out and provide service to Laurel at the next census. Transportation districts would be easier to establish or change, and the County could do this by a petition by a single commissioner and single passing of a resolution by the county rather than needing to be initiated by voters. It would then go to the voters for approval.

Transportation Study Bill SJ19 would be a bill to support the passenger rail lines that are being discussed. This could establish different transportation modes, including port authorities.

b. **Other**

Lora mentions that a PCC meeting will be held April 15<sup>th</sup> at noon. Three items will be finalized, including Grand Avenue, the TIP amendment, and Ped/Bike Plan Master Plan.

Next month, there will be a TAC meeting to discuss next year's UPWP and scoring of transportation alternative projects that came in. Grants were due yesterday, and based on requests, both may be funded. Lora mentions starting another TIP amendment process.

**Future Agenda Items:** None

**Adjournment 11:26AM**