

Flathead County Transportation Advisory Committee

Minutes

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Meeting was held via zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/97299137971?pwd=V25SRGQ5S1ZFUFHGOEpscW16eVdEZz09>

Meeting ID: 972 9913 7971

Passcode: 389743

Kyle Waterman called meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

Members Present: Randy Brodehl (Commissioner), Jenny Cloutier, Jeny Covill, Shawna Himsl, Marceen Liechti, Marcy Roberts, Robert Smith, Tagen Vine, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman (Chair)

Staff Present: Lisa Sheppard (Agency on Aging Director), Dale Novak (Transit Manager), Kristina Stone (Transit Office Coordinator), Elizabeth Wood (Dispatcher), Alan Gilbertson

Guests: Seven guests were in attendance: Wade Kline and Mark Rohweder (KLJ Engineering), Karin Hilding (City of Whitefish), Tom Tabler (City of Kalispell), Susan Nicosia (City of Columbia Falls), James Freyholtz and Vicki Crnich (MDT)

Call to Order: Chair Kyle Waterman opened the meeting.

Public Comments: There was no public comment.

Chair Opening Remarks: Kyle welcomed everyone to the meeting. Given that we are engaged in annual planning and undergoing significant changes within transit and in the Valley as a whole, he encouraged members to be thinking beyond COVID and about what we want the system to look like going forward and what our highest priorities should be, noting that one of those priorities is hiring a permanent transit manager. All those in attendance introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes: Members reviewed the minutes of the October 1, 2020 meeting. Tagen moved to approve the minutes. Randy Brodehl seconded. All in favor. Motion Passed.

Presentation on Cities' Transportation Plan Updates- Wade Kline, KLJ Engineering

- Lisa thanked Wade for his willingness to share some of his preliminary data with us and for his time.
- Wade explained that he has been working on new twenty-year Transportation Plans with Kalispell, Columbia Falls and Whitefish. Whitefish and Columbia Falls are both about 25% of the way through the process, while Kalispell is about 70% done. The Kalispell Plan is also looking at the Evergreen area. The planning process for all three cities includes multiple opportunities for public input, and transit has been part of those discussions.
- Wade presented preliminary travel study results that show opportunities for public transit to help address transportation needs, particularly in the north-south corridor in and between Kalispell and Whitefish and the Reserve Drive area. Wade noted that the origin to destination data they are capturing, including key patterns, will be useful in future transit planning.

- Wade presented information about travel to and from the airport.
- Wade noted the City of Whitefish has the most interest in public transit as a potential solution to some of their mobility challenges, including park-n-rides, service to the airport and coordination with the Snow Bus.
- Members asked questions about the data presented and about the data collection process.

Discussion- TAC Priorities for FY 2022 - Lisa Sheppard Director, Flathead County AOA

- Lisa noted members will be voting on the annual Transportation Coordination Plan at the February meeting and today is an opportunity for members to give input on the Plan.
- Lisa reviewed the **Update on Transit Issues/Projects** handout and discussion followed:
 - **Pending separation of transit from the AOA.** Lisa mentioned that transit has grown exponentially over the past 8 years and that separation would be a good move both structurally and financially. Lisa added that all three commissioners are on board with the split.
 - An update was given regarding the new Transit Director position. A job description has been sent to HR. We have also obtained the services of an executive recruiting firm that will help us find the replacement.
 - **Question-** When is the separation of the departments likely to happen?
 - **Answer-** Commissioner Brodehl explained that the commissioners might come to a decision in January and the separation would possibly happen in February or March.
 - **Mountain Climber rebranding effort:**
 - MDT has approved using CARES Act funds to wrap the vehicles. Most will be completed by the end of March 2021.
 - Snow Ghost, the firm that designed the MC logo and wraps, is working with us on a new website.
 - Since Mountain Climber is a service brand, the new department will most likely be called something generic like Flathead County Public Transportation to allow for evolving branding over time.
 - **On-Demand service and software:**
 - **Question** - Kevin asked what our measure of success will be for the On-Demand service.
 - **Answer-** Lisa noted that, ultimately, we will want to see ridership equaling or exceeding pre-COVID fixed route/paratransit numbers, but we're also looking at customer satisfaction and the degree to which we are serving passengers who benefit from transit but couldn't access it before because of the inherent limitations in our fixed route system.
 - **Comment** - Dale talked about the software increasing the efficiency of the system, making it possible to provide more rides with existing resources.
 - **Question** - Will we be bringing back any fixed city runs?
 - **Answer-** Not in the near-term. We have the option to re-introduce fixed routes at any time, and the software we are looking at would support an improved paratransit system as well. Dale also commented that we could consider any number of options, including commuters, that can be integrated into the system.
 - **Question** - Marcy asked what this looks like for the Premium Dial-A-Ride area now and going forward.
 - **Answer-** We're serving the former Premium Dial-A-Ride area with On-Demand service now. Going forward, it depends on how many resources we have and how much capacity we gain using the new software.
 - **Comment** - Kyle mentioned that with the rebranding and system changes we need to educate the public and develop a marketing plan.
- Kyle asked members to discuss any opportunities or obstacles they see in achieving our goals moving forward.

- **Comment** - Shawna mentioned that she is excited about the rebranding but is also wondering if the lack of a route with a set schedule will be a problem for some riders.
 - **Comment**- Lisa mentioned that people will have even more flexibility and convenience with the On-Demand service and will have more control over their own scheduling once we have the new software/app (and can still call in if they need to).
- **Comment**- Commissioner Brodehl said an obstacle going forward might be funding and that we need to make sure we're getting the best value for the taxpayer.
- **Comment**- Lisa added that funding drives everything we do. Looking forward, we feel that rebranding to the Mountain Climber is more inclusive of the community as a whole and might be more attractive to potential funding partners.
- **Comment**- Kyle mentioned that it would be really great if we could get local hotels to partner with us. He also posed the question: Who are essential partners are that aren't yet at the table?
 - **Comment**- Jenny said she feels Glacier National Park is as essential partner as they drive so much of the visitation to the area.
 - **Comment**- Kyle mentioned that once the separation takes place we need to keep Lisa involved as an AOA resource.
 - **Comment**- Tagen suggested visitor centers and chambers of commerce as important partners.
 - **Comment**- Lisa said we need to continue discussion with the cities and collaborate where our priorities intersect.
 - **Comment**- Commissioner Brodehl indicated public transportation shouldn't compete with private industry in the Valley.
 - **Comment**- Lisa noted we are required to reach out to private industry, invite them to participate in our planning process and coordinate our services with them whenever possible.
 - **Question**- Shawna asked what private provides still exist in the area now that Glacier Taxi is out of business. **Answer** – Arrow Shuttle and Rocky Mountain Transportation (Snow Bus)
 - **Comment**- Kyle suggested TAC members can help recruit partners and encourage community engagement.

Surveys: Lisa mentioned that we currently have an on-board survey and a general public survey underway and asked for TAC member assistance in circulating the public survey.

Closing Comments

- Lisa suggested we could add a January meeting if members would like additional opportunity to provide TCP input. After some discussion, members decided to schedule a meeting for Thursday January 7th at 2:00 p.m.

Member Announcements

- None at this time

Meeting Closed at 12:10 p.m.



Flathead County Transportation Advisory Committee

Minutes

Thursday, June 15, 2021

Meeting was held via Zoom

<https://zoom.us/j/7634019667?pwd=Ulh0a2JzYWJwcThQLzZyMFhXWkxUdz09>

Meeting ID: 763 401 9667

Passcode: jHrF1m

Kyle Waterman called meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Members Present: Randy Brodehl (Commissioner), Jenny Cloutier, Jennyh Covoll, Shawna Himsl, Jessica Kramer, Marcy Roberts, Robert Smith, Tagen Vine, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman

Staff Present: Dale Novak (Transportation Director), Kristina Stone (Transit Operations Coordinator), Elizabeth Wood (Dispatcher), Lindsay Reid (Dispatcher)

Guests: Melissa Nielsen (Blind and Low Vision Services), Karen Hilding (Whitefish City), Garrett Brinker (VIA)

Call to Order: TAC Chair Kyle Waterman opened the meeting.

Public Comments: There was no public comment.

Chair Opening Remarks: Kyle welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members and guests introduced themselves. Kyle also covered our strategic goals that we have accomplished over the past year. These goals include separating from the Agency on Aging, completing the RFP for the new software program, and hiring a new director. We are still in need of a Vice Chair for the TAC, Kyle encouraged all to be thinking about who may want to step up to the job.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes of the April 1, 2021, meeting were reviewed. Tagen Vine moved to approve the minutes. Second by Randy Brodehl. All in favor. Motion Passed.

Transportation Department Update- Dale Novak Transportation Director

- Dale mentioned that we are very fortunate to have Garrett Brinker from VIA with us today.
- We have been holding weekly Zoom meetings with VIA as we are planning for launch. We have held two Monday meetings so far.
- Ridership is up and down with the warmer weather. We get fewer rides when the weather is nicer, however our on-demand rides continue to increase.
- Operationally we filled our last two open positions. We had one summer seasonal position and one .75-time position.

Via Mobility Presentation- Garrett Brinker

- Garrett mentioned that this has been quite a while in the works, and it is great to finally see it coming to fruition.
- Garrett also said that it was really nice to meet everyone in person when he was in town last week. He was able to ride the Mountain Climber and it was a quick response time. He was also able to stop in the office and meet the office staff in person.
- Garrett gave his presentation briefly touching on different facets of VIA service.
 - **Question-** Kyle W. asked how some of the other agencies using VIA were able to expand their services with the same budget.
 - **Answer-** Garrett mentioned that each agency was a little different. Some of them changed from a fixed route system only to an all demand or combination system. By going to on demand a lot of the agencies began using smaller vehicles which saves on fuel costs. The upgrade in the software and the algorithm helps rides to be grouped up well helping them to be more efficient.
 - **Question- Kyle** asked what happened if there is a loss of internet service.
 - **Answer-** Garrett mentioned that the driver app is preloaded with prescheduled rides, this enables the driver to be able to scroll through those rides in the case that there is a loss of internet service. They would then be able to route themselves manually.
 - **Question-** Shawna asked if the idea of ever getting fixed routes back in the valley are dead in the water and a thing of the past.
 - **Answer-** Dale replied that is not necessarily the case. That is part of what VIA is going to help us establish. Once we start getting a history of where our concentrated rides are going to and from, we may be able to establish if a fixed route may be of benefit to us.
 - **Question-** Shawna asked if the micro transit systems work well in bigger populations or not.
 - **Answer-** Garrett mentioned that the largest On Demand system that they serve in the US is in Arlington Texas with a 400K population. They also serve Berlin with over 170 vehicles in their fleet. Larger areas are very successful with the On Demand service.
 - **Comment-** Mary Riddle commented that we are now set up to do a fixed commuter between cities and on demand within the cities however we do not have the commuter.
 - **Comment-** Dale added that our ultimate goal would be to get the commuter back and thus create a successful on demand system with the tri-city commuter in conjunction with a first and last mile service.
 - **Comment-** Dale also mentioned that we are currently receiving rural transit 5311 funding. He explained that once we hit 50K population within our city limits we move to a 5310 funding. The only other cities with the 5310 funding in the state of Montana are Missoula, Billings and Great Falls. Bozeman is very close to reaching the 50K.
 - **Question-** Does the software help with the planning and how does the software account for changes such as fixed routes.
 - **Answer-** The software can facilitate both micro transit and fixed route or a combination of the two services.
 - **Question-** Kevin W. asked if the software and the App will save the rider data and previous trip information.
 - **Answer-** Garrett answered that some previous trip data will be saved for the rider convenience. He also stated that VIA uses the most secure cloud hosting and have never had any security issues. He additionally mentioned that they have never had any issues with stolen payment information.

- **Question-** Karen H. asked if a consultant was being hired out to provide transit planning to go with transportation on demand, and if so when will they begin their work.
- **Question-** Commissioner Brodehl asked that we keep our IT department involved as we proceed.
- **Comment-** Dale mentioned that we had IT included on our last meeting with VIA held yesterday.
- **Comment-** Commissioner Brodehl commented that it is very important that our IT department is very comfortable with the safety of any client or County information.
- **Question-** Mellissa N. asked if the app for the riders would be accessible for iPhone and Samsung voice over.
- **Answer-** Garrett said that the app will facilitate iPhone and Samsung voice over.
- **Question-** Kyle W. asked if the app would facilitate reoccurring rides.
- **Answer-** Garrett answered that yes, the app will facilitate reoccurring rides.
- **Question-** Commissioner Brodehl reiterated that the safety of rider personal information is of utmost importance. He also asked if there was any way for the information to not be saved.
- **Answer-** Garrett answered that he has never seen an instance or situation where they did elimination or deleting of data. He also mentioned that Amazon is the 3rd party web service they use, and they are rated very high for privacy and safety.
- **Question-** Does Amazon own the information and are they able to do whatever they want with the information.
- **Answer-** Garrett stated that no, Amazon does not own the information, nor can they use it for whatever they want.
- **Question-** Jenny C asked if there might be a way to integrate the S.N.O.W. Bus schedule in with any future schedules listed on the VIA app.
- **Discussion-** There was discussion about how they could possibly make the integration of the schedules work and it was decided that Jenny could reach out to Garrett for further information on what that would look like and how we could possibly make that happen.
- **Question-** A member of the TAC asked if Park and Rides make sense with micro transit.
- **Answer-** Garrett stated that yes, sometimes it does. Bigger cities for sure benefit from park and Rides and cities with parking issues as well. In some cases, smaller cities benefit as well.
- **Comment-** Dale mentioned that Elizabeth does the marketing for the Mountain Climber.
- **Comment-** Kyle mentioned that perhaps we could meet before the next meeting with Elizabeth to go over different ideas for marketing including in the Whitefish area.

TAC By-laws- Kyle Waterman

- Kyle stated that the TAC By-laws were recently reviewed in 2014. He also suggested that the largest change he sees for any By-law revising would be re-writing the By-laws focusing on the TAC rather than with the AOA agenda in mind. Kyle read the TAC Purpose from the By-laws.
- Kyle asked Commissioner Brodehl what his expectations are for the TAC. Commissioner Brodehl answered that he is looking for an advisory role from the TAC. He also mentioned that Dale should be able to look at the By-laws to ensure that any changes in service are in line with the By-laws.

Motion

- Tagen V. made a motion for Kyle and Dale to work on revising the By-laws. Second by Shawna H. There was some discussion and motion passed.

- Kyle will send out track changes on the By-laws to the TAC.
 - **Question-** Marcy R. asked if they would be open to suggestions and additionally, she is wondering if we can send out a survey out regarding assessing if we are meeting the needs of the community.
 - **Answer-** Kyle stated that he will put together surveys for both the community needs as well as separate survey for the TAC.
 - **Comment-** Kyle mentioned that we still need a vice Chair for the TAC.
 - **Comment-** Commissioner Brodehl suggested that we add the vote for the Vice Chair to the next agenda.

Member Announcements

- Mary Riddle mentioned that a press release on the ticketed entry of the park will go out the end of the week. She also mentioned that they are still crunching numbers, however, May is looking to be the busiest May on record.
- Marcy Roberts announced that she is not going to contract with the State beginning July 1st. She also mentioned that she will continue to serve on the TAC for the time being.

Next meeting will be Thursday August 5th 2:00 p.m.

Meeting Closed at 3:30 p.m.