



## Transportation Advisory Committee

Flathead County South Campus Building, Kalispell, MT

### Minutes

Thursday, August 1, 2019

Chuck Wilhoit called meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.

**Members Present:** Hugh Austin, Carla Augustad, Bill Gehling, Marceen Liechti, Marcy Roberts, Robert Smith, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman, Chuck Wilhoit

**Staff Present:** Lisa Sheppard (Agency on Aging Director), Thomas Schneider (Eagle Transit Manager), Nicole Birk (Eagle Transit-GNP Lead), Kristina Stone (Office Coordinator), Elizabeth Wood (Eagle Transit Dispatcher/GNP Coordinator), Lindsay Reid (Eagle Transit Dispatcher)

**Guests:** No guests present

**Call to Order:** TAC Chair, Chuck Wilhoit opened the meeting.

**Public Comments:** No members of the public were present to comment

**Chair Opening Remarks:** Chuck welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance and participation in the meeting. He mentioned it would be a smaller meeting due to busy summer schedules.

**Approval of Minutes:** Minutes were reviewed. Bill Gehling moved to approve the Minutes from the April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019 Meeting. Carla Augustad seconded. All in favor. Motion passed. No meeting in June.

### **Transportation Manager Report - Tom Schneider**

- Tom reviewed the ridership statistics for the end of Fiscal Year 2019, noting the 116,000 rides are well above the 99,000 rides provided in fiscal year 2018 and represent the first time Eagle Transit has broken the 100,000 ride threshold.
  - Additionally, we saw many months over 9000 rides and several over 10,000, which is a new trend.
  - Lisa pointed out ridership is at record high even with Glacier National Park #s (over 15,000 rides up from FY 2018).
  - The Orange Line, which was implemented at the beginning of the calendar year as a result of what we learned on our planning trip to Bozeman, contributed to the increase in ridership, providing more than 1500 rides each quarter. The success of the line stems from targeting pick-ups at high higher density apartment complexes and other multi-family housing and popular destinations such as Albertsons and the Hutton Ranch area.

- Tom described the proposed Blue Line, which would target those areas where we have a lot of passengers needing to get to health care related appointments and services. It would pick up at the front doors of apartments and assisted living facilities and drop off at various locations around KRMC as well as local pharmacies.
  - We need financial participation from the hospital and other community partners to implement the plan.
- Tom reported on the Glacier Commuter
  - We added a second commuter bus this season and are providing rides fare free. Passengers still have to pay to get into the Park.
  - The route this season is focused on pick-ups at hotels in Kalispell to get a sense of the demand for commuter service from local lodging to the Park.
  - The route does not include Whitefish this year as we were unable to coordinate times with the Snow Bus. Additionally, we requested but did not receive financial support from BMCA. We hope to partner with them next year.
  - The rental car shortage this season is severe and is creating more interest in the commuter service.
  - Ridership is up 24% over last year.
- Tom updated the Committee on the status of bus stop signs in Kalispell.
  - About half of the Green Line signs are up.
  - About half of the Orange Line have been submitted to City for permits.
  - A big thank you to Kyle Waterman for helping with signs.
- **Question-** Chuck Wilhoit asked if there has been an increased strain on our equipment/buses due to increased ridership? Tom replied that we are mostly ok as we have received a number of new buses.

## **Transportation Development Plan Update**

### ***Planning trip to Acadia National Park, Maine***

- Tom presented the integrated transit model used in Acadia National Park, Maine, noting we will be making a formal presentation to Glacier National Park on our findings and resulting proposal on September 4<sup>th</sup>.
  - Like ours, the system is operated under a Cooperative Agreement (CA). The CA is between Acadia National Park and Downeast Transportation (which is like Eagle Transit) and is supported by the Maine Department of Transportation.
  - Acadia and its surrounding communities are similar in many ways to ours.
    - They have 3.5 million seasonal visitors to the Park; we have 3 million.
    - Their peak season is also in summer and is similar in length to ours.
    - They operate 39 buses; we operate 34.

- Their communities are somewhat similar in size and distance from the Park.
- Some features of the system include:
  - A single, integrated system that runs inside the Park, between the gateway communities and the Park, and within and between the communities.
  - It operates a single “brand” of bus called the Island Explorer.
  - The system is fare free.
  - The buses run early to late 7 days a week.
  - The Island Explorer stops at hotels, shops, restaurants, businesses and popular spots inside the Park. It connects the gateway communities to the Park and to each other. Visitors can have a complete experience without using a personal car or worrying about parking.
  - A 2012 Economic study showed that 21% of businesses had employees that used the Island Explorer to get to work.
  - Marketing strategies are inclusive and mutual. The transit system promotes Park attractions and local businesses on its schedules. The hotels promote the Island Explorer as an amenity; they and other local businesses sell Park passes and some voluntarily donate 2% of sales profits to Acadia.
  - The system is mostly funded by the Park, but the State of Maine DOT, municipalities, hotels and businesses and private donors contribute.
    - The Friends of Acadia, like our Glacier Conservancy, is a partner
    - L.L. Bean is the corporate sponsor, giving \$200,000 a year to support the system. Buses are not wrapped but do acknowledge the L.L. Bean “conservation “sponsorship”.
    - Acadia staff and Downeast Transportation staff attend township meetings together to gain support for the Island Explorer
- Acadia and its gateway communities work together to manage the challenges associated with high visitorship and create a positive visitor experience.
  - The Park experience begins in the communities. The Island Explorer has a visitor center in Bar Harbor with Park staff on hand to answer questions and promote Park activities.
  - There is an emphasis on local goods, services and experiences in the communities.
  - The Island Explorer benefits locals, especially workers, as much as visitors
- **Question** - Kevin Warrington asked how much the hotels and businesses are paying in? **Answer** - Tom stated between \$500-\$4,000 annually.
- **Question** - Kyle Waterman asked what hours the system served the downtown area? **Answer** - Tom stated between 9:00am and 10:00am to Around 10:00pm

- Tom presented some ideas on how we might adapt the Acadia model here in the Flathead.
  - We're tentatively calling it the Mountain Climber
- Tom talked about the GNP Commuter this season
  - The commuter is focusing on hotel stops in Kalispell as a pilot project to gauge interest.
    - **Question-** Marcy asked if the hotels are willing to pay into the system?
    - **Answer-** Tom said he has informed them that this is a Pilot Program and we would need funding from them in order for us to continue the service next year.
  - We couldn't work out an arrangement that would allow us to stop in Whitefish this year but are hoping to next year.

### ***Discussions with City of Whitefish***

- Tom reported on his ongoing discussions with the City of Whitefish and area stakeholders regarding transit solutions to parking concerns and the possibility of coordinating winter service with the Snow Bus.
- David Kack, Western Transportation Institute, is consulting with the Whitefish group on these issues.

### ***Evergreen and Columbia Falls***

- David Kack is also consulting for us regarding the Evergreen and Columbia falls runs to develop potential workable solutions for these areas given low ridership and high costs of service.

### **Other Discussion**

- Tom, Lisa and Nicole attended the annual Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) Conference in May. Tom and Nicole received Instructor Certification for PASS training for drivers. Lisa attended two intensive courses, one on procurement and another on branding and marketing.
- Lisa attended the National Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) conference in July which included an all-day transportation workshop. She learned we provide a lot of transportation to older adults and people with disabilities relative to other participants and that our new Orange Line and Blue Line concept are innovative ways to improve service and address some common challenges that other participants were interested in learning about.
- Carla Augustad reported that Applied Materials has grant money up to \$100,000 that we might want to look into.

- Claudia Walter is moving back to Germany. She asked Chuck to say farewell to all and has enjoyed her time with the TAC. Chuck suggested we contact Jane Karas at FVCC about a new representative.
- Chuck asked members to consider volunteering for a subcommittee to work on partners and sponsors for the Mountain Climber.
- The Planning Committee will regroup after the September presentation to Glacier National Park.

***Meeting Adjourned.***



## Transportation Advisory Committee

Flathead County South Campus Building, Kalispell

### Minutes

Thursday, October 3, 2019

Lisa Sheppard called meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

**Members Present:** Carla Augustad, Hugh Austin, Randy Brodehl (Commissioner), Marceen Liechti, Marcy Roberts, Robert Smith, Kyle Waterman

**Staff Present:** Lisa Sheppard (Agency on Aging Director), Thomas Schneider (Eagle Transit Transportation Manager) Nicole Birk (Eagle Transit-GNP), Elizabeth Wood (Dispatcher)

**Guests:** Jessica Kramer (FVCC)

**Call to Order:** The TAC Chair, Chuck Wilhoit, was unable to attend the meeting. There is currently no Vice-Chair is, so Lisa Sheppard filled in for Chuck and opened/facilitated the meeting.

**Public Comments:** There was no public comment.

**Chair Opening Remarks:** Lisa welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance and participation in the meeting. Lisa welcomed Jessica Kramer from FVCC. She will apply to replace Claudia who has moved.

**Approval of Minutes:** Minutes were reviewed. Robert Smith moved to approve the minutes from 08/1/2019 meeting. Randy Brodehl Seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

#### **Nominating Committee:**

- Lisa mentioned that we are currently without a Vice-Chair. She suggested that we consider having election of Officers since we are likely overdue according to our by-laws. Due to the number of member absences at today's meeting, Lisa suggested we revisit this issue at our next meeting in January.

#### **Upcoming TAC and Public Meetings:**

- Lisa reminded everyone that we will not have a November or December meeting.
- Our next meetings will be held on January 2<sup>nd</sup> and February 6<sup>th</sup>. These are critical meetings TAC members will provide input on and vote on the annual Transportation Coordination Plan, 5311 application and capital request. Please plan to attend if at all possible.
- We will host our annual public meeting(s) in December. All TAC members are invited.

### **Transportation Manager Report** - Tom Schneider, Transportation Manager

- Tom explained the ridership data provided on the handout.
- Tom provided an update on changes to the Orange Line to streamline service and maximize ridership
  - We removed several stops south of Beg Park due to low ridership.
  - We also moved Rosauers and Lions Park stops from the Green Line to the Orange line
  - We have been picking up an average of 11-14 college kids in the A.M.
- Tom noted we split the Kalispell City Green Line from one figure-eight loop into a north and a south run calling the north run the Green Line and the south run the Red Line. This change facilitates transfers at Gateway Community Center, which in turn increases the ridership count on the city buses.
- The City of Kalispell has placed 10 bus stop signs so far and will install the remaining signs as time and weather permit.
- Having numerous newer buses in the fleet is finally resulting in maintenance savings.
- Staff attended the Montana Transit Association fall business meeting where members voted to hold the MTA spring conference in Kalispell.
- Nicole Birk gave an end-of-season recap for shuttle service in Glacier Park
  - The Hiker-Biker Season started in May and ended June 22<sup>nd</sup> and ran 5 buses/trailers.
  - We provided 13,000 rides in the September shoulder season. We ran one large bus and five Sprinters on the west side, and two large buses on the east side. As is typical, we were short drivers due to school starting.
  - The Glacier Commuter run ended with 9,951 rides and did not run after Labor Day. These numbers were down some previous seasons due to one of the larger buses being broken down necessitating use of a smaller capacity bus as a replacement.
  - We started the regular season with over 40 drivers. We were able to fill all of the runs on the west side until school started, but we were short drivers on the east side all season.
  - Total rides were 255,000.

### **Transportation Development Plan Update** – Lisa Sheppard, Agency on Aging Director

- Lisa summarized where we are in the planning process, noting we are waiting on consultant recommendations for Columbia Falls and Evergreen. The planning grant will wrap-up at the end of December. Staff will produce a final report once all of the planning work is complete.
- Lisa updated members on our Mountain Climber proposal to Glacier National Park management on September 4<sup>th</sup> as well as presentations to other community groups/stakeholders, including city and business leaders. While community stakeholders have been overwhelmingly positive about proposal so far, Park management seems reserved and cautious.
- We have also been in discussions with Montana Department of Transportation staff about the proposal and the possibility of using 5311 funds to support the

shuttle system, which we have not been allowed to do to date. They also participated in the September 4<sup>th</sup> meeting via phone. They have been unwilling this far to reconsider their position on the 5311 funding and have indicated the state may not have a future role as a Cooperative Agreement partner.

- Lisa attended Glacier National Park's public meeting regarding the recently released Going-to-the-Sun Road Corridor Management Plan, where she provided both written and verbal comment focusing on the ways in which the Mountain Climber could address many of the issues raised in the report. Commissioners have also submitted written comment.
- Commissioner Brodehl mentioned the Department of Interior directed GNP to address visitor flow issues a couple of years ago. He has visited with DOI officials, including the Secretary, as well as our senators and congressman, and they are putting pressure on the Park to work with us to resolve our concerns and develop a system that works.
- Members discussed the Mountain Climber at length, as well as asked questions about current shuttle operations and 5311 funding restrictions. Members expressed continued excitement about and support for the Mountain Climber and offered suggestions as we continue or discussions and advocacy efforts.
- Lisa thanked Commissioner Brodehl as well as Senators Daines and Tester and Congressman Gianforte for their support. Lisa also mentioned the Daily Inter Lake will be doing a front-page article shortly covering the Mountain Climber proposal.
- Lisa mentioned the Park has extended their public comment deadline on the GTSR report to November 6<sup>th</sup> and asked if the TAC wanted to offer written comment as group. **MOTION:** Robert Smith moved to authorize Lisa to draft a Letter of Support for the Mountain Climber to be presented as public comment on the GTSR Corridor Management Plan on behalf of the TAC and authorize Chuck Wilhoit to approve and submit the letter. The motion was seconded by Carla Augustad. All in favor. Motion passed.

### **Next TAC Meeting**

- Lisa reminded everyone again that our next regular meetings will be held on January 2, 2020 and February 6, 2020.

Lisa thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 3:37 pm.





**Transportation Advisory Committee**  
Flathead County South Campus Building, Kalispell

**Minutes**

Thursday, February 6, 2020

Lisa Sheppard called meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

**Members Present:** Carla Augustad, Hugh Austin, Randy Brodehl (Commissioner), Jenny Cloutier, Marceen Liechti, Marcy Roberts, Robert Smith, Tagen Vine, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman

**Staff Present:** Lisa Sheppard (Agency on Aging Director), Thomas Schneider (Eagle Transit Transportation Manager), Kristina Stone (Eagle Transit), Elizabeth Wood (Dispatcher)

**Guests:** Five (5) public guests in attendance

**Call to Order:** The TAC Chair, Chuck Wilhoit was unable to attend the meeting. The Vice-Chair position is still unfilled, so Lisa Sheppard opened/facilitated the meeting.

**Public Comments:** There was no public comment.

**Chair Opening Remarks:** Lisa welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance and participation in the meeting. Lisa briefly went over the agenda and explained the voting process.

**Approval of Minutes:** Minutes of the January 2, 2020 meeting were reviewed. Tagen Vine moved to approve. Robert Smith Seconded. All in favor. Motion Passed.

**Transportation Coordination Plan/5311 Application/Capital Request**

***Transportation Coordination Plan (TCP)***

Lisa reviewed the FY 2021 TCP in full, noting it is developed based on data analysis, multiple internal and external planning efforts (including the 5-Year Transportation Development Plan), TAC input and diverse stakeholder input. Discussion and comments below.

- Lisa referenced the Eagle Transit FY 2020 (to date) ridership handout, explaining the data and how it is reflected in the TCP in both the description of services and the development of priorities and strategies for achieving priorities.
- Lisa explained the structure and management of Eagle Transit relative to the Agency on Aging and Flathead County Commissioners.

- In providing background to the TCP, Lisa noted the increasing and ongoing growth in population and commercial/residential development in the Flathead as well as the 3 million plus visitors that travel here annually as challenges for our system, currently and looking into the future. As pointed out in our recent Mountain Climber proposal, “the status quo is not acceptable, but if we want to increase the services we provide in a way that meets our communities’ needs, we must find additional funding and local planning/financial partners.
- Lisa reviewed the recently completed 5-Year Transportation Development Plan and its impact on the TCP. Phase 1 was completed and recommendation implemented in July 2018. Phase 2, which focused on our Cooperative Agreement with Glacier National Park and possible alternatives for Evergreen and Columbia Falls, wrapped up in December 2019. A draft report has been submitted to MDT.
  - Lisa commented that although we were unable to come to an agreement with Glacier National Park, resulting in Flathead County Commissioners terminating the Cooperative Agreement, we have been inspired by community interest to continue pursuing the Mountain Climber project to provide better connectivity within and between our gateway communities, leaving open the possibility of connecting to the Park at some point in the future.
  - Lisa reviewed the consultant’s report on Evergreen and Columbia Falls, which in light of area demographics recommended consideration of a general public demand response system or a volunteer driver program (possibly in coordination with area senior centers).
- Lisa reported that due to a paid caregiver shortage, pending final approval from the MT Department of Public Health and Human Services, AOA plans to shift federal Title III Older Americans Act (OAA) funds and/or state general funds for aging services from attendant-based transportation to Eagle Transit to provide more Premium Dial-A –Ride service in Evergreen; add Premium Dial-A-Ride service within and from Columbia Falls, Bigfork and Whitefish to select destinations in Kalispell, including “medical hill” and Hutton Ranch shopping area; and supplement service in Kalispell as needed.
- Lisa and Tom summarized the input from the public meetings in November and December, which were not well-attended. Members and guests discussed ways to increase participation next year. Tom also mentioned we sent a survey to local businesses in the Valley focused on The Mountain Climber and possible routes to provide reliable transportation options for workers, year-round and seasonal. Tom noted we have only received a handful of responses so far but that several indicated a willingness to pay a fee for a stop at or near their business.
- Lisa noted other planning documents/processes that informed the TCP, including the most recently completed Area Plan on Aging and Community Health Needs Assessment. The rapidly growing number of older adults is having and will continue to have a substantial impact on demand for paratransit and demand response service and will affect how we design and implement our fixed routes. Although older adults are a significant portion of the population, youth represent a natural market for transit services and we should continue to focus efforts on how to best service this population.

- Lisa reviewed the service needs and plan strategies/priorities sections. Members and guests discussed the following points specifically:
  - Rebranding: The Plan calls for consideration of rebranding Eagle Transit as the Mountain Climber to build on community interest in creating an integrated transit system within and between our Flathead communities that is easily identifiable. Eagle Transit has very little name recognition beyond current passengers, and there is a common misconception among the general public that one must be older or have a disability to ride the buses. Also, it isn't always clear the buses that have advertising wraps are public transportation. If we do rebrand, we could still allow for limited sponsorship recognition on buses. Rebranding would need Commissioner approval.
    - **Comment-** Karin from the City of Whitefish commented that the branding on the Snow bus helps sell it and causes real community awareness of the service.
    - **Comment-** Kyle Waterman reiterated that the name Eagle Transit and the wraps currently on our buses do not send a clear message of who we are and what service we provide.
  - Fare-free fixed route service: Tom explained the benefits of not charging on onboard fare (primarily substantially increased ridership which positively affects federal funding) as well as the costs of collecting a fare. He noted our area meets the criteria for successful fare-free implementation (rural/small urban, resort area, fare box is small percentage of budget). Tom also mentioned that Bozeman, Missoula and Butte are all fare free.
    - **Question-** Marcy asked if going fare free would be an incentive for riders who currently use paratransit service to ride fixed routes instead, which would potentially free up paratransit capacity for others.
    - **Answer-** Currently, riders can already ride any fixed route bus for free if they show their paratransit i.d. The challenge is offering fixed service that works for paratransit riders, but we've made some changes over the last year or so to offer front door service at many senior/subsidized/affordable housing complexes in Kalispell which has resulted in more riders using fixed instead of paratransit service. Dispatchers always try to steer paratransit riders to these routes when they are also able to walk from the drop-off stop to the front door of their destination.
    - Tom mentioned we are doing Fixed Route Fare Free February again this year. Several members and guests said they would be happy to share our info/Facebook post to help get the word out. Flyers are on the buses and we will post them at apartments and other target areas. Tom mentioned we have already seen a significant increase in ridership in these first few days of the month.

### **5311 Application and Budget**

- Lisa reviewed the 5311 application, TransADE justification and the annual budget.
- Lisa noted the annual 5311 and TransADE allocations and explained how the budget is developed, noting the increases in personnel costs due to COLA and

anticipated rise in health insurance premiums, the potential for increases in fuel costs and the expected reduction in maintenance costs due to recent replacements for aging vehicles.

- Tom mentioned that our cost per ride has gone down from the previous year. We showed a decrease from approximately \$14.00/ ride to \$10.00/ ride, which has a positive impact on our federal funding.

### **Capital Request**

- Lisa and Tom went over staff capital recommendations, including two 19-passenger replacement buses (Priorities One and Two) and up to five buses to expand commuter service between the cities (Priorities Three through Seven).
- Members and guests discussed the commuter option at some length with the consensus being that it makes sense to request the buses now while we are working to secure partnerships given the length of time it takes to get buses approved/delivered.
  - **Comment-** Karin from the City of Whitefish mentioned that it may be helpful to have letters of support from different Flathead entities/communities as well as from individuals.
- At Tagen's suggestion, the group favorably discussed the possibility of transitioning our fleet to propane or other alternative fuel.
  - **Comment-** Karin mentioned that Bob Ruth from the Columbia Falls School District might be a good contact to reach out to regarding the propane option.

**MOTION:** Tagen moved to approve the FY 2021 TCP, 5311 application and budget, and the Capital Request Priorities One through Seven as presented with the addition of language to explore alternate fuels. Kyle seconded. The motion passed with a unanimous vote.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.