



Transportation Advisory Committee

Flathead County South Campus building, Kalispell

Minutes

Thursday, August 2, 2018
8:30-10:00 am

Members Present: Chuck Wilhoit (Chair), Hugh Austin, Jim Foster (Glacier National Park Liaison), Gary Krueger (Commissioner), Mike Merchant, Marcy Roberts, Claudia Walter, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman

Staff Present: Lisa Sheppard (Agency on Aging Director), Dale Novak (Transportation Manager), Tom Schneider (Eagle Transit-GNP)

Guests: Stephen Smith (Glacier National Park), Robert Olson, Amanda Paul

Call to Order: Chuck Wilhoit called the meeting to order.

Public Comments: No public comment offered.

Chair Opening Remarks: Chuck welcomed participants and introductions were made all around.

Approval of Minutes: Kyle Waterman moved to approve the minutes. Hugh Austin seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

5-Year Transportation Development Plan

- Status of July 1st Changes
 - Dale reviewed the changes that went into effect on July 1st relative to the Kalispell city routes, Evergreen Commuter and Premium Dial-A-Ride and the Tri-City Commuter.
 - He noted we are revising stops and times based on driver and rider feedback, including adding another run to the Evergreen Commuter to give riders more flexibility and accommodate the needs of veterans frequenting the Vet's Food Pantry.
 - We're working with Sherry Stevens at Gateway Community Center to come up with an alternative pick-up spot for Dial-A-Ride passengers going to the Food Bank as the north entrance is too far for some people to walk.
 - The Tri-City Commuter connection between Whitefish and Columbia Falls has been well-received.
 - Having a bus dedicated to Premium Dial-A-Ride for Evergreen is working well as is having additional paratransit capacity in Kalispell.
 - Marcy Roberts asked if we know how many DAR rides there were in Evergreen last year compared to now. Dale said we did not track them separately from Kalispell ride last year.

- Marcy asked if we were able to provide all of the requested premium rides, not just in Evergreen but also west Kalispell. Dale replied that so far we've been able to accommodate most requests.
 - Marcy also expressed concern that the hours premium DAR service is available in Evergreen are too limited and premium riders cannot get a guaranteed ride. This makes it difficult for people who want to use the service to get to work. Dale confirmed the hours and policy but said he would follow-up with Marcy to brainstorm about other options for individuals she is working with for whom these are issues.
 - Chuck asked if passengers are using the transfer at Gateway Community Center. Dale said they are and it is working well. There was discussion about tracking the number of transfers, and Dale said he would see what we can do.
- Dale provided handouts on trip statistics for July, noting ridership is up overall from July 2017 in all areas (with the exception of the Glacier Park Commuter within the Park, which is down slightly).
 - Both AM and PM Kalispell City Bus routes are up, with the PM route seeing a substantial increase in ridership. Lisa noted this is the route that experienced the most ridership decline over the last couple of years.
 - Commissioner Krueger asked for clarification about Glacier Park Commuter rides outside and within the Park. Tom explained how the rides are counted and noted the number of rides from outside into the Park has already more than doubled the ridership for all of last season as word has gotten out about the service. Information about the route is on the GNP website, and AOA/Eagle staff have promoted it heavily in the local area. In addition, we are taking riders from Whitefish this year. In years past, the Snow Bus/Glacier Express has covered Whitefish, but now they are transporting people in Whitefish to catch the Glacier Commuter at Mountain Mall.
- Next Steps for Planning Committee
 - Lisa noted the next steps will be to follow-up on initial conversations with the cities about the immediate changes to discuss mid and long-range priorities, develop recommendations to present to the TAC and complete the final written report for submission to MDT by the end of December.
 - Chuck commented the Planning Committee is committed to coming up with very specific goals with timelines, noting there will be opportunities for TAC members to assist staff in efforts to achieve the goals.

Transportation Manager Report – Dale Novak

- Chuck asked about the progress on bus stop signs. Dale reported the city just informed us we need to complete a new application for each stop (as opposed to the single application we were initially instructed to complete). However, upon reviewing the new application it asks for insurance limits we aren't legally able to meet as a county government. It also requires us to pay a \$15 per month charge for any parking places displaced by a bus stop. We will work with city staff to revise the insurance portion and request a waiver of the \$15 monthly fee. Because of the new requirements, it's highly unlikely we can get city approval by September 1st as we had hoped. Chuck and Commissioner Krueger offered to help with the process if needed.

- Kyle also suggested we offer to take all of the city staff who need to review the stops on a bus to do so. That way, Dale or Tom could go with them and answer any questions they may have.
- Kyle asked if we can go ahead and produce the signs so they are ready to go when we get approval. Dale will get that done.
- Mike Merchant asked if the stops on the MDT right-of-way are permitted. Dale replied they are permitted and were recently reviewed by MDT for compliance.
- Amanda Paul asked if the bus shelters are actually stops. She was particularly concerned about the shelter at Walmart as she has a client who was confused when the bus didn't stop directly in front of the shelter. Dale explained how the bus shelters are managed and gave the history of the Walmart shelter and how we had to change the stop direction for safety reasons. Dale agreed to look at the possibility of installing a bench closer to the actual stop. Commissioner Krueger suggested a sign in the shelter to alert passengers the stop is on the side rather than in front.
- Mike reminded members they can make comment to the Kalispell City Council at any meeting about issues or topics of concern. He often comments at City Council and Planning Board meetings regarding transit and Age-Friendly efforts.
- Chuck asked if there have been any equipment or personnel challenges related to the July 1st changes. Dale said none related to the new routes but summer is always difficult without the use of the Park buses and temp drivers (who work in the Park in the summer) to fill in when Eagle Transit resources aren't available.
- Mike asked about plans to put new signs on the buses to say where they are going. Tom said they currently say "north" and "south" but will soon be changed to say "uptown" and "downtown" to correspond to the new schedules.
- Dale informed the TAC he is retiring at the end of September. Chuck and Lisa thanked him for the great job he's done in all of his roles at Eagle Transit, including Glacier National Park Lead and Transportation Manager.

Presentation on Glacier National Park Shuttle Service - Stephen Smith

- Stephen gave an overview of the seasonal shuttle system in the Park.
- Chuck asked about the effects of increased visitorship on the shuttle system and on the Park generally. Jim Foster replied the high volume of visitors is straining Park resources, infrastructure and wildlife. He gave an example of 1,000 people using the Highline Trail at any given time.
- Chuck asked about the new digital passes (which Jim said have been quite successful) and for an update on the Sperry rebuild.
- The annual TAC trip to GNP is set for Thursday, August 16th. Lisa asked members to email and let her know if they plan to go on the trip.

Next Meeting – October 4, 2018

Chuck thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting.



Transportation Advisory Committee

Flathead County South Campus building, Kalispell

Minutes

Thursday, October 4, 2018
8:30-10:00 am

Members Present: Chuck Wilhoit (Chair), Hugh Austin, Rick Cunningham, Jim Foster (Glacier National Park Liaison), Bill Gehling, Mike Merchant, Marcy Roberts, Tagen Vine, Claudia Walter, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman

Staff Present: Lisa Sheppard (Agency on Aging Director), Tom Schneider (Transportation Manager), Nicole Birk (Eagle Transit-GNP), Beth Richardson (Agency on Aging Assistant Director)

Guests: Robert Olson, Summit Independent Living Center

Call to Order: Chuck Wilhoit called the meeting to order.

Public Comments: No public comment offered.

Chair Opening Remarks: Chuck welcomed participants and introductions were made all around. Chuck noted this is Tom Schneider's first meeting as the new Transportation Manager. Tom introduced Nicole Birk as the new Glacier Park Operations Lead.

Approval of Minutes: Hugh Austin moved to approve the minutes from August 2, 2018. Kyle Waterman seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

5-Year Transportation Development Plan

- Lisa thanked the Planning Committee members for all their hard work. She and Tom gave a brief update on the status of the grant.
- The grant ends on December 31st. We had hoped to have a draft report ready for the TAC by the meeting today, but the Committee is still working through the process. Since the TAC won't meet again until January, Lisa will email the draft to members for comment when it's ready.
- Remaining Committee tasks include:
 - Following up with city planners and elected officials regarding their priorities and interest in participating in our ongoing planning efforts.
 - Marcy suggested reaching out to the Evergreen Chamber to get input regarding the Evergreen area.
 - Traveling to Bozeman to meet with consultant David Kack and staff from Streamline to learn about their transit system and what we might consider implementing in the Flathead.
 - Developing mid and long-range recommendations (the recent Kalispell changes were the short-term focus).
- Tom noted Hugh Austin completed a comprehensive marketing plan and that the Committee is also looking into phone apps. Beth noted marketing is a substantial component of planning requiring

expertise and a commitment of resources. Lisa said that is the biggest issue from an implementation perspective.

- Lisa commented the 5-Year Plan will be a living document, and Planning Committee members have agreed to continue as a committee indefinitely.
- Chuck remarked the Planning Committee and staff will need help from all TAC members to implement the Plan recommendations, especially those related to messaging, marketing and funding.
 - Mike Merchant reminded members one of the best ways they can help spread the positive message about transit is to comment at city council meetings and planning board meetings
 - Kyle noted the Health Department is using this strategy effectively and that now is good timing for transit given the focus on downtown core development.

FY 2020 Annual Transportation Coordination Plan

- Lisa noted the annual Transportation Coordination Plan (TCP) development process is underway and reminded members they will give their input on the plan draft and capital request at the January 3rd meeting, then vote on the plan and capital at the February 7th meeting.
- Lisa briefly reviewed the TAC's priorities from the FY 2019 TCP. Members also received a hard copy.
- The annual public input meeting will be held on Thursday, December 13th at the South Campus second floor conference room from 4:00-6:00 pm. Lisa encouraged TAC members to attend.

Transportation Manager Report – Tom Schneider

- Tom noted recent operational changes, including cross-training of staff, working with the County Road Department to do more of our maintenance (as we pay for parts only when they do the work) and getting our routes and stops onto Google Transit (Nicole is in the process of inputting data).
- Tom gave an update on the new routes/service changes implemented in July:
 - The change from a fixed route in Evergreen to a commuter plus premium Dial-A-Ride service did eliminate or reduce service for some riders in that area, but many continue to be able to get where they need to go and the resources were needed in Kalispell to ensure we are in compliance with paratransit rules.
 - We added a third run to the Evergreen commuter at the request of the vet's pantry
 - We are making adjustments to the stops and times on the Kalispell fixed route based on rider and driver feedback.
 - Chuck asked about the transfer stop at Gateway Community Center and Tom replied it was working well.
- Tom reviewed ridership statistics and specifically noted the substantial increase in ridership on the Kalispell fixed route, and the overall increase despite the early shut-down of Glacier National Park due to fires (August 12th) and the reduction in Evergreen rides.
 - One area of increase is in transporting children to after school programs at The Summit (SPARKS) and Kalispell Parks and Rec.
 - Chuck thanked Tagen for the increase in funding from KRH to support the SPARKS route.
 - Mike noted the after school program rides are a support to working families and represent an opportunity to educate the public about the value of transit to our community.
- Tom reported staff gave a presentation to the Evergreen Rotary club at their request.

- Tom gave an update on bus stop signs in Kalispell noting we are still in the permitting process as the city has requested additional information. We are still hoping to get the fees waived as well. Tom will report back at the next meeting.
- Tom informed members about his recent meeting with staff and officials from the City of Whitefish. They are very interested in transit, especially as it relates to tourists. They are willing to work with us on getting grant funding. Rick commented the whole community understands the positive economics of transit and the benefits of supporting it.

Next Meeting – January 3, 2019

Chuck thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting.



Transportation Adversary Committee

Flathead County South Campus Building, Kalispell

Minutes

Thursday, January 3, 2019

Lisa Sheppard called meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

Members Present: Hugh Austin, Randy Brodehl (Commissioner), Rick Cunningham, Marceen Liechti, Mike Merchant, Marcy Roberts, Tagen Vine, Kevin Warrington

Staff Present: Lisa Sheppard (Agency on Aging Director), Tom Schneider (Eagle Transit Transportation Manager), Nicole Birk (Eagle Transit-GNP), Elizabeth Wood (Dispatcher), Kristina Stone (Office Coordinator/Dispatcher Supervisor)

Guests: No guests present

Call to Order: The TAC Chair, Chuck Wilhoit, was unable to attend the meeting. It is unclear who the current Vice-Chair is, so with the group's permission, Lisa filled in for Chuck and opened/facilitated the meeting.

Public Comments: No members of public in attendance.

Chair Opening Remarks: Lisa welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance and participation in the meeting as it is the TAC's opportunity to weigh in on the development of the draft of annual Transportation Coordination Plan.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes were reviewed. Hugh Austin asked we correct the spelling of his name. Motion: Tagen Vine moved to approve the minutes from the 10/4/2018 meeting with the name spelling correction. Mike Merchant Seconded. All in favor. Motion Passed.

Discussion FY 2020 Transportation Coordination Plan/5311 Application/Capital Request:

- Lisa explained the handouts, which included last year's section of the TCP on "Priorities and Strategies for the Future" as a beginning place for discussion and the Annual Summary showing current services and detailing changes in operations from last year.
- Lisa reported the **funding allocation for FY 2020** from MDT:
 - \$721,400 in 5311 funds, compared to \$705,708 in FY 2019
 - \$142,596 in TransADE compared to \$75,556 in FY 2019
 - Total increase of \$87,732
 - Lisa noted we received an increase last year as well but that the majority of it went to cover cost of living raises and increases in insurance rates for staff. We don't yet know how much of this year's increase will go toward those types of costs as well. We are hoping there is enough to add to our capacity this year.
- Staff and TAC members gave an **update on the Public Meeting held on December 13, 2018**. Twenty-one (21) members of the public, including TAC members, participated as did six staff

members. The turnout was not as high this year as last year. However, many participants last year expressed concerns with varying aspects of the service. This year there was a lot of positive feedback and people seemed pleased with the direction Eagle Transit is taking overall.

- Hugh thanked staff members for all the work they put into the meeting this year. He was very impressed with the displays and handouts.
- Tom gave an overview of his **recommendations regarding the capital request** this year
 - Tom would like to consider requesting up to two (2) new larger capacity buses (like school buses) to more efficiently operate the after-school route during the majority of the year and the GNP Commuter during the summer.
 - Running larger buses on the after-school route would cut down on driver costs and reduce the likelihood we would have to take smaller buses out of paratransit/Dial-A-Ride service to complete the route on a high-volume day.
 - A larger capacity bus would allow us to pick up more riders on the GNP commuter to and within the Park, which would increase our ridership count.
 - Tom noted four (4) buses currently in our fleet have around 250,000 miles.
 - *Question-* Rick Cunningham asked if the current and new buses have air-conditioning.
 - *Answer:* Tom stated that yes; all of our buses have and will have A/C.
 - *Question:* Mike asked if the funding for the buses is separate from our regular budget.
 - *Answer:* Lisa explained we request funding for specific vehicles and other capital separately from the 5311 Federal Funding/TransADE operating funding allocation. An MDT committee determines which capital requests to fund, so we may or may not get what we request each year. When we are approved for a vehicle, we pay a 13-20% match rate; the rest is federal funding.
 - We just received two (2) new smaller buses (13-passenger) and we have two (2) more of the same coming shortly.
 - *Question:* Rick asked where the match money for the buses comes from.
 - *Answer:* We are responsible for coming up with the funds and can use sources like the County mill, city contributions, contracts, bus wrap advertising, etc. We can also solicit grants or other funds specifically for match for a bus.
 - The TAC will vote on the capital request at the February 7th meeting. Tom's final recommendations will go out via email prior to the vote.
- Lisa led TAC members through a review of the progress on the previous year's TCP Priorities and Strategies for the Future and **members discussed what they would like to see in the FY 2020 Transportation Coordination Plan**. Members agreed they would like to keep the same priorities but update them to reflect changes and progress since last year and add some new components. A summary of the discussion is as follows:
 - **Engage in Strategic Planning:** This section will be updated to include the Transportation Development Planning Committee's recommendations (and implementation of recommendations) to date as well as areas of focus for the remainder of the planning cycle, which MDT approved to extend through December 2019. Anticipated areas of focus include a better solution for Evergreen (e.g. a volunteer driver program), plans specific to Whitefish and Columbia Falls, reconfiguration of the commuters to better serve workers and a plan for securing additional funding.
 - In response to members' questions, Lisa noted we are required to complete a Transportation Coordination Plan annually for funding. We are not required to do a 5-Year Transportation Development Plan, but it is encouraged and we can apply for grant funding from MDT to support the work of it.

- *Question:* Marci Roberts asked how much funds are generated from fares, after school programs, and other funding.
 - *Answer:* Lisa explained that average annual fares are approximately \$42,000. We receive just under \$30,000.00 from city contributions, \$32,000 from The Summit/KRH for the SPARKS after school program, anywhere from \$30,000-50,000 a year from bus wraps, about \$40,000 a year from our contract with DPHHS to transport clients to Flathead Industries and a small amount from North Valley hospital to support medical rides in Whitefish and Columbia Falls. (We are currently negotiating with the City of Kalispell on transportation to their Park & Recreation after school program now that we've done a trial run.)
 - *Comment:* Marci commented on the current and potential growth in Flathead County, specifically in the western parts of the Valley. She expressed concern that even a 42-passenger bus might not be large enough to facilitate transporting the students from West Valley to after school programs in the near future. Lisa noted the importance of securing community partnerships to help fund these types of services.
 - *Question:* Randy asked about the average cost per ride for the school district?
 - *Answer:* Lisa said she didn't know but that we could try to find out. She reported Eagle Transit's average cost per ride is about \$13.00, which includes both fixed and paratransit/Dial-A-Ride (which is a more expensive service to provide). She reminded everyone that the average cost per ride for the School district would be much different comparatively due to the concentration of riders. Mike, who serves on the Kalispell School Board, offered to try to find out the school district's per ride costs.
 - *Comment:* Mike noted the mention of the Age-Friendly Flathead initiative and asked if MDT reviewers will know the reference. Lisa replied there is a description of the initiative in a different section of the TCP.
 - *Question:* Mike asked for clarification of the amount of the county mill.
 - *Answer:* Lisa said it's around \$246,000.
- **Build public, elected official and business community support for a well-planned, coordinated and adequately funded transit system:**
 - Members discussed the significant progress that has been made over the last year relative to engaging elected official and staff at the three cities on transit issues
 - Members wanted to expand on the points in this section that address transit-oriented solutions to worker travel and travel/parking congestion as well as the benefits of transit to area businesses.
- **Increase Ridership**
 - Tom reported on meetings/discussions with both Columbia Falls and Whitefish officials regarding their transit needs and options that could better serve the cities and increase ridership. Whitefish in particular is concerned with workforce development and traffic and parking congestion in the winter and summer seasons and would like to partner with us on some transit-based solutions. They are also open to increasing the annual financial support for transit generally.
 - Tom also reported we are looking at options to target transit routes/services for workers generally, noting the onboard survey showed 30% of riders use the bus for employment.
 - *Comment:* Mike commented we should consider offering express service in Kalispell during peak hours.

- Lisa stated we will add more specific verbiage to the Plan regarding worker travel per Mike’s suggestion.
 - Mike mentioned the Planning Committee’s continuing work on developing a “Boots on Ground” Marketing plan and put it into action to increase ridership.
 - *Comment:* Rick suggested the budget be a part of this document. Lisa noted the budget is part of the package of documents the TAC reviews and approves annually in February and said she would include it as part of their review at the January meeting going forward.
 - *Question:* Hugh asked if we track operation time and miles.
 - *Answer:* Yes, we do track both.
 - *Question:* Marci asked if we track growth and mentioned if we do that we should also add that information to this document.
 - *Answer:* Lisa mentioned that it would be in the final document.
 - Lisa and Tom talked about working with the Planning Committee and a consultant to develop a workable, long-term solution for Evergreen that would better serve the public and increase ridership as current and past efforts have achieved less than desirable results.
 - *Comment:* Marci mentioned we should keep a close eye on the high-end RV Park that is coming in at the south end of town.
 - Lisa asked everyone if weekend service is something they still want to consider as a priority as it is often mentioned by riders and the general public as a need? Marci added when it was offered on Saturdays in the past for paratransit riders, it was not very successful.
 - *Question:* Marci asked if we have worked with the Vets’ Pantry and the Chamber in Evergreen for assistance and additional funding.
 - *Answer:* Tom mentioned that he visited the Vets Pantry and they were working on DAR applications for Evergreen residents. He also mentioned he had attended the Evergreen Chamber meeting and had discussed a possible Evergreen Volunteer Driver program.
 - *Question:* Have we visited with Walmart for funding yet.
 - *Answer:* Tom answered that we have not, however we would add them to the list.
 - Lisa mentioned that our Kalispell Fixed ridership has significantly increased.
 - Lisa brought up the removal of the Evergreen Commuter bus effective the end of December due to extremely low ridership.
 - Elizabeth Wood explained how we are currently servicing the Evergreen area and explained the Premium Dial-A-Ride guidelines.
 - *Comment:* Mike mentioned we should put some additional thought into facilitating rides for recreational users like bikers, hikers etc.
 - Nicole gave an update on Google Transit for Eagle Transit. She stated that it should be up and going in a few weeks.
 - *Comment:* Commissioner Brodehl asked if the TCP states the transit system won’t complete with private services.
- Answer:* Lisa answered the TCP doesn’t explicitly state that, but there are parameters and rules we have to follow. For example, we can’t provide charter services in competition with private providers, and we’re required to invite private providers to participate in our plan. Additionally, the vast majority of our riders are public transit dependent from a financial standpoint. Many of them can barely afford the \$1.00 fee so they would not be able to use Uber or taxi service in most cases. Lisa also talked about transportation to airports in big cities as an example of multiple modes of transportation, including public transportation, servicing the same destination with riders choosing the option that best fits their needs.

- **Expand Partnerships, Collaboration and Coordinated Service**
 - Members felt the current points were still relevant (with updated from the Planning Committee).
- **Explore New Funding**
 - Members agreed the general gist of the section is still valid, again with updates from the Planning Committee and staff work.
 - Commissioner Brodehl asked that we include our top priorities in this or a separate section with cost estimate included. Lisa said we would do that, noting the TDP would go into that more in depth.

Closing Questions and Comments

- Marci mentioned that she really like the Orange Line being off the beaten path. She also feels that some people who currently use the paratransit/Dial-A-Ride system may ride it, freeing up paratransit/DAR spots for other riders who need it.
- Tom explained the Evergreen Commuter was using 30% of our resources for 3% ridership. By moving that driver to the Orange Line, we hope to provide more service to more people. He noted on the first unofficial day of Orange Line service we had 26 riders. The Orange Line covers 22 apartment complexes and businesses. Some of the stops include Lazer School, LC Staffing, Express and college housing on east side of Kalispell.
- Tom announced we will offer “Fare Free February” to promote ridership on our fixed routes. Anyone riding the City Bus or Commuters in Kalispell, Columbia Falls or Whitefish will get to ride free the entire month of February.
- Rick asked if we can charge a business for having a stop at their location.
- *Answer* Lisa said she didn’t think we could charge directly as we’re public transportation but we could ask for business partnership/support for routes that benefit them.

Next Meeting

- Lisa asked members about adjusting our meeting times to the afternoon to accommodate Commissioner Brodehl’s schedule as the Commissioners typically are in session during the mornings. Members in attendance were positive about changing to afternoon meetings. Lisa said she would send an email polling the rest of the members not in attendance today and get back with everyone. Assuming the rest of the members are in favor, the February 7th meeting will start at 2:00 pm.

Lisa thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting at 10:35 a.m.



Transportation Advisory Committee
Flathead County South Campus Building, Kalispell

Minutes

Thursday, February 7, 2019

Lisa Sheppard called meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

Members Present: Carla Augustad, Hugh Austin, Randy Brodehl (Commissioner), Jim Foster (Glacier National Park Liaison), William Gehling, Marceen Liechti, Mike Merchant, Tagen Vine, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman, Robert Smith

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

Guests: Peter Pelchen (Summit Independent Living Center), Sherry Stevens (Gateway Community Center), Val Hemsley (ASSIST)

Call to Order: The TAC Chair, Chuck Wilhoit, was unable to attend the meeting, so with the group's permission, Lisa Sheppard filled in for Chuck and opened/facilitated the meeting.

Public Comments: There were no public comments.

Chair Opening Remarks: Lisa welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance and participation in the meeting. Lisa welcomed and introduced our newest TAC member Robert Smith.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes were reviewed. Tagen Vine moved to approve the minutes from the 01/03/2019 meeting. Carla Augustad seconded. All in favor. Motion Passed.

Review FY2020 Transportation Coordination Plan

- Lisa reviewed the FY 2020 Transportation Coordination Plan (TCP) in full with special emphasis and comments on the topics below. Lisa explained the TCP is different than the 5 Year Transportation Development Plan (TDP) and added the plans complement each other.
- Regarding Plan Partners, we added the three incorporated cities of Kalispell, Columbia Falls and Whitefish as well as United Way/Gateway Community Center, My Glacier Village, and Momentum Transport.
- Lisa noted that we are still trying to figure out how best to service Evergreen. This has been an ongoing challenge for us as we have tried several different options that have not been very successful. It is a priority for the Planning Committee working on the TDP.
- Lisa reviewed the Planning Committee's efforts to date and next steps (Section 4. Needs Assessment and Planning), noting substantial progress has been made in increasing ridership and creating a more user-friendly system.
- Nicole Birk gave an update on Google Transit. She is fixing a few small issues, then it should be up and going.

- Lisa mentioned that the onboard rider surveys gave us some very interesting feedback. Notably, all of our riders feel very safe when riding our buses. She attributed this to our bus drivers and commended them for the excellent job they do. We were also pleased to learn 33 % of our Kalispell riders use our services for employment.
- Regarding operations, routes and services, we have for years covered the major “activity centers” but have struggled to develop fixed neighborhood routes to pick people up closer to where they are. The new Orange Line is our first attempt to do this and is already showing substantial ridership.
- *Question-* Mike Merchant asked if both pick up and drop off destinations for paratransit have to be within the ¾ mile radius of a fixed route. *Answer-* Lisa said yes, they both need to be within the ¾ mile radius. Lisa mentioned we discontinued our Country Dial-A-Ride program a couple of years ago to shift the resources into the required paratransit coverage area where we were experiencing an increase in demand. Lisa noted it was a difficult decision as about half of Flathead Valley residents are outside of our coverage area, but we had to ensure compliance with federal paratransit rules.
- Regarding vehicle maintenance, we are in a slightly better spot currently than in past years due to the number of new buses in our fleet. We also have a few back-up buses now to cover for breakdowns and repairs. We have not had enough resources to increase the daily number of buses on the road, or to pay for additional drivers.
- *Question-* Mike asked if Eagle Transit still assists with transportation needs to the Care Farms. *Answer-* Lisa stated that we do not do those rides anymore as we had to redirect the resources into our paratransit program. We quit providing that service when we eliminated the Country Dial-A-Ride program.
- **Motion:** Hugh Austin moved we approve the FY 2020 Transportation Coordination Plan. Bill Gehling seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

5311 Application and Budget

- Lisa went over the 5311 Application and highlighted a few areas.
 - She noted our annual ridership estimate is 99,000 rides but that we will likely break 100,000.
 - Tom mentioned we are doing a high number of paratransit/Dial-A-Ride rides compared to other transit agencies across the state. He noted we have an excellent reputation across the state for our service to paratransit/Dial-A-Ride passengers.
 - Lisa explained TransADE funding and reviewed the TransADE Needs Justification section.
 - *Comment* – A member commented the % of riders noted as “elderly” may be a bit on the low side.
- Lisa reviewed the budget, noting the increased funding allocation this year over last will be used to cover the COLA raise for employees, a \$1000 per employee per year increase in health insurance premiums, a .25 increase in a dispatcher position and some additional capacity to hire temp drivers to fill in when employees are on leave. We had also hoped to add a .50 bus driver position but given the COLA and increased health insurance costs we are unable to do so at this time.
- *Question-* Hugh asked about the Glacier Park Administration fee increase. *Answer-* Lisa noted the amount listed had been previously approved.
- *Question-* Mike Merchant asked if the \$721,000 comes from MDT and if it is pass through money. *Answer-* Lisa stated it is federal money allocated to us by the state according to a funding formula.

- *Question*-Mike asked about the Capital Request, questioning if the amount we are applying for is \$190,000 and to whom are we applying to for this money. *Answer*- Lisa replied that \$190,000 is the total cost of the vehicle we are requesting, noting we have to provide up to 20% of the cost in match. The request goes to MDT and if approved they procure the vehicle through their office.
- *Question*- Mike asked if the \$241,000 in county funds is unrestricted funds. *Answer*: Lisa said the funds are restricted to use for transit purposes. We use them for operating and capital match.
- *Question* - Mike asked if the revenue amounts are firm figures we can count on. *Answer*- Lisa stated the numbers are solid. The 5311 and TransADE amounts are given to us by MDT before we start the application process. The county funds are equal to one voted mill, so we can be fairly certain of that amount. Most of the other sources of income are recurring, many of them contractual so we know the amounts. A few fluctuate, like the DPPHS funds which are based on ridership and the bus wrap advertising revenue which depends on sales, but we have enough history with those sources to make good estimates.
- Lisa noted our largest operating expense is personnel, followed by maintenance and fuel. Another substantial cost is our annual support contract with RouteMatch. Tom stated we are looking at the possibility of securing new scheduling software when our current contract is up in three years.
- *Question*- A member asked for clarification of where the funding for the capital comes from. *Answer*- Lisa stated it is a combination of federal funding (80%) and local match (20%).
- **Motion:** Mike moved we approve the 5311 application and budget. Carla seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

Capital Request

- Lisa reviewed the Capital Request (only one item requested). Tom explained the rationale behind requesting a larger capacity bus like a school bus. Currently, we're using 4 buses to run the after-school program routes. Using a 44-69 passenger bus will save money as we can decrease the number of buses and drivers needed to complete the route. The larger bus could also be used during the summer months for our Glacier Commuter.
- *Question*- Mike asked if we are currently using 4 buses to go to 5 destinations. *Answer*- Tom replied we currently have 4 buses going 9 schools with two separate drop-off points. With the larger bus we would be able to use 2 buses instead.
- *Question*- Mike asked about the capacity of the smaller bus we would be replacing. *Answer*- Tom stated the larger bus would be replacing a 22-23 passenger bus.
- **Motion:** Mike moved to approve the FY 2020 Capital Request. Carla seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

Transportation Manager Report – Tom Schneider

- Tom noted we are currently 4,000 rides up from this time last year.
- Tom gave an update on the new Orange Line in Kalispell.
 - The route includes stops at the front of multiple apartment complexes and multi-family housing units as well as popular stops on Highway 2 like Taco Bell and Dairy Queen. It includes stops requested by passengers in the Onboard Survey.
 - In order to implement the route, we discontinued the Evergreen Commuter where we had almost no ridership (3-5 rides a day) and redirected the resources.

- The route started off with an average of 23 riders per day and by the end of the first month it was averaging 40.
- We publicized the new line and a “Fare Free February” ride incentive with a three-week ad in the Flathead Beacon that highlighted our new stops. We also did interviews and promos on KGEZ radio.
- Tom gave an update on bus stop signs in Kalispell. The Kalispell City Council will vote on the permits and proposed fee waivers on February 19th.
- Tom noted we have been meeting with Whitefish City staff and stakeholders regarding potential collaboration on the following:
 - A transit hub by Depot Park funded by grant monies secured by the city. The hub will include a bench, shelter and a possible bus cutout.
 - Park & Rides to assist workers to get to their places of employment as there are too few parking places downtown.
 - New recreational stops at the local city beach and Lion Mountain Trail.
- *Question-* Carla mentioned we were originally hoping that some of the paratransit riders would choose to ride the new Orange Line and wondered if we’re seeing any of them doing so. *Answer-* Tom said we are seeing quite a few, noting dispatchers are doing a great job of identifying paratransit customers who would be good candidates for riding the new line and educating them about it.
- Tom brought up that we are looking at another possible route, tentatively called the Blue Line, that would cover the Two Mile Drive apartment area and connect riders to the hospital and other medical providers on the hill.
- Tom noted he would eventually like to get a route along Main Street.
- *Comment-* Sherry Stevens from the Gateway Community Center commented she has worked with Eagle Transit for so many years, and this year has been a truly revolutionary year. Eagle services have made a huge difference for all of those needing public transportation and specifically those needing to access the social services provided at Gateway. The changes have made the service easier to use and people are able to move around more quickly to get where they need to be. It’s made a huge impact on our community. She thanked us for all that we do.

Next Meeting

Our next meeting is scheduled for April 4th, 2:00-3:30 pm.

Lisa thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting at 3:43 p.m.



Transportation Advisory Committee
Flathead County South Campus Building, Kalispell

Minutes

Thursday, April 4, 2019

Chuck Wilhoit called meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

Members Present: Hugh Austin, Randy Brodehl (Commissioner), Jim Foster (Glacier National Park Liaison), Marceen Liechti, Marcy Roberts, Robert Smith, Tagen Vine, Claudia Walter, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman, Chuck Wilhoit

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

Guests: David Kack (Consultant from Western Transportation Institute)

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

Public Comments: There were no public comments.

Chair Opening Remarks: Chuck welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance and participation in the meeting. He thanked Lisa for stepping in while he was out of town for the previous meeting.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes were reviewed. Tagen Vine moved to approve the minutes from 02/7/2019 meeting. Kevin Warrington Seconded. All in favor. Motion Passed.

Transportation Manager Report – Tom Schneider

- Tom briefly reviewed the trip taken last fall to Bozeman to look over and compare operations.
- Announcement of the trip to Acadia National Park in Maine. The trip is scheduled for June 2019. Meetings are scheduled with staff from the Park staff, the State of Maine staff and Downeast Transit (the local transit provider). Meetings will focus on the structure of the Cooperative Agreement, federal/state/local/private partnerships and overall operations. We hope to gain insight into the following:
 1. Building effective and lasting partnerships. Tom gave an example of the longstanding partnership Acadia has had with L.L. Bean which has pledged a total of \$3 million since 2001.
 2. Improving operations within the Park and at Eagle Transit. We want to look at ways we can more efficiently and creatively serve Glacier National Park transit needs and improve our own general operations.

3. Examining the structure of Acadia's Cooperative Agreement. We want to learn how Acadia's agreement is structured relative to shared funding, ride counts for 5311 purposes and enhancement of local transit options.
 - Tom mentioned we have been working on onboard driver evaluations and training on safety and customer service. Drivers are doing a great job. He has also implemented a cross-training program to enhance our capacity and ability to fill gaps when staff are out on leave. Dispatchers are working their CDLs so they can drive and select drivers are being trained in dispatch. Additionally, Kristina is training dispatchers in some of her tasks, and Tom is training her to complete certain management tasks. The program has been well-received by staff.
 - Ridership is strong. We are projecting 108,000-110,000 rides for the year. In March, we were up 1200 rides compared to last year. Increased ridership helps our funding.
 - The newly implemented Orange line, which brings our Kalispell coverage to almost 40 multi-family housing areas, continues to see growing ridership. We are seeing a steady increase in DAR clients utilizing the Orange line to get them where they need to go due to the convenience and freedom it offers. Rider feedback is really positive.
 - Tom introduced the idea of a "Blue Line" that would target moving passengers from high density housing areas to the hospital and medical facilities on the hill.
 - *Question-* Commissioner Brodehl asked if we had plans to cover the new senior housing complex in Evergreen. *Answer-* Tom said the complex will be served only by Premium Dial-A-Ride, which means qualified passengers can schedule rides based on our availability. Lisa added the new complex will offer some transportation services to their residents, and many if not most residents will still drive, so the potential for riders may be low.
 - Tom gave a report on the presentation at Buffalo Hills Terrace, which would be a stop on the proposed Blue Line. Close to 80 residents attended the presentation and nearly everyone in the room said they would like to ride the bus if the line stopped there.
 - Tom stated he continues to communicate with Whitefish regarding their transit needs and future plans, including park and rides, parking garages and summer transit services.
 - *Question-* Chuck asked how the partnership with Gateway Community Center has been working. *Answer-* Tom stated that everything seems to be working smoothly with good feedback from riders.
 - *Question-* Marcy Roberts asked when we would be updating the GNP Commuter schedule on the website. *Answer-* Nicole stated the new schedule should be posted in about a month.
 - *Question-* A member asked about the response to the *February Free* campaign. *Answer-* We received positive feedback from riders and the public, and rides were up significantly from the previous February.
 - Lisa noted total rides on the Evergreen Commuter for two quarters was 504 with only 98 rides for the entire month of December. The route was discontinued to create the Orange Line which provided 1,534 rides for one quarter.

Transportation Development Plan Update- Lisa Sheppard

- The Planning Committee met in March to discuss next steps.
- Regarding operations:
 - Lisa recapped planning efforts to date to address needs/concerns in the Evergreen area noting that none of the multiple iterations of routes/services have been particularly effective or efficient. Currently in Evergreen we have expanded Premium DAR hours,

however scheduling is still based on availability. The Planning Committee's goal is to come up with a workable solution to meet the needs of the Evergreen Community by the end of the calendar year.

- Lisa noted the Committee's work will also focus on Columbia Falls, Whitefish and commuter service between the cities. Consultant David Kack will help us evaluate the needs of these communities and develop potential service options and cost projections.
- Finally, we're looking at ways to improve our Cooperative Agreement with GNP.
- Lisa mentioned Hugh Austin has put together a very comprehensive marketing plan for us. The next step is to prioritize elements of the plan and determine the resources needed for implementation.

Comments from Consultant Western Transportation Institute – David Kack

- David gave a brief background on himself and the experience he brings to the table.
- He compared the impact of commuter runs versus geographically compact, high population density runs. He noted we should strive to provide mobility for people in higher density areas who do not have it otherwise, focus on getting them from home to work, grocery shopping, and medical facilities.
- He discussed a few of the challenges we face in Evergreen, including the main road consisting of some retail and a lot of commercial property with scattered residential areas.
- He also talked about current efforts in Whitefish to address visitor, worker and parking concerns noting they are still uncertain which direction they want to go and which issues they want to address first.
- David posed the possibility of a voucher system as well as a volunteer driver program to serve Evergreen and other more rural areas.
- He discussed the importance of data collection in planning and in ongoing management so we can adjust as we learn what works and what doesn't.
- *Comment-* Lisa mentioned that one of the maps David presented showed that we are hitting the concentrated areas where people are without transportation.
- David gave Eagle Transit big kudos for making all of the changes and adjustments back in July.

Committee Comments, Questions & Answers

- *Comment-* Chuck mentioned that until recently Eagle Transit has been "a closely guarded secret." He feels we are doing a great job developing partnerships and reaching out more to the area municipalities. He stated he also feels doing our own planning in house has been successful.
- *Comment-* Nicole mentioned as of Monday April 1st she is full-time with the Park. She noted that the Hiker Biker service will begin running weekends in May from Apgar to Avalanche.
- *Question-* Commissioner Brodehl mentioned the 2 hour waits that occurred last year in the Park and is wondering if we will have a solution for that. *Answer-* Nicole said the wait times will still be there. She explained a one -way pass system they had tried at the end of the 2018 season that seemed to help. Jim Foster explained the passes gave riders a specific time to get back on the bus and said they do plan on using them again this year. He stated that they are continuously looking for ways to improve operations without extending the budget.
- *Question-* Commissioner Brodehl inquired about the status of the road rebuild in the Park. *Answer-* Jim said additional road repairs within the Park are scheduled for 2020.

- Tom mentioned that one of the advantages to riders catching the commuter to the park they are able to ride all the way to Avalanche and miss the lines at Apgar.
- Kyle Waterman said he continues to hear positive feedback about the Gateway Community Center transfer hub. Everyone is very pleased with the quick turnaround times.
- *Question-* Chuck inquired about the status of the bust stop signs. *Answer-* Tom said the City Council decided to waive the monthly fees. Public Works staff are still working on getting them placed and we hope it will be soon now the snow is melted off. Regarding signs in Whitefish, Tom said the City offered to install the signs at no cost to us.
- Tom discussed our advertising efforts:
 - We cut the TV advertising which will save \$1200.00/ month.
 - He is planning to visit apartment complexes to share our newest schedules and routes with them and promote ridership.
 - We have ads running on KGEZ as well as interviews.
- We are continuing to cut costs wherever we can: utilizing smaller buses saving on fuel costs, cleaning our own building, and doing in house training for bus drivers.
- Lisa mentioned that after we voted on the 5311 application the commissioners met and went through the application as well. There were a few changes made, specifically regarding health insurance costs in the budget. Tom is finding money to offset the difference with the bus he is looking to purchase.
- Lisa mentioned that transportation again rose to the top of the list in public feedback gathered as part of developing the new AOA Area Plan on Aging.
- Lisa also shared past comments from Sherry Stevens at United way. Sherry stated the changes we have implemented in the past year, including new routes and the transfer hub at Gateway Community Center, have been game changing for so many people in our community.
- Lisa commented that she would like everyone to be thinking about how things could be done differently with regard to our meetings and committee structure as we've been doing things the same way for some time and we'd like to know what we could do to improve our process and capitalize on members' interest and expertise. We will add this discussion to a future agenda.
- *Question-* A member asked if Chandler Communication is still responsible for the bus shelters, stating some of the bus shelters get run down at times and need attention, particularly the stop at Smiths. *Answer-* Lisa stated that yes, Chandler is still responsible for the upkeep of the shelters. The drivers should be calling dispatch regarding any bus shelters that need attention, then dispatch can contact Chandler. It was discussed that perhaps we could request that Chandler make more frequent checks on the shelters that tend to be an issue.
- *Question-* A member asked if we were planning on moving the Walmart bus shelter. *Answer-* We will not be moving the shelter as it is very costly and the stop is so close. We do plan on posting a sign in the shelter stating that the pickup is around to the side of the shelter.
- Jim announced the website where the Park will post updates regarding weather, camp grounds, road conditions, and closures. <https://www.nps.gov/applications/glac/dashboard/v1.3.2/>

Closing Remarks - Chuck Wilhoit

- Chuck stated that as we continue to plan we need to be as interactive as possible. We will try our very best to keep you informed. Chuck also mentioned that he would love to see everyone at the Planning Committee Meetings as well.
- Chuck thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting at 3:15p.m.

Next Meeting

Our next meeting is scheduled for June 6th 2:00-3:30



Transportation Advisory Committee
Flathead County South Campus Building, Kalispell

Meeting Canceled
Thursday, June 6, 2019