

Draft Bill LC726 \$.02 Gas Tax Legislation Testimony

Need for transit:

Everyone in Montana acknowledges that we have both a driving and drinking culture in our state. These alone are not necessarily bad. We celebrate our diverse microbreweries in communities all over our vast land area. Those vast open spaces are celebrated for their spectacular beauty, agricultural heritage and habitat for wildlife. This also means we have long distances to traverse, and because we have only invested in highways, we traverse these distances by car. If the norm is to celebrate these two cultural characteristics, then we have a serious problem where they overlap. Montana's DUI problem is where these two parts of our culture overlap.

Montana needs transit. Our culture, climate and demographics require it for the safety of our citizens. Our history was not laid down by the automobile, it was by the railroad. Our cities and towns were connected by rail transit, amazingly some of them by the world's first electrified passenger rail line. Today the Empire Builder provides essential service to Montana's High Line, an example of what we have lost in the more populated portion of our state. Rail transit isn't everything however, and it may not make the most financial sense in all cases. Motor coaches have come a long way, and are a highly viable option for connecting many towns together.

Our population is aging and this demographic requires more transportation options to be able to safely get around. When the weather turns sour, our highways are hazardous even for the most adept driver. Unfortunately, the bus options we do have leave much to be desired. Anyone who has been on our existing motor coach services along I-90 and between Missoula and Whitefish knows how poor the current service is. The service is slow and badly timed to fit with most people's lives. To be a true transportation option, we need to think of transit as a part of our highway system. It is only right to give young people, aging Montanans and disabled citizens of our state the same access to the roads they pay for as anyone.

The \$.02 tax on gas is a very small price to pay to be able to leverage the additional federal funding that is available for us to provide these essential services to our towns and cities.

Missoula UDASH Case Study:

If the culture in Montana combines driving and drinking, one can imagine that these combined with a college lifestyle would be a problem. Montana's universities, like others around the country, have a drinking culture. In 2003 students at the University of Montana knew they couldn't stop their peers from drinking, but maybe they could be prevented from driving drunk if they had another way home.

We started with one bus serving the UM campus, student housing and downtown. The bus runs until 12:00am Monday-Wednesday and until 2:30am Thursday-Saturday. In the last 10 years the service has grown to two buses with a 15 minute frequency on Friday/Saturday nights when we reach peak ridership of 200-300 rides. For fall 2012 we gave a total of 20,797 rides on our late night service. That was a 19% increase over fall 2011 ridership. Ridership has increased 67.5% every year since the service

began in 2003. Every ride on our bus is a potential drunk driver taken off the road. We couldn't do anything about the drinking culture, but we could offer a safe option. Whether it is night bus service in urban areas or taxis elsewhere, we feel it is an effective policy to reduce drunk driving. Enforcement is important, but if we can prevent breaking the law altogether Montana will be much healthier.

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