

Transportation Interim Committee

Transit Overview & Follow-up

9/11/2020

Overview

- Transit in Montana provides rides to any person who needs transportation and has become literally a lifeline for many Montanans' who need public transportation to medical and nutritional services. For many Montanans, it is their only way to the rest of the world.
- The Montana Department of Transportation passes millions of dollars in Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding to local transit providers across Montana. Transit systems develop their own routes and services locally. MDT provides technical assistance and support for all rural transit activities.

History and Existing Services

- In 2005, Montana had 9 rural general public transit systems and 3 urban systems (Billings, Great Falls and Missoula).
- Federal funding increased 239% in the 2005 federal surface transportation act (SAFETEA-LU), significantly increasing public transportation service throughout the state. Today, there are 41 rural public providers and 3 urban transit systems. MDT administers pass through funding to 38 of the rural systems. The 3 urban systems receive funding directly from FTA.
- Federal funding for rural transit agencies includes operations, vehicle purchases, facilities, and planning activities. All funded activities require a non-federal match.
- Montana's state funded TransADE (Transportation Assistance for the Elderly and Disabled) program provides these rural transit systems with the much-needed match to assist them in maximizing their federal dollars for services to the elderly and disabled.
- Coordinated efforts have improved the efficiency of these systems by bringing local transportation officials together through transportation advisory committee meetings to make key decisions on service and funding for their communities.
- MDT works with Veterans Transportation service to maximize the resources available by sharing rides across the state.

Rural Transit Systems: Performance Data

- In 2019, Rural transit systems in Montana provided 2.2M rides statewide. (MT's Urban transit systems typically provide around 1.5 million rides annually)
- Of that, 1.2M were provided to the elderly and disabled.
- Transit buses traveled 7.1M miles during that year.
- 7 of 12 Amtrak stations connect with local Transit services and 3 Amtrak station locations also offer essential air services.
- Intercity services include Jefferson Lines, Salt Lake Express, Skyline, Flathead Transit, North Central Montana Transit and Northern Transit Interlocal. These intercity service providers cover all major corridors in Montana.

Funding

- In 2005, Montana received about \$5 million* in federal funding to implement public transportation services around the state.
- In 2020, FAST ACT provided the following funding to Montana's transit systems:

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<u>Federal</u>	<u>Match (Fed/Local)</u>	<u>FAST ACT funding approximately \$24M</u>
Section 5307 (Urban)	50/50 Operating; 80/20 Capital	\$5.064M Urbanized (direct from FTA to Missoula, Great Falls, Billings)
Section 5310 (Capital)	86.58/13.42 Capital; 85/15 ADA Capital	\$489K Urbanized, \$467K Non-Urbanized
Section 5311 (Rural)	54.11/45.89 Operating; 80/20 Admin and Maint; 86.58/13.42 Capital	\$11.7M Non-Urbanized, \$137K RTAP (Rural Transit Asst. Program)
Section 5311(c)(1)(b)** (Tribal)	100% Federal – Operating, Admin, Maint, Capital	\$2.27M Tribes (direct from FTA)
Section 5339 (Capital)	80/20 Capital	\$514K Urbanized, \$3.5M States Discretionary
CARES Act (5307 and 5311) COVID-19 Response	100% Federal – Operating, Admin, Maint, Capital	\$14.3M Urbanized, \$35.4M Non-Urbanized
Urbanized = Billings, Missoula, & Great Falls		Non-Urbanized = Rural Areas in the State
State		
TransADE (MCA 7-14-112)	Used entirely as match	Approximately \$1,400,000
Fuel Tax (MCA 7-14-102)		\$75,000

***Includes Sections 5307, 5310, 5311, 5316, and 5317**

****Tribal Transit funding program**

- The FTA Section 5309 Capital Investment Grant Program is a discretionary program that is a multi-step, multi-year process. Projects must receive at least a “medium” overall rating to be eligible for funding. The evaluation and rating criteria to determine a need for rail service includes but not limited to: congestion relief, cost effectiveness (cost per trip), local financial commitment (acceptable degree of local financial commitment including evidence of stable and dependable financing sources). The matching criteria for this program is 80%(federal)/20%(non-federal) and funding is for only the initial construction phase. Non-federal sources must cover a large portion of the startup and ongoing costs through state or local appropriations, dedicated tax revenues, private donations, etc. Montana has not received these funds due to eligibility and program requirements.

Issues

- Through the pandemic ridership has dramatically decreased. However, the need is still there, and ridership numbers are starting to improve over time.
- CARES Act funding has helped the rural transit systems to continue to provide service during the pandemic providing them with 100% federal funds.
- The state funded TransADE program continues to be a vital funding source for operations of elderly and disabled transit service and in matching the federal transit funds. This state funding is critical to transit agencies to maximize their federal funding.

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Federal Surface Transportation Program Reauthorization

Status:

- The *Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act* expires September 30, 2020.
- Though there is movement on reauthorization in both chambers of Congress with initial Senate Environment & Public Works committee action on the highway program provisions thru the *American Transportation Infrastructure Act (ATIA) of 2019* and the recent passage of the *Investing in a New Vision for the Environment and Surface Transportation in America (INVEST in America) Act* by the House, reauthorization this year may be difficult given the few remaining days that Congress is in session.
- These bills are a first step in a lengthy process for transportation funding and continued long-term program stability. Current reauthorization bills through the House and Senate are quite different from each other.
 - The House bill, passed along a partisan vote, includes significant increases in funding and program expansion.
 - The Senate Bill unanimously passed out of committee with more modest growth in funding. The transit and safety provisions have not yet been considered.
 - Funding for the program also has not yet been formally considered by either chamber.

MDT Readiness:

- MDT has experience in working with growth in the Federal program as demonstrated thru successful implementation of the various reauthorization acts over the past decades, which have all included highway and transit program growth.
- Relative to public transportation, with the significant growth provided thru the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, MDT implemented a successful, coordinated approach that expanded transit services and the number of providers throughout the state. This effort has continued with demonstrated success thru implementation of the transportation provisions and funding provided through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and the recent 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding.

Passenger Rail

- Today MT's passenger rail service consists of a daily east-west bound passenger train operated by Amtrak, the Empire Builder line, which runs across Montana's hi-line, providing passenger service to 12 Montana stations. The Empire Builder provides essential services to Montanans. People rely on this line to get to school, hospitals, and other essential services. Businesses along the route rely on the Empire Builder by using the available baggage service to receive express shipments of goods.
- MDT's role in rail is limited and includes:
 - MDT manages rail programs including the Montana Essential Freight Rail Loan (MEFRL) Program and the highway railroad crossing safety programs.
 - MDT also owns rail track near Lewistown that is operated by CMR – MDT does not operate any lines.
 - MDT advocates for preservation of existing passenger rail service
- Missoula County is leading a charge for the establishment of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority with a goal of establishing safe passenger rail service through southern Montana. Rail Authorities, at the local government level, are provided for in Montana Code Annotated 7-14-16. To date the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority is comprised of about 12 counties. MDT is following the conversation and will provide information as able. More information can be found at <https://montanapassengerrailsummit.org/big-sky-passenger-rail-authority>.