



# Public Involvement Program

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the public involvement program to date. There are several components to this program including the involvement of a Policy Group made up of elected officials from each of the five counties. Additionally, a Stakeholders Group of interested agencies provides technical review of reports and insight into both the current services and community character. Many of the Stakeholder Group members are also members of the local Transportation Advisory Committees in their respective counties. In addition to these two groups, the Montana Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the LSC team, held local public meetings covering the study area. A summary of the issues and discussion is presented for review.

## POLICY GROUP

In November 2006, MDT and LSC began the process of soliciting elected officials and decision-makers from across the Five Valleys Region. The Policy Group was initially intended to be made up of elected officials from each of the counties, municipalities, and the local tribal government. Letters were mailed out across the Five Valleys Region seeking elections for a member representative to represent constituents from the respective areas. On January 10, 2007, the first Policy Group meeting was held in Missoula at MDT's Region 1 offices. Eleven representatives were present for this initial meeting, which was aimed at providing an overview of the process and project background, general roles the Policy Group would play throughout the process, significant issues which need to be addressed throughout this study, and an overview of the public involvement program. Overall, it was stressed that the Policy Group would set the direction and policy for the study as it progresses. Appendix A provides the list of Policy Group members.

## **STAKEHOLDERS GROUP**

In addition to the Policy Group, MDT and LSC involved a group of local stakeholders. The Stakeholder Group is made up of representatives of various stakeholders in the community such as transportation providers, human services agencies, and citizens. This group provided broad representation from throughout the study area and served as an advisory panel for the study. Input from the Stakeholder Group was used by the consultant team in the study and given to the Policy Group. Twelve representatives attended the first meeting in January 2007. Appendix B provides the list of Stakeholders Group members.

## **STUDY ISSUES**

Study issues were identified by attendees of the two meetings. The issues which were identified are:

- Funding. What are the costs of providing transportation service?
- People in this region like transit and rail.
- There is a lack of riders. Some services have been tried with very little demand.
- There is a lack of flexibility for users.
- Services should not be centered on Missoula.
- Coordination.
- Publicity.
- The Montana mentality and attitude are not supportive of transit use.
- There should be fewer single-occupant vehicle-trips.
- Any service should be cost-effective.
- Address special needs: mental health, nursing homes, hospitals.
- Traffic congestion.
- Solve local problems first.
- Kalispell-Polson.
- Darby-Hamilton.
- Salmon-Hamilton.
- Use volunteers for transportation.
- Lack of employment stability and shifting commute patterns.
- Price of gasoline will increase demand.
- Long commutes.
- Lack of reliable cars.
- Difficulty in finding housing.
- Aging population and need to access services.
- Transportation needs of students (college and high school) and youth. Also non-traditional students.
- Some people prefer buses and some people prefer vanpools or carpools.

- Too many stops and too long travel times result in poor service.
- Integration of different services and positioning to grow in the future.
- Education and publicity of services is critical.
- Technology difficulties and lack of communications.
- Flexibility in the type of vehicles.
- Lack of coordination from the Disabled American Veterans.
- Consolidation vs. coordination. Coordination should occur, but may not need consolidation.
- Poor communication of changes and new programs.
- Aging workforce.
- Solutions should include ridesharing and park-and-ride.
- There should be regular regional transportation meetings, quarterly or semi-annually.

## COMMUNITY MEETING INPUT

Several community meetings were held across the Five Valleys Region. Table II-1 provides the meeting location and dates of those meetings. A summary of the issues and discussion from the initial meetings are presented in the following section. Much of the discussion was on assessing the needs and gaps in services for different market segments of the population. Additionally, needs vary across the Region and so each area has distinct needs for services. During the second set of meetings, the alternatives were presented. Although attendance was low, there was support for starting with small increments of service.



<b>Table II-1 Summary of Community Meetings</b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b># of Attendees</b>
Hamilton Resource Council Conference Room	February 20, 2007	4:00 to 6:00 p.m.	8
Plains, Clark Fork Valley Hospital	February 21, 2007	11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.	5
Polson, City Hall Council Chambers	February 21, 2007	4:00 to 6:00 p.m.	10
Lolo Community Center	February 22, 2007	11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.	35
Clinton, Clinton Federated Women's Club	February 22, 2007	4:00 to 6:00 p.m.	0
Hamilton Resource Council Conference Room	August 22, 2007	10:00 a.m. to noon	2
Frenchtown High School	August 22, 2007	3:00 to 5:00 p.m.	2
Missoula, Grant Creek Inn	December 5, 2007	4:00 - 6:00 p.m.	17

## **Hamilton**

The Hamilton meeting took place the evening of February 20, 2007. Meeting attendees represented both stakeholders and decision-makers in the area. The following issues and discussion points are notable:

- Existing vanpool service is effective; however, bus service may not be.
- Must “sell” the service as a reliever of congestion and air quality issues, as well as it must represent a cost savings.
- Service must be convenient.
- Seniors may not use an intercity service due to the fact that they would need to transfer to Mountain Line in Missoula to reach their final destination.
- There is a need for the unemployed/underemployed to reach employment opportunities and interviews.
- While there may be a medical need, this specialized need is difficult to accommodate using standard intercity services.
- Children also represent a need at the north end of the valley for activities and participation in organizations such as the YMCA.
- There may be a college student need; however, this may be minimal.
- There needs to be a real education and marketing campaign if any type of expanded service is to be successful.
- Challenges for service include getting to Missoula efficiently and coordination with Mountain Line for transfers must be done effectively.
- The over-arching sentiment is that while people may want service, the reality is that it may not be used.
- If any service is initiated, it must start small and grow as needed.
- May be a real need for additional service, (mid-morning/mid-afternoon) for a select market segment.

A second meeting was held in Hamilton on August 22, 2007. There were two attendees. The options were presented and feedback was that the greatest need was for periodic scheduled service to allow Ravalli County residents to access medical facilities in Missoula. Commuter service and all-day service were not seen as priorities.

## **Plains**

The Plains meeting took place the following day (February 21, 2007) at the Clark Fork Valley Hospital. With the distances between the Plains area and Missoula, discussion focused on other community connections such as Polson, Kalispell, and even Spokane, Washington. The following issues and discussion points are notable:

- Plains has one of the few medical centers since the Hot Springs Hospital closed recently.
- Given Sanders County's distance from Missoula, medical trips to Spokane are similar, and some prefer to go there instead of Missoula.
- Trips west of Thompson typically end in Sand Point, while trips east go to Polson.
- Coordination between Sanders Transportation and Mountain Line is an option; however, most users don't necessarily like to transfer and learn the Mountain Line system.
- If Sanders Transportation has one request to go to Missoula, they honor that request.
- Longer distance trips need different vehicles (minivans) instead of a larger bus for few people.
- Sanders and Mineral Counties could coordinate "down valley" trips to Missoula.
- There is a need for mechanic services and facilities in Plains or Hot Springs to store community buses.

## **Polson**

The same day (February 21, 2007), a meeting was held in Polson at the City Council Chambers. There was good discussion on the transportation needs of the area, both in terms of local and regional service. Much of the issues and discussion regarding regional service are provided in the following notable bullet points:

- There is a need for trips between Arlee, Polson, and Missoula.
- Any service provided needs to be affordable.
- The consensus was that service should be higher frequency when provided; however, it would not need to be provided daily.
- Two round-trips per day between Polson and Kalispell, and Polson and Missoula would satisfy many of the needs.
- There is a shortage of qualified drivers.
- One of the greatest difficulties is scheduling service around dialysis appointments in Missoula. There is rarely any flexibility in this scheduling. Most other medical appointments and five of fourteen clinics work with transportation providers to schedule appointments.
- Need to provide for elderly and low-income individuals.
- An education/promotion component needs to be addressed.
- Local providers would be willing to coordinate and provide feeder service to the regional services to Missoula and Kalispell.
- There is a need for a regional/county transportation coordinator.

## **Lolo**

The Lolo meeting was held at the Community Center during a Senior Luncheon. Additionally, members of the community were able to attend and discuss any

intercity needs. There was some participation by the seniors. Questions and issues which were raised at this meeting included the following:

- How would it be financed?
- Where would a pick-up point in Lolo be?
- When would it operate?
- There is a great deal of development up the Lolo Creek area.
- Need to publicize the meetings.
- Who would operate the service?

### **Clinton**

Unfortunately, this meeting did not take place because the facility was locked and there were no attendees.

### **Frenchtown**

A public meeting was held at the Frenchtown High School on August 22, 2007. The meeting was held in the school library and two of the librarians participated. There were no other attendees. The two attendees were not aware of the regional transit study, so information about the study was presented. The two participants commented that a vanpool from Missoula might be beneficial for faculty and staff at the school.

### **Missoula**

The final public meeting for the study was held on Missoula on December 5, 2007 at the Grant Creek Inn. The meeting was publicized through local media and flyers were sent to all of the Policy Group and Stakeholder Group members to distribute. Group members were encouraged to publicize the meeting and to promote attendance. In addition, over 200 direct invitations were sent to those who had asked to be informed about the study, either by e-mail or direct mail. There were only 17 in attendance at this meeting with only five being from outside the City of Missoula. Many of the comments were from advocates for transit service rather than from those who live outside Missoula and could be potential users. The comments discounted any demand analysis and indicated a strong desire for frequent bus service in the corridors outside Missoula. Comments included requests to consider light rail service, to use the comprehensive bus service, and plan for

long-range needs. There was support for additional vanpools from attendees living outside Missoula. The written comments are included in Appendix J.

## **MEETING QUESTIONNAIRE**

In addition to the commuter and community telephone surveys, which are presented in this report, LSC distributed a short questionnaire at the meetings to take written comments and spur discussion. While there is no statistical significance to the responses, the input represents the opinions of those participating.

### **Travel Characteristics**

Similar to the commuter survey presented in the following chapter, this shortened version of the questionnaire attempted to gain insight from the public meetings and spur discussion. The survey asked respondents to indicate things such as frequency of travel to Missoula, mode of travel used, other communities frequented, and provided space to provide additional comments.

#### Travel Frequency

When asking about travel frequency to Missoula, 41 percent of respondents indicated that they travel there daily. Twenty-one (21) percent indicated they travel to Missoula two to four times per week, while 17 percent travel there several times per month. Other communities frequented include destinations such as Kalispell, Lolo, Polson, Bonner, and the Bitterroot Valley. Travel frequency to these communities is somewhat less frequent than those reported trips to Missoula; however, some reported daily and weekly trips.

#### Trip Purpose and Mode

Respondents were asked to indicate the primary purpose for travel to Missoula. The highest indicated responses were for Work, Medical, Shopping, and Education. Surprisingly, when respondents indicated their primary travel mode to Missoula, using a bus ranked the highest, with driving with family/friend a closely ranked second and driving alone ranking third. This use of buses may reflect the high representation of seniors in these meetings. Most of the respondents indi-

cated that they travel with a friend or family when they travel to other communities; however, many still drive alone.

While these responses do not represent statistically-significant results, they help to provide some insight into travel patterns across the Region. These data supplement other public input such as is found in the commuter and telephone surveys.

### **Additional Public Input**

There have been several additional surveys conducted by various other agencies. However, it should be pointed out that these agencies represent only the senior population in the region.

### **Missoula Aging Services**

Missoula Aging Services has conducted a survey as part of a four-year strategic planning process. Missoula Aging Services surveyed the communities of Clinton, Frenchtown, Missoula, and Seeley Lake. These surveys reported on housing, medical, and transportation issues. There was a total of 133 respondents from the five groups. For the most part, seniors feel they have problems with transportation in each of their respective areas. Aside from those respondents in Missoula, transportation issues seem to be more of a problem in the rural areas where services are limited. The questions ranged from the frequency of service, to difficulty in getting in and out of buses, to feelings about safe driving during the winter.

### **Community Needs Assessment**

A Community Needs Assessment for the Area VI Agency on Aging was conducted by Northwest Montana Human Resources, Inc. Nearly 3,000 surveys were mailed to applicants for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program in Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, and Sanders Counties, Montana. Results presented were from seniors only, with a total of 164 completed surveys from those 60 years and older. There were few transportation questions asked of respondents; however, two percent list transportation as a top concern.