



# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

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The City of Laurel, in cooperation with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), contracted with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to complete a Transit Development Plan (TDP). The plan specifically focuses on public transportation issues for the residents of Laurel, Montana. The plan examined the transit needs, alternatives, and programs of the City of Laurel.



This report presents the existing community conditions, demographics, peer community analysis, service options, goals, objectives, and implementation plan for the preferred service plan. The report focuses on transportation for the general public, elderly, disabled, and commuters. There is currently limited transportation service within the City of Laurel as well as between the cities of Laurel and Billings, Montana.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyze and recommend strategies for the City of Laurel that will affect the delivery of public transportation services over the next five to six years. The finished product of this study describes the existing conditions in the region related to public transit services, discusses service and other alternatives for meeting the public transportation needs into the future, identifies the locally preferred set of alternatives, and presents an implementation plan for the next five to six years.

### REPORT CONTENTS

Chapter II of this document presents the mission statement, goals, and objectives of the planning process. Chapters III through VI review the existing conditions for the study area including the demo-



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graphics, transportation providers, transit demand, and peer community analysis. Chapters VII through IX present the service alternatives, vehicle types, and organizational alternatives. Chapters X and XI present the preferred service and implementation plans. Appendix C presents the coordination plan for the City of Laurel.

## **STUDY APPROACH**

As in many regions, the City of Laurel is taking a closer look at public transit services and is seeking to find the most effective means of providing those services. Public transportation is currently provided by several human service providers in the community, as detailed later in this document. A key element in the plan will be to clearly evaluate the unmet transportation needs of the local residents and businesses and the need for regional service between the cities of Laurel and Billings. The study will focus on the feasibility of providing public transit services to meet the community's needs.

One important step toward providing an integrated community-wide and regional transportation system is involving key players such as MDT, Yellowstone County, Yellowstone County Council on the Aging (YCCOA), other human service providers, local governments, and residents. Individuals from each key stakeholder agency served as members of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) for this planning process.

## **Project Team**

An initial “kick-off meeting” was held at Laurel City Hall on March 11, 2009. The meeting was attended by key stakeholders from the City of Laurel, Yellowstone County, and other local agencies within the study area that have transportation concerns for the community. This project team met to discuss the project goals, priorities, and a time line for completion of the final study. The project team also discussed the local stakeholders who will be critical in completing the transit study for the area.



The second SAC meeting was held on May 7, 2009 to discuss Technical Memorandum #1 and to provide feedback/comments to the LSC team. During this time, a public open house was also conducted to gather input regarding transit issues from residents of the study area.

The third SAC and public meetings were held on June 30, 2009 to discuss the service options and recommendations. The LSC team is presenting the service alternatives and recommendations to the Laurel City Council during the months of June and August 2009.

## **Stakeholders**

The group of local stakeholders identified by the project team included the following organizations:

- City of Laurel Planning Department
- City of Laurel Public Works Department
- MET (City of Billings transit service)
- City of Red Lodge
- MDT
- Yellowstone County
- YCCOA
- Crossings (senior living center)
- Laurel Senior Citizen Center
- Total Transportation
- Vocational Rehab
- Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services
- Elderly programs

These groups represent organizations that provide transportation services as well as those that may have a specific transportation need. These stakeholders were contacted to provide input for the transit study and help identify local transportation issues.

## **Opportunities for Public Involvement**

Throughout the planning process, public involvement is key to the success of the study area's transit plan. At critical points during the process, public meetings were announced and held where citizen participation was openly welcomed and appreciated.

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Two public open house sessions have already been conducted. A third is being held in August 2009. The open houses offer members of the community an opportunity to provide public input regarding transportation issues that should be addressed as part of the planning process. Community residents are asked to comment on the existing and future transit services within the region. The public is given the opportunity to state which transit services and alternatives they think are necessary in order to address identified issues and meet established goals.

## **SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES**

During the March 2009 meeting, the LSC team briefed SAC members on the study process to be undertaken over the six-month period. Key stakeholders involved with public transit services were identified. Major issues and concerns regarding public transportation were discussed. These major issues were reaffirmed at the SAC and public meetings held in May 2009.



Following are summaries of the major issues:

- Transportation to and from places of employment within the City of Billings
- Mobility of the elderly and disabled to and from medical appointments, work, and shopping in the cities of Laurel and Billings
- Student transportation to and from the City of Billings
- Access to and from work, medical, and shopping locations for the low-income population (due to the lack of private vehicles) in the cities of Laurel and Billings
- Implementation of the transit service in the short term and maintenance of the transit service over the long term
- Regional service between the cities of Laurel, Billings, and Red Lodge
- Coordination of the existing human service providers and private transportation services provided in the western portion of Yellowstone County
- Coordination with MET, which operates fixed-route transit service in the City of Billings
- Affordable transportation service within the City of Laurel and between the cities of Laurel and Billings