



# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

---

Opportunity Link contracted with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to develop a Regional Public Transportation Plan. The plan specifically focuses on transit service issues for north-central Montana. The plan examines the transit needs, alternatives, and programs that could be used to develop regional public transportation service throughout the study area. The study area encompasses the counties of Teton, Cascade, Judith Basin, Chouteau, Hill, Blaine, and Phillips. The study area is detailed in Chapter II.

### REPORT CONTENTS

The following is a brief outline of the contents of this report.

Chapter II presents the existing community conditions, demographics, and economics. Chapter III provides an overview of the existing transit services within the study area. Chapter IV presents an analysis of the existing and future transit demand within the study area. This analysis uses several demand models to analyze the location and level of transit need for the general public, elderly, disabled, and low-income populations.

Chapter V presents the peer communities analysis that LSC conducted in order to determine the public transit service operational structures and costs for other communities and Native American Reservations in Montana.

Chapter VI presents the mission statement and the supporting goals and objectives for the future regional transit service for north-central Montana.

Chapter VII reviews the different types of transit services that the study area could implement. This information was used in the determination and analysis of the transit service alternatives. Chapter VIII reviews the various transit vehicles that

## *Introduction*

could be purchased for the transit service. The type, size, cost, seating capacity, and general description of the different vehicles are discussed.

Chapter IX presents several coordination strategies that could be implemented in the region to fulfill the SAFETEA-LU and Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) coordination requirements for receiving Federal Transit Administration (FTA) 5310, New Freedom, and JARC funding. Chapter X presents the financial funding alternatives.

Chapter XI reviews the types of organizational structures that could be used to oversee the transit service. Chapter XII offers transit service alternatives for meeting the existing and future transit demands. The alternatives include: no change in the existing transit service, checkpoint service, vanpool service, demand-response service, and regional service. Also reviewed are the advantages and disadvantages of each transit service alternative, along with the level of capital needed to implement each alternative.

Chapter XIII details the operational function of each type of transit service recommended for implementation. Included are the service levels of each phase, route structure, schedules, capital requirements, and operational costs. Chapter XIV presents the implementation steps for each phase, as well as the organizational and management implementation steps. Chapter XIV includes a detailed financial plan and a marketing/implementation timeline.

This document should be reviewed by all concerned with the future of transit services within the study area. Comments should be submitted to either LSC or the Opportunity Link staff. Comments from this Draft Report will be incorporated into a Final Report. The Draft Report will be presented for review by the Stakeholders Committee before compilation of the Final Report.

## **STUDY APPROACH**

As in many regions, north-central Montana is taking a closer look at public transit services and is seeking to find the most effective means of providing those

services. Currently, there is little to no regional public transportation provided in north-central Montana. The key elements of the plan are to clearly evaluate the unmet transportation needs of the residents within the rural areas outside of the Great Falls urban area, and the feasibility of providing regional public transit services to meet these unmet needs.

One important step toward providing an integrated region-wide transportation system is involving key players such as the local residents, transit providers, human service agencies, governments, and MDT. The Opportunity Link Board members from the seven counties, human service providers, and two Native American Indian Reservations made up the Stakeholders Committee for this planning effort.

## **Project Team**

An initial “kick-off meeting” was held in Havre, Montana at the Opportunity Link offices on February 21, 2007. The meeting was attended by key stakeholders from Opportunity Link and other local agencies within the study area who have transportation concerns for the community. This project team met to discuss the transit issues, priorities, and a timeline for completion of the final study. The project team also discussed the public involvement process for this planning process and the local stakeholders who would be critical in completing the transit study for the area.

At the April 2007 Stakeholders Committee meetings, the LSC team discussed Technical Memorandum #1, obtained feedback and comments, developed the draft regional transit service alternatives, and conducted a work session to develop transit service goals and objectives. At the June 2007 Stakeholders Committee meetings, the LSC team presented the regional transit service alternatives analyzed in Technical Memorandum #2 and discussed adjustments to the recommended regional transit service plan. At the July 2007 Stakeholders Committee meetings, the LSC team presented Technical Memorandum #3, the preferred regional transit service plan, and the implementation plan. This Draft Report combines the three Technical Memoranda and the Stakeholders Committee comments.

## **Opportunities for Public Involvement**

Based on the discussion at the kick-off meeting, it was agreed that the public involvement process would be based on the Stakeholders Committee meetings. At each key point in the planning process, the LSC team conducted one Stakeholders Committee meeting each in Great Falls and Havre, which were publicly announced and open to the general public. These meetings offered the Stakeholders Committee and public an opportunity to provide input regarding the transportation issues and the existing/future transit services within the study area. The public was given the opportunity to state which transit services and alternatives they think are necessary in order to address the identified transportation issues and meet the established goals. This public involvement process was conducted in order to meet the FTA public involvement requirements. Appendix A presents the sign-in sheets from the Stakeholders Committee meetings, along with the meeting announcements and the contact list.

## **Stakeholders Committee**

The Stakeholders Committee represented organizations that provide transportation services and/or have a specific transportation need. The stakeholders were contacted to provide input for the transit study and help identify the local transportation issues. The group of local stakeholders identified by the project team included the following organizations:

- Health departments
- Opportunity Link member entities
- Elderly programs
- Colleges
- American Indian Nations and Reservations
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
- County governments
- Bear Paw development
- Work training programs
- TANF
- Human services programs
- Head Start program

## **SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES**

During the February 2007 kick-off meeting, the LSC team briefed the Stakeholders Committee on the study process to be undertaken. The key stakeholders involved

with public transit services were identified. The major issues and concerns regarding regional public transportation were discussed. These issues were used as the basis of the planning process to develop the preferred regional transit service for north-central Montana.

Following are summaries of the major issues:

- Transportation to and from places of employment throughout the study area.
- Mobility of the elderly and disabled to medical appointments, work, and shopping.
- Student transportation to and from the colleges.
- Access to employment, medical, and shopping locations for the low-income population due to the lack of private vehicles.
- Funding alternatives for the transit service.
- Sustainable long-term funding.
- Implementation of the transit service in the short term, and maintenance of the transit service over the long term.
- Coordination of the existing human service providers to meet the transportation needs in the region.
- Regional connection with Amtrak services in Havre and Malta.