

GREAT FALLS URBAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes
November 12, 2015

CALL TO ORDER

Acting Chair Dave Dobbs called the Great Falls Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting to order at approximately 9:35 a.m. in the Rainbow Room of the Civic Center, #2 Park Drive South.

ROLL CALL OF TAC MEMBERS & ATTENDANCE

TAC Members Present/Represented:

Brian Clifton	Director, Cascade County Public Works Department
Dave Dobbs	City of Great Falls Engineer
Andrew Finch	MPO, Sr. Transportation Planner, City of Great Falls
Craig Raymond	Director, City of Great Falls Planning & Community Development
Jim Helgeson	Manager, Great Falls Transit District
Ken Jorgensen	Street Supervisor, City of Great Falls Street Division
Courtney Lyerly	Civil Engineer, Special Projects, City of Great Falls
Christie McOmber	District Project Engineer, GF District MDT
Jim Rearden	Director, City of Great Falls Public Works Department
Rick Schutz	Superintendent, Cascade County Road & Bridge Division
Carol Strizich (via telephone)	Statewide & Urban Planning Section, Helena MDT
Bruce Treis	Environmental Health Specialist, City-County Health Department
Jerilee Weibel	Right-of-Way Supervisor, Great Falls District – MDT

TAC Members Absent/Not Represented:

Susan Conell	Director, Cascade County Planning Division
Jim Ekberg	Deputy Director, Cascade County Public Works Department
John Faulkner	Director, Great Falls International Airport Authority
Bill McLaughlin	Deputy Base Civil Engineer, Malmstrom Air Force Base
Jerry McKinley	Traffic Supervisor, City of Great Falls

Recognition of Others Present:

Galen Steffens	Planner II, City of Great Falls
Chris Ward	TD&H Engineering
Kenn Winnegar (via telephone)	Statewide & Urban Planning Section, Helena MDT

MINUTES

Prior to the meeting, Committee members were provided a copy of the August 13, 2015 TAC meeting minutes. Mr. Dobbs moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Lyerly. All being in favor, the minutes were approved as submitted.

BUSINESS ITEMS

Prior to the meeting, TAC members were provided with copies of the TAC meeting agenda. Copies of the agenda and handout materials are attached and incorporated by reference.

5A. Addition to Urban System/removal of Airport Dr. from Urban System

Mr. Finch provided an update, stating he received notice from Carol Strizich that the Transportation Commission approved the removal of Airport Drive from the Urban System, and also approved the addition of a segment of 9th Street South and 17th Street South to improve connectivity. The next step is to finalize the easement and operational agreement between the Airport and the City, effectively transferring functional responsibility to the Airport while MDT retains roadway ownership.

Ms. Strizich said the legal department is actively working on the transfer documentation.

No formal action was required.

5B. North Great Falls Transportation Study

Mr. Finch said this was an item discussed during the Unified Planning Work Program discussion for FFY 2016. He said the north area of town is seeing the most industrial and residential growth, and there are transportation needs in the 20 year horizon of the Transportation Plan. This is an opportunity to hire a consultant to take an in-depth look at this particular sub-area of Great Falls and make specific recommendations based upon different modeling for new roadways, or changes in how existing roadways function, as well as examining the different recommendations regarding U.S 87, particularly the intersection of Old Havre Hwy and 15th Street NE. One of the key chokepoints is 36th Avenue NE and Bootlegger; some minor changes have been made, and the transportation study will help take a closer look at whether or not the changes have been effective. As of yet, there has been no feedback.

The contracting agency will be the City of Great Falls, specifically the Planning Division. Mr. Finch welcomed review and comments of the RFP and Proposed Scope of Work, and said he will send it to the Technical Advisory Committee for approval.

Mr. Rearden asked if this study would include the northwest area Great Falls. Mr. Finch replied that the project limits are 6th Street Northwest over to Black Eagle Road, and he doesn't have definitive limits yet on the north to south area of the study. Mr. Rearden asked if the developers are supposed to pay for a portion of a traffic study in the northwest quadrant. Mr. Finch said there was cash in hand for \$10,000 contribution from developers, so it will be partially locally funded. Mr. Rearden asked if this will include discussion on how to pay for improvements, and Mr. Finch said yes, that will be one of the key requirements of the consultant.

Mr. Rearden and Mr. Clifton requested an emailed copy of the RFP.

5C. CMAQ/Bus Purchase Discussion

Mr. Helgeson requested \$1,380,000 of the MACI funding for the purchase of four 35' fixed route buses for the Great Falls Transit District (GFTD). He said congress eliminated discretionary spending, and funds that previously were used for bus purchases have now gone to large urban systems via the FTA. Great Falls is considered a small urban system, and the funding of approximately \$50,000 to \$80,000 a year to maintain a fleet of eighteen buses and nine Paratransit vans is woefully inadequate.

The useful life of a 35' bus is twelve years and the cost to replace it is \$380,000. The useful life of a Paratransit van is seven years and the cost to replace it \$40,000. Currently, there are four buses and nine Paratransit vans which have reached the end of their useful life, totaling \$1,880,000 to replace. He said the Great Falls Transit District has \$500,000 for this procurement, leaving them \$1,380,000 short.

The GFTD has worked to stagger the purchases of buses and vans so the whole fleet does not have to be replaced at one time. The longer the District keeps out of date vehicles and spends on repairs, the less cost effective the operations become. Mr. Helgeson said with the purchase of the four requested buses, they will not need to procure further buses until 2019. He thanked the Committee for their consideration, and said Congress is currently working on a new bill, and he hopes they will see the need for a better funding mechanism in the future. He said the District does not want to get to the point where they have to replace all eighteen buses at one time.

Ms. Steffens asked what will happen to the buses that are being replaced. Mr. Helgeson said there is a possibility they will be able to sell them; there are three or four places in the United States that buy buses and most of them go to South America. If they are sold, the Federal Government requires the money be

used towards the replacement of the buses; if the GFTD ends up not needing the full \$1,380,000, they would not take the full amount.

Mr. Helgeson said it can take one or two years to receive a bus once purchased; every bus in the United States is custom built upon purchasing, and they are purchased through the manufacturer, Gilly Corporation. There was discussion about how they are purchased, and "piggy-backing" off other large orders.

Mr. Clifton asked if they were considering a true capital improvements program where they replace one to two buses every year. Mr. Helgeson said they are set up now for two to four buses every two to four years. Under the current federal plan of \$50,000 to \$80,000 a year, it takes a long time to save up for one \$380,000 bus. Mr. Helgeson said there are State of Good Repair Grants that are given out; however, because Great Falls competes with places such as New York City, they are impossible to receive unless you are in the top 35 transit districts in the country.

There was discussion about a revolving purchase fund and entering a public-private partnership with the bus manufacturer, which is not a possibility in the U.S. or Canada. Mr. Helgeson also discussed the difficulties of being classified as "small urban" by the federal government (population of 50,000 to 100,000), and he explained that cities with under 300 buses are considered small. He said the Community Transportation Association started a "small urban" group which has been lobbying Congress aggressively to stop getting completely overlooked.

Mr. Finch said TAC does have the option to allocate funds for capital improvements, but he suggested to take this under advisement, consider the Federal bill that may be passed in the next month or two regarding funds, and asked the TAC members to think about what their options are for use of the MAQI monies. Mr. Rearden asked how much money is available and Mr. Helgeson said it is approaching six million. Mr. Finch said he would check with Mr. Winnegar and Ms. Strizich to make sure that amount is actual funds available, not just projected figures. There was discussion about rotating the purchases of buses every year as opposed to every four years.

Ms. Steffens asked Mr. Helgeson if when he tried to sell the 1991 buses, he discussed with the company further what he could get for buses that were in better shape. Mr. Helgeson said they operate off supply and demand; there is no way to sit down and calculate what you can get back from a bus depending on its condition or number of years used. Further, because the federal government contributes funds, they require the buses be used for their full useful life of 12 years, otherwise the grant money must be paid back.

There was agreement to consider the request, give the Federal bill more time, and consider other replacement options. Mr. Helgeson said at this point, he sees no other option; however, he is willing to continue looking into replacement options.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Finch said there have been some public inquiries on the crane out on the Sun River, which is the Sun River Trail project.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Mr. Raymond moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Dobbs. All being in favor, the meeting adjourned at 10:25 a.m.