

Montana Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division Seeks Public Input Regarding Airway Beacon Program

HELENA — The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) would like to notify the public and seek comments on a proposal to decommission airway beacons.

The 84 airway beacons in Montana were installed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in the 1930s as part of a national airway corridor network to assist pilots with night navigation. As safer navigational resources became available in the 1960s the FAA began decommissioning the airway beacons until withdrawing all support by the early 1970s.

At that point the State adopted and continued operation of 17 of the beacons in southwest Montana where radio navigational aids did not provide night pilots complete coverage in this area. As navigational technology has advanced, however, the beacons have become less viable as a navigational aid to night pilots.

This spring, MDT Director Mike Tooley executed a charter that established a working group to assist him with his decision regarding the future of the remaining airway beacons in Montana. With the objective of providing information, advice, and recommendations for Director Tooley, the working group met to consider multiple issues regarding the beacons, including:

- Whether a network of beacons can and should be maintained, and the anticipated level of human and financial resources necessary to do so, which may include a public-private partnership
- Long-term funding sources for any maintained beacons long term
- How beacons can be regularly monitored to determine they are working properly
- Which beacons have significant maintenance and other issues and whether they should be maintained or removed from the system
- Issues surrounding decommission such as expense, liability, or environmental concerns
- Other currently unanticipated issues that emerge from the group's investigation and deliberations

The working group met to discuss these issues and concluded that only the nine beacons MDT identifies as operational plus the University Mountain site should be considered for some sort of future use by MDT. The working group went on to recommend the following two options for these 10 beacons:

- 1) MDT disposes of all the beacons, but offers any public/private partnerships the opportunity to assume ownership before they are decommissioned, and
- 2) MDT continues to maintain the 10 beacons identified, understanding that MDT has limited funding to put toward this maintenance and that alternative funding for the remainder might need to be found through private entities or foundations.

To inform the public and encourage public comment on the proposal, MDT will be conducting public informational meetings in the form of an open house, as follows:

- August 24, 2017, Billings Airport, 1901 Terminal Circle (the meeting will be held at the Airport Operations Center located on Overlook Drive off Highway 3), 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- August 28, 2017, Missoula Airport, 5225 Highway 10 West (the meeting will be held next to the restaurant/bar on the main floor of the terminal building), 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- August 31, 2017, Helena Airport, 2801-2873 Skyway Drive (the meeting will be held on the second floor of the terminal building next to the administration office), 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

For more information please contact the Aeronautics Division Administrator Debbie Alke at (406) 444-9569. Members of

the public may submit written comments to the Montana Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division office at P.O. Box 200507, Helena, MT 59620, or online at:

www.mdt.mt.gov/mdt/comment_form.shtml

Please note that your comments are for the “Airway Beacons Proposal” and submit by September 30, 2017, to ensure your comments are adequately reviewed and considered. Comments will not receive a response.

Alternative accessible formats of this information will be provided upon request by contacting the Office of Civil Rights, P.O. Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620; (406) 444-9229; fax (406) 444-7243, or e-mail to aflesch@mt.gov. Those using a TTY may call (800) 335-7592 or through the Montana Relay Service at 711.