



# Meeting Summary

PROJECT: Montana Freight Plan      DATE/TIME: 10/17/2016 at 1:30 PM

ORGANIZER: MDT Rail, Transit, and Planning Division      SUBJECT: Stakeholder Meeting #1

LOCATION: MDT Headquarters West Auditorium

ATTENDEES:

Mark Blazer	Watco Company
Kathy Fasso	Port of Montana
Nik Griffith	DOWL
Neil Hanson	Hanson Trucking
Matt Jones	BNSF
Quincy Lee	Port of Montana
Melissa Lewis	Port of Northern Montana
Brian Lorengo	Montana Logging Association
Kraig McLeod	MDT Rail, Transit, and Planning Division
Diane Myers	MDT Rail, Transit, and Planning Division
Sarah Nicolai	DOWL
Spook Stang	Montana Motor Carriers Association
Mike Tooley	MDT Director
Charity Watt	MDT Rail, Transit, and Planning Division
Lynn Zanto	MDT Rail, Transit, and Planning Division

## MEETING SUMMARY

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On Monday, October, 17, 2016, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) hosted an initial freight stakeholder meeting to solicit input on the Montana Freight Plan. Freight stakeholders gathered in the MDT Headquarters West Auditorium for an overview presentation followed by open discussion on Montana's freight issues, needs, goals, trends, and challenges.

### **Stakeholder Discussion**

Stakeholders were asked to consider a series of questions regarding the current state, functionality, and future of Montana's freight system. They identified trends, challenges, barriers, solutions, and strategies for addressing Montana's freight system demands. Stakeholders discussed the following topics regarding the Montana freight system.

#### *Ocean Container Freight*

- There is a need for increased volume of freight through Montana to make container loading and unloading economically viable.
  - The Port of Montana accommodated container freight until 2008, when it became nonviable due to low density.
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- As a best practice, containers need to arrive at and depart from a facility at full capacity.
  - Containers are owned by shipping companies and need to be efficiently returned to the owners to maintain shipping through Montana.
  - The Port of Northern Montana is working on a feasibility study and business plan looking at on-site storage and making loading/unloading container freight viable.

#### *Funding*

- Infrastructure funding issues directly affect freight movement in Montana. Reinvestment and upgrades to the transportation system are needed to ensure efficient movement.
- An increase in the fuel tax is supported and would be a positive move to increasing state funding. The last increase in Montana's fuel tax was in 1991.
- Support of private-public partnerships is important and needed to help fill gaps in funding.

#### *Qualified Workforce Recruitment/Retention*

- New federal and Montana commercial driver license (CDL) regulations are making it difficult to hire and recruit drivers.
- Some drivers wait 6-8 weeks for licenses. Additionally, Haz Mat and other qualifications add to wait times.
- Third party companies in other states provide testing services that could help supplement and decrease wait times. Related bill drafts may be proposed for the 2017 Montana Legislative session; no bills are available currently.<sup>1</sup>
- Increased partnership between MDT, private companies, and freight partners is important to address this issue.
- Rail system retirement is not as acute as the issue facing the trucking industry.

#### *Oversized Loads*

- Weight restrictions on secondary roadways mean costly detours for drivers.
- Weight and size restriction differences between the states cause issues for drivers who are delivering in the five-state region (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, North and South Dakota) as regulations change at every border.

#### *Parking and Rest Areas*

- Current efforts to revitalize/reconstruct rest areas as truck parking are beneficial.
- Increased truck parking signage could benefit drivers by alerting them of availability earlier.

#### *Roadway Speed*

- Non-commercial drivers pass trucks and commercial vehicles at unsafe speeds.
- The conversation surrounding the speed limit increase bill during the 2015 session was concerning to stakeholders as it seems safety concerns were dismissed; more education could help alleviate those issues.
- Stakeholders noted insurance partners have identified an increase in rear-end collisions on Montana highways.
- Stakeholders mentioned that MT 16 in eastern Montana has a posted 65 mph speed for both commercial and non-commercial traffic.

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<sup>1</sup>As of October 18, 2016, only one bill draft (requested by Sen. Ed Buttrey) discusses drivers' licensing; no text for the bill is available yet.

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- The speed differential between commercial and non-commercial traffic is dangerous and can be frustrating for all drivers.

#### *Safety and Education*

- The Montana Motor Carriers have a successful high school education program teaching how to interact with trucks on the road. Grant funding or private/public partnership support could be used to expand the program.
- Rail stakeholders offer education programs and are seeing good trends. However, planning efforts that place walking paths near rail lines make it difficult to communicate the need for pedestrians to remain off rail tracks.
- MT 93 was presented as an example where passing lanes could enable commercial and non-commercial traffic to flow more safely together.
- Stakeholders mentioned that in eastern Montana there were fewer problems with delay and safety because of the higher number of passing lane segments, which give non-commercial drivers opportunities to safely pass commercial drivers.
- Stakeholders recommended MDT continue to educate the public and strategically discuss projects both in and outside of Montana that will affect freight stakeholders.
- Stakeholders also suggested coordinating with Canadian partners as federal, provincial, and local government coordination provides positive outcomes.
- Some stakeholders expressed concerns with issue groups pushing specific agendas that could hamper the ability for freight to move across Montana. Both environmental and “truck ban” concerns are issues that MDT could assist with by supporting education and communication with these groups.
- MDT-supported positive media attention is a vital part of stakeholder support that could be expanded to showcase freight achievements and successes.

#### *Infrastructure Elements*

- Grain elevator and pipeline infrastructure is essential to freight movement and assists in keeping truck weights and loads within regulations.
- Additionally, weight scales and stations remain important to movement and schedules.
- Stakeholders emphasized that, due to the interconnectivity of Montana’s freight network, all infrastructure elements are important. Failure of one element affects the movement, timing, and success of the entire network.

#### *Rail Service*

- Rail services need support to remain competitive with other shipping options both in and outside of Montana, while still being able to engage non-rail customers.

#### *Great Northern Corridor*

- Multiple stakeholders have joined MDT in support of the Great Northern Freight Corridor, a route from the Great Lakes to Canada and the West Coast.
- The coalition is working to increase the importance and prominence of the corridor.

#### *Permitting*

- In reference to developing and expanding freight infrastructure, stakeholders identified an increasingly difficult permitting process.
- Federal regulations and permitting processes are causing long, detrimental delays in system construction and expansion.

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### *Interstate System*

- Stakeholders support the identification of Montana's Interstate system as a critical freight corridor.
- Stakeholders mentioned that Montana Highways 2, 16, and 212 deserve to be considered as well.
- Routes connecting Boston to Seattle (by both highway and rail) and the CANAMEX corridor via I-15, are also important corridors to be included in freight system review.

### *Winter Conditions*

- Stakeholders noted MDT's efforts to keep roads clear and drivable during the winter are appreciated.

### *Rail Flow*

- Rail stakeholders mentioned that they made significant investment in their facilities to allow for increased volume and capacity.
- National trends are seeing rail freight volumes decrease as natural resource (e.g., coal) shipping decreases, but there are still many commodities moving over rail.

### *Multi-state Coordination*

- Stakeholders asked about the possibility for a multi-state freight plan that could include neighboring states and streamline the process. MDT explained efforts associated with the Great Northern Corridor Coalition and the Western States Freight Corridor enabled positive coordination between states.

## **MPO Freight and Vehicle Flow Mapping**

Stakeholders were presented with five maps of the Montana freight system, vehicle flows, and MPO freight routes (for Great Falls, Missoula, and Billings). Using colored dots and comments, stakeholders identified issues and opportunities within the system.

### *2015 Traffic Flow Map*

- Dot 1 – North Reserve Street, Missoula, MT
    - Traffic, access, and flow are all issues on this main thoroughfare through the city. Stakeholders mentioned drivers changing their hours to late at night or in the early morning to avoid lost time and improve safety.
  - Dot 2 – N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, Bozeman, MT
    - Congestion and lack of access in this area makes it difficult to navigate for larger commercial vehicles.
  - Dot 3 – The Flathead Valley/W. Reserve Drive/Bypass, Kalispell, MT
    - West Reserve Drive (site of the new Kalispell bypass) was identified as a place where delay was being caused by freight due to the construction and the consolidation of the lumber yards and mill in the area.
  - Dot 4 – Main Street, Billings, MT / Billings, Bypass
    - Due to construction and numerous roundabouts, the Billings area causes some drivers to take long detours adding hours to shipments and decreasing the safety of their trips.
  - Dot 5 – MT 89 / MT 12 – Billings, MT to Great Falls, MT
    - Stakeholders expressed surprise that the route did not see larger traffic volumes, as it seems to be heavily travelled when they and their peers
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use it.

- Stakeholders asked the map be expanded to include rail, pipeline, and other freight commodity flows around the state.

#### *Billings MPO Freight Infrastructure*

- Stakeholders feel the improvements coming from the ongoing Billings Bypass project will assist in decreasing congestion, freight-caused delay, and increase safety for commercial and non-commercial traffic.

#### *Great Falls MPO Freight Infrastructure*

- Stakeholders complimented the Great Falls area's traffic light timing and reasonable speeds, noting the combination enables easy navigation of 10<sup>th</sup> Ave. S, the main route through the city.

#### *Missoula MPO Freight Infrastructure*

- Stakeholders noted congested roadways such as North Reserve Street in Missoula present challenges for freight movement.
- Stakeholders noted lack of alternative business accesses that are separated from through traffic routes. Access planning causes issues when it creates chokepoints at intersections and at traffic signals.
- Stakeholders added there are similar issues in the Flathead Valley on US 93.
- Suggestions included continuing to work with local jurisdictions on long-range and land use planning efforts to keep freight in mind.

### **Next Steps**

Ms. Nicolai explained DOWL would provide a summary of the workshop and a copy of the presentation to stakeholders in the coming weeks. She requested that stakeholders review copies of the maps and return any comments to Charity Watt. Comments may be provided throughout the duration of the planning effort to Ms. Watt or through the MDT Montana Freight Plan website.

<http://www.mdt.mt.gov/freightplan/default.shtml>

MDT will hold another stakeholder meeting in the spring to gather feedback on the draft plan.

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