

ADA TRANSITION PLAN UPDATE

Montana Department of Transportation



FEBRUARY 26, 2021

Providing equitable access for all transportation users



Public and Stakeholder Involvement Plan

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

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Montana Department of Transportation



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Public and Stakeholder Involvement Plan

1.0. INTRODUCTION

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has initiated an update to the 2016 *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan* which directs the department's efforts to provide an accessible transportation system within the state of Montana. The purpose of the plan is to provide guidance for removal of accessibility barriers in the public right of way on state-maintained routes and in MDT's public programs and services. The plan provides an overview of MDT's external ADA program, outlines MDT's mission and ADA policy, and identifies methods to assist MDT in complying with ADA regulations. Nearly five years have passed since the last ADA Transition Plan was finalized and the department has experienced many changes. An update to the plan is now needed to ensure it provides a full and current disclosure of MDT practices and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance and requirements and that it continues to provide a consistent, repeatable, respected methodology to be used as a tool for MDT efforts to eliminate accessibility barriers.

1.1. Planning Process

The updated ADA Transition Plan will be completed in three phases: discovery, synthesis, and documentation. The discovery phase involves identifying areas for improvement and best practices for the ADA program by conducting a document review, MDT staff interviews, investigation of ADA plans for other jurisdictions, and an audit of current processes. The synthesis phase involves reviewing findings from the discovery phase to identify process improvements to include in the plan update. Finally, in the documentation phase the project team will develop an updated ADA Transition Plan that reflects findings and recommendations from previous phases.

The phased planning process also involves early communication with interested parties to help identify needs, constraints, and opportunities. Community, stakeholder, agency, and other interested party involvement are important components in any successful planning process. For the transition plan update, the project team will use multiple engagement strategies to reach a diverse audience and elicit meaningful participation while adhering to appropriate health and safety guidelines.

1.2. Purpose of the Public and Stakeholder Involvement Plan

Statewide planning efforts are often challenged in effectively engaging a broad population in the process. Education and public outreach are essential parts of fulfilling the responsibility to successfully inform the public about the planning process. Public and stakeholder input is vital to understanding accessibility issues, concerns, and needs. Comments and input from the public and stakeholders foster cooperation and help the planning team, MDT staff, and elected officials make informed decisions.

An initial step in the planning process is to develop a *Public and Stakeholder Involvement Plan (PSIP)* to guide public input opportunities throughout the planning process. The PSIP outlines traditional and non-traditional public participation strategies and opportunities for involvement with members of the public and stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities and disability advocates. The goal of the PSIP is to facilitate significant and ongoing public engagement throughout the update process. Early and continuous public involvement in all major actions and decisions is paramount to the plan's success. The PSIP describes the information and input opportunities that will be provided as part of the development of the plan.

2.0. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The updated plan will be developed by the consultant team from Robert Peccia and Associates (RPA) and will be overseen by the project management team (PMT) made up of staff from the MDT Office of Civil Rights and the MDT Rail, Transit and Planning Division. RPA and the PMT will communicate regularly through email and informal calls to discuss project status.

2.1. Plan Contacts

The following contact information for MDT and RPA will be provided in all published information and will serve as main points of contact for the plan.

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3.0. INTENDED AUDIENCES

Active participation and input will be encouraged at every stage of the planning process. Key audiences that will be involved in this process include both internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders will include MDT representatives from throughout the department. These individuals will be involved in the planning process and tasked with making decisions both during planning and future implementation/rollout phases. External stakeholders include those with interest or expertise related to the transition plan, with particular focus on the disability community.



ADVISORY COMMITTEE

An Advisory Committee (AC) will be established to guide work and review deliverables produced by the planning team. The AC will be comprised of representatives from MDT, FHWA, and representatives from the disability community. AC meetings will be scheduled approximately every two months over the 10-month planning period. The meetings will track progress and address plan development issues and questions. The meetings are important for the exchange of technical information and ideas during the development of the plan update and to provide guidance to the consultant team.

RPA's project manager and support staff will attend the AC meetings to make regular presentations covering the current work effort. During these meetings, ideas, issues, problems, and possible solutions will be identified and discussed. These meetings will provide the planning team with essential feedback and guidance and provide the AC with opportunities to guide the development of the plan update. The following topics are anticipated to be covered at the AC meetings.

- **AC Meeting 1:** Project Kickoff and Public Involvement Plan Review
- **AC Meeting 2:** Discovery Phase Findings and Synthesis Phase Kickoff
- **AC Meeting 3:** Synthesis Phase Recommendations and Documentation Phase Kickoff
- **AC Meeting 4:** Administrative Draft Review and Public Involvement Preparation
- **AC Meeting 5:** Public Comments Review and Final Plan Changes



INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

An internal stakeholder contact list will be developed and is anticipated to include MDT leadership and staff with relevant interest, expertise, and involvement in the following areas: ADA accessibility relating to inventory data; right-of-way planning, design, construction, and maintenance; stakeholder outreach; program management; and other related functions. As part of the discovery phase effort, the consultant team will meet with internal stakeholder groups for informal interviews. Potential discussion topics may address how the existing program currently functions, any changes or issues with data inputs and outputs, staff roles and responsibilities, and associated needs, issues, challenges, and areas for improvement. The list of interview participants will be developed in coordination with the PMT. Internal stakeholder representatives may be identified within the following areas of the department:

- Director’s Office
- Office of Civil Rights
- Rail, Transit and Planning
- Engineering – Preconstruction/Construction
- Maintenance
- Districts
- Information Services



EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

An external stakeholder contact list will include individuals or groups identified by the AC and PMT with potential interest in the plan update and knowledge about ADA accessibility issues and concerns. RPA will actively seek out these stakeholders and invite them to participate in the project. Potential stakeholder groups include:

- Disability Rights Montana
- Montana Independent Living Project
- Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Montana Association for the Blind
- Montana Association for the Deaf
- Montana Statewide Independent Living Council
- AARP Montana
- Montana Disability and Health Program
- The University of Montana Rural Institute on Developmental Disabilities
- North Central Independent Living Services
- Silver Bow Developmental Disabilities Council
- ADAPT Montana
- Coalition of Montanans Concerned with Disabilities
- Aging and Disability Resource Center
- Rocky Mountain ADA Center
- Summit Independent Living
- Others as identified or requested



PUBLIC

Public comments and input will be collected and considered throughout the planning process. An official comment period will be provided after the release of the draft plan update. Additionally, all comments and concerns received through individual discussions will be considered by the AC throughout the planning process, and common themes will help establish critical areas of concern and consideration. While MDT encourages comments at any time as ADA accessibility-related transportation issues arise, the plan update presents an opportunity for targeted outreach on this topic to better understand needs and concerns from the perspective of disabled individuals, disability advocates, and other interested members of the public.

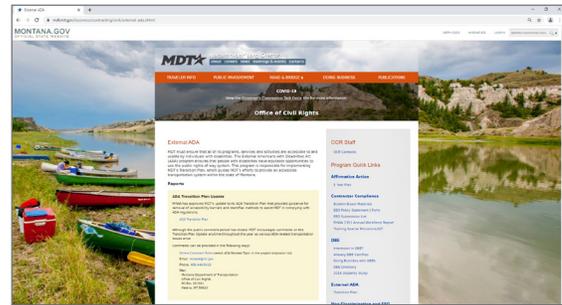
4.0. ON-DEMAND AND TARGETED INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES

On-demand engagement strategies allow interested individuals to participate at their convenience, while targeted approaches typically involve a higher level of commitment at a designated time. A combination of these strategies will be used to reach a wide-ranging audience and elicit meaningful participation.



WEBSITE

A project website will be used to encourage public interaction and to provide information about the plan update. The website will be hosted by MDT and be updated as needed throughout the planning process. RPA will provide informational material to be posted to the website including a description of the transition plan update process, contact information, meeting announcements, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and published documents. The website may be linked through the existing External ADA website page or a new project website may be developed.



The 2016 ADA Transition Plan is currently posted to MDT's External ADA website: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/contracting/civil/external-ada.shtml>



ONLINE SURVEY

During the discovery phase, an online survey will be developed to collect opinions and feedback about transportation accessibility on state routes. The survey will be available via the project website, and an online link will be emailed to stakeholder representatives to distribute to their membership groups. This method of distribution is intended to maximize participation rather than provide statistically significant results applicable to the state population or the disability community as a whole. The survey will consist of questions in which respondents are asked to provide basic demographic data including their geographic location, age group, and disability status. Respondents will also be asked about their travel habits, typical trips, and frequent travel destinations. The survey will then ask respondents to list perceived accessibility barriers which limit their mobility from a system-wide perspective (as opposed to individual spot locations). The survey is intended to help identify needs and areas of focus for the plan update.



INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

RPA will conduct a series of interviews with MDT leadership, key staff, and other individuals with knowledge or experience related to the program. Through these informal discussions, we hope to learn insightful information about how the existing program currently functions, any changes or issues with data inputs and outputs, staff roles and responsibilities, and associated needs, issues, challenges, and areas for improvement. Information gathered from the conversations will directly influence updates to the transition plan.



EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS

During the discovery phase of the project, key representatives from key stakeholder groups representing the disability community will be contacted via informal telephone/video calls. These conversations will be collaborative and interactive to identify issues, concerns, needs, and potential focus areas for the plan update. The information gathered from the conversations will help the project team identify areas for special consideration throughout the planning process.



EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER PRESENTATION

Part-way through the documentation phase, the project team will facilitate a virtual meeting with identified stakeholder representatives to share a summary of findings and present initial recommendations in consideration of public and stakeholder coordination. The live event format will enable participants to listen to the presentation, ask questions, and receive responses from the project team in real time. For those without access to the internet or other accessibility barriers, alternative access will be provided through mailed copies of printed materials and appropriate accessibility accommodations.



ONLINE OPEN HOUSE / PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD

During the public review period for the draft transition plan, the project team will host an online open house using enhancements to the MDT website portal. To accompany the open house, RPA will develop an informational summary sheet, pre-recorded video, and other appropriate materials to explain the update process, summarize key findings, and share relevant updates to the plan. Members of the public would be invited to view information and submit comments at their convenience during the open house/review period.



MEDIA OUTREACH AND COORDINATION

A news release and advertisements will be developed to announce the online open house/public review period. The ads will publicize the website and announce the availability of the draft transition plan update and supporting materials for review. In addition to traditional media coordination, content will also be developed to post on MDT's social media channels to encourage additional public participation.



5.0. ACCESS AND VISIBILITY

RPA staff will be available to all interested parties for the purpose of receiving comments and answering questions. All information published regarding the transition plan will provide contact information for the consultant and MDT project managers as discussed previously. Comments can be submitted throughout the planning process via the website or through the direct contact information.



INFORMATION AVAILABILITY

Technical and planning-level information related to the development of the plan update will be available in memorandums, project updates, graphics, and other miscellaneous materials. The materials will be made available on the project website.



CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC INPUT

Input and comments from stakeholders and the public will be considered by the AC throughout the planning process. Public comments received on the draft report will be documented and included as an appendix.



ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

RPA will work with MDT to ensure interested individuals of all abilities can access information and participate in planning events. The following steps will help with these efforts.

- Provide appropriate accommodations: Appropriate non-discrimination statements and alternative accommodation contacts will be included on all printed materials. Accessibility accommodations will be planned for all public outreach activities, including virtual meetings. Upon request, RPA will coordinate with MDT to provide alternative participation methods and materials.
- Seek help from community leaders and organizations: To facilitate involvement of traditionally underserved populations, we will consult with community leaders and organizations representing these groups about the most effective ways to reach their constituents.
- Be sensitive to diverse audiences: At meetings and during informal conversations and interviews, the project team will attempt to communicate clearly and understandably. Presenters will avoid using overly technical terminology.

Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided on request. Persons who need an alternative format should contact the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Transportation, 2701 Prospect Avenue, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620. Telephone 406-444-5416 or Montana Relay Service at 711.

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