



# Transit Newsletter

4th Edition  
October 2024

## Meet the New Director of Transportation, Chris Dorrington



Chris Dorrington now serves as the Director of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), appointed by Governor Gianforte in June 2024. With an agency mission to plan, build, operate and maintain a safe and resilient transportation system to move Montana forward, Chris is actively advancing MDT programs while honoring our most valuable assets – our people.

In July 2022 Governor Gianforte also appointed Chris as the Chair of the Housing Task Force, with an objective of quickly researching and then proposing improvements that the Montana Legislature, Executive branch and local citizens could implement to address Montana's housing crisis. Prior to his current role as Director, he led the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as Director for 3.5 years, prior to that worked 4.5 in the Air, Energy, and Mining Division at DEQ. Chris started his state career at MDT, working for 10.5 years in the Rail, Transit and Planning Division. In total, Chris has nearly 19 years in leadership with the state and six in private industry. Chris earned his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Gonzaga University, and a master's degree in transportation policy, operations and logistics from George Mason University.

[Article Courtesy of MDT Newsline](#)

*Whew, another summer is behind us, and what a summer it's been! Ridership is on the rise, new vehicles are being delivered to providers, and we've successfully wrapped up another Rodeo. Transit in Montana remains a vital community service, acting as the great equalizer regardless of community size or location. It ensures all citizens have equal access to medical care, education, shopping, and recreation, providing freedom and independence to many.*

- Montana Transit Association (MTA) Board

## Fall Transit Workshop

The annual Fall Transit Workshop, hosted by MDT in Helena, successfully gathered a total of 36 transit service providers from throughout the state. The two-day workshop consisted of innovative trainings, program updates, insightful discussions, and networking opportunities.



The workshop featured a day with national guest speaker, Mark Szyperki, followed by a day with multiple guest speakers.

Each session brought a unique perspective to the workshop. Here are some of the highlights:

- **Workshop Welcome:** Rail, Transit, and Planning Division Administrator, Rob Stapley, kicked off the event by stressing the importance of the importance of Montana transit services and the significance of the jobs of each attendee.
- **National Guest Speaker:** Mark Szyperki, founder of On Your Mark Transportation, discussed popular topics related to customer service, driver retention, marketing and website development, HR policies and issues, and emergency preparedness.
- **Law Session:** Adam Creppelle, professor and associate judge, presented on Native Nations historical property law and legal interactions with the United States government, aptly named Federal Indian Law 101. He discussed the history of Indian sovereignty and how it relates to transportation, from precontact trade routes to modern tribal road and transportation issues.
- **MDT Updates:** Transit, Fiscal, Civil Rights, and Highway Traffic and Safety Sections presented program updates and work studies related to their respective sections.
- **BlackCat Grant Management System Consultant Update:** Beth Thompson and Rachel Pallister from B2Gnow gave an update about the latest National Transit Database (NTD) report module in preparation for the annual NTD report scheduled for release in October.
- **Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) Work Plan Consultant Update:** Deb Brisk from DRB Consulting presented the results from a recent survey. This comprehensive survey is part of an effort to identify and deliver improved training opportunities to statewide transit service providers.

Feedback from attendees has been overwhelmingly positive, with many praising the usefulness and applicability of the material presented as well as the opportunity to network with peers. Presentation material can be accessed from the MDT website: Fall Transit Workshop | MDT ([mt.gov](https://mt.gov)).

## Manager Refresher Training

Following the annual Fall Transit Workshop, MDT provided a full-day Manager Refresher training. This refresher provided a full program overview to assist new and existing transit managers with direct program questions and needs. It also defined the specific roles and responsibilities for grant recipients of both Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) Section 5310, Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities, and FTA Section 5311, Formula Grants for Rural Areas. The program overview included a history of federal transit programs, applications for funding and reporting, the Drug and Alcohol Program, Subrecipient Monitoring, asset management, and much more.

### Webinars and Trainings

- Hands-on General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) Workshop for Annual NTD Compliance Reporting and Empowering Online Trip Planning. October 2, 9, and 16, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET, National RTAP Webinars ([nationalrtap.org](http://nationalrtap.org)).
- National Transit Institute (NTI), National Transit Database (NTD): Annual Reporting for Indian Tribes Webinar, October 8, ([ntionline.com/webinars-2](http://ntionline.com/webinars-2)).
- NTI Annual Reporting for Indian Tribes Virtual Course. December 17-18, NTD Virtual Course ([ntionline.com/webinars-2](http://ntionline.com/webinars-2)).
- AASHTO 2024 Safety Summit and Peer Exchange. October 15-17, in Houston ([transportation.org](http://transportation.org)).
- Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium. Courses are available self-paced online or various dates in-person. Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium ([ruraltraining.org](http://ruraltraining.org)).

**Please take the MDT Satisfaction Survey!**

[How are we doing?](#)

## State Fiscal Year 2026 Allocations and Applications

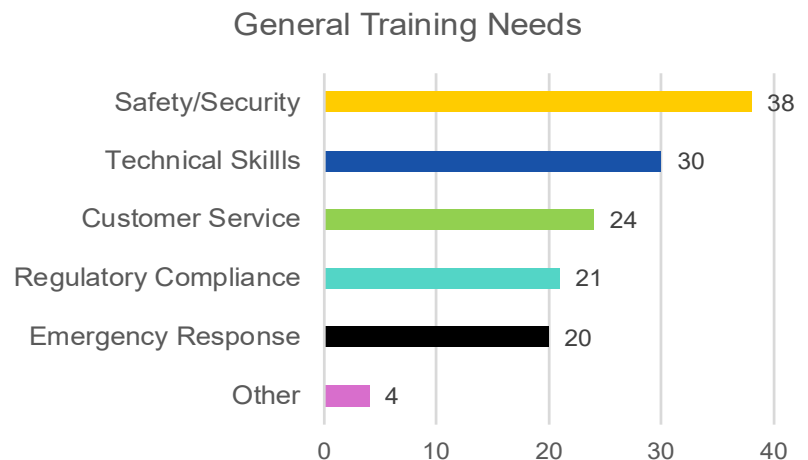
This year MDT will be distributing notification of FTA Section 5311 and state TransADE allocations as early as mid-November. MDT is in the process of making minor updates to the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2026 applications for capital and state and federal operating assistance. Funding opportunities will open on or before January 1, 2025, with a closing date of March 3, 2025. After submittal capital applications are subject to the statewide selection process, which occurs throughout the summer months.

## Strengthening Montana's Transit Training Program

MDT has been working to develop a statewide Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) Work Plan by working with rural transit operators, both public and private, to identify and prioritize general training needs for transportation research, technical assistance, training, and related support services in other than urbanized areas.

Following the recent surveys, focus group meetings were conducted which included the MTA and statewide transit service providers. The survey had 54 participants from four Tribal Nations, 32 Counties, and one urban area.

The following chart illustrates the General Training Needs that were identified in the survey:



Top six specific training needs for transit service managers:

1. Coordinated transportation planning to meet FTA requirements
2. HR basics: managing recruitment and retention; employee performance; policies and handbooks
3. Fleet & facility asset management
4. NTD requirements
5. Drug and Alcohol Program management
6. BlackCat Grant Management System training

Upon completion of the Work Plan, MDT will contract a training coordinator to assist with implementation. Addressing specific training needs by delivering assistance will help MDT better serve transit service providers statewide.

### MDT News, Events, and Trainings

- The MDT Transit Section is scheduled to table at the 93rd annual Montana League of Cities and Towns (League) in West Yellowstone on October 2-4. Honoring our “Local Legacy” is this year’s conference theme. Municipal leaders and professionals from across the 127 cities and towns in Montana are invited to the event. Come visit the Transit table for great program and grant information. Further details, including registration, can be found at: The League ([mtleague.org](http://mtleague.org)).
- MDT is in the process of soliciting for proposal to hire a consultant to update the statewide Transit Rural Needs planning study. The solicitation closes on October 11. For more information contact Nancy Lightner: [nalightner@mt.gov](mailto:nalightner@mt.gov).
- Registration for live online driving courses is now open. Courses include Winter Driving and Preventing Distracted Driving. The Winter Driving course presents practical strategies to reduce collisions, injuries, fatalities, and repairs during the winter driving season. The Preventing Distracted Driving course teaches the definition of distracted driving and how to modify our behavior to protect ourselves, family and friends out on the roadways. Courses are presented live on Zoom every other Tuesday from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., beginning on October 8. Courses are free and open to everyone. To register, visit the Risk Management and Tort Defense Division training homepage: ([svc.mt.gov/doi/mtdtraining.org/](http://svc.mt.gov/doi/mtdtraining.org/)).

### Civil Rights Update

MDT is hosting Pre-Bid Networking Conferences in each of its five districts. These events were largely successful last year. Thank you to all transit providers who participated. This is an opportunity for MDT, transit providers, airports, cities, and counties to discuss their upcoming projects and opportunities for small businesses. All events are free and no advanced registration is required.

Please reach out with questions to the main MDT Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program email account:

What	When	Where
District 4: Pre-Bid Networking Conference	October 17 3 pm	Sleep Inn & Suites 1006 S Haynes, <b>Miles City, MT</b>
District 1: Pre-Bid Networking Conference	November 18 2 pm	Hampton Inn 1140 2nd St W, <b>Kalispell, MT</b>
District 3: Pre-Bid Networking Conference	January 2025 TBD	Details TBD <b>Helena, MT</b>
District 2: Pre-Bid Networking Conference	February 13 3 pm	La Quinta Inn & Suites 1 Holiday Park, <b>Butte, MT</b>
District 5: Pre-Bid Networking Conference	March 2025 TBD	Details TBD <b>Billings, MT</b>

### Vehicle Delivery Updates

MDT anticipates a small order of 9-passenger Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) extended vans to be delivered in late October. Erin Root, Procurement Planner, will coordinate delivery as the date nears. MDT is in the process of preparing purchase orders for capital awarded through SFY 2025. Please reach out to Erin with questions and/or updates: [eroot@mt.gov](mailto:eroot@mt.gov).



**We want to hear from you!**  
Please reach out if you have news you would like to share with the Montana Transit community in a future quarterly newsletter!

Contact Jackie RedEagle,  
[jredeagle@mt.gov](mailto:jredeagle@mt.gov).

### MDT TRANSIT PROGRAM - QUARTERLY REPORT TIMELINE



QUARTER END DATE	QTR	SUBRECIPIENTS 30 DAYS TO SUBMIT	REGIONAL PLANNERS 15 DAYS APPROVAL	FISCAL PLANNERS 31 DAYS INVOICING / APPROVAL	EXPENSE DATES*
30-Sep	Q1	31-Oct	15-Nov	30-Nov	1-Jul - 30-Sep
31-Dec	Q2	31-Jan	15-Feb	1-Mar	1-Oct - 31-Dec
31-Mar	Q3	30-Apr	15-May	31-May	1-Jan - 31-Mar
30-Jun	Q4	31-Jul	15-Aug	31-Aug	1-Apr - 30-Jun**

\*The expenses reported in Q1 through Q3 must be received and paid by the subrecipient within the stated dates for each quarter.

\*\*The expenses reported in Q4 need only be received by the subrecipient between April 1 and June 30. Payment may take place after June 30.

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