



**BILLINGS AREA
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
COORDINATION PLAN**

FY23/24

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I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This coordination plan, as required by the Montana Department of Transportation and federal regulations, provides an overview of the structure and practices of the Billings Area Public Transportation Coordination Group and Technical Advisory Committee along with a summary of current and anticipated coordination efforts in the Billings, MT area including prioritized projects for the current funding cycle. Billings is the largest city in the state with a population of approximately 110,000 people (according to 2017 census estimates) and covers a geographic area of 41.6 square miles. Roughly, two-thirds of the city is located within the Yellowstone River valley with the remainder of the city located north of a sandstone cliff formation above the river valley; Billings is also in close proximity to a significant rail hub for the region (Laurel, MT) which presents a number of challenges regarding transportation where rail and vehicle traffic interact. Regarding demographics, according to 2018 census estimates, 30 percent of the population is under the age of 18 years while 16 percent is over the age of 65 years with the remaining 54 percent falling between the ages of 18 and 65. Further, according to the same source, 9.1 percent of the population under the age of 65 presents with some form of disability. Approximately 10.8 percent of the population falls below the federal poverty level; the area's median income is approximately \$55,500 annually.

The Billings area is served by a variety of health care providers, human services organizations, senior services agencies, private transportation companies, and a single public transit operator. As transit funding is limited at the local, state, and federal levels, it is imperative entities within the Billings area coordinate transportation services and needs in order to maximize mobility for residents and minimize duplication of services.

The primary purpose of this plan is to refine existing methods and develop new strategies that increase mobility for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income populations through public and stakeholder input. The identified strategies update the current Billings Area Public Transportation Coordination Plan and involve the public transit operator as well as other area agencies/entities. All area transportation and human services providers are welcome to participate in the group.

Public Transit Sources of Funding and Eligible Projects

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) administers a variety of public grant programs across the nation. This coordinated plan focuses primarily upon those outlined in 49 U.S.C. 5310, but the public transit operator may also utilize other funding sources in support of goals outlined in this document. In regards to FTA Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities, funding may be utilized for both traditional and non-traditional projects, as recommended by the Coordination Group and selected by the Technical Advisory Committee.

Goals

The overall goal of this plan is for all providers listed in this coordination plan to work closely with each other and the lead agency, the City of Billings MET Transit, to:

1. Provide more effective transportation solutions for improvements to ridership, improved access to jobs, and reduced congestion.
2. Minimize duplication of services and ensure more efficient provision of transportation services and resources.
3. Identify transit best practices, enhancements, and human service transportation coordination projects which may help improve transportation services and coordination.
4. Identification and discussion of community needs and recommendations on how to best meet those needs.
5. Ensure adequate and appropriate outreach efforts including seeking participation from non-participating local agencies and entities who may not qualify to receive state or federal transportation funding.

As the lead agency, MET Transit is committed to including the following groups and organizations in the coordinated process:

1. Existing and potential transit riders including the general population, individuals, with disabilities, seniors, and low-income groups.
2. Area transportation planning agencies and transportation providers, including both private and non-profit entities.
3. Human services agencies.
4. Other public and private agencies which administer health and medical, employment, vocational rehabilitation, independent living, and other essential services.

II. COORDINATION STRUCTURE

Management of the Coordination Plan is facilitated by the lead agency, MET Transit, in conjunction with other agencies and interested parties. In order to ensure efficient and effective group coordination and planning, the overall Coordination Plan will involve input from two distinct groups: the Transportation Coordination Group and the Coordination Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

Coordination Group

The Coordination Group is composed of representatives from area agencies listed in this plan as well as members of the public and any other interested groups. Coordination Group meetings are held at least once per quarter and open to the public with the meeting date, times, and locations published in accordance with the MET Transit Public Participation Plan. These meetings are intended to aid in determining the needs of and prioritizing solutions and services for transportation in the City of Billings area. Once needs and potential solutions are identified,

the Coordination Group will make recommendations on projects to be considered by the Coordination Technical Advisory Committee.

Coordination Technical Advisory Committee

The Coordination Technical Advisory committee is a five (5) member committee composed of representatives from area agencies responsible for providing services to the distinct groups identified in the Federal Regulations regarding section 5310 funding. Specifically, the group will include one representative each from agencies responsible for providing services to seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income populations; each representative should be an individual with the authority to recommend or make decisions regarding projects and transportation coordination within their respective agencies. The group will also include representation from the lead agency, MET Transit, as well as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Agencies and members are as follows:

- Adult Resource Alliance of Yellowstone County
- Riverstone Health/Healthy By Design
- State of Montana DPHHS Developmental Disability Services
- Billings Urbanized Area MPO
- City of Billings MET Transit
- Mike Larson
- Melissa Henderson
- Mark Kluksdahl
- Scott Walker
- Rusty Logan

This group will meet at least once per quarter following the quarterly Coordination Group meetings to discuss and develop recommended projects. Identified projects will be assessed for feasibility, potential impacts, and overall effects on area transportation and coordination efforts; periodically, the CTAC may invite outside members directly involved in proposed projects to provide further information for or discussion on the identified project. Should multiple projects be identified and recommended which exceed available funds, the group will select and prioritize projects based upon majority consensus; application for these projects will then be submitted for funding. Prior to final recommendation and application for funding of projects, the CTAC will publish a public meeting notice and allow for public comment on selected projects.

III. AGENCIES INVOLVED

Coordination Technical Advisory Committee Agencies

MET Transit: As MET Transit is the local designated recipient for Federal Transit Administration 5307 operating funds to provide public transit service, it serves as the lead agency in coordination efforts. MET has been providing public transportation since 1973 and currently provides both fixed-route and paratransit services. Paratransit is public transportation for individuals who are, due to a disability or other condition, unable to use the MET fixed-route service. Paratransit service was originally established in 1977 by Special Transportation, Inc, which was assumed by the City of Billings MET Transit in 1997 under the new designation of MET Special Transit; MET Transit has since renamed all operations under paratransit to MET-PLUS. Paratransit service meets the transportation needs of a broad spectrum of people who otherwise could not travel locally.

MET provides fixed-route and paratransit service from approximately 5:50 am to 6:50 pm, Monday through Friday and 8:10 am to 5:30 pm on Saturdays. MET serves any disability group, ambulatory and non-ambulatory, including seniors with disabling conditions. Provided rides include trips for employment, educational, medical, shopping and recreational. MET coordinates with many different agencies, as well as the general public, to provide transportation within the City Of Billings. The State of Montana Developmental Disabilities Division regularly coordinates with MET for client rides while area skilled nursing facilities and hospitals coordinate for transportation when they are unable to provide transportation. Montana Medicaid and Adult Resource Alliance of Yellowstone County both contract with MET to provide medically related transportation as well as support for waiver services.

Billings Urbanized Area Metropolitan Planning Organization: The Billings Urbanized Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) oversees transportation planning for the Billings Urban Area. The urban area encompasses the City of Billings as well as a planning area extending approximately 4.5 miles outside the city limits. The MPO prepares a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) each year that contains the discussion of projects to undertake during the upcoming program year, including transit specific projects. The UPWP is supplemented by a five-year Transportation Improvements Plan (TIP). The TIP is a fiscal planning program for federally assisted highway and transit improvements for the Billings Urban Area. Every four (4) years, the MPO prepares an Urban Area Transportation Plan that assesses the transportation needs and recommends actions to address those needs. As the MPO exists as a requirement for both Federal Highway and Federal Transit funding in the small urban area and is directly involved in all aspects of area transportation, MPO involvement in coordination efforts is essential for addressing and planning for existing and future transportation needs.

Adult Resource Alliance of Yellowstone County: The Adult Resource Alliance has been assisting seniors within Yellowstone County and their families and caregivers since 1975. The Alliance provides a comprehensive range of services which promote the overall well-being of healthier and more active seniors, while also supporting and assisting the senior population in remaining independent and living at home as long as possible. Services provided include, but are not limited to: the Meals on Wheels Program, meal sites to provide meal and social opportunities, assistance with Medicare, the Volunteer Program and limited transportation.

Riverstone Health: Riverstone Health was created in 2008 as a single identity that grew out of the Yellowstone City-County Health Department. The foundation of their work has been Health, Education, Leadership and Protection (HELP). In their medical and dental clinics they provide care to 20,000 patients each year. Through their Montana Family Medicine Residency they train doctors to help meet Montana's shortage of family medicine practice physicians and provide health services, such as WIC and Maternal Child Health, to help families and young children. They provide hospice services and focus efforts at preventing infectious diseases to make the whole community a safer and better place to live.

State of Montana DPHHS Developmental Disabilities Program (DDP): The Montana Developmental Disabilities Program's central office is in Helena with regional offices in Billings, Glasgow, Great Falls and Missoula. DDP contracts with private, non-profit corporations to provide services across the lifespan for individuals who have developmental disabilities and their families. The focus of the program is to tailor care to the individual and provide it in as natural environment as possible.

Coordination Group Agencies

Listed below are providers who regularly participate in the Coordination Group meetings and participate in the coordination of services.

A.W.A.R.E., Inc. (Anaconda Work and Residential Enterprises): AWARE is a private, non-profit corporation that was started in Anaconda, Montana in 1976. Since AWARE's start over 45 years ago, it has grown into an organization that has helped and continues to help thousands of people across Montana achieve their potential. AWARE is governed by a seven member Board and presently employs more than 800 people in multiple communities around the State. AWARE offers a variety of services in fully licensed and nationally accredited programs, geared towards improving lifestyles and opportunities for Montanans affected by disabilities or mental challenges. In Billings, AWARE operates 4 adult group homes, 2 adult DD autism group homes and 1 youth mental health group home. A second, youth mental health group home is scheduled to open in the near future. AWARE also operates a day service work program that provides a variety of work and day activities including janitorial services, sensitive document disposal and community employment. AWARE operates the Enterprise Learning Center in collaboration with Billings public schools that provides educational and vocational programs to autistic youths in the Billings area. AWARE also manages the "Growth Through Art" program which is located at AWARE's main office facility. Many of the individuals participating in this program utilize MET Special Transit.

AWARE provides transportation services to their clients who reside at their group homes. Clients are transported on a daily basis to and from their respective residential settings for a number of reasons which include but are not limited to; work, school, after school activities, medical visits, community events and family visits. Transportation services are provided for whatever need arises with service available seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Big Sky Senior Services: Big Sky Senior Services provides comprehensive support services to help seniors and adults with developmental disabilities maintain independence and quality of life by helping them remain in the community. Such services include personal care, nursing services, safety from senior abuse, transportation to medical appointments and staying connected to the community.

Billings Clinic: Based in Billings, Billings Clinic is Montana's largest health care organization and serves a vast region covering much of Montana, northern Wyoming and the western Dakotas. Billings Clinic manages 11 Critical Access Hospitals and has other partnerships across the region.

Affiliated hospitals are located throughout Montana and Wyoming. Billings Clinic is a physician-led, integrated multi-specialty group practice with a 304-bed hospital and a Level II trauma center. It also operates a number of clinics providing a full range of medical services. Billings Clinic's vision is to be a national leader in providing the best clinical quality, patient safety, service and value.

COR Enterprises, Inc.: COR was originally known as the Billings Sheltered Workshop and has been in operation since 1971; they provide vocational rehabilitation and developmental services for persons with disabilities. COR Enterprises services include Organizational Employment, Community Employment and Community Support Services. Aside from the Yellowstone County and Billings area, this agency also provides services in Lewistown, Bozeman and two Native American Reservations in Eastern Montana.

COR Enterprises provides rides for their clients primarily Monday through Saturday. The agency does provide rides on Sundays for special events and services needed by their clients. Most rides are provided between the hours of 7:00 am and 4:30 pm; however a number of rides are also provided during evening hours depending on the client needs. Transportation is provided for a variety of services, including employment, medical, shopping and recreational purposes. COR Enterprises regularly coordinates with both the MET fixed-route buses and MET-PLUS; MET Transit currently provides fixed-route service to COR's primary facility in Billings on Lampman Drive. COR also coordinates and provide transportation for clients from other agencies such as the PD Waiver Program, Developmental Disabilities and the SDMI Program. COR Enterprises also has vehicles available through an individual agreement for other agencies as needed, including Eagle Mount, to use when COR is not using them.

Residential Support Services (RSS): RSS contracts with the State of Montana Developmental Disabilities Program and provides rehabilitation training in all life skills and supervision of the health and safety concerns of persons who have a developmental disability. RSS provides housing, meals, transportation and medical assistance for individuals who reside in 16 group homes and apartments in the Billings area. RSS has provided these services since 1974. RSS provides transportation for their clients, 7-days a week, 24-hours a day. Peak times usually occur from 6:00 am to 10:00 am and 2:00 pm to 8:00 pm, Monday through Friday and 10:00 am to 8:00 pm on weekends. Rides are provided for a variety of services, including employment, medical appointments, shopping and recreational activities. RSS coordinates transportation with other agencies whenever possible, including COR Enterprises, RSD Incorporated and Job Connection.

Resource, Support and Development, Inc. (RSD): is a private, non-profit Montana-based corporation that was established in 1974 to provide an array of community-based supports and services to adult citizens with disabilities. RSD currently provides service in Billings, Lewistown, Hardin, Red Lodge and Harlowton. Many of RSD services are funded via the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS).

RSD provides a variety of vocational options to adults with disabilities. These include working with a vocational specialist to obtain work in the community, working on a work crew, or in one of the work centers on a variety of business contracts. Consumers can also be involved in retirement activities in a day program hosted in the community or in their own home. Individuals may also receive training in areas based on their needs and desires.

Billings Training Industries (BTI) East and West, a part of RSD, serve many individuals with developmental disabilities in two work centers. Many work in the community on crews or at their own jobs. The Billings Activity Program offers retirement activity opportunities which include art, crafts and specialized programs that meet the needs of elderly people with developmental disabilities who do not want to work. All of these programs offer training that includes participation and inclusion in the community as well as a variety of volunteer work that gives the people served the opportunity to give back to the community and make friends.

St. Vincent Health Care: St. Vincent Healthcare delivers compassionate, quality care to the people of Montana, Wyoming and the western Dakotas. Serving the region for more than 120 years, St. Vincent Healthcare is located in Billings, Montana. In addition to 11 primary care clinics in and around the Billings area, St. Vincent Healthcare offers dozens of progressive specialty services and a 201-bed hospital. St. Vincent even has a special “hospital within a hospital” just for children, St. Vincent Children’s Healthcare. St. Vincent Healthcare has more than 1,700 associates and more than 500 physicians and advanced care professionals. St. Vincent is part of SCL Health, a nonprofit faith-based health system with 12 hospitals in Colorado and Montana. Together, St. Vincent Healthcare, St. James Healthcare in Butte, and Holy Rosary Healthcare in Miles City, represent SCL Health Montana.

United Way of Yellowstone County: United Way of Yellowstone County is the primary community-building organization in South Central Montana. They provide leadership to effectively mobilize people and financial and strategic resources to improve people's lives. They identify and address the community's priority needs and provide solutions that achieve measurable results and sustained community change.

Other Identified Area Agencies

MET Transit has identified the following local area agencies who occasionally participate or may be interested in participating; contact has been made via invites to the local coordination group.

Advanced Care Hospital of Montana
Affinity
Aspen Grove
Aspen Meadows
Aspen View Retirement
Autumn Springs Assisted Living
Avanterra/Bellaterra

Morning Star Senior Living
MSU-Billings
Montana Center on Disabilities
Northern Rockies Oncology
Parkview
PLUK
Prairie Towers

Beartooth Assisted Living	Rainbow House
Billings Bible College	Rocky Mountain College
Billings School District	Rocky Mountain Home Care
Billings Taxi	Rocky Mountain Hospice
Billings Yellow Cab	S.T.E.P.
Blind & Low Vision	Sage Tower
Central Court Village	St. John's Lutheran Ministries
City Cab	Sweetwater Retirement
Eagle Cliff Manor	Synergy Home Care
Edgewood Vista	Tender Nest
Fraser Tower	Total Transportation
Golden Advantage Senior Services	Vintage Suites
Head Start, Inc.	Visiting Angels
Highgate Senior Living	Vocational Rehab
Human Resources Development Council	Volunteers of America
Interim Health Care	Westpark Retirement Village
Job Connection	Yellowstone County Human Services
Lasting Legacy	Yellowstone Naturopathic Clinic
LIFTT	YMCA
Magic City Terrace	YWCA
Mental Health Center	

IV. Participating Agency Vehicles

Fleet information for participating agencies is listed below; please note, not all participating agencies may have provided fleet information for publication in this plan.

MET Transit:

All vehicles are ADA accessible (15 passengers + 3 wheelchair)

2018 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1872)	75,456 miles
2018 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1873)	82,967 miles
2018 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1874)	79,852 miles
2018 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1875)	85,995 miles
2018 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1876)	97,317 miles
2019 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1877)	53,964 miles
2021 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1878)	40,709 miles
2021 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1879)	45,100 miles

2011 Startrans Ford Supreme (Unit 1886)	131,339 miles
2012 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1888)	119,508 miles
2015 ElDorado Aerotech (Unit 1889)	113,427 miles
2015 ElDorado Aerotech (Unit 1890)	100,600 miles
2015 ElDorado Aerotech (Unit 1891)	112,162 miles
2016 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1892)	102,525 miles
2016 Elkhart Coach (Unit 1893)	96,004 miles

COR Enterprises, Inc:

2010 Lincoln MKS	46,400 miles	Non-Accessible
2005 Dodge Caravan	217,100 miles	Non-Accessible
2010 Ford Econoline	204,000 miles	Non-Accessible
1996 Chevy Pickup	143,000 miles	Non-Accessible
2012 Dodge Caravan	181,300 miles	Non-Accessible
2012 Ford Flex	89,500 miles	Non-Accessible
2012 Subaru Outback	71,100 miles	Non-Accessible
2014 Chevy Impala	112,650 miles	Non-Accessible
2019 Ford Elkhart Bus	52,150 miles	ADA-Accessible
2010 Dodge Caravan	177,800 miles	Non-Accessible
2010 Dodge Caravan	140,000 miles	ADA-Accessible
2013 Ford Taurus	136,000 miles	Non-Accessible
2011 E-450 Bus	126,600 miles	ADA-Accessible
2009 Subaru Forester	61,000 miles	Non-Accessible

AWARE, Inc (did not provide updates, most recent available info below)

- 2013 – Ford E350 van, 107,897 miles (non-accessible)
- 2014 – Dodge Grand Caravan, 29,967 miles (non-accessible)
- 2017 – Ford E350 van, 25,680 miles (non-accessible)

2017 – Ford Transit Connect, 19,311 miles (non-accessible)

2017 – Ford Transit Connect, 39,494 miles (non-accessible)

2017 – Ford Transit Connect, 45,427 miles (non-accessible)

2017 – Ford Transit Connect, 28,321 miles (non-accessible)

2017 – Ford Transit Connect, 11,083 miles (non-accessible)

2017 – Ford Transit Connect, 27,894 miles (non-accessible)

2019 – Ford E350, 9,545 miles (non-accessible)

2019 – Ford Transit Connect, 8,630 miles (non-accessible)

NOTE: AWARE was awarded an accessible vehicle replacement last year with delivery expected in the coming months.

IV. FUNDING AND FY22 CAPITAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS

Agencies identified in this coordination plan have an in-depth understanding of the limits of available funding to provide transportation services to both the groups identified in the 5310 program and the public as a whole. The group has continually discussed innovative means to improve access to transportation by utilizing available funding in more efficient and effective ways. In the coming year (FY21/22), MET Transit intends to continue engaging identified agencies in the coordination plan in re-evaluation of existing coordination practices and agreements. Both the CTAC and Coordination Group understand existing needs in the community which may be better served by evaluating existing practices in ways which utilize available funding in increasingly effective ways.

TransADE

Historically, the transportation coordination group has discussed the use of TransADE funds to improve access to transit for the identified groups, and the public as a whole. While the group has expressed understanding that TransADE funding is too limited in amount to significantly help expand access or services, the group has openly discussed improvements with innovative funding practices moving forward. Currently, MET Transit utilizes TransADE funding in preventing a decrease in available services as the funds help to maintain current service levels provided by the public transit agency. While federal regulations require paratransit service within a ¾ mile corridor around fixed-route service, MET Transit currently provides paratransit service beyond this minimum requirement by serving nearly any area within the City of Billings city limits. Without TransADE funding, this expanded service would be detrimentally impacted.

Capital Assistance Projects for FY22

Throughout the course of the discussions in the previous plan year, the existing group identified needs regarding fleet replacement for local area transportation and human services providers as well as modifications to the existing MET Transit practices. Through discussion reflected in the attached meeting minutes, the group identified and agreed upon the following three eligible capital projects:

Priority 1: Cover vehicle price escalations for past year contracts

As multiple MDT vehicle contracts have experienced significant price escalations in the recent year, the TAC agreed that current year funding should be utilized to offset the increases as agencies had not budget for the significant cost increases seen on available vehicles. This decision will assist in mitigating the impact of coming up with significant additional funds, especially for projects awarded to area non-profits with limited funding sources (specifically, COR Enterprises).

Priority 2: MET Transit purchase of a full size Paratransit ADA accessible van:

MET Transit's paratransit service, MET-PLUS, provides valuable and extensive service to the City of Billings area by addressing the needs of individuals who are unable to utilize the fixed-route service. These needs are addressed by providing curb-to-curb complimentary paratransit service to eligible individuals in ADA accessible vehicles as well as by coordinating service through various local contracts and agreements. This service is provided to the general public in accordance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and other applicable regulations. In keeping with standards identified by both the FTA and within its own Transit Asset Management Plan, MET Transit strives to maintain its fleet in a state of good repair. As MET Transit is the primary transportation provider for the area, ensuring well-maintained and operable vehicles are available for use has been identified as a very high priority. As indicated in the "Participating Agency Vehicles" section of this document, MET Transit currently has 6 vehicles exceeding the identified usable life standard of 7 years or 100,000 miles. One of these vans is flagged to be replaced with as of yet undelivered vehicle ordered in the previous application cycle. As all of MET's current vehicles are body on chassis small buses, MET is opting to utilize the full-size van option as a lower profile.