
March 16, 2023 | 11:00-1:00 PM | MDT Commission Room and Teams

RRC Members

Mack Long, MDT Director
Julie Brown, MDT Deputy Director
Dwane Kailey, Chief Operations Officer
Mike Bousliman, Information Services Division Administrator
Dustin Rouse, Highways and Engineering Division Administrator
Larry Flynn, Administration Division Administrator

Brad Marten, Motor Carrier Services Division, Administrator
Shane Mintz, Glendive District Administrator
Rob Stapley, Rail, Transit, and Planning Division Administrator
Jon Swartz, Maintenance Division Administrator
Matt Strizich, FHWA
David Kack, WTI Director

RRC Members Present: Julie Brown, Dwane Kailey, Dustin Rouse, Mack Long, Brad Marten, Shane Mintz, Jon Swartz, and Matt Strizich

Others Present: Rebecca Ridenour, Vaneza Callejas, Megan Coon, Chad DeAustin, Kevin Kauska, Nicole Pallister, and Kendra Smith

Action items are in red.

TRB Annual Meeting Recap

Rebecca Ridenour attended lots of great sessions at the TRB Annual Meeting. Two sessions were Transitioning from Fuel Taxes to Mileage-Based User Fees and Building the Future Transportation Workforce. Rebecca wants to encourage more TRB participation at MDT as a growth opportunity, at the individual and agency levels. Being involved in a professional organization adds to job satisfaction.

Megan Coon represented MDT at the TRB poster session for a High Value Research Award winning project: Ultra high performance concrete research (phase 2). Megan said there was much interest from other agencies and departments, and there are several other states that are working on UHPC research right now. MDT is a frontrunner for this type of research and the award was a testament to that.

Proposed Research Ideas

23-020 The Future of Transportation Funding in Montana

Kendra Smith, as project champion, attended this meeting to request funding and move this project to the technical panel stage.

Motor fuel taxes and GVW fees are the primary revenue source for MDT state transportation funding. Over time, however, the amount of user-fee funding for highways has dropped due to rising fuel efficiency,

shifting federal-state cost share on infrastructure investments, and inflation. The increasing popularity of electric vehicles (EVs) and alternative fuels adds to worries about future transportation funding. In response to this worry, more than half of states have introduced an annual registration fee on EVs. States continue to explore various methods to best reflect the user pays principle. These include: increasing existing motor fuel tax rates; indexing motor fuel taxes to inflation; implementing mileage-based user fees; and studying fuel-neutral fees, based on energy consumption. Multiple research projects have explored a variety of funding methods and identified best practices from around the country. This research topic would explore the same ideas but be specific to Montana in order to help MDT plan for future transportation revenue.

The total project budget is \$132,852. The estimated project period is 12 months.

Dwane suggested we get a broader technical panel (external participants/contacts and legislators) on this project.

Dustin Rouse made a motion to fund with \$132,852. Dwane Kailey seconded the motion. All RRC members present voted in favor.

Research staff will proceed with forming the technical panel for this new MDT SPR-funded research project.

23-021 Bringing Montana's History into the Future: Modernizing MDT's Interpretive Marker System

Jon Axline as project champion, attended this meeting to request funding and move this project to the technical panel stage.

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) currently administers 295 historic and geological interpretive markers along the state's primary and secondary roads and in rest areas on the Interstates. The markers have been an important part of the Montana transportation landscape since 1935. But, in the twenty-first century, new ways of providing that information to motorists is required. In addition to the printed medium, the marker texts can be displayed on interactive electronic maps on the MDT website. But there may be other methods available to get that information out and into the hands of people interested in the history and geology of Montana. One method may be a cell phone app for travelers to obtain the texts of the markers without stopping to read them. How that app would work is something to study. It would also be critical to the study to determine how other states are handling this issue and whether their methods are successful - or not. There may be other methods to consider based on a study of the other states as well. The roadside historical and geological markers are a popular way of providing information to the traveling public. But as times change, it is important the historical/geological marker system change with it.

The total project budget is \$77,497. The estimated project period is 18 months.

Dustin Rouse made a motion to fund with \$77,497. Dwane Kailey seconded the motion. All RRC members present voted in favor.

Research staff will proceed with forming the technical panel for this new MDT SPR-funded research project.

Research Program Highlights

WTI Director search progress

Rebecca has been participating in the candidate search for a new WTI director. Eighteen candidates applied, eight were interviewed and five will be giving presentations.

FFY 2024 Idea Request

Rebecca explained that research is wrapping up the formal idea solicitation request that do ever spring.

Open Discussion

Peer Exchange

Rebecca explained that the research program, by federal law, must conduct a peer exchange every five years approximately. So, Montana will be hosting a research peer exchange, with three or four invited states, sometime in September 2023.

MDT Librarian

The MDT Librarian position is open. Kia Rosen left for a position with Montana Legal Services doing outreach with at risk youth or under 18 and homelessness.

Status Reports

Dwane had a question about the Wildlife Fences Jump-Outs project status report (page 17 of the meeting packet). Rebecca explained that panel and principal investigator have been discussing the possibility of extending or amending the research to add in another phase to study the barrier height for white-tailed deer.

Next RRC quarterly meeting is scheduled for June 14, 2023.