

MONTANA AERONAUTICS BOARD MEETING
Yellowstone Airport
721 Airport Rd
West Yellowstone, MT 59758
JUNE 3, 2025

Montana Department of Transportation
(MDT)

Tim Conway, MDT Aeronautics
Karen Hallenbeck, MDT Aeronautics
Stephen Torske, MDT Aeronautics
Jeff Kadlec, MDT Aeronautics
Jess Bousliman, MDT

MDT (Remote)

Amie Zendron, MDT Legal
John Haffey, MDT Legal

Aeronautics Board (In-Person)

Tim Robertson
Wade Cebulski

Matthew Prinkki
Robb Bergeson
Tim Damrow

Aeronautics Board (Remote)

Bill Lepper
Tom Schoenleben

Guests

Travis Eickman, Morrison-Maierle

Guests (Remote)

Lance Bowser, RPA
Matt Wilder, RPA

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes

Tim Robertson called the meeting to order on June 3, 2025, at 1:01 pm.

Roll call established a quorum; eight board members were present.

Robb Bergeson commended the details of the minutes and recommended one change. He stated under the Stevensville airport when inquiring whether or not the FAA would fund the tank, the minutes currently had the response to the question listed as the FAA would fund the tank. Bergeson stated “not” should be added.

Robb Bergeson made a motion to approve the February 2025 minutes as presented with the addition of the word not. Tim Damrow seconded the motion, all board members voted aye.

Public Comment

Chairman Robertson called for public comment at 1:03 pm. Travis Eickman and Lance Bowser both stated they were available for questions if any arose from the board.

Updates – Tim Conway

Grant Fund recap

Conway provided an update to the board of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. Tim Robertson asked about the interest rate for loans, which is 4.25% for this year.

Legislative update

Conway provided an update on various bills that were signed in and tabled throughout the legislative session that affected the aeronautics community, as well as the Montana Aeronautics board Senate confirmations.

Congressional Updates

Conway reviewed the changes to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) database and the protection of registered pilot information. As of May 29, when MDT aeronautics tried to access the database, it was inaccessible, and the reason why is unknown at this time. Matt Lindberg reached out to the FAA and has not received a response. Conway advised the congressional delegation of the lack of communication.

Tim Robertson stated it may be of interest to the board to share the impacts of inaccessibility to the delegation.

Conway went over FAA staff changes. They are currently at nine staff members and there is a prediction of losing another staff member. This may cause a delay in essential services and potential burn out due to job security concerns.

Matt Prinkki asked about essential services that are being trimmed back. Tim Robertson asked Bill Lepper about this, who stated FAA are so understaffed, they cannot get things done, therefore impacting business and commerce in Montana. Lepper also made a point to consider making a statement, writing a letter, or taking some kind of action.

Robb Bergeson asked what the congressional delegation's response to this is. Conway stated Representative Zinke's office is closely monitoring the staff and the impacts of these FAA changes. They hired a new FSDO (Flight Standards District Office) manager so there should hopefully be improvement with that change.

Bill Lepper stated he is hoping for improvement. Lepper talked to Tim Sheehy, and he feels it is an across-the-board problem with the FAA, and it may get worse with the budget cuts.

Tim Robertson asked if the board would want to communicate with delegates and Governor's office about the FAA staff challenges and database removal.

Robb Bergeson stated that the staffing issue and its impacts is crucial enough to be a standalone inquiry from the board.

Tim Robertson asked if the board should not mention the database in the letter. Robb Bergeson mentioned that two separate letters focusing on the importance of each may be

a good idea. Tim Conway stated it may be too early for board to take actions due to mixed messages coming in. Wade Cebulski agreed that waiting until there is more information would be a good idea.

Robb Bergeson made a motion to send a letter to the State of Montana delegation outlining the board's concerns and how it relates to funding. Wade Cebulski seconded the motion, Tim Roberston asked for public comment on the matter at 1:25pm and all board members voted aye.

Tim Conway stated there were proposed budget cuts of around 60%, but not many other details were provided. He reiterated this is a wait and watch situation, and he will continue to provide updates as information comes out.

MDT Reorganization

Tim Conway updated the board on the agency realignment. He stated Director Dorrington announced an agency realignment in December of 2024, aligning the agency into four program areas. Conway stated where the Aeronautics division landed and provided the board with information regarding the changes and the new program area manager, Doug McBroom.

Matt Prinkki asked if this was in relation to the legislative announcement earlier. Conway confirmed it was part of it, the bill discussed earlier allows the department to eliminate the division names.

Conway then reviewed over the draft organizational chart and the program area diagrams, stating there are still changes to be made and decisions still up in the air.

ARM Updates

Karen Hallenbeck reviewed the ARM (Administrative Rules of Montana) changes. 18.13.405 stated the changes the board made to the scoring system as recommended by the "Fly the Big Sky" Legislative Audit, and 18.13.406 and 407 updated the changes regarding the documents required to obtain a grant.

Robb Bergeson asked what the steps were after the review. Tim Conway said they will be sent to the Secretary of State, reviewed for formatting, and signed and filed if accepted.

Tim Robertson asked if they would ever go back to the audit committee, and Conway stated they would not.

Yellowstone Airport Terminal

Jeff Kadlec provided a summary of the airport project. He stated that air service started on time this year, and reviewed over the flight schedules, GA (General Aviation) flights, smoke jumpers, and medical flights at the airport.

Kadlec also reviewed the terminal project and the reasons for the new terminal, including new security needs and an influx of traffic.

Tim Robertson asked if the old building would be torn down. Kadlec said it would be eventually.

Wade Cebulski asked if the asphalt for the parking lot was supposed to be finished this year. Kadlec stated that the project ran out of funding and asphalt is not currently in the works, but they are hoping for the access road to be completed next year.

Tim Damrow asked what the cost of the project was. Kadlec stated it was \$46.5 million and that inflation after covid and competition of contractors affected the project.

FY24 Second Extension Requests

1. Culbertson Airport

- The airport requested an additional extension for the snow removal building. The board approved last year's extension. The building cost 57% more than the engineer's estimate, and the airport is also requesting snow removal equipment. The airport is asking for an extension on both.
- Wade Cebulski asked if the project has been re-bid and he shared concerns about the project being completed in 2025.
- Matt Prinkki asked if the board has done conditional extensions before, and Tim Conway stated that they can put date ranges on the extensions.
- *Wade Cebulski made a motion to grant the extension with the condition they have until November 30, 2025 to spend the funds. Robb Bergeson seconded the motion, and all board members voted aye.*

2. Malta Airport

- The airport requested a second extension for snow removal equipment, due to supply chain issues.
- *Wade Cebulski made a motion to grant the extension with the condition they have until November 30, 2025 to spend the funds. Matt Prinkki seconded the motion, and all board members voted aye.*

FY25 Extension Requests

1. Circle Airport

- The airport requested an extension for the construction of new drainage and a partial runway construction. Construction was supposed to occur in 2024 but did not, and the runway has since deteriorated and needs more improvement.
- Tim Robertson asked if this was a change of project, as it was for construction and it is now for design and construction.
- Wade Cebulski stated it is an automatic setup for second extension if the board grants this because of the project. Tim Conway stated that is not necessarily true as they could get reimbursed. Robb Bergeson stated that this is a good project, and extending them to June 30, 2026, would give them more time to get things done.
- *Robb Bergeson made a motion to grant an extension until June 30, 2026. Tim Damrow seconded the motion, and all board members voted aye except Tom Schoenleben, who voted nay. Motion passed.*

2. Deer Lodge Airport

- The airport is requesting an extension to move forward with projects and land acquisition. The EA is currently on hold while waiting for public comment and the FAA will turn it around as soon as they can when the public comment period is over.
- *Wade Cebulski made a motion to grant the extension until June 30, 2026. Matt Prinkki seconded the motion, and all board members voted aye.*

3. Ekalaka Airport

- The airport is requesting an extension to install an Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS) with construction to occur in 2026. Robb Bergeson stated this extension is an easy way to assist the airport on this funding hurdle.
- *Wade Cebulski made a motion to grant the extension until June 30, 2026. Robb Bergeson seconded the motion, and all board members voted aye.*
- Matt Prinkki asked if the time limit on the extension was typical. Stephen Torske said yes, it is the default.

4. Geraldine Airport

- The airport is requesting an extension due to administrative delays of signatures. There were questions from the board regarding the digital circulation of the grant. Lance Bowser stated they are waiting on the signed hard copy from the FAA.
- *Wade Cebulski made a motion to grant the extension until June 30, 2026. Robb Bergeson seconded the motion, and all board members voted aye.*

5. Superior Airport

- The airport is requesting an extension due to the project being pushed to the next construction season because of increased labor and material cost. They advertise for bid in the spring of 2025.
- Wade Cebulski asked if the bid package had gone out since the extension was requested in April and if it is the first extension. Stephen Torske stated it was the first request, and he had not yet heard from the engineering firm, KLJ about the status of the bid package. Matt Prinkki asked how much the project is; the sponsor share is \$80,000 (5%).
- Tim Roberston recommended a shorter extension considering the unknown of the bid package going out.
- *Wade Cebulski made a motion to grant the extension until November 30, 2025, contingent on the bid package. Tim Damrow seconded the motion, and all board members voted aye.*

New Business

Board Roles and Responsibilities - Round Table Discussion

Chair Tim Robertson thanked Bill Lepper for his leadership over the years and for the staff prepping and helping through the legislative session. Robertson stated he has a lot to learn in this new position.

Robertson mentioned he wanted to have discussion on roles of what the board can and can't do based on Montana Code Annotated (MCA), and he provided an outline of his thoughts for the roundtable.

Outline:

- Robertson stated he has received critique about participation as board members. The remote world is convenient but not ideal for meetings. It is imperative that the board only have one formal winter meeting, and short of emergency board members should be attending in person.
- Be prepared for meetings and up to speed on the process. Have thoughts on items and be ready to share and participate fully.
- Speak your mind. Ask everyone to consider the same, speak up, have a voice, ask questions and the better the results will be.
- There is a learning process, and it is complicated with lots of details. If you are not sure about something, ask the other board members.

Tim Robertson then ran through the board's roles and responsibilities. There are critical parts of a project lifecycle, the board is making very critical decisions, and there is a lot of

education that comes with that decision. Amateur board members may not see all the details, and often engineers have a lot of influence. Robertson and Conway then went over the Independent Fee Estimate (IFE) process. Lance Bowser also provided an overview of how engineering firms complete the IFE process. There was discussion on where the board's responsibility lies for understanding the disparity and how they are dispersing funds based on that knowledge.

There was encouragement for engineering firms to attend board meetings to address questions about loans, grants, and extensions as engineers often have more details. Then there was further discussion on the requirements and cost of the IFE process and how that affects the application.

Award Process Refinements

Tim Robertson provided a summary regarding this item. Since last session, there have been a lot of questions about where the funding for the loan and grant awards comes from, and whether the process of distributing funds is done appropriately across all airports, big and small. Most of the applications are from non-commercial, small airports and the board needs to consider the larger airports because, while they do have other funds, they also serve a larger need. Robertson stated the board needs to find balance and deal with that issue.

There was discussion on larger airports, their needs, and the fact that the board can and should provide some assistance but can't fully fund their requests due to their size. Most larger airports realize the needs of smaller airports, and don't often apply because they have other funding sources and are not always granted funds. There was also discussion on the money that comes in from these airports, and how the board could better support them in future years.

There was discussion about setting aside a certain amount of funding to dedicate to larger airports, what that would look like, and how it would affect the award process. The board talked about airports not applying at all, how to disperse funds, how to classify an airport in this designated category, and giving airports the option to accept or deny the funds granted.

After further discussion, the board decided to schedule a meeting to further decide on this item.

Schedule Next Meeting

Chairman Tim Robertson proposed scheduling a meeting in October to discuss the rule refinement topic. The next meeting was scheduled for October 1st, 2025, at 10:00 am, virtual. The following meetings were scheduled as well, location to be determined:

- January 28-29, 2026 – the annual Grant and Loan Award Meeting.
- June 3, 2026
- January 27-28, 2027 – the annual Grant and Loan Award Meeting

Meeting Adjournment

Tim Robertson asked if there was anything for the good of the order. There was discussion about having the June meeting outside of Helena and moving around the districts.

Robb Bergeson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Wade Cebulski seconded the motion. All board members voted aye.

The meeting adjourned at 3:54 pm.