

MONTANA AERONAUTICS BOARD MEETING
MDT Aeronautics Division Office
Helena, MT 59620
October 1, 2025

Aeronautics Board In-Person

Wade Cebulski, Vice-Chair

Aeronautics Board-Virtual

Tim Robertson, Chairman

Matthew Prinkki

Tom Schoenleben

Tim Damrow

Robb Bergeson

Grayson Sperry

Bill Lepper

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)

Doug McBroom, MDT Statewide Planning &
Modal Ops

Tim Conway, MDT Aeronautics

Karen Hallenbeck, MDT Aeronautics

Stephen Torske, MDT Aeronautics

Kelly Atkins, MDT Aeronautics

John Haffey, MDT Legal

Jess Bousliman, MDT

Call to Order

Chair Robertson called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Eight board members present.

Approval of June Minutes

Tim Robertson opened the floor for discussion of the June meeting minutes.

Robb Bergeson made a motion to approve the June 3, 2025 meeting minutes as presented, Grayson Sperry seconded the motion, all board members voted aye.

Public Comment

Robertson then asked for public comment at 10:03 am, which there was none.

Aeronautics Updates

Tim Conway introduced Doug McBroom, Statewide Planning and Modal Operations Program Area Manager. McBroom stated the Aeronautics Division is now under this program. He also provided a brief history of his time with MDT. Conway then introduced the new Aeronautics Program Manager, Kelly Atkins. Atkins provided an introduction and an overview of his duties and current projects.

Tim Conway then provided an update of Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Grant and Loan Fund status. He stated it will grow in the next two months before it is made available to the board for distribution.

Tim Damrow asked if the revenue showing from July to September was trailing slightly or if it showed the accurate amount. Conway stated it was most likely trailing but the financial contact was not currently available. Damrow also asked if there was an update on any extensions. Karen Hallenbeck provided a brief update on the status of some of the extensions.

Conway then provided a legislative update. MDT has submitted proposals to the Governor's office earlier than normal to get ahead of schedule. There are two proposals affecting Aeronautics. The first is to change requirements for aircraft decals, and the second is to generally revise the General Aviation (GA) fee matrix.

Robertson stated they may not want to lump large and small turbines into the same category for the fee matrix. Conway shared if any board members wanted to participate in the drafting of the language, they are encouraged to be a part of the process.

Cebulski noted to be specific about the language as legislators may dig deeper into this leading to bigger changes.

Conway stated some pilots have said the fees are too low for the services provided and it would be worth increasing. We don't want to push for more money and that is not the purpose of making these changes, but it could allow for more staff.

Conway then commented on the Government shutdown and stated at this time it does not have any known effects on the airport community. Grants from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) will move forward as normal.

Robertson then asked about the Ferndale Airport. Conway stated the Glacier International Airport Manager asked if MDT Aeronautics was interested in taking over the Ferndale Airport. There are a lot of complicated aspects to that occurring. The Governor's office is interested in MDT owning less airports, and from the financial side collecting revenue is limited, but the community needs to be considered as well. There has not been an official request to take it on, but it is anticipated.

Cebulski stated there are numerous hangars there which could provide a revenue source.

Robertson stated he would hate to see the airport go, especially due to its high usage, and he hopes we have a positive attitude about it since we have a statutory duty.

Conway then summarized the steps if MDT Aeronautics did not acquire it.

Hallenbeck then provided an update to the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) and that there were no public comments during the comment period and if they go through the Secretary of State's office they will be published October 10 and effective October 11

Board Business

State Grant Assurances

Robertson opened the floor for conversation regarding State Grant Assurances.

Conway mentioned the guidelines can go astray if they are too detailed.

Cebulski stated that Montana is the only state that doesn't have grant assurances. When the board was giving away a smaller amount of money it wasn't as risky, but now there are millions of dollars involved, and we need to ensure it is being used for what we grant it for.

Atkins then provided an overview of the work he had done compiling information from other states, and that each state varies in details of provisions, but they all have some form of grant assurance. He used AI to make three drafts with different levels of details as a framework to help build Montana's. Robertson mentioned that there was some language in the AI versions that will need to be edited as it changes the intent of what is trying to be done.

Robertson then asked the board if this is something they feel should be put in place. There was discussion on what this change would look like and how it would affect the application process, but overall agreement that it is something that needs to be done.

Robertson then asked if it was possible to have something in place before the next grant cycle. Conway stated it should be possible as it does not require ARM, rather it is just an addition to the application process. Haffey mentioned it should also not conflict with anything statutory. Hallenbeck stated if it was not complete by January when other documentation was sent out, a notice could be sent out that it would be coming at a later date.

There was concern that there would be pushback from some applicants, which furthered the board's support on instating grant assurances. Hallenbeck mentioned that most applicants are federal airports that must comply with FAA assurances which are stricter, so it should not cause much concern.

Robertson then asked the board if there were any concerns.

Lepper reminded the board there should be time for public comment.

It was then decided to create a draft, allow the board to review it, and then have it ready for the January meeting to allow the public to comment.

Primary Airport Guaranteed Allocation

Conway provided a brief history of the grant and loan program and what the process was like when it first started. Historically there was an amount set aside that was evenly dispersed to the “Big Seven”, with the agreement that those airports would not apply for additional grants and loans. This agreement was not statutory, and due to HB 661 changes to funding, both the set aside and the agreement have faded.

There was discussion on whether they should bring back this agreement. There was concern for the smaller airports that have minimal funding sources and their need for these loans and grants. The large airports have many funding sources and often don’t need additional funding. Most of the time the larger airports do not even apply because they have other funding sources and the grant and loan money is such a small portion it does not greatly increase the monetary support they need.

It was suggested that a set amount of the funding could be set aside so the larger airports felt included, considering they contribute a lot of the grant funds, while also ensuring the smaller airports still had available funding to complete their projects. It has been brought to attention that the larger airports contribute funds and don’t often see any return.

There was question if the larger airports made a formal complaint. It was stated that the Montana Airport Managers Association (MAMA) was vocal during the 2019 legislative sessions testifying against HB661 with concern that most of the grant funding comes from the “Big Seven”, but that they are receiving nothing back.

After further discussion and concerns brought forth both in support and not in support for setting aside guaranteed funding for the “Big Seven”, this topic was tabled for the next meeting.

Meeting Adjournment

Hallenbeck then provided a summary of the calendar and the next board meetings.

Robertson suggested an additional meeting be scheduled to further discuss the State Grant Assurance item. A meeting was set for November 5, 2025 at 10am to review the drafted language for the grant assurance and to pass on to legal.

The meeting adjourned at 11:27 a.m.