



Bike Walk Montana, Inc.

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December 20, 2019

Mr. Mike Tooley  
Director, Montana Department of Transportation  
POB 201001  
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Dear Director Tooley,

Greetings to you, your staff and your family during this holiday season. Even with snow and ice, Montanans are able to travel across our state, thanks in a large part to MDT's efforts. For those that must or choose to travel by bicycle, foot or rolling, this season is particularly challenging and I ask that their needs continue to be considered and addressed through maintenance, policy, planning and construction.

We are engaged with the interim transportation committee and in particular the HJR45 work group. Your staff presentations were informative for the group of stakeholders at the December 10<sup>th</sup> meeting. The real work remains in how to have an expanded and well-maintained system of safe and practical shared use paths in Montana. We encourage your staff to be creative, to consider new ideas and solutions, and to lead in making changes in policy and possible new legislation to improve our active transportation culture.

Your staff responded to a question from Representative Loge that bike/walk issues and opportunities were being "covered" by the existing staff and structure. We are encouraging and helping our members engage with your district staff across the state and as we feel it creates a strong community effort. But there is still a strong desire in the bike/walk community to see the Helena Bike/Ped position to be filled and strengthened. While not speaking negatively of the Helena office efforts or staff, both symbolically but also as a way to get more done, we need that strong advocate that works well within MDT structure, just as so many of the other states have. There is federal funding available to pay for the position, it is a policy choice to not fill it.

Since bike/ped issues are not just a planning responsibility but also is affected by construction, maintenance, certainly funding, communications, and as mentioned, district activity, we are asking that you move the bike/ped position from planning into your office, possibly under the Deputy Director. This would give multi-modal transportation the status and attention it needs for us to move Montana into the top tier of states in providing a forward looking and effective system for our citizens and visitors. I ask that you give this immediate and serious



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consideration. We would love to introduce that new staff person to the world at our Bike Walk Summit April 29 – May 1, 2020 in Great Falls.

We feel this position could lead the following efforts, which we are asking to be priorities in this new year;

- Work with Adventure Cycling to develop better bike crash and fatality information including location, details of the accident, and follow up results including law enforcement actions. Many other states have been cooperating in doing so. This would establish another criterion for considering improvement and investment priorities.
- Provide more detailed funding and expense information to both the public and the legislature. This is the primary consideration of and was evident in the interim committee work group that the costs of construction and maintenance are significant and need to be quantified to address. The Bike/walk community needs to get inside the decision making process and work together with MDT, at both the district and Helena level, to be completely clear about what funding is available, what is being spent and what for.
- There should be a record of bike/ped comments received during the pre-construction phase of projects, how MDT reached out and any actions taken in response, even if no change was made. This is part, again, of qualifying what is actually being done, so benchmarks reached and progress made can be completely understood by the public and staff alike.
- Define what implementation of the Bike/Ped plan means and set that as defined actions and goals. What changes are happening, what results have been achieved, how do we all measure progress? Under the goals of each strategy, the plan lists “ideas that can be employed” – this term is used throughout and is ambiguous. Even if the plan is purely a strategic document, which was needed and it is recognized positively as it being, we need a defined implementation for the plan to be anything other than meeting a federal requirement.
- Officially integrate walk audits into the pre-construction phase of all projects. This is an effective, recognized and low cost way to gather public comment, discuss options and to make your process inclusive. The biggest benefit goes beyond these in that it builds community around our transportation system. We have offered to help in this process, on a volunteer or contract basis.
- Law enforcement training – we could improve and make reporting of bicycle accidents more consistent which would help with data gathering. We would like to see bicycle law enforcement be formally integrated into the MLEA academy basic training, utilizing such resources as the NHTSA Primer for Law Enforcement Professionals, the American Bicycling Education Association friends in law enforcement approach and the Institute for Police Technology and Management training in “Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety High Visibility Enforcement”.
- Support to the district offices. We would like to see expanded training and support for the districts in how to partner with the local bike/walk community, to hold walk audits, and to provide expanded engineering and design training. At least one district



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employee, hopefully more, should be recognized in the dual role of citizen and agency advocate.

I hope you can see that there is plenty of work for a dedicated position, and it needs the authority of your office to reach all aspects of our transportation system and to be truly integrated into MDT's multiple functions.

I look forward to working with you on this and other active transportation opportunities and challenges. You are recognized as an effective leader who uses and values all modes of travel. We feel fortunate to have you as Director and ask that you adopt our suggestions. It does reflect the general feelings of the bike/walk community.

With regards,

Doug Habermann  
Executive Director

cc: Representative Loge  
Senator Gordon Vance  
Governor Steve Bullock  
Bike Walk Montana newsletter



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