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UM Launches Transportation Study

MISSOULA – The University of Montana and the UDASH bus system are launching a collaborative transportation study to plan for improving transit service to campus, easing traffic and parking pressure, and ensuring efficient access to the preferred Missoula College site on East Broadway.

The UM Transportation Study will launch with two meetings on Tuesday, April 22: from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the University Center, and from 6:30 to 8 p.m. in the Lewis and Clark Villages Community Room located at 3000 South Higgins Ave. Both meetings are free and open to the public.

The Associated Students of UM, the city of Missoula, Mountain Line and UM have contributed a combined \$103,000 to the study, which includes focus groups, meetings and online surveys.

“The University and ASUM are committed to a thorough public process,” said Peggy Kuhr, UM’s vice president for integrated communications. “We encourage students, faculty, staff and community members to participate fully in the meetings next week.”

ASUM’s Office of Transportation operates the UDASH bus system – one of a handful of student-run transit systems in the country. Founded by student referendum in 1999, UDASH now provides more than 400,000 rides per year. Mountain Line provides nearly 1 million rides annually and has experienced record growth in recent years.

Mountain Line's new Bolt service stops at the University every 15 minutes. More frequency offers more convenience, which leads to more riders, said Mountain Line General Manager Michael Tree. And more riders allow the agencies to provide better transit service.

Both bus services are hoping to gather recommendations for improved collaboration.

"Mountain Line and UDASH provided more than 1.4 million rides last year, and more than half of those rides were taken by University students, faculty or staff," said Jordan Hess, ASUM Office of Transportation director. "We're both trying to do the same thing – get riders to their destinations quickly and safely – and we're looking for ways to work together."

The city of Missoula long has been interested in the same goals.

"This is a great opportunity for the University of Montana, its students and the city of Missoula, through Mountain Line, to work for the greater good and better serve our shared constituents," said Mayor John Engen. "Our study is a step on the path to delivering the best transportation options of any small city in the United States."

UDASH and Mountain Line together provide enough transit service to qualify for Small Transit Intensive Cities funding through the Federal Transit Administration. Through STIC funding, cities can become eligible for additional performance-based funding. According to Hess, the study could help ASUM and Mountain Line meet more performance metrics to receive STIC funding for future enhancements.

The process also includes a review of other transportation needs. As UM prepares to build a new Missoula College campus, the University and ASUM want to make sure the transportation system provides the right number of buses at the right time, along with the ideal mix of bike and vehicle parking spaces. The University has selected a preferred site for a new Missoula College building on East Broadway, and that site now is under evaluation as part of an environmental assessment process.

Better transit service also helps alleviate parking congestion and cut down on the need to construct new parking spaces. According to Hess, it costs significantly less much to improve transit service to accommodate commuters than it does to construct new parking for them.

The transportation study will be conducted by Nelson\Nygaard of San Francisco. The firm has extensive experience in campus transportation planning and recently prepared short- and long-range plans for Mountain Line.

For more information visit <http://umt.edu/transportation/study> or email transportation.study@umontana.edu.

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