SUMMARY REPORT OF THE WORK OF THE 2025-2026 TRANSPORTATION INTERIM COMMITTEE

FINAL REPORT TO THE 70TH MONTANA LEGISLATURE

Transportation Interim Committee (TIC)

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This report is a summary of the work of the Transportation Interim Committee (TIC), specific to the committee's 2025-2026 work plan and Senate Joint Resolution 19 (2025).

Members received additional information and public testimony on each subject, and this report is an effort to highlight key information and the processes followed by the Transportation Interim Committee in reaching its conclusions. To review additional information, including audio minutes and exhibits, visit the Transportation Interim Committee website: https://committees.legmt.gov/#/nonStandingCommittees/32.

TRANSPORTATION INTERIM COMMITTEE 2025-2026

INTRODUCTION

The 2019 Legislature passed and approved Senate Bill 226 establishing a Transportation Interim Committee (TIC). Historically, transportation matters were combined with revenue and tax policy under the authority of the Revenue and Transportation Interim Committee. The 2019 Senate Highways and Transportation Standing Committee requested SB 226, and Senator Gordon Vance carried the bill. He stated in his testimony that it was important to split the subjects into separate committees to ensure that transportation, including the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), receives the attention it deserves.

TIC is one of several interim committees established by law and required to meet in the months between regular legislative sessions. Interim committees provide oversight for the various state agencies, perform interim studies as needed and as assigned by the Legislative Council, and propose legislation for consideration during the next legislative session. The interim committees also give Montana's citizens an opportunity to provide testimony about their experiences with state government.



(Left) TIC members are viewed from below, while they look up into a red-and-yellow hot-air balloon, watching as liquid propane is ignited to inflate the balloon.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Transportation Interim Committee's work plan includes the task of developing findings and recommendations related to the assigned study and any other committee topics that were discussed during the 2025-2026 interim.

1. Assigned Study – SJ 19: Interim Study of Public Transportation
2. Areas of Concern on Montana Roads
3. Autonomous Vehicles (AVs)
4. Fuel Tax Needs
5. Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) Fees
6. Highway Construction and Maintenance
7. Motor Carrier Services (MCS) Officer Enforcement
8. Railroad Crossings
9. Tow Trucks / Wreckers
10. Wildlife Corridors

The following list of findings and recommendations was developed by staff based on what the committee learned, heard, and discussed over the 2025-2026 interim.

ASSIGNED STUDY – SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

For detailed information on this topic, please refer to the SJ 19 Final Report on the TIC web page.

Committee findings (*numbered*) and recommendations (*lettered*):

1. Public response indicates a broad desire for increased public transportation statewide.
    a. Implement a Public Transportation and Passenger Transit entity (such as an advisory board or a commission) to continue the work of SJ 19 and improve transit service delivery to Montanans.
    b. Create a dedicated funding source for public transportation.
2. Montana citizens who report the highest usage of public transportation tend to be young (ages 18-34) and lower paid (under $70,000 annual household income).
    a. Require "free fare" public transportation in cities above a certain population threshold (*to be determined by the entity specified in 1a*).
    b. Require cost-adjusted fares for young and low-income citizens.
3. Existing fixed-route public transportation is underused due to route schedules misaligned with the standard workday or route stop locations that don't reach desired destinations.
    a. Require public transportation to be provided between the hours of 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. and between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. in order to be eligible for state funding.
    b. Implement weekend and late-night public transportation services.
    c. Require route stop locations within a given distance (*to be determined by the entity specified in 1a*) from a city's highest concentration of population.
4. Existing public transportation services are not interconnected enough for users to get to their "last-mile" destination.
    a. Implement shuttle or short-route services to and from areas of high demand, such as shopping centers or hospitals.
5. Citizens in rural counties overwhelmingly cite a lack of access to public transportation.
    a. Consider requiring each county to coordinate publicly available transportation, such as vanpool or dial-a-ride, available on a weekly basis to a nearby center of commerce.
6. Recreation access is the most frequent and the most desired use of public transportation, both by Montana residents and by tourists visiting the state.
    a. Implement regular public transportation to and from Glacier and Yellowstone national parks and various state parks in Montana.
7. Shared-use pathways are utilized positively by Montanans, but the pathways could use some improvements.
    a. Identify gaps in connectivity between shared-use pathways and areas of high risk, then build additional infrastructure to protect citizens.

AREAS OF CONCERN ON MONTANA ROADS

Committee findings:

1. The section of U.S. Highway 212 east of Billings has experienced challenges with enforcement, jurisdiction, risky driver behavior, and cellular service along the route.
2. Risky driver behavior, including high speeds and mobile phone usage, endangers the lives of highway workers, emergency personnel, law enforcement, and schoolchildren.

Committee recommendations:

1. Request that the Attorney General's office issue demand letters to GPS mapping providers, urging them to update posted speed limits for U.S. Highway 212 within GPS navigation apps.
2. Establish cross-citation authority between Motor Carrier Services (MCS) and tribal law enforcement.
3. Propose legislation **PD 05** to prohibit distracted driving related to mobile devices (*see **Appendix B***).

Committee discussion:

U.S. Highway 212 was discussed during the TIC meeting on September 12, 2025 (*pages 11-12 of this report*). Methods to address risky driver behavior, including **PD 05**, were discussed during the TIC meetings on May 11-12, 2026 (*pages 19-20 of this report*) and July 8, 2026 (*pages 21-23*).



(Left) TIC members were greeted by a LiteSys, Inc. truck-mounted changeable message sign. Pictured (left to right): Sen. Russ Tempel, Rep. Sidney "Chip" Fitzpatrick, Sen. Denley Loge, Rep. Greg Kmetz, Rep. Curtis Cochran, Sen. Gregg Hunter, Becca Brown, Maddelyn Pennington.

AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES (AVS)

Committee findings:

1. AV technology is already present in the United States, and Montana needs to be ready for it.
2. Autonomous freight vehicles pose an opportunity to meet Montanans' shipping demands while facing workforce shortages.
3. Fully autonomous driverless passenger vehicles will continue to be developed and will likely become more prevalent on Montana roads in the coming years.

Committee recommendations:

1. Establish regulations on AVs, including registration, enforcement, and insurance coverage.
   - *Note the rulemaking process on Senate Bill 67 (2025), including stakeholder consultation, is ongoing.*
2. Require data collection on AVs in the state, including safety, performance, and insurance data.
3. Authorize the testing of freight AVs and determine whether to implement an open/permissive framework or a more stringent regulatory framework (including data reporting requirements).
4. Authorize the testing of passenger AVs in this state so that adverse conditions, such as weather events, two-lane highways, and gravel roads, can be identified and solutions can be engineered.
5. Require training for first responders and emergency personnel who may be responding to incidents involving AVs.

Committee discussion:

AV policy, innovations, and other state approaches were discussed throughout the interim, including:

- a site visit discussion on November 24, 2025 (*pages 13-14 of this report*);
- the Utah Department of Transportation overview of AV Technology and State Implementation on March 13, 2026 (*pages 17-18*);
- a site visit to Aurora Innovation, Inc. and Montana State University's Optical Technology Center (OpTeC) during the May 11-12, 2026, travel meeting (*pages 19-20*); and
- state perspectives from the Minnesota and Texas Departments of Transportation and an overview of the proposed federal SAFE DRIVE Act on July 8, 2026 (*pages 21-23*).



(Left) TIC members are pictured at the Aurora Innovation campus in Bozeman. From left to right: Sydnee Journel, Rep. Sidney "Chip" Fitzpatrick, Jim Curry, Sen. Russ Tempel, Sen. Denley Loge, Rep. Denise Baum, Sen. Gregg Hunter, Rep. Curtis Cochran, Rep. Greg Kmetz, MDT Deputy Director Larry Flynn, Becca Brown.

FUEL TAX NEEDS

Committee finding:
The majority of MDT's state funding comes from fuel tax revenue. The federal fuel tax hasn't changed since 1993, and Montana's fuel tax was most recently revised in 2017. After the inflation of the past decade and increased state match requirements with no corresponding revenue solution, the fuel tax dollars are not "stretching" as far as needed.

Committee recommendation:
No specific legislative recommendations at this time.

Committee discussion:
Fuel taxes, as one source of MDT's revenue, were discussed throughout the interim. A one-page overview from the Legislative Fiscal Division was provided on September 12, 2025 (*pages 11-12 of this report*), MDT provided an overview of fuels and what they fund on March 13, 2026 (*pages 17-18*), and draft legislation was considered on July 8, 2026 (*pages 21-23*).



(Left) TIC members gather in front of a Streamline bus while Belgrade Public Works Director, Camaree Uljua, describes newly built commercial warehouses and ongoing residential construction off of Jackrabbit Lane in Belgrade.

GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT (GVW) FEES

Committee finding:
Montana's GVW fees are among the lowest in the nation and are the lowest out of regional neighbor states, including Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Washington. Commercial traffic and heavyweight loads cause exponentially more damage to road surface than passenger vehicles do.

Committee recommendation:
No specific legislative recommendations at this time.

Committee discussion:
GVW fees in Montana were discussed multiple times throughout the interim. On January 23, 2026, MDT provided an analysis of Montana's GVW fees compared to regional neighbor states (*pages 15-16 of this report*). At the committee's request, MDT provided a 50-state comparison of GVW fees on March 13, 2026 (*pages 17-18*). Legislation was considered on July 8, 2026 (*pages 21-23*).

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

Committee findings:

1. There has been confusion among contractors and subcontractors regarding how highway projects are identified, put up for bid, and awarded. Confusion particularly centers around the difference between the traditional "Design-Build" contracting process and alternative project delivery methods.
2. The required state match to qualify for federal funding, including redistribution funding, has increased regularly since at least 2002.

Committee recommendations:

1. Request that MDT propose Administrative Rules clarifying both contracting processes.
2. Propose legislation to add specifics of project delivery into statute.
3. Increase MDT funding via fuel tax or GVW fees so that the remaining budget, after meeting the state match requirement, is less affected.
4. Request that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) put a "freeze" on increasing state match proportion, either temporarily or indefinitely.

Committee discussion:

The committee hosted a panel discussion regarding contracting and alternative contracting processes on November 24, 2025 (*pages 13-14 of this report*). The topic of state match requirements was discussed a few times, notably during draft committee legislation on July 8, 2026 (*pages 21-23*).



(Left) Members of TIC inspect sheds being built by GHS Construction students. Launched in the 2025-2026 school year, Bozeman Construction Academy has already established a strong foundation to prepare students for the construction workforce, an area of high demand in the Gallatin Valley.

MOTOR CARRIER SERVICES (MCS) OFFICER ENFORCEMENT

Committee findings:

1. Enforcement on Montana's highways currently relies on Highway Patrol officers and is limited by the number of officers available or the size of the area patrolled by each officer.
2. The scales used by MCS officers to weigh commercial vehicles must be routinely inspected and calibrated for accuracy.

Committee recommendation:

Authorize MCS officers to enforce moving violations committed by commercial vehicle drivers.

Committee discussion:

MCS officer authority was discussed in multiple meetings throughout the interim; draft legislation was reviewed on May 11-12, 2026 (*pages 19-20 of this report*) and July 8, 2026 (*pages 21-23*).



(Left) A Vision Aerial drone is pictured in the foreground, while TIC members learn from Dr. Riley Logan at MSU's Optical Remote Sensor Lab (ORSL) about how drones can utilize optical technologies in a mobile fashion, allowing for wider data collection in a variety of applications.

RAILROAD CROSSINGS

Committee finding:

While the railroads are regulated by the Public Service Commission (PSC), MDT needs permission to access rights-of-way for road maintenance, bridge inspections, and utility relocations.

Committee recommendations:

1. Examine the division of railroad oversight between PSC and MDT in an interim study.
2. Authorize MDT to access railroad rights-of-way without prior approval from the PSC or the railroad.

Committee discussion:

Railroad crossings and related issues were discussed during the MDT agency update on January 23, 2026 (*pages 15-16 of this report*). Other rail topics discussed throughout the interim included the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA) updates on September 12, 2025 (*pages 11-12*); a committee letter regarding a proposed railroad merger, approved on March 13, 2026 (*pages 17-18*); and discussion of the 2025 State Freight Plan update on March 13, 2026 (*pages 17-18*).

TOW TRUCKS/WRECKERS

Committee finding:

Tow truck operators need clarity on the division of responsibility as well as insurance reimbursement for required debris cleanup pursuant to section 61-9-416(2)(e), MCA.

Committee recommendations:

1. Request an advisory memo from the Commissioner of Securities and Insurance (CSI).
   - *See the request letter, and subsequent response, in the July 2026 section (pages 17-18 of this report).*
2. Propose legislation to add specific definitions of damage and debris and specific insurance coverage requirements to the current debris cleanup statute.
3. Propose legislation **PD 12** to require insurance providers to notify customers about uninsured or underinsured motorist coverage (*see **Appendix B***).

Committee discussion:

A panel discussion was held on January 23, 2026 (*pages 15-16 of this report*). The committee wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Securities and Insurance (CSI), and CSI staff attended the TIC meeting on July 8, 2026, for further discussion (*pages 21-23*).



(Left) TIC members pose outside CVFD Station 1. Front row (left to right): Rep. Denise Baum, Sen. Gregg Hunter, Rep. Greg Kmetz, Maddelyn Pennington, CVFD Chief Jay Wittwer. Back row (left to right): Rep. Curtis Cochran, Sen. Denley Loge, Dave Cunningham (MDT Project Delivery Engineer), Rep. Sidney "Chip" Fitzpatrick, Sen. Russ Tempel, Geno Liva (MDT Butte District Administrator), Larry Flynn (MDT Deputy Director).

WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

Committee finding:

Wildlife-vehicle collisions are a risk when driving Montana's roads, and further mitigation is needed.

Committee recommendation:

Request additional federal support for wildlife crossings projects.

- *See the request letter in the November 2025 section of this report (page 13).*

Committee discussion:

Wildlife-vehicle interactions were discussed in the committee's letter to the U.S. Department of Transportation requesting reinstatement of rescinded funding for the Ninepipes project, approved on November 24, 2025 (*pages 13-14 of this report*). During the TIC meeting on July 8, 2026, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and MVD staff provided an overview and updates regarding wildlife crossings and the new license plate program (*pages 21-23*).

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

In this section, you will find a summary of the work completed at each committee meeting, organized by date. For specific details on any of the meeting topics, please visit the committee website at: https://committees.legmt.gov/#/nonStandingCommittees/32.

JULY 16, 2025, ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

Agenda — Minutes — Video

At its organizational meeting on Wednesday, July 16, 2025, the Transportation Interim Committee (TIC) began the task of determining its workload for the 2025-2026 interim.

Committee members elected Senator Russ Tempel as Chair and Representative Chip Fitzpatrick as Vice Chair. Staff provided an overview of the rules, procedures, and guidelines for interim committees, which TIC adopted with no changes. The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) provided an agency overview, including the 2024 Fact Book and information about the Vision Zero program.

The majority of the organizational meeting was spent reviewing the draft Work Plan, including the assigned study resolution, SJ 19, and other topics requested by TIC members. Ultimately, staff was directed to bring an updated Work Plan, incorporating the requested topics, to the next TIC meeting for approval.

SEPTEMBER 12, 2025

Agenda — Minutes — Video

TWO PANEL DISCUSSIONS INFORMED TIC ABOUT CURRENT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION EFFORTS AND SAFETY CONCERNS ALONG THE U.S. HIGHWAY 212 CORRIDOR.

AGENCY AND STAFF UPDATES

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) provided an agency overview, including an updated organizational structure, fiscal updates, and the updated status of legislation passed during the 2025 session. The committee approved a motion to draft a letter to the U.S. Department of Transportation requesting reinstatement of the rescinded Nine Pipes project funding.

The overview from the Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) of the Department of Justice included the division's organizational structure, updates on the Credentialing and Registration System (CARS) rollout, a fiscal status update, and updates from the Operational Services, Driver Services, and Vehicle Services bureaus.

Staff updates throughout the meeting included Administrative Rule Review of the MAR Notice 2025-90.1 rule proposal; an updated Work Plan and Timeline for the interim, which TIC voted unanimously to adopt without changes; and a short summary of the transportation-related legislation that was considered by the 2025 Legislature, including 54 bills that passed and 51 bills that failed, for reference throughout the interim. Staff from the Legislative Fiscal Division (LFD) provided a one-page overview of how state and federal funding sources contribute to transportation in Montana. The fiscal committee that considers transportation funding issues is the Natural Resources Interim Budget Committee (IBC-C).

SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

TIC conducted a panel discussion that included representation from the Montana Association of Counties (MACo), the Gallatin Valley Urban Transportation District (GVUTD), the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA), the Mountain Line of Missoula, Butte-Silver Bow Transit, the Montana Transit Association (MTA), the Veterans Transportation Service (VTS), the Essential Air Service (EAS) Task Force, and MDT's Statewide Planning and Modal Operations. The discussion covered modalities and the usage of existing public transit services, funding sources for public transit, interactions between tourism and public transit, and ongoing plans for public transit expansion, such as the Big Sky North Coast Corridor efforts. MDT also provided a map of public transportation services (2023), which is maintained on its website.[1]

[1] https://www.mdt.mt.gov/TRAVINFO/public-trans.aspx

U.S. HIGHWAY 212 EAST OF BILLINGS

TIC hosted another panel discussion to talk about safety concerns along the portion of U.S. Highway 212 that runs east from Billings through the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations to the MT/WY Montana and Wyoming border near Alzada. The panel included representation from Powder River, Big Horn, and Rosebud Counties, House District 41, the Crow Tribal General Council, local Disaster and Emergency Services (DES), towing and recovery services, the Montana Trucking Association (MTA), the Montana Highway Patrol (MHP), and MDT Motor Carrier Services (MCS). Discussion included an overview of the current roadway conditions, concerns about unsafe driver behaviors, such as dangerous passing and excessive speeds, cross-jurisdictional enforcement, and cell service coverage. MHP provided crash statistics on this section of U.S. Highway 212 from 2016 to 2025, noting that the 2025 statistics would likely change before the end of the calendar year. Recent efforts to address these issues include a Safety Action Plan (2024) and Speed Studies (2022), and MDT continues to make roadway improvements, such as passing lanes and additional signage along the route.



(Above) The segment of U.S. Highway 212 that runs east of Billings to the Montana and Wyoming border near Alzada, Montana, is roughly 231 miles long, travels through both the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations, and passes through Yellowstone, Big Horn, Rosebud, Powder River, and Carter Counties. (*Image courtesy of Google Maps*)

PUBLIC COMMENT

TIC received written public comment prior to the meeting, and live comment during the meeting was given by membership of the Highway 2 Association, the Big Horn County Commissioner, and MDT Motor Carrier Services.

NOVEMBER 24, 2025

Agenda – Minutes – Video

TIC LEARNED ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RELATIVELY NEW ALTERNATIVE PROJECT DELIVERY METHODS AUTHORIZED BY THE 2023 LEGISLATURE.

AGENCY AND STAFF UPDATES

The overview from MVD included the new driver's license credentials, statistics from the Driver Services and Vehicle Services bureaus, and an update on the Montana Mobile ID.

MDT provided an agency overview, including informational presentations on Project Selection and Funding for Highway Construction/Maintenance.

This meeting's Administrative Rule Review covered rule proposals in MAR Notices 2025-171.1 and 2025-172.1, rule adoption 2025-090, and repeal/amendment 2025-232.2.

Staff presented a draft committee letter to the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) requesting reinstatement of the rescinded $63 million Neighborhood Access and Equity grant funding and strongly encouraging permanent wildlife-vehicle collision reduction programs within the USDOT's FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan. TIC voted 8-1 to approve and send the letter.

MONTANA CONTRACTOR BIDDING AND ALTERNATIVE CONTRACTING

TIC conducted a panel discussion on the topic of alternative contracting processes for highway projects. The panel included contractors based out of Helena, Kalispell, Billings, Missoula, and Great Falls, the Montana Contractors Association (MCA), and engineers from MDT's Project Development and Delivery divisions. MDT provided reference information about the federal regulations, state statutes, and state administrative rule governing the process of contracting for highway projects. Discussion included concerns with the relatively new alternative project delivery methods authorized by the 2023 Legislature,[2] such as the lack of clarity or competition. Contractors described the direct and indirect costs of preparing a project bid[3] and confusion with MDT's process of scoring bids for approval.

MDT staff emphasized their priority of finding the best value for Montana's traveling public and taxpayers and noted that lessons have been learned throughout this new process, including:

- stronger emphasis on project selection criteria;
- regional effects (both geographic and demographic) on project costs; and

[2] https://bills.legmt.gov/#/bill/20231/LC0505?open_tab=bill
[3] Panelist Note: this exhibit, in the bottom-right circle, should state "direct" costs instead of "indirect"

- differences in Progressive Design-Build (PDB) and Construction Manager/General Contractor (CMGC) costs compared to a routine Design-Bid-Build (DBB) project.

Contractors highlighted the fact that collaboration between engineering firms and contractors is creating a more efficient and less costly initial project-design process. In closing, it was emphasized that as the conversation continues, any recommendations or legislation must align with existing provisions in the Federal Highway Act.

SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Based on TIC's discussion in July and September, staff developed a Study Strategy for the rest of the interim, including panel discussion topics, statutory questions, potential field trip connections, and committee legislation. Staff also provided a brief overview of statutory provisions that govern public transport—a work-in-progress to be completed by the end of the interim. A short update of the Essential Air Service (EAS) program was provided, noting some recent federal decisions that may (but ultimately did not) effect EAS funding.

Chair Russ Tempel and Sen. Denley Loge described a site visit to an autonomous vehicle (AV) facility in Arizona, including some pictures and video of an AV in operation. This overview included a caution that overly restrictive policies may prevent AV exploration or innovation in the state.

In a discussion about Passenger Rail, Rep. Denise Baum and Sen. Andrea Olsen provided information and reflections from the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) Economic Forum and Rail Summit[4] and the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA) Annual Conference.[5] MDT staff provided an overview of Montana's State Rail Plan, including a comparison of the Rail Plan to the Freight Plan, which is a separate but similar plan required by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

TIC reviewed a preliminary draft of a public survey to be conducted by TIC staff that is intended to gather information from across the state about how Montanans utilize public transportation. The committee determined the survey was incomplete and opted to revise it before the next meeting in January 2026.

PUBLIC COMMENT

TIC received written comment and live comment during the meeting, including input from Ability Montana, Disability Rights Montana (DR-MT), North Central Independent Living Services (NCILS), and the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA).

[4] https://www.pnwer.org/2025-forum.html
[5] https://bigskyrailmt.gov/2025-bspra-annual-conference

JANUARY 23, 2026

Agenda – Minutes – Video

TWO PANEL DISCUSSIONS INFORMED THE COMMITTEE ABOUT MOBILITY, INTERCONNECTIVITY, AND TOWING AND RECOVERY SERVICES

AGENCY AND STAFF UPDATES

The overview from MVD included updates on Montana Mobile IDs, the rollout of the revised credentials, the implementation of the Citizenship Marker, and Highway Patrol's SmartCop rollout. Improved systems are allowing more efficiency, freeing up staff time to address a backlog of requests. Goals for 2026 include electronic title and registration processes, online and automated process testing, and ADA compliance.

MDT provided an agency overview, including information about railroad crossings, rulemaking regarding autonomous vehicles (AVs), and analysis of Montana's Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) fees compared to regional neighbor states. Additional information was requested regarding GVW fees nationwide and Motor Carrier Services (MCS) officer enforcement along U.S. Highway 212.

This meeting's Administrative Rule Review covered MAR Notices of adoption 2025-171.1, adoption 2025-172.2, and proposal 2026-658.1.

The Western Transportation Institute (WTI)[6] of Montana State University provided introductions to WTI staff as well as an overview of WTI's work and ongoing studies related to TIC's topics of interest, including rural transportation, education and workforce development, the Safe Streets For All (SS4A) project, and the Federal Railroad Administration's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program.

SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

TIC hosted a panel discussion, including representation from Ability Montana, Disability Rights Montana (DR-MT), the National Federation of the Blind of Montana, North Central Independent Living Services (NCILS), the Rails to Trails Conservancy, Bike Walk Montana, and the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities at the University of Montana. The discussion focused on the need for interconnected transportation services so that users can get to their "last-mile" destination and the crucial need for public transportation for citizens with accessibility or mobility needs. According to the USDOT,[7] over 25%

[6] https://westerntransportationinstitute.org/
[7] https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2023/dv1c.cfm

of Americans do not have a driver's license and must rely on other forms of transportation besides a personal vehicle.

TIC recessed to leave the committee room and engage in an Inclusive, Interdisciplinary Walk and Move Audit, organized by multiple members of the panel, across the Capitol Complex, including the newly renovated Montana Heritage Center museum. This outdoor activity included panelists as well as representation from Lewis and Clark Public Health and the Department of Administration. Committee members saw how gaps in infrastructure planning cause downstream effects to all users with different levels of ability. Inside the Montana Heritage Center, museum staff highlighted exhibits showing innovations and changes in transportation modalities throughout the state's history.

Concerned agricultural producers provided information and commentary on a proposed merger between the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern railroads and its downstream effects on freight shippers in Montana. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway Company was also in the room to provide information and perspective on the merger's predicted effects. TIC directed staff to draft a committee letter to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) for the March meeting.

TIC reviewed the updated public transportation survey questionnaire, requested input from disability advocates, and voted 7-1 to publish the survey before the next TIC meeting in March.

TOWING AND RECOVERY

TIC conducted a panel discussion that included representatives from the Montana Tow Truck Association (MTTA), Towing and Recovery Professionals of Montana (TRP-MT), the Montana Trucking Association (MTA), and the Montana Highway Patrol (MHP). The discussion covered multiple topics of concern coming out of the 2025 legislative session in which several bills were proposed but ultimately failed. Topics of discussion included the on-call rotation system operated by MHP, instances of "wreck-chasing" interfering with the rotation, light colors for tow vehicles, and financial constraints on local tow companies, such as insurance claims, some of which are related to statutory "debris cleanup" responsibilities. A representative from the Commissioner of Securities and Insurance (CSI) of the State Auditor's Office was present in the room to answer informational questions. Tow operators highlighted the 2023 Legislature's Yield – Slow Down – Move Over Act and asked for TIC's continued support to improve conditions for tow operators in the state.

PUBLIC COMMENT

TIC received some written comments, and input during the meeting was given by the Montana Transit Association, wheelchair users, the Montana Grain Growers Association, the Montana Farm Bureau Federation, and the Montana Tow Truck Association (MTTA).

MARCH 13, 2026

Agenda – Minutes – Video

THE COMMITTEE BEGAN REQUESTING BILL TOPICS AND DRAFTED LETTERS TO THE CSI AND THE STB REGARDING ONGOING EVENTS.

AGENCY AND STAFF UPDATES

The overview from MVD included the implementation of Mobile Driver Licenses (mDLs), updates on the rollouts of the new driver's license card credentials and Citizenship Markers, progress on Digital Birth Certificate access, support for counties, efficiencies within division operations, and the continued reduction of backlogged issues.

MDT provided an agency overview, including updates on winter maintenance demands, U.S. Highway 212 improvement efforts, safety priorities going into the 2027 biennium, details about different Fuels and What They Fund, a 50-State Comparison of GVW Fees, and the Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan update process.

Staff presented a summary of the significant amendments to Montana's fuel tax in 1991, when duties of multiple state agencies were consolidated under MDT.

Staff was directed to draft a committee letter asking the Commissioner of Securities and Insurance (CSI) to lay out the current landscape regarding insurance coverage for, and payment toward, debris cleanup by tow truck operators required pursuant to section 61-9-416(2)(e), MCA, and requesting the CSI's participation in future TIC meetings on this topic.

TIC unanimously approved a draft committee letter regarding the proposed merger of the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern rail corporations to be sent to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) and Montana's federal representatives.

Committee bill drafts were requested on the following topics: closure of U.S. Highway 212 to commercial traffic; GVW fees; a fuel tax increase; DUI repeat offenders; pilot program authority for automated enforcement cameras; and extended MCS authority to enforce more than overweight violations.

Staff briefly reviewed a draft agenda for the May 2026 2-day travel meeting in Bozeman, Montana.

ROAD USE CHARGES (RUCs)

Staff from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) presented about Oregon's innovative strategy to move away from a fuel tax toward a usage charge based on miles driven (sometimes referred to as a Mileage-Based User Fee). Oregon has seen similar issues to Montana, where fuel tax dollars are

not stretching as far as they once did, and has been a leader in developing a "user-pays" model to continue funding highway construction and maintenance.

SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Staff from the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) presented to TIC about Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Technology and State Implementation in Utah and across the nation.

Commissioners from Blaine and Fergus Counties gave some insight into their counties' Missouri River Ferry programs, including who uses the ferries, how the counties administer and maintain the ferries, and the division of responsibility for the McClelland-Stafford Ferry that travels along the shared county border.

A handout was provided to explain funding that passes through MDT for public transportation, including state TransADE and federal Section 5311 formula grants.

MDT provided information on the 2025 update to the biennial TranPlanMT public survey, specifically related to TIC's topics of interest under SJ 19.

Staff provided a work-in-progress update of an interactive map of public transportation services available across the state that is to be completed by the end of the interim. Staff also showed a preliminary status update of the online public survey about public transportation, which would remain open until April 10, 2026.

PUBLIC COMMENT

TIC received some written comments, and input during the meeting was given by a Gallatin County resident, the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, Ability MT, the Montana Contractors Association (MCA), and the Montana Tow Truck Association (MTTA).

MAY 11-12, 2026, TRAVEL MEETING IN GALLATIN VALLEY

Agenda

Note that due to the meeting's offsite location, Zoom participation and MPAN streaming services were unavailable. Audio recordings, available by request, cover the "committee business" portions of the agenda and do not include any of the site visits.

TIC WENT OUT ON THE ROAD FOR THEIR FIRST-EVER TRAVEL MEETING. DRAWN TO THE GALLATIN VALLEY'S VERSION OF DYNAMIC GROWTH AND ENTERPRISE, THE COMMITTEE MET WITH STUDENTS AND LEADERS TO TALK ABOUT ROAD DESIGN, SELF-DRIVING VEHICLES, AUTO REPAIRS--AND EVEN HOT AIR BALLOON LICENSING.

AGENCY AND STAFF UPDATES

MVD was unable to join TIC in Bozeman, so they provided a one-page overview of updates from the Vehicle Services, Driver Services, and Operations bureaus since the prior TIC meeting in March.

MDT provided overviews of multiple topics related to the site visits, including the relationship between MDT and the MSU Design Unit; partnership between MDT, WTI, and MSU; coordination between MDT and the Streamline bus system; and an overview of the Aeronautics Division of MDT.

This meeting's Administrative Rule Review covered MAR Notices of amendment 2026-23.2, proposal 2026-332.1, adoption 2025-171.2, and adoption 2025-658.2.

SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Staff provided an update of the "statutory crosswalk" of statutes throughout the MCA that are related to different modalities of transportation. Staff also presented a summary of the results of the public survey that closed on April 10, 2026, after 46 days of collecting responses. The survey received 1,330 responses from 55 counties.

COMMITTEE LEGISLATION TOPICS

Based on committee requests in March, staff compiled preliminary documents containing draft language and/or existing statutes that may be affected by each of the draft legislation topics, listed below.

- Motor Carrier Services (MCS) expanded authority
- U.S. Highway 212 closure to commercial vehicles – the committee voted to table this bill topic
- Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) fee increase
- Fuel Tax increase
- DUI repeat offenders – Law and Justice Interim Committee timeline of major changes to DUI law
- Pilot program authorization for Automated Safety Enforcement

The committee also requested additional provisional bill drafts for the next meeting in July 2026.

- Establish a rebuttable presumption that state commercial motor vehicle (CMV) scales are calibrated correctly
- Require MDT to update the state rail plan

SITE VISITS AROUND THE GALLATIN VALLEY

Most of the 2-day meeting was spent "on the road" visiting multiple sites in Bozeman and Belgrade, including Montana State University (MSU)'s MDT Design Unit, Optical Technology Center (OpTeC), and Western Transportation Institute (WTI); the Bozeman Yellowstone (BZN) International Airport; Gallatin High School's Career and Technical Education (CTE) department; the Streamline bus system; Endeavor Ballooning; and Aurora Innovation, Inc. Committee members were able to see home-grown transportation innovations and workforce development happening right here in Montana. Information about each site visit location, including additional resources, can be found on the TIC Meeting Materials webpage.

PUBLIC COMMENT

TIC received some written comments, and input during the meeting was given by Skyline public transit, the Streamline bus system, the Missoula Urban Transportation District (UTD), a resident of Belgrade, WTI, the Montana Contractors Association (MCA), the Montana Trucking Association (MTA), and LiteSys, Inc.



(Left) Endeavor Ballooning owner Colin Graham (and son Declan) stands in a basket and controls burners to inflate a hot air balloon while members of the TIC stand in the foreground. Pictured left to right: Becca Brown, Sen. Denley Loge, Sen. Gregg Hunter, Rep. Denise Baum, MDT Deputy Director Larry Flynn, Rep. Curtis Cochran, Rep. Greg Kmetz, Sen. Russ Tempel, Rep. Sidney "Chip" Fitzpatrick.

JULY 8, 2026

Agenda – Minutes – Video

AGENCY AND STAFF UPDATES

The overview from MVD included the promotional waiver of license and identification card fees to encourage Montanans to get the new citizenship marker added to their cards. Other updates included the Mobile Driver License (mDL), driver services wait times, Credentialing and Registration System (CARS) rollout efficiencies, business partner interface transactions, production data, and a discussion of specialty license plates, which include the new wildlife crossings plate approved by the 2025 Legislature.

Staff from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) provided a summary of the wildlife crossings program.

MDT provided an agency overview, including their involvement in traffic planning for the commemorative reenactment of the Battle of the Greasy Grass (or the Battle of the Little Bighorn) in June, coordinating with Motor Carrier Services (MCS), local law enforcement, and multiple tribal governments. MDT also provided updates about the aeronautics program reorganization, project development and delivery, including the 5-year outlook construction plan,[8] and recent education about wildlife crossings in Alberta. MDT presented an updated draft bill to expand MCS officer authority to enforce moving violations. The department didn't have any new legislation requests, but it noted its priorities going into 2027 will be safety and efficiency.

This meeting's Administrative Rule Review covered MAR Notices of proposal 2026-123.1, proposal 2026-105.1, and proposal 2026-332.1.

TOW TRUCKS AND DEBRIS CLEANUP – COMMISSIONER OF SECURITIES AND INSURANCE

Staff from the Commissioner of Securities and Insurance (CSI) in the State Auditor's Office was present to provide information and answer questions in relation to the committee letter to the CSI from April. CSI staff summarized the current law and CSI's role, noting this is an intersection of many policy areas, including insurance, tort and negligence, contract law, property law, tow truck, and motor vehicle statutes. **CSI's stated role is to**: regulate insurance companies, enforce insurance law, review insurance policy forms, review insurance rates, investigate consumer complaints (noting CSI does not represent third parties like tow operators), and to monitor insurance compliance with existing law.

[8] https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.aspx

CSI's office stated it does not: determine cause or fault in an accident, determine ownership of damage, decide contractual disputes, adjudicate civil liability, or make policy.

CSI'S OFFICE STATED IT DOES NOT HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO ISSUE AN ADVISORY MEMO IN THIS CASE.

CSI's office stated that insurance reimbursement is assessed on a case-by-case basis depending on the legal responsibility and law enforcement involved, but generally it does not reimburse a third party (*tow operators, in this case*) unless specifically provided for within the insurance policy. Some insurance companies say that a tow operator lacks an insurable interest—financial and personal property—in an accident. CSI staff stated that the legal determination of "ownership" of the damage falls outside of the CSI's statutory authority, and that there is no universal answer under current law.

In conclusion, CSI's office stated it does not have the authority to issue an advisory memo in this case. CSI provided a response letter to TIC on July 26, 2026.

SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

A panel discussion with staff from the Departments of Transportation in Minnesota and Texas provided overviews of the approaches to autonomous vehicles (AVs) in those states. Both states have some organization of experts in Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CAVs) who are involved in studies, analysis, and assorted pilot projects. Minnesota noted that AV shuttle programs and platooning were tested and likely won't continue in the state.

Staff from Ohio Congressman Bob Latta's office provided a short overview of the SELF DRIVE Act currently making its way through Congress, which seeks to establish an AV Safety Case framework nationwide.

Jefferson Transit provided an overview of their recent study and related efforts to improve the existing public transportation bus services in rural Jefferson County, Washington, which includes geographic as well as demographic challenges.

Staff reviewed work products of the SJ 19 interim study, including the summary of responses to the public survey that closed in April, the statutory crosswalk, and the map of public transportation options in Montana. Staff also walked through a draft of the Final Report, asking for committee input and revisions. *Please note this final report draft included more topics than just SJ 19 so that the committee could review all potential findings and/or recommendations in the same place. The report topics will be separated in September*.

COMMITTEE LEGISLATION

The committee reviewed draft legislation on topics that had been previously requested, listed below.

- GVW fee increase
- Gasoline fuel tax increase
- Pilot program for automated safety enforcement systems
- Prohibiting distracted driving related to mobile devices (Chloe's Law)
- Establish a rebuttable presumption that state CMV scales are calibrated correctly
- Require MDT to update the Montana state rail plan

The committee also heard a bill proposal from the Montana Association of Counties (MACo) to authorize counties to enter into agreements with other entities for the maintenance of county roads. TIC members voted unanimously to bring this as a committee bill topic.

PUBLIC COMMENT

TIC received written comment (part 1 and part 2) prior to the meeting, and input was given during the meeting, including from the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, the Montana Trucking Association (MTA), members of the Montana Tow Truck Association (MTTA), the Montana Association of Counties (MACo), the Montana Contractors Association (MCA), the Montana Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association, and the Montana Infrastructure Coalition (MIC).

SEPTEMBER 11, 2026, FINAL MEETING

Agenda – Video

The final meeting of the 2025-2026 interim focused on reviewing drafted committee legislation, approving and assigning sponsors for committee bills, authorizing agency legislation to be drafted, and approving final reports, findings, and recommendations.

PLEASE NOTE THIS REPORT SECTION WAS DRAFTED PRIOR TO THE FINAL MEETING, AND LINKS TO MATERIALS WERE UPDATED AFTER THE COMMITTEE ADJOURNED

AGENCY AND STAFF UPDATES

MDT presented agency-requested legislation topics for the committee's consideration:

- MCS officer authority to enforce moving violations on CMVs
- MCS authority to require weigh station stops
- Death benefit leave payout
- Remove the Transportation Commission's authority to adopt outdoor advertising control administrative rules
- Aircraft registration stickers
- Official state highway map
- Increase the threshold when real property goes to auction
- Eliminate section 69-14-620, MCA, railroad quiet zones
- International Registration Plan (IRP) license plate fee alignment
- Limited speed-enforcement camera pilot program in highway work zones

TIC authorized staff to draft the agency bill topics prior to session.

SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The committee reviewed and adopted the draft Final SJ 19 Report of the interim study on public transportation, including the following work products:

- Interactive Map of Public Transportation Options in Montana
  - Table data of public transportation options in Montana
- Results of Public Survey
- Statutory Crosswalk

The edited and finalized version of the SJ 19 Final Report is posted on the TIC webpage.

COMMITTEE LEGISLATION

TIC considered and acted on nine draft committee bill topics:

1. PD 01 – GVW fee increase (Did not adopt)
2. PD 02 – Gasoline fuel tax increase (Did not adopt)
3. PD 04 – Pilot program for automated safety enforcement systems (ASES) (Did not adopt – authorized as an agency bill)
4. PD 05 – Prohibit distracted driving related to mobile devices (Chloe's Law)
    a. **Adopted as a committee bill**
    b. Sponsor: Sen. Sara Novak
5. PD 06 – Establish rebuttable presumption that state scales are calibrated accurately (Did not adopt)
6. PD 07 – Require MDT to update the Montana state rail plan (Did not adopt)
7. PD 10 – MCS officer expanded authority (Did not adopt – authorized as an agency bill)
8. PD 11 – Authorize county road maintenance agreements
    a. **Adopted as a committee bill**
    b. Sponsor: Sen. Gregg Hunter
9. PD 12 – Revise insurance laws regarding uninsured, underinsured motorists
    a. **Adopted as a committee bill**
    b. Sponsor: Sen. Andrea Olsen

SUMMARY REPORT

The committee reviewed and adopted this final summary report, noting the recommended legislation would be updated based on the committee's legislation decisions earlier in the day. The report went through the Edit process before this finalized version was posted on the TIC webpage.

PUBLIC COMMENT

TIC received written comment prior to the meeting, including a letter from the Transportation Commission, and took public comment on each report and each proposed topic of legislation throughout the meeting.

APPENDIX A:
TRANSPORTATION INTERIM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Before the close of each legislative session, House and Senate leadership appoint lawmakers to interim committees. The members of the Transportation Interim Committee, like most other interim committees, serve one 20-month term. Members who are reelected to the Legislature, subject to overall term limits and if appointed, may serve again on an interim committee. This information is included in order to comply with section 2-15-155, MCA.

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Transportation Interim Committee Staff – Legislative Services Division

Joe Carroll, Attorney | Becca Brown, Research Analyst | Maddelyn Pennington, Research Assistant

APPENDIX B:
COMMITTEE LEGISLATION

Legislation approved by the committee is organized below by topic. Each URL hyperlink leads to the version of the bill draft presented during the TIC meeting on Friday, September 11, 2026.

PD 05 – CHLOE – Chloe's Law: Prohibit distracted driving related to mobile devices

- Sponsor: Senator Sara Novak

PD 11 – COUNTY – Authorize counties to enter into agreements for county road repair and maintenance

- Sponsor: Senator Gregg Hunter

PD 12 – UNDERINSURED – Require insurance consumers to accept or reject underinsured motorist coverage

- Sponsor: Senator Andrea Olsen



(Left) Members of TIC stand in the Bozeman GHS automotive lab, while Career Outreach Coordinator Karl Schwartz describes how GHS students are educated in auto maintenance and prepared for a career in the automotive industry.