

SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

**FINAL REPORT TO THE 70TH
MONTANA LEGISLATURE**



Transportation Interim Committee (TIC)

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DRAFT FOR REVIEW July 2026

INTERIM STUDY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

INTRODUCTION

This draft is intended to provide a starting point for the Committee's discussion, and includes a collection of potential findings and recommendations. Your work plan includes the task of developing findings and recommendations as part of the assigned study and any other committee topics that were discussed in the 2025-26 interim.

Finding – a conclusion reached as a result of an inquiry, investigation, or trial.
(Oxford dictionary)

The following list was developed by staff based on what the Committee has learned, heard, and discussed over the past 12 months. Again, it should be viewed as a starting point for discussion.

As you review, contemplate, and discuss this list, **consider the following questions:**

- What is NOT on this list, that should be?
- What is on this list that SHOULDNT be?
- Where did each finding come from? What evidence substantiates it? Is it coming from multiple sources?
- What additional information is needed for Committee consideration?

The list is organized alphabetically by topic, with the assigned study resolution listed first. Organizationally, the list contains *numbered* potential findings, followed by *lettered* potential recommendations, like so:

1. *Potential Finding #1*
 - a. *Potential Recommendation #1*
 - b. *Potential Recommendation #2*

POTENTIAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SJ 19: INTERIM STUDY ON WAYS TO IMPROVE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND PASSENGER TRANSIT IN MONTANA

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), whose role is to continue the work of SJ 19 and keep working to improve service 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 \$70k annual household income).
 - a. Require “free fare” public transportation in cities above a population threshold
 - b. Require cost-adjusted fares for young and low-income citizens
3. Existing fixed-route public transportation is under-utilized due to route schedules misaligned with the standard workday and/or route stop locations that don’t reach desired destinations.
 - a. Require public transportation to be provided between the hours of 6am-9am and 3pm-6pm in order to be eligible for state funding
 - b. Require route stop locations within a given distance (to be determined) from a city’s highest concentration of population
 - c. Implement weekend and late-night public transportation services
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 hospital clinics
5. Citizens in rural counties overwhelmingly cite a lack of access to public transportation.
 - a. Require each county seat to coordinate publicly-available transportation such as van pool 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 the two National Parks
 - b. Implement regular public transportation to and from State Parks

7. Multiuse pathways are utilized positively by Montanans, but could use some improvements.
 - a. Identify gaps in connectivity between multiuse pathways
 - b. Identify areas of higher risk and build additional infrastructure to protect citizens

AREAS OF CONCERN ON MONTANA ROADS

1. The section of Highway 212 east of Billings has experienced challenges with enforcement, jurisdiction, risky driver behavior, and cellular service along the route.
 - a. Request the Attorney General's office to issue demand letters to GPS mapping providers, to update the posted speed limits along highway 212 within GPS navigation apps
 - b. Establish cross-citation authority between Motor Carrier Services and the Tribes
 - c. Establish cross-deputization authority between MCS and the Counties
 - d. Close Highway 212 to thru traffic on an emergency basis due to hazardous winter conditions, such as:
 - i. Regular annual closure (such as November 1 through April 30)
 - ii. Define a "snow emergency" threshold in statute that would trigger preemptive closure of the road (such as 30% chance of over 3in of snow)
 - e. Close Highway 212 to commercial vehicle traffic, with an exception for deliveries 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.
 - a. Authorize MDT to conduct a "pilot program" utilizing automated safety enforcement systems in work zones and school zones to document unsafe or unlawful driving.

AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES (AVs)

1. Autonomous Vehicle (AV) technology is already present in the United States, and Montana needs to be ready for it.
 - a. Establish regulations on AVs, including registration, enforcement, and insurance coverage
 - b. Require data collection on AVs in the state, including safety, performance, and insurance data
2. Autonomous freight vehicles, such as platooning truck fleets, pose an opportunity to meet Montanans' shipping demands while facing workforce shortages.
 - a. Authorize the testing of freight AVs and/or platooning, such as:
 - i. Open/permissive framework
 - ii. Stringent regulatory framework including data reporting requirements
3. Fully autonomous driverless passenger vehicles will continue to be developed, and will likely become more prevalent on Montana roads in the next few years.
 - a. 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 engineered around
 - b. Require training for first responders and emergency personnel who may be responding to incidents involving AVs

FUEL TAX NEEDS

1. The majority of Montana's Department of Transportation (MDT) 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, the fuel tax dollars are not "stretching" as far as needed.
 - a. Propose legislation to revise fuel tax:
 - i. Increase fuel tax for all fuel types by a certain percentage
 - ii. Increase fuel tax for certain fuel types (to be determined)
 - b. Move away from a fuel tax system to a Road Usage Charge (RUC) system, where drivers pay according to miles driven on public roads

GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT (GVW) FEES

1. Montana's GVW fees are among the lowest in the nation and are the lowest out of regional neighbor states including Idaho, North and South Dakota, and Washington. Commercial traffic and heavyweight loads cause exponentially more damage to road surface than passenger vehicles do.
 - a. Propose legislation to increase GVW fees in some way such as:
 - i. Increase all GVW fees by a certain percentage
 - ii. Increase GVW fees at certain weight thresholds (to be determined)

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

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.
 - a. Request MDT propose Administrative Rules clarifying both processes
 - b. Propose legislation to add specifics of project delivery into statute
2. The required state match to qualify for federal funding, including redistribution funding, has increased regularly since at least 2002.
 - a. Increase MDT funding so that the remaining budget after the state match is less-affected
 - b. Request that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) put a "freeze" on increasing state match proportion – temporarily or indefinitely

MOTOR CARRIER SERVICES (MCS) OFFICER ENFORCEMENT

1. Enforcement on highways currently relies on Highway Patrol officers, and is limited by the number of officers and/or the size of the area patrolled by each officer.
 - a. Authorize MCS officers to enforce moving violations committed by commercial vehicles / commercial drivers

2. The scales used by MCS officers to weigh commercial vehicles must be routinely inspected and calibrated for accuracy.
 - a. Establish a rebuttable presumption, in statute, that the MCS scales are calibrated accurately

RAILROAD CROSSINGS

1. While the railroads are regulated by the Public Service Commission, the Montana Department of Transportation needs permission to access to rights-of-way for road maintenance, bridge inspections, and utility relocations.
 - a. Examine the division of oversight between the PSC and the MDT in an interim study
 - b. Authorize MDT to access railroad rights-of-way without prior approval from the PSC or the railroad

TOW TRUCKS / WRECKERS

1. Tow truck operators need clarity on the division of responsibility for required debris cleanup pursuant to section 61-9-416(2)(e), MCA.
 - a. Request an advisory memo from the Commissioner of Securities and Insurance (Complete - a [letter from the TIC](#) was sent to the CSI on 4/24/2026)
 - b. Propose legislation to add specifics to current statute

WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

1. Wildlife-vehicle collisions are a risk when driving Montana's roads, and further mitigation is needed.
 - a. Request federal support for wildlife crossings projects (Complete - a [letter from the TIC](#) was sent to the USDOT on 11/24/2025)