



Strategic Work Plan for 2015

Adopted February 4, 2015

Overview

Mountain Rides is coming off a year filled with much success including:

- ✓ Record ridership of over 500,000 one-way trips in calendar year 2014 (a first in the history of public transportation in Blaine County)
- ✓ Our safest year in the past 6 years with no at-fault accidents and very limited incidents
- ✓ Very stable, conscientious and experienced staff
- ✓ Receipt of all approvals and entitlements allowing two key capital projects, the Ketchum transportation hub and the Bellevue south valley facility, to move forward
- ✓ Receipt of two leadership awards from the Community Transportation Association of Idaho
- ✓ Launch of a fresh new brand for Mountain Rides
- ✓ Coordination of the development of regional bike and pedestrian master plan, resoundingly supported and applauded by all Wood River Valley governments and stakeholders

In order to move forward successfully into 2015, Mountain Rides must continue to be looking ahead, planning for the future and executing on its plans. Each year Mountain Rides looks at what it must accomplish in order to fulfill its overarching vision, which is to be the sustainable transportation backbone of Blaine County and adjacent communities in order to improve the livability and attractiveness of the region.

On January 7, 2015, the Mountain Rides board of directors met to discuss the upcoming year and develop plans for the organization to accomplish. This discussion was lively and varied, but four main themes were apparent including:

- Complete the hub and the south valley facility, even if they are reduced in scope to meet budget constraints
- Continue to focus on fundamentals of safety, customer service and high quality operations
- Plan for the future in terms of funding opportunities and challenges and the associated service impacts
- Be a partner that stands ready to help solve transportation challenges in the community

These broad themes were then discussed in more detail, according to strategic priorities for the coming year. These strategic priorities are listed in priority order with a detail of what exactly the priority entails, what actions are necessary to accomplish the goals and the overall timeframe for accomplishment.

Strategic Priorities

Strategic priority #1 – Complete major capital projects

2015 will see the completion of two major capital projects – the south valley facility and the downtown Ketchum transportation hub. These are high priority projects that will define Mountain Rides operations for many years to come and are the highest priority for the coming year. This strategic priority carries over from the 2014 priorities and will take significant concentrated effort on behalf of board and staff to complete before the end of 2015.

These projects are both heading towards a spring construction start, so organizational resources will be stretched between January and April to ensure that the projects get in the ground. Here is a look at major milestones by month for each project:

For the hub:

- Jan 2015 – using the knowledge gained from the unsuccessful hub bid in August 2014, bid drawings and documentation will be updated with the project broken into different bid alternatives to give us a better chance of meeting our budget. The full board will receive an update on the bid development at its regular board meeting. Design team will be working on all updates to bid package with support from Mountain Rides' staff.
- Feb 2015 – construction bid package will be released at the Feb 4 special board meeting. Staff will respond to any bidder questions or clarifications in conjunction with design team.
- March 2015 – bids will be due on March 4th. Finance and Performance committee will do initial review and make recommendation to full board. Full board will award bid at its March 18th meeting.
- April 2015 – construction will start on April 15th.
- May 2015 – construction will be underway. Mechanism for handling change orders must be in place. Coordination with the City of Ketchum will also be critical during this time.
- June 2015 – construction will be complete on June 20th, ahead of the busiest summer weekends. Ribbon cutting and celebration.
- July 2015 – as part of budgeting and service planning process, Mountain Rides route operations should be adjusted to best utilize the hub going forward.

For the south valley facility:

- Jan 2015 – bid drawings and documentation will be created with a focus on developing a project that will meet budget.

- Feb 2015 – the planning and marketing committee will look at a draft of the construction documents and the finance and performance committee will look at the project budget. The design team will update the documents based on feedback received.
- March 2015 – construction bid package will be released at the March 4th special board meeting. Staff will respond to any bidder questions or clarifications in conjunction with design team.
- April 2015 – bids will be due on April 1st. Finance and Performance committee will do initial review and make recommendation to full board. Full board will award bid at its April 15th board meeting.
- May 2015 – construction start
- June –Nov 2015 – construction in full swing with 180 day construction period. Mechanism for handling change orders must be in place.
- Dec 2015 – Mountain Rides will move in and start operating out of the new facility. Ribbon cutting and celebration.

The tracking and completion of these projects is of the highest priority and work associated with completing these projects will take precedence over all other priorities.

Strategic priority #2 – Complete a 5 year business development plan

Mountain Rides has been operating without a business development plan for the past few years and needs a defined direction for growth, funding and capital projects in the coming years. A clear 5 year business plan would provide the roadmap for Mountain Rides that shows all of our funding partners, as well as the community at large, our assumptions about revenue, expenses, service levels, programming and staffing over the coming 5 years.

When Mountain Rides was formed in 2007, there was a clear 5 year plan that set the course for growth and development of the organization. Mountain Rides followed this plan as it merged all the different transportation organizations into one and executed a host of initiatives that strengthened and grew the organization. By 2012 most of the big ideas in that original plan were fully realized including mergers, expansions, service improvements, ridership gains and funding growth. Since 2012, Mountain Rides hasn't had a fully expressed plan for where the organization hopes to go over the coming 5 years. Developing and adopting this plan will fill this gap and give us something for which to reach.

The plan will be informed by and encompass parts of many existing planning efforts including:

- 5 year Capital Improvement Plan
- Annual budget process
- Annual service plan
- Annual Marketing and Communications Plan

The timing for the development of this plan will be:

- Feb 2015 – outline of plan components presented and reviewed at planning and marketing committee meeting

- April 2015 – financial assumptions and components will be reviewed at finance and performance committee meeting
- May 2015 – first rough draft to be reviewed at planning and marketing committee meeting
- June 2015 – draft plan will be presented at special board meeting
- July 2015 – plan presented and adopted at regular board meeting
- September 2015 –service plan aspects of the business plan incorporated into design of new schedule

Strategic priority #3 – Continue to develop funding with planning for any changes in federal funding; evaluate opportunities for dedicated local option tax (LOT)

The board discussed the need to continuously adapt to funding uncertainties, especially the potential decrease in federal funding. The board also decided that Mountain Rides must revive the effort to explore more dedicated local funding through the LOT. If Mountain Rides could receive a fixed percentage of local option funding from the partners that have it, we could better plan and predict local funding. If LOT funding were to improve in the coming years, Mountain Rides could re-establish bus service that was cut in the past few years and could also look to expand services.

In order to carry out this strategic priority, there are several different action items that must be accomplished including:

- Creation and adoption of a contingency plan that defines how and where Mountain Rides would cut service in the case of lower than expected funding
- Begin conversations with the funding partners about how a dedicated percentage of LOT could work for funding public transportation in Blaine County
- Stay involved at state level in conversations about how federal money is allocated and awarded under an updated application process
- See Strategic Priority #5 regarding potential service to FMAA and use of Air Service LOT

This approach to increasing LOT funding will require considerable research and very careful thought so as to protect the current LOT funding that Mountain Rides receives. The work at a state level regarding changes to how federal funding is awarded and allocated will involve attendance and involvement at various state level meetings including the Public Transportation Advisory Committee meetings, the task force on mobility management, as well as quarterly meetings of the District 4 Coordination Council.

The outline of major tasks:

- Jan 2015 – begin work at a staff level on a contingency plan. Executive Director will attend the state task force meeting at ITD on mobility management, where potential changes to provider funding will be discussed.
- Feb 2015 – review the first draft of the contingency plan at the special board meeting. Executive Director will attend the last of the mobility management task force meetings. Outcomes from that meeting will move to the PTAC for review and consideration.

- March 2015 – adopt the contingency plan at the special board meeting on March 4th.
- March 2015 – evaluate our options for increasing LOT funding during the joint committee meeting and set a direction
- April – May 2015 – research possible avenues for the LOT dedicated funding percentage effort and develop alternatives. In conjunction with this research will be discussions with elected officials on how this dedicated LOT for public transportation could work and best be presented. Present results to Finance and Performance committee at the May meeting.
- June 2015 – present dedicated LOT plan to the full board for adoption at the June regular board meeting.
- July – Oct 2015 – work with local funding partners on support for a fixed percentage goal for LOT for public transportation going forward.

Strategic priority #4 – Evaluate employee compensation package and make adjustments as soon as possible

The last salary survey was completed in 2008 and needs to be updated and reviewed. Mountain Rides has not had a significant change in its compensation or benefits package since the 2008 salary survey. As a result, we are starting to lose employees to better employment opportunities, and long-time employees are finding themselves with limited opportunities for wage increases.

In order to remain a competitive and attractive workplace for existing and new employees, Mountain Rides needs to carry out a survey of pay rates for comparable positions within organizations that could be considered peers, namely our local municipal funding partners, other resort transit agencies and other large Idaho agencies. In addition to pay rates, Mountain Rides must look at its complete benefits package to see how things like health insurance, paid time off, retirement and other employee benefits compare.

Since we have a template from the previous salary survey and contacts within the industry, Mountain Rides can carry out this work on its own without having to hire a consultant. This effort will take considerable research time to complete but isn't overly complex work. This effort will be carried out with support and direction from the Finance and Performance Committee and should be completed in time to incorporate into Mountain Rides' FY2016 budget.

Major work for this priority includes:

- Feb 2015 – methodology for collecting and comparing wage and benefit information will be reviewed at Finance and Performance committee meeting
- March 2015 – staff roundtable on pay and benefits to understand what is most important to cross section of employees
- March - April 2015 – research and data collection will be carried out
- May 2015 – preliminary results and recommendations will be presented to the Finance and Performance Committee meeting. Updates and additional research will be done based on committee input.

- June 2015 – draft of salary survey results will be presented to the full board at the special board meeting.
- July 2015 – final salary survey and resulting update to compensation and benefits package will be completed and adopted at the July special board meeting
- August 2015 – at the regular August board meeting, the updated pay chart and benefit costs will be adopted and incorporated as part of the Mountain Rides’ FY2016 budget. Implementation at the start of FY2016.

Strategic priority #5 – Start conversations on airport service and Galena service; be a partner ready to help

The board discussed the community transportation needs that exist outside of the current services provided by Mountain Rides, most notably direct service connecting Friedman airport with Ketchum-Sun Valley and service for the highway corridor extending north of Ketchum to Galena Lodge to serve the winter and summer recreation demands to various trailhead destinations.

The board agreed that Mountain Rides should be involved in these conversations in the community about transportation challenges for airport service and Galena. Mountain Rides may not be the ultimate solution to these challenges, but we should be ready to define how we could help and what would be involved to start a new service. By investigating these options, Mountain Rides is staying true to its mission, vision and goals of being a comprehensive transportation resource for Blaine County.

This priority shouldn’t involve a lot of work trying to proactively develop solutions. Mountain Rides should simply stay engaged on these issues and make sure that relevant stakeholders understand that Mountain Rides is available to evaluate how public transportation may be part of the solution, if given the resources. For the coming year, the timeline and tasks for this priority include:

- April 2015 – Mountain Rides will attend a Fly Sun Valley Alliance and Air Service board meeting to introduce the possibility of an express route to/from the airport.
- May 2015 – Mountain Rides will sit down with BCRD and the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, and ITD, to understand the needs and possibilities for Galena bus service during peak times.
- June 2015 – staff will report to the board at regular board meeting as to the status of the discussions about these services.
- August 2015 – if requested, costs will be developed for potential new service in 2016 that can be presented to specific stakeholders who may be able to fund the startup of service.
- Sept – Oct 2015 – if any new service has funding identified, the service will be developed as part of the FY2016 service planning process. Implementation of any potential airport or Galena service will depend on funding for both operations and capital equipment.

Strategic priority #6 – Incorporate opportunities for service improvements into the annual budgeting and service planning process

This priority represents a continual focus on strong, existing fundamentals that are already in place to allow Mountain Rides to improve. Being focused on improvements to operations and service planning must continue to define Mountain Rides, regardless of whether funding is increasing or decreasing.

Mountain Rides will continue to use the spring and fall schedule updates as opportunities to incrementally improve existing services by evaluating the need for route changes, schedule tweaks, service cuts and/or service enhancements. In short, Mountain Rides must continue to stay nimble and adapt to shifting demographics, ridership patterns, funding and community needs.

Going forward, Mountain Rides will look at the following:

- March 2015 - evaluate night owl service performance and look at options for incorporating better night service into future schedules and budget requests.
- April 2015 – present service plan adjustments that will need to be in place once the hub is in operation to Planning and Marketing Committee at its April meeting.
- May 2015 - determine what the budget will allow in terms of a 2015 summer season start and if a later summer start still has to be included in the summer-fall schedule. Staff will also look at incremental improvements to existing services that maximizes funding for community benefit and ridership opportunities.
- June – Sept 2015 – work on service plan opportunities in conjunction with budget development and budget requests to funding partners. Involvement will be required for both committees and the full board throughout the process.
- Oct 2015 – adopt the FY2016 service plan that optimizes funding, takes advantage of opportunities and reflects newly constructed facilities (all routes will benefit from the Ketchum hub and the south valley facility).
- Nov 2015 – implement FY2016 service plan.

Strategic priority #7 – Continue to work on fundamentals in all areas and departments

The board wants to keep Mountain Rides firing on all cylinders in all areas of its day to day functions. With so much success in 2014, Mountain Rides must continue to stay focused on the fundamentals of safe, high quality, customer-focused services and programs that meet the community needs in 2015. The other priorities in this strategic work plan will take much focus and concentrated effort, but the day to day running of a strong organization must continue to take precedence, especially for those staff with existing, heavy workloads that are required to keep Mountain Rides running.

This strategic priority is really about incremental progress that should continue to be made in all areas of Mountain Rides. Most of these efforts are already underway and some are included in other Mountain Rides' planning documents.

The items that were identified during the strategic workshop that represent continued execution of fundamentals:

- Capital Improvement Plan – add a CIP project for improving bus stop signage system-wide.
- New brand – continue to roll out the new brand as quickly as budget and resources will allow.
- Technology projects – research possibility for an app; look at installing additional real-time next bus information signage at key stops; look at opportunities for electronic fareboxes and refillable bus passes.
- Renew Joint Powers Agreement – the document that makes Mountain Rides an entity will expire in October of 2015, so it must be renewed by all the existing JPA partners well ahead of October 2015 to allow for organizational continuity.
- Finish items identified in audits – continue to add and improve policies/procedures like Passenger Code of Conduct, Investment policy, boarding and alighting (bus stop standards) and safety standards.

Apart from the renewal of the JPA, which must happen before October 2015, this list will not be tied to specific timeframes and will instead be spread across the year, as time allows. With a high level of baseline, day-to-day work for a very small staff, combined with all the other strategic priorities, there is a very limited amount of time for completing all that has been identified in this document. Given that reality, Mountain Rides must remain flexible and opportunistic on the lower priority items that don't have a strict timeframe.

Vision, Mission, and Goals

All of the priorities for 2015 are related to our vision, mission and goals. This year, the group didn't discuss the vision, mission and goals because it was felt that the current ones are serving us well. As a reminder the vision, mission and goals are stated here.

The stated vision of Mountain Rides is:

To be the sustainable transportation backbone of Blaine County and adjacent communities in order to improve the livability and attractiveness of the region.

The central purpose and role of Mountain Rides is to:

Manage transportation demand by providing access and mobility to those who live, work, or visit Blaine County with public transportation service alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle that are environmentally sustainable, energy efficient, attractive, safe, convenient, reliable, and cost-effective.

The business goals of Mountain Rides are:

1. Provide and advocate for transportation solutions in Blaine County that reduce the number of single occupancy vehicle trips.
2. Maintain and develop sources of short and long term, sustainable funding support.
3. Provide transportation solutions that are cost effective.
4. Promote knowledge and increase awareness of transportation issues and the impact of transportation choices.

5. Promote regional cooperation on transportation issues in order to help fulfill all of Mountain Rides' other goals.

2015 Success Factors

In order to execute for 2015, Board and staff discussed what is needed to support the activities of Mountain Rides. It was agreed that, by and large, Mountain Rides structure is well suited for the work ahead in 2014. In particular, it was agreed that it is important to:

- Continue to communicate to the community and to our funding partners the relevance and importance of Mountain Rides
- Follow the Marketing and Communications plan and implementing the strategies will help grow support and ridership, even as service is flat or declining, and continue to focus on ridership growth and 100% customer satisfaction
- Communicate effectively internally so that we can all be aware of what Mountain Rides is doing, what direction we are heading and how all the pieces fit together
- Keep capital equipment needs in mind and continue strong capital asset planning

Conclusion

With clear priorities for 2015 and solid execution, Mountain Rides will continue to operate a best in class organization that is a model for regional, multi-modal transportation organizations in rural resort areas.