

# Butte Silver Bow County Transportation Coordination Plan



February 2025

## **Community Description**

Butte-Silver Bow County is situated in the heart of the Rocky Mountains in southwestern Montana. Butte began as a collection of small mining claims, becoming a large and booming mining center during the early 1900s. Butte is known as "The Richest Hill on Earth" due to the vast wealth of valuable ores lying beneath the surface. While silver and gold were actively mined in Butte, it was copper that truly put Butte on the map. Butte has a long history of Public Transit that started in Butte in 1887 and by 1933 under the Butte Electric Railway there was 38 miles of track and 57 motor cars carrying 10,000,000 passengers per year.

The city of Butte has seen many changes over the past 100 years; currently Butte is in a transition from the older areas of Butte to newer developments to the south. Silver Bow County is approximately 718 square miles in size; ranking it as the smallest county in Montana in terms of land area, and 8<sup>th</sup> in the state for population with 34,200 citizens according to the 2010 census, which is about the same as the 2000 census. Butte-Silver Bow has a population density of approximately 48 persons per square mile. The population is most dense within the northern portion of Butte.

A majority of residents that live in Silver Bow County have access to personal vehicles that allow them access to jobs, education, employment, medical, and social opportunities. However, according to the 2010 Census, approximately 10% of the households in Silver Bow County do not own any vehicles. Those individuals must rely on public transportation, friends, or families.

Nationwide a significant number of transit dependent individuals are 60 years and older. According to the 2020 Census 19.5% of the total population for Butte-Silver Bow are individuals that 65 years and older. Nationwide, approximately 10% of the population has some form of mobility impairment; although this is typically much lower in rural areas. This holds true for Butte-Silver Bow, where approximately 2% of the population have some type of mobility limitation. Low-income persons tend to depend on transit to a greater extent than more wealthy persons or persons with a high level of disposable income. The portion of population living below poverty level within Butte-Silver Bow is approximately 15%, according to the 2010 census.

## **Transportation Advisory Committee Description**

The Transit Advisory Committee (TAC) was formed for the development of the Butte-Silver Bow Transit Coordination Plan. The TAC is represented by the five major Transportation providers in our community Butte-Silver Bow Transit, BSW, Aware, BSB Developmental Disabilities Council and Belmont Senior Center. Other members include the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, Montana Voc-Rehab Services, Ability Montana, Montana Blind & Low Vision Services, Area V Agency on

Aging, other State of Montana representatives, and various other agencies have been involved on a more limited basis, we also have a consumer that attends the TAC meetings. The consensus in the development of our Coordination Plan was to improve transportation services in Butte by minimizing duplication of services while enhancing transportation access and striving to provide high quality, personalized and cost-effective services for the community.

A description of the transportation services provided by the five providers is as follows:

### **Butte-Silver Bow Transit Division (Copper City Connection)**

Butte-Silver Bow Transit has been providing public Transportation service to the City of Butte since 1976. The Transit Division is under the umbrella of the Butte-Silver Bow Public Works Department and the main office is 126 W. Granite, Butte, MT. Butte-Silver Bow Transit operates a fixed route system within the Butte urban area which includes the City of Walkerville. Butte-Silver Bow Transit System has changed its name to the Copper City Connection and provides reliable and affordable Transit services to our 34,000 residents. The bus fleet consists of five 2013 Low floor Gillig buses, 2011 International 23 passenger bus, 2010 10 passenger cut-away bus, 12-passenger ADA cut-away bus, along with five Transit Vans for the para-transit service.

Butte-Silver Bow Transit began operating the para-transit service on July 1, 2014. The hours of operation for the fixed route and para-transit service are Monday through Friday from 6:45 a.m. to 6:15 p.m. and the service route operates from 8:45a.m to 4:15p.m Monday through Saturday. All buses meet every ½ hour at the Bus Transfer Station which allows convenient transfers to all areas of our community.

Butte-Silver Bow has received additional TransAde funds that will be used for providing Senior Transportation through the Belmont Senior Center and will allow Butte-Silver Bow to redirect 5311 Funds that were previously used to fund senior transportation back to our fixed route operations.

A five-year Transit Development Plan was completed in 2012 and routes were changed and reconfigured as follows:

### **Purple Route/Walkerville Route**

This route serves the uptown business district and Butte High School. The route travels North on Utah/Arizona Streets to the Uptown continues North on Excelsior through Walkerville down Main Street to Granite across Granite to Montana then to the Mural Park Bus Stop on Park Street. The bus returns South on Arizona/Utah Streets to the Bus Transfer Station. The Walkerville Loop takes ½ hour to run the route.

### **Green Route/ Montana Tech Uptown Route**

This route provides service to Front Street, the Westside, Montana Tech, Uptown area and Main Street. The bus travels from the Bus Transfer Station over Front Street to Montana Street over Platinum Street with access to St. James Hospital and surrounding medical facilities. The bus continues up Excelsior Street to Montana Tech Campus then over Park Street to the Mural Park Street Bus Stop. The bus returns to the Bus Transfer Station by traveling down Main Street to Front Street

### **Red Route- Oregon Avenue/Racetrack Route**

This route has been changed as the bus used to run the Oregon Avenue Route on the first loop and then the Montana Street Loop on the second leg of the route. The TDP Plan recommended changing this route by combining the two routes which have similar coverage and are a lower number of passengers which did not warrant ½ hour service. The new Oregon Avenue Route provides adequate coverage on a hourly basis and this change allowed BSB Transit to add ½ hour service to Harrison Avenue commercial corridor. The Racetrack Loop that was previously served by the Walkerville/Racetrack bus is now the Oregon/Racetrack bus and the route has remained the same. Starting in the summer of 2018, the Oregon Avenue route will divert into Stodden Park to stop at the Ridge Waters waterpark during the summer months.

### **Orange Route/Harrison Avenue**

This route has been changed with the addition of the bus to Harrison providing ½ hour service to meet the demands of our passengers. The route travels directly South on Harrison Avenue to the Highlands College (formerly the College of Technology) and then returns north on Harrison to the Bus Transfer Station. This route provides service to major commercial centers for shopping and employment, the stops include Tamarack Square, Wal-Mart, Butte Plaza Mall and many more businesses in the corridor. This route along with the Walkerville route provides most rides for work and training opportunities for our low-income riders.

### **Blue Route/Around Town Route(Service Route)**

This route serves a large portion of the Butte-Urban areas. The route is designed to serve elderly and disabled population by traveling north to the Silver Bow Homes, St. James Hospital, Uptown area and senior living centers to transport person to shopping centers and medical services. This route travel southbound down Continental Drive stopping at the Copper Ridge Care Center, Continental Gardens, Big Sky Living, then travels over Elizabeth Warren to Wal-Mart then north with stops at Highland View and Columbus Plaza apartments before arriving at the Bus Transfer Station. The Bus provides front door service to all the senior centers. The Saturday bus service is provided by this bus with an addition of Walkerville added to the route.

### **Para-Transit Service**

Butte-Silver Bow Transit operates the para-transit service primarily using 4 four full time drivers. The BSB Paratransit operations began on July 1, 2014. Paratransit has 4 Dodge

minivans and a Ford Transit van, and 12 seat Ford conversion van. Butte Silver Bow Paratransit was fortunate to receive through a grant from the Montana Transit Association dispatching software. The dispatching software is very helpful when scheduling rides across the community. With the dispatch software Butte Silver Bow also purchased tablets and installed them in paratransit vehicles. Dispatch and the drivers are on real time and can communicate when a rider is ready to be picked up or if a ride has been cancelled. The para-transit service is a demand response service for people with disabilities that are unable to use our fixed route system. The people must meet eligibility requirements to qualify for the service. A review committee comprised of representatives from MT DPHHS, Montana Blind & Low Vision Service, MILP and BSB DD Council and Southwest Community Health all lend their expertise to review the applications. The service is offered Monday through Friday 6:45 a.m. to 6:15 p.m. and Saturdays 8:45 a.m. – 4:15 p.m. reservations can be made for next day service. The Para-Transit committee has updated the para-transit application.

Rank # 1: Butte-Silver Bow Transit is requesting 2 ADA mini vans (\$189,870).

### **Belmont Senior Center**

The Belmont Senior Center provides a door-to-door service to riders (seniors) who come to the Belmont Senior Center for lunch Monday through Friday. The Belmont has 2 buses which cover two city routes. The buses leave from the Belmont Senior Center at 9:00 each day picking up seniors from their homes. Without safe, reliable bus transportation seniors would not be able to come to the Belmont for lunch or many other activities, which include bingo, pinochle, exercise, nursing clinics, foot clinic, SHIP, and Medicare appointments and other entertainment. The Belmont Senior Center provides a home away from home where seniors can visit and interact with other friends and neighbors. The seniors can also receive information and assistance for a variety of services throughout Butte and the surrounding area.

The Belmont Senior Center provides transportation to grocery stores, pharmacy, doctor appointments, hospital, nursing homes, and assisted living visits to loved ones.

### **BSW**

BSW provides private services to developmentally disabled individuals. Funding for the agency is based mainly from Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Vocational Rehabilitation, and Developmental Disabilities Program.

BSW provides transportation and employment services for disabled persons within the Butte-Silver Bow area. BSW produces clothing and apparel, laundry textiles and supplies, park equipment, textiles, fibers, household linens, and piece goods, picnic tables, and survey stakes.

BSW provides transportation services for the residents of group homes and for persons with disabilities. Approximately 58,988 trips are provided each year for clients. Portions of BSW clients utilize Butte-Silver Bow Transit on a daily basis and the city taxi.

Rank # 2: BSW is requesting one ADA conversion minivan. (\$94,935)

### **AWARE, Inc.**

AWARE is a non-profit agency, headquartered in Anaconda, Montana that provides community based services in Butte and in multiple communities across the State of Montana. AWARE provides services to adults and youths with challenging mental, emotional and in some cases, physical needs who otherwise would be served in a more restrictive setting or in some cases, not at all. These services ensure that these individuals achieve maximum independence, productivity, and integration into the community.

AWARE is directed by a seven-member Board and currently employs approximately 800 people in multiple communities around the State, including Butte. AWARE offers a variety of services in fully licensed and nationally accredited programs, geared towards improving lifestyles and opportunities for Montanans affected by disabilities or mental challenges.

In Butte, AWARE currently operates three therapeutic youth group homes, one adult mental health group home, six adult developmentally disabled group homes and one Day Service Center. Transportation is integral to the services provided and AWARE has committed approximately a dozen vehicles to provide transportation services to the clients residing at AWARE Butte group homes and Day Service Center. These vehicles provide transportation services for a number of activities which include but are not limited to day service activities, work, school, recreation, and medical appointments. Transportation services are available to clients seven days per week, 24 hours per day.

Rank #5: AWARE is requesting one 9-passenger AWD van. (\$97,850)

### **Silver Bow Developmental Disabilities Council**

Silver Bow Developmental Disabilities Council (SBDDC) is a private non-profit agency formed in 1977. The funding comes from the Department of Public Health and Human Services. SBDDC has a goal to assist people with disabilities so they can complete their goals to be independent within the community. SBDDC provides transportation to constituents to different events including work, medical appointments, recreational outings, and basic life needs. SBDDC has done travel training with clients so that they are able to ride the fixed route system. SBDDC provides transportation in a variety of ways. They own a 2011 Ford Econoline 12-passenger van, 2005 Dodge Caravan, 2009

Chrysler Town and Country Braun entry, and a 2013 Dodge grand caravan. They also reimburse staff and families for covered transportation rides in non-owned vehicles. The 4th quarter of FY24 there were 20,000 miles of rides in these non-owned vehicles and are averaging 15,000 miles a quarter in owned vehicles. SBDDC has partnered Paratransit, nursing homes, the Belmont Senior Center and Whitehall Transportation over the years by loaning vehicles in non-peak hours. This past fiscal year, SBDDC rented 12 passenger transit vans from a local dealership so that they could safely travel to the Special Olympics both in May and November. The director of SBDDC sits on the ADA Para-Transit Committee, TAC, and local ADA committee.

Rank #3: SBDDC is requesting one 12-passenger non-ADA AWD van. (\$74,000)

### **Ability Montana**

Ability Montana, a resource center for people with disabilities, has been able to partner very closely with the Butte Silver Bow Transit System to provide travel training to individuals with disabilities wishing to access public transportation. Through this partnership we have assisted several individuals in becoming independent bus riders and assisted BSB transit in increasing the number of riders to a high need population. Ability Montana has members that sit on the ADA Para-Transit Committee, TAC, and local ADA committee.

Ability Montana was formerly Montana Independent Living Project (MILP).

### **DPHHS Blind and Low Vision Services**

Blind and Low Vision Services is part of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. We provide Vocational Rehabilitation to individuals with low vision who wish to gain or maintain meaningful employment. We have a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, a Vision Rehabilitation Therapist who assists individuals with low vision learn daily living skills and an Orientation and Mobility Specialist. BLVS's Orientation and Mobility Specialist serves on BSB TAC. An Orientation and Mobility Specialist assist individuals who are blind or have low vision learn to navigate their environment. This is often done through teaching the person who uses a cane to interpret the environment and detect obstacles, as well as how to know where they are, where they need to get to, and how they are going to get there. Learning about the transportation system whether it is the fixed route or Paratransit is an important part of this.

Blind and Low Vision Services also serves individuals who are 55 and over and living with vision loss by teaching low vision skills and offering some limited low vision technology. This is a non-cost program to the individual.

### **ACTION, INC.**

Action Inc. is a private, non-profit organization that provides a variety of safety net services to poor and low-income people in Butte and Southwest Montana. For many of the agency's participants, transportation is a challenge, which can impede their access to important services. As part of the Continuum of Care Coalition that organizes an annual service connect event for homeless families and individuals, Action Inc. works with Butte-Silver Bow Transit Services to provide free bus service to people wishing to attend the event at the Maroon Activity Center in January. At the event, participants can access critical medical, housing and other social services as well as get food, clothing, a haircut and shower. Free bus service that has been offered in Butte-Silver Bow over the last couple of years has been critical to the poor and low-income people served by Action Inc., particularly the elderly and/or disabled, and their ability to access our services. Action Inc. also provides transportation services to the Butte-Head Start program.

### **Southwest Montana Community Health Center**

The Southwest Montana Community Health Center opened its doors in 1986 under the name Butte-Silver Bow Primary Healthcare Services Inc.

SWMTCHC is a mission-driven private, nonprofit organization governed by a community volunteer board of directors.

The clinic is partially funded through a grant through the federal government that allows it to offer discounts on services so that healthcare remains accessible and affordable.

At the Southwest Montana Community Health Center, we offer and administer a variety of programs to assist people in our communities.

Southwest Community Health Center works with the Transit Advisory Committee and helps review para-transit applications.

### **Jefferson Bus Lines and Salt Lake Express**

In 2013 the Intercity Bus service in Montana came to halt because of the shutdown of Rimrock Stages. Jefferson Bus Lines and Salt Lake Express stepped up as a temporary fix to keep intercity bus service going.

Jefferson Bus Lines is the provider of intercity bus transportation between Missoula and I-90 east assuming the routes previously served by Rimrock Stages/Greyhound.

Jefferson Bus Lines has been providing very safe and efficient passenger service, the company also provides a number of other services for its customers such as same day package delivery to all the destinations they serve. Jefferson Bus Lines has assumed the agent duties for Greyhound at the Bus Transfer Center.

Salt Lake Express which runs the route from Butte to Salt Lake City twice daily. Salt Lake Express also provides a single route daily from Great Falls to Butte meeting the 7:00 PM routes.



Butte-Silver has decided to continue to lease the Bus Transfer Station for inter-city connections. The Butte Transfer Center has served approximately 40,000 inter-city travelers each year.

## **FAMILY OUTREACH**

Founded in 1977, Family Outreach Inc. is a state-contracted 501(c)(3) non-profit provider of intervention and support services for individuals with developmental delays or disabilities across the lifespan. Headquarters in Helena with branch offices in Bozeman and Butte, our operations cover 19 counties of western Montana. We are proud to have been among the first non-profit organizations to follow the modern model of supporting and integrating people with disabilities in their communities, using an inclusive approach that fosters dignity and respect for often marginalized groups. Our services include Early Intervention, Supported Living, Vocational Rehabilitation, Applied Behavior Analysis, and more. We served a total of 859 clients in our fiscal year ending June 2024, and this number is expected to increase as we serve more families in our new northwest service area. Family Outreach aims to make a lasting positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities, following our vision to build communities where abilities are celebrated, and every individual can achieve their fullest potential.

Most transportation needs within our organization fall into two categories: staff traveling to meet with a family or client at their home, or staff transporting clients from one location to another (e.g., to a job site or store). There are occasional staff trips between offices to facilitate administrative or other required tasks. Different service programs have different needs, and everyone shares the vehicles through a reservation system. For example, a Job Coach in Support Services may drive one company vehicle from Butte to Anaconda to meet an adult client at their home and take them to a job site in Deer Lodge. When work at the job site is completed for the day, the Job Coach drives their client home before returning to Butte with the vehicle. Meanwhile, a member of Early Intervention staff may drive another company vehicle to a family's home to perform an assessment of their young child as part of intake procedures and then return it to the office when the assessment is complete. Company vehicles enhance the ability of Family Outreach staff to perform their duties and fulfill our shared mission to provide individuals and families with personalized innovative support to empower people with disabilities.

Rank #4: Family Outreach is requesting a 7 passenger, non-ADA minivan. (\$49,999)

## **The Future of Transit in Butte**

The Transit Advisory Committee represents: Butte-Silver Bow City / County Government, Aware Inc., BSW, Belmont Senior Center and Montana Department of

Transportation Transit Division and private providers. The following is a list of the members: Joe Gilboy, Area V Council on Aging; Belinda Ballard, Blind & Low Vision Services; Cory Johns Butte-Silver Bow Transit Director; Holli Bennett, Silver Bow Developmental Disabilities Council; Amanda Stone, Belmont Senior Center; Mark Melby, BSW; Cassie Weightman, Ability Montana; Ron Knight, AWARE, Inc.; Tina Crummett, Southwest Community Health; Amy Simpson, Family Outreach.

During the planning stages for the coordination of services we reviewed the demographic data of the community and it became apparent that Butte-Silver Bow must pursue a coordinated effort with all transit providers in our community so that we may meet the needs of the elderly, mobility impaired, disabled, low income, and individuals without access to a vehicle.

When developing the coordination plan our main focus is to improve transportation services to the community, minimize duplication of services, enhance transportation access, and provide the most appropriate cost effective transportation possible with available resources.

The Butte-Silver Bow Transit Committee has accomplished coordinating Transit Services under the City and County of Butte-Silver Bow. BSW and AWARE has been included in the Transit development plan to incorporate the DD service they perform for their consumers. Belmont Senior Center will provide their own transportation services.

The Transit Advisory Committee will have quarterly meetings to insure that coordination efforts are being achieved. During these meetings we will encourage riders from the community to attend (elderly, low income, persons with disabilities, the general public and minority population groups). Since a coordination plan is a living document each day we must work to coordinate our services.

The Transit Advisory Committee currently meets all transportation needs that we have identified with dependable, reliable and cost effective services. In our many meetings we have established goals to outreach the various agencies and Health Care facilities (i.e. Southwest Mental Health Services, Butte Convalescent Care Center and etc.) to identify any unmet needs in our community.

The Transit Advisory Committee entities currently provide services to work places and retail shopping centers.

Butte-Silver Bow has approximately 15% of the population living below Federal poverty levels. The majority of these residents reside in the areas served by the Walkerville Bus Route. A total of 12% of the households do not have access to a private vehicle and are Transit dependent. The only access to work and training related activities is by City bus. The BSB Transit needs assessment is determined by the areas in our community that contain the highest percentage of zero vehicle household that are elderly, low income

and mobility limited residents. The census tract information was utilized to determine if BSB Transit was serving the greatest need areas of our community. The new Transit Development Plan will look again at the areas we are currently serving and areas not being served such as the Second Street neighborhood.

BSW currently provides daily transportation services for seventy one developmentally disabled men and women. These consumers are served by five buses that transport from group homes and private residents to their individual programs, work training and job sites. At present BSW is accruing costs that exceed current revenues received from the DPHHS and the JARC funds would allow the agency to recover a portion of the total transportation costs.

AWARE provides approximately 35,000 rides for developmentally disabled men and women from group homes to MT View Social Development Center, BSW and other agencies.

Butte-Silver Bow advertises the application to solicit public comment and comment are also solicited at the Council of Commissioners meeting at which the application is approved.

Butte-Silver Bow Transit hopes to identify changes in our operations that would provide for more growth possibly route changes and marketing efforts we discover in our Transit Development Plan update.

As the 5311 recipient, Butte-Silver Bow City/County Government will manage the coordination plan and facilitate coordination efforts with the other transportation providers. Butte-Silver Bow Transit (fixed route and Para-transit) and, The Belmont Senior Center will operate under the funds designated from the TransAde program.

## **Short and Long Term Goals**

- On a daily basis personnel will monitor transit services that have been coordinated to make sure we are meeting the needs of our customers.
- The Transit Advisory Committee will meet on a quarterly basis to assess our coordination efforts. By meeting on a continual basis we hope to identify the weak and strong points of our transportation services. This analysis should provide us with information on what is working and to determine where we need to improve our services. This will help the committee develop the future coordination plans.
- Request funding for a transportation study for Butte-Silver Bow.

- Work on getting all Bus Stop signs up and accessible areas. Adding seating with bus stop signs to replace bus benches.