



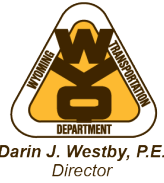
Mark Gordon
Governor

WYOMING Aeronautics Commission

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

5300 Bishop Boulevard
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009-3340

Bruce McCormack, Chairman
(307) 777-4015



Darin J. Westby, P.E.
Director

MEETING MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) Aeronautics Commission was held on Tuesday, November 14, 2023, via videoconference. Chairman Bruce McCormack presided, calling the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman McCormack led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. ROLL CALL

The following commission members were present, constituting a quorum.

Bruce McCormack, Chairman, District 4

Steve Maier, Commissioner, District 5

Jerry Blann, Vice Chairman, District 2

Sigsbee Duck, Commissioner, District At-large

Dean McClain, Commissioner, District 1

Randy Harrop, Commissioner, District At-large

Bill DeVore, Commissioner, District 3

WYDOT Director Darin Westby was absent.

The following WYDOT staff and guests were present and participated in the business meeting.

Brian Olsen, Aeronautics Administrator

Sheri Taylor, Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Manager

Mariah Johnson, Air Service Development Manager

MacKenzie Sewell, Assistant Attorney General

Phillip Hearn, Engineering & Construction Manager

Kimberly Chapman, Commission Secretary

A.J. Schutzman, Planning & Programming Manager

Susan Elliott and Caitlin Casner assisted with virtual meeting management.

IV. AGENDA ADJUSTMENTS

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Vice Chairman Blann, seconded by Commissioner Duck, and unanimously carried to approve minutes from the October 17, 2023, business meeting.

VI. UPDATES/DISCUSSIONS

A. CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

Chairman McCormack presented the Chairman's Update.

Chairman McCormack shared information on the “People’s Initiative to Limit Property Tax in Wyoming.” The potential ballot initiative seeks to lower property taxes on residential properties by 50 percent. He shared that, if successful, the initiative would drastically decrease county revenues. Airports currently receive around \$4.2 million from the counties, and the initiative would decrease county contributions to airports by half. Chairman McCormack made no recommendations for or against the initiative, but he encouraged commissioners to monitor its progress.

B. DIRECTOR’S UPDATE

Administrator Olsen presented the Director’s Update.

Recruitment and Retention Efforts

The department worked with the Human Resources Division (HRD) of Wyoming Administration and Information (A&I) to establish a \$2,000 hiring bonus for any new WYDOT hire. The department hopes this strategy will be a good tool in recruitment efforts.

Chairman McCormack expressed his hope that this bonus will draw attention to the department’s vacancies, especially the snowplow drivers and road maintainers.

Joint Transportation, Highways, and Military Affairs Committee (JTC) Meeting

On November 3, WYDOT leadership provided testimony at the JTC meeting in Cheyenne. Legislators discussed a fuel tax increase to support surface transportation, but both bills died in committee.

The second significant issue the JTC discussed concerned light and high profile vehicle blow-overs. These incidents can lead to lane and road closures, as well as being costly and time intensive to remedy. The committee is considering enacting higher fines and stiffer penalties for operators who disregard blow-over advisories and closures.

Overall, Administrator Olsen thought the meeting went well and was very beneficial for the department.

Light & High Profile Vehicles

The Transportation Management Center (TMC) leadership developed a program called “Weight-based Wind Closures” to decrease the number of blow-over incidents on Wyoming roads. Using research from the University of Wyoming (UW) on blow-over risk, WYDOT created a matrix that determines blow-over risk based on road location and vehicle profile and weight.

The matrix will help the department make closure decisions for certain vehicles (e.g. under a specific weight or certain vehicle profiles). The program allows operators to ascertain whether they are subject to closures based on vehicle profile or load. WYDOT is hopeful this program will significantly reduce blow-over incidents.

C. ADMINISTRATOR’S UPDATE

Administrator Olsen presented the Administrator’s Update.

Federal Updates

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization

Administrator Olsen reported that no progress was made on reauthorization. The Senate is still at an impasse on a few key issues, such as the 1,500-hour pilot training rule. Congress has until the end of the year to pass legislation as the current continuing resolution (CR) funds the agency until December 31, 2023.

Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Appropriations

On November 1, 2023, the Senate passed three bills to fund agriculture, military and veterans affairs, and transportation. Administrator Olsen reported that the funding levels are similar to previous years. Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funding remains flat at \$3.35 billion, but the Senate did add \$500 million of supplemental discretionary funding. The additional funding has been helpful to Wyoming in the past, but more of the funds have been earmarked in recent years. Administrator Olsen reported that \$200 million of the supplemental discretionary funding is earmarked for specific uses this year.

There was a slight increase to the Essential Air Service (EAS) program, with funding increased to \$500 million.

The House commenced work on its transportation funding bill last week, but it is on hold due to significant disagreements over funding for Amtrak. Congress will need to take action on appropriations bills soon, as the current CR expires on November 17.

FAA Administrator

On October 24, 2023, the Senate confirmed Michael Whitaker as the FAA administrator in a 98-0 vote, demonstrating broad support for his nomination. His confirmation will allow for stable leadership at a time when it is critically needed.

The National Association of State Aviation Officials (NASAO) has assembled a list of important [policy] issues for Administrator Whitaker's immediate attention. A couple of those issues are critical to Wyoming including the use of federal funds for incentives; the modernization of weather stations, the weather reporting system, the Citizen Weather Observer Program; and expedited guidance on the transition to fluorine-free fire-fighting foam.

State Updates

Reno Air Races

Administrator Olsen reported that the National Championship Air Races are searching for a new host city as 2023 is the last year the races will be held in Reno, Nevada. Casper is one of six communities vying to become the new host city. The races are reported to bring \$100 million of economic activity to the region around the host city each year, so it will be extremely beneficial to Wyoming if Casper's bid is successful.

Administrator Olsen traveled to Casper last week to attend a dinner with the selection committee to support the bid. The new host city should be announced in early 2024.

Fueling Aviation's Sustainable Transition Grants (FAST-SAF)

Administrator Olsen reported that he is working with a small group of stakeholders on FAST-SAF grant opportunities. The program was created under the Inflation Reduction Act to expedite the production and distribution of sustainable aviation fuel. The program's two tiers address planning, feasibility, and production capabilities as well as infrastructure. Administrator Olsen is working with Southwest Wyoming Regional Airport, the School of Energy Resources at UW, the Wyoming Energy Authority, and Governor Gordon's office to pursue the grant.

Division and Department Updates

Wyoming Transportation Commission Education Session

Administrator Olsen reported that the Transportation Commission will hold an education session at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 15, 2023. The first half of the session includes a presentation providing an overview of the Aeronautics Division and the Aeronautics Commission. Chairman McCormack will represent the commission at the session, but other commissioners are invited to attend either in person or virtually.

New Pilot

Administrator Olsen announced that a new pilot for Flight Operations has been hired. The new hire cannot start until he is type-rated for our aircraft, and he will be trained after the new year. Administrator Olsen will continue to recruit for the remaining pilot vacancies.

D. AIR SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM UPDATE

Ms. Johnson presented the Air Service Development Program Update.

General Matters

October Traffic

Ms. Johnson reported that October load factors were similar to September totals. However, Casper and Cheyenne both experienced an 8 percent increase in load factors from last month with Casper finishing the month with a 53 percent load factor and Cheyenne with 75 percent. Gillette had a 4 percent increase in load factors from September to October and finished the month with an 88 percent load factor.

Future Bookings

Ms. Johnson reported that holiday traffic is projected to be near record levels this year. Month-to-date load factors of current bookings for December are trending above fall levels. Ms. Johnson noted that, as of November 8, Cheyenne's month-to-date load factor was at 73 percent.

Industry Updates

Ms. Johnson reported that the third quarter earnings reports were published last month for all of the U.S. airlines. On average, load factors and unit revenues were down year-over-year for the industry, but that varied widely by airline. United, Delta, and Alaska airlines all reported strong, double-digit pre-tax profit margins for the quarter. American, Southwest, and Allegiant airlines'

performance was significantly lower, but still positive. JetBlue, Frontier, and Spirit airlines all lost money in the third quarter.

Fare levels are softening across the industry compared to the increases over the past 12 months. Fuel costs per gallon were down 20 percent year-over-year for the industry, but up 13 percent from the second quarter of 2023.

Domestic seat capacity is up by 7.8 percent over fourth quarter of 2022, which is about 4 percent higher than pre-pandemic totals from fourth quarter of 2019. Wyoming's seat capacity, for the same period, will grow 8.4 percent year-over-year, which is 7.3 percent higher than pre-pandemic levels. The growth is primarily due to Jackson traffic, while the remaining airports are down about 1 percent on average. The decrease is due to the regional pilot shortage. Compared to fourth quarter 2022 totals, Jackson's seat capacity is up 7 percent and the remaining airports are up 10 percent.

Standard Reports

Air Service Enhancement Program (ASEP) Budget Forecast Report

Ms. Johnson reported no changes to the ASEP Budget Forecast Report.

Capacity Purchase Agreement (CPA) Budget Forecast Report

Ms. Johnson reported no changes to the CPA Budget Forecast Report.

Percent of Grant Projects by City Report

Ms. Johnson reported no changes to the Percent of Grant Projects by City Report.

Monthly Load Factors Report

Ms. Johnson reported that the Monthly Load Factors Report was updated to include the most recent load factor data available for each airport.

Following a question from Vice Chairman Blann, Ms. Johnson reported that the load factors for the Casper to Salt Lake City route are slightly misleading. In July, Delta began using a 76-seat aircraft for this route, which lowered the average load factors in the report. Ms. Johnson reviewed averages for both the 76- and 50-seat aircraft and found that, while the load factors are lower for the larger aircraft, more seats were sold for the route on the larger aircraft. The October 2023 load factors for the route averaged at 40 seats.

Ms. Johnson clarified that she does not receive data from the airline on the Cody to Denver route. WYDOT's contracted data provider obtains figures on the Cody and Jackson routes from the data that the airlines provide to the federal government. The data can lag three to four months behind, so data may be missing for certain routes. The data for the rest of the routes comes directly from SkyWest Airlines.

After a robust discussion on the Monthly Load Factors Report, Administrator Olsen and Ms. Johnson will investigate the possibility of providing overall load factors for Wyoming airports.

Vice Chairman Blann commented that while he would like to see data for more routes, he feels that the quarterly cost-per-passenger report provides the most relevant data to the commission.

Following a question from Commissioner Harrop, Administrator Olsen stated that the FAA recommended that airlines increase the average weight per passenger in calculations for aircraft weight and balance. He did not know if this was actually a FAA mandate and if it would impact calculations for individual flights.

Administrator Olsen clarified that he gathers concerns and issues from the airports before he meets with any airlines.

E. ENGINEERING AND CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM UPDATE

Mr. Hearn presented the Engineering and Construction Program Update.

General Matters

Pavement Condition Index (PCI) Inspections

Mr. Hearn reported that the division received the preliminary results from the PCI inspections conducted this fall. The inspection data was used in the Wyoming Aviation Capital Improvement Program (WACIP) planning process to rate pavement projects and help staff manage budgetary concerns.

Mr. Hearn reported that Wyoming airport pavements are aging well. In general, the pavements rated a few points higher than the predictive models projected for this year. Following a question from Chairman McCormack, Mr. Hearn stated that the crack seal and seal coat and mark projects definitely extend the longevity of Wyoming airport pavements by keeping the PCI scores higher. Accurate inspections also ensure that rehabilitation projects are occurring at the most appropriate time.

Final Inspections

Mr. Hearn reported that the final inspections of projects should be completed within the next two weeks. Overall, the construction projects went very well, and inspections should be finalized by December.

Standard Reports

Change Orders Report

Mr. Hearn reported one new change order to amend the contracted workdays due to weather delays.

Statewide Line Items Report

Mr. Hearn reported seven new line items.

Bid Summary Report

Mr. Hearn reported no new bid results.

F. PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING PROGRAM REPORT

Mr. Schutzman presented the Planning and Programming Program Update.

General Matters

Wyoming Aviation Capital Improvement Program (WACIP) Update Cycle

Mr. Schutzman thanked the division staff and the FAA for their work on the annual WACIP update process and the considerable effort to review all of the airport projects to determine appropriate funding allocations. The division has completed funding coordination meetings with the FAA and is currently scoring projects and using the BlackCat Aviation Data Management System's gaming module to program state funds through FY 2030.

Mr. Schutzman reported that he will have the draft FY 2025 budget and the FY 2026-30 plan in the December packet for the commission to review and approve. Once approved, the drafts will be sent to the airports for a 30-day comment period. The division will address any airport concerns before a final draft is approved by the commission.

Staffing

Mr. Schutzman reported that the senior planner position has been advertised, as well as a temporary planner for the division. He hopes to conduct interviews for these positions in early December.

Airport Rates and Charges Update

Mr. Schutzman reported that the survey of airport rates and charges is live and will be open until January 5, 2024. The division has already received 40 responses from airports in multiple states.

Standard Reports

Administrative Approvals Report

Mr. Schutzman reported there were no administrative approvals this period.

Recovered State Funds Report

Mr. Schutzman reported that there were no recovered state funds for this period.

G. UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS PROGRAM UPDATE

Ms. Taylor presented the Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Program Update.

General Matters

Laramie Flight Training

Ms. Taylor reported that two new pilots were trained and activated during a two-day training at the end of last month in Laramie. WYDOT now has 27 active drone pilots. The next training will take place in March 2024, and about six people from several different WYDOT programs will be trained in advance of the 2024 construction season.

Ms. Taylor reported that she plans to focus more on public outreach this winter. She intends to reach out to local communities to produce a statewide update on drone usage.

Following a question from Chairman McCormack on the statewide update, Ms. Taylor stated that WYDOT has helped train drone pilots for a few other state agencies and could help train pilots for local governments or community organizations, as time permits.

VII. REGULAR BUSINESS

A. FY 2024 WACIP BUDGET MODIFICATIONS

Mr. Schutzman reported two statewide line item increases for \$180,000 of state funds and 12 modifications this period for a reduction of state funds allocated towards projects of \$101,444 and an increase in federal funds of \$1,182,351. The remaining state reserve is currently \$1,557,754, which is a comfortable reserve for this point in the fiscal year.

Action: It was recommended by Mr. Schutzman, moved by Commission DeVore, seconded by Commissioner Maier, and unanimously carried to approve the FY 2024 WACIP budget modifications as presented.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. PRIORITY RATING MODEL (PRM) UPDATE

Mr. Schutzman reported that the Wyoming Priority Rating Model for Project Evaluation is due for an update. Two task forces will be formed to update the PRMs for both the AIP and ASEP. The division will be soliciting volunteers for the two task forces, which will commence work in early 2024. Mr. Schutzman anticipates the commission will approve the newly formed task forces at the January 23, 2024, business meeting.

The task forces will meet in Casper three times in person to complete their work, beginning in February 2024. The two task forces will meet consecutively, so participating commissioners and commercial service airport representatives are encouraged to serve on both groups.

The commission will discuss the issue again at the December meeting and make a final decision on commission representatives before the January meeting.

B. NASAO 2024 AVIATION ART CONTEST

Mr. Schutzman informed the commission that the annual International Aviation Art Contest for 2024, entitled “Air Sports for a Peaceful World,” is underway. Division staff sent the contest flier to Wyoming schools, airports, and consulting firms asking for participation. The Wyoming Arts Council was asked to distribute the contest information as well.

Mr. Schutzman reported that the commission will select contest winners, by age group, at the January business meeting. Winning state submissions will be submitted to the national competition, which is sponsored annually by NASAO.

IX. EXECUTIVE SESSION

There was no need for an executive session.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS

Commission Activities

Ms. Chapman announced that the commission's next business meeting will be held in Cheyenne on December 18-19, 2023.

Following a question from Chairman McCormack, Ms. Chapman clarified that a final date has not been selected for the February 2024 business meeting. She and Mr. Olsen still hope to hold it in conjunction with the Wyoming Airports Coalition's legislative reception.

The commission decided to tour the Wyoming State Capitol during the December meeting.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Vice Chairman Blann to adjourn and passed unanimously. Chairman McCormack adjourned the meeting at 2:48 p.m. on November 14, 2023.