January 1, 2015

Opinion Editorial on Mountain Line Zero-Fare Service

2015 marks the 40th Anniversary of the Missoula Downtown Association, a membership-based business organization with the mission to “promote, support and enhance the vitality of Downtown Missoula for the betterment of our community.” We anticipate surpassing the 500-member mark this year, and we are grateful for the support and engagement of our members.

One of the MDA’s greatest accomplishments was the partnership created with Mountain Line in 2004 to provide free bus passes to all MDA member employees, today more than 6,000 strong. With a decade of success and growing usage of transit services by Downtown employees, the MDA is happy to be one of 14 community partners to support zero-fare service on all Mountain Line buses, which commences January 5.

In addition to everyone being able to ride all buses without paying a fare, the Missoula community will benefit from Mountain Line’s new late evening service until 10 pm on all routes, as well as the ***Bolt*** 15-minute service on Routes 1, 2, 6 and 7, which operate in Missoula’s urban core. These services are offered, thanks to the mill levy Missoulians supported in 2013.

Robust transit services benefit our community in a variety of ways:

* Riding the bus reduces traffic congestion and parking demand. When you ride the bus, you don’t have to think about driving or parking.
* Riding the bus improves air quality and prevents inversions in the Missoula valley. The fewer cars on the street, the better for all.
* Riding the bus increases our physical activity as individuals and contributes to the health of our community, especially since all buses have bike racks.
* Riding the bus reduces the expenses for car maintenance and gasoline each year.
* Riding the bus increases our disposable income, allowing for more spending on the things we love.

In addition to providing a tremendous service to all Missoulians, Mountain Line contributes as an agency to our community’s well-being through employment of nearly 60 local residents and purchasing of goods and services from local providers (think fuel, maintenance and marketing). Mountain Line is also providing value-added services for bus riders, including a smart phone mobile app that tells riders when the bus will arrive, free Wi-Fi service on all buses, as well as bike racks and repair stations, making it easy and convenient to both bike and bus throughout town.

The conversion to zero-fare service will also provide improved access and services for Missoula tourists. For example, folks staying at Reserve Street hotels can now ride the bus Downtown without worrying about the fare which improves access and connection to the heart of our community.

Missoula Downtown Association member employees have greatly appreciated access to free bus service for the last 10 years, and we are delighted to see that benefit expand to include all Missoulians. The MDA has a long partnership history with Mountain Line, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide zero-fare access to all.

Ride the Bus!

Linda K. McCarthy
Executive Director
Missoula Downtown Association