



MISSOULA URBAN TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

December 28, 2016

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## Mountain Line Closed Jan. 2 in Observance of New Year's Day

MISSOULA – Mountain Line will be closed on Monday, January 2, 2017 in observance of the New Year's Day holiday. All 12 fixed routes, Paratransit, Senior Van, and the customer service line will be closed for the day. Service will resume on a normal weekday schedule on Tuesday, January 3. All routes will operate on a normal Saturday schedule on New Year's Eve, Saturday, Dec. 31. Happy New Year to everyone from Mountain Line.

*Mountain Line, Missoula's community bus service, is operated by the Missoula Urban Transportation District. Founded in 1976, Mountain Line provides fixed route and paratransit Zero-fare bus service in and around Missoula, helping employees get to work, students get to school, and keeping seniors and those with disabilities active and mobile. By reducing congestion, improving air quality, and providing safe, comfortable, and reliable transportation, Mountain Line improves the quality of life for everyone in our community. For more information, current press photos, and a complete list of routes and services, visit [www.mountainline.com/news-alerts/overview/](http://www.mountainline.com/news-alerts/overview/).*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

December 29, 2016

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## **Mountain Line Celebrates Second Year of Record-Breaking Zero-fare Service with Free Commuter Breakfast**

MISSOULA –Missoulians continue to hop on the bus in record numbers thanks to a three-year Zero-fare demonstration project that began in January 2015 with the financial support of 15 public and private community partners. Mountain Line gave more than 1.5 million rides to commuters in 2016, a new 12-month agency record. Overall, bus ridership is up 50% since the project launch and March 2016 was the busiest month in the agency's 39-year history. With the help of Zero-fare and a growing population, transit use in Missoula has more than doubled since 2006 and Mountain Line officials believe the growth in ridership is good for everyone.

"Public transit benefits our entire community by reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality, and getting people where they need to go. It means students getting to class, employees commuting to and from work, and seniors and people with disabilities staying active and mobile." said Bill Pfeiffer, Mountain Line Community Outreach Coordinator. "

Mountain Line will celebrate the continued success of Zero-fare with free coffee from Black Coffee Roasting Co. and free pastries from Le Petit Outre for morning commuters and bus operators on Thursday, January 5, 2017 from 7:30am-10am at the Downtown Transfer Center. Riders will be able to leave written or video "Thank You" messages for Mountain Line's Zero-fare funding partners at the event. Mountain Line riders who are unable to attend the breakfast can also send a "Thank You" message to the system's partners via a form on Mountain Line's website at [www.mountainline.com](http://www.mountainline.com) or on the agency's Facebook page beginning January 2.

"We want to thank our partners for the difference they're making in our community and in the lives of real people," said Pfeiffer. "The more people riding, the greater the benefit to Missoula as a whole, so we hope folks will let our partners know how much they appreciate the service, both online and in person, when they visit their businesses. We created a special form on our website for 'Thank You' messages and we're also going to collect them at our breakfast event and deliver them to our partners." Pfeiffer says riders interested in leaving a "Thank You" message should visit Mountain Line's Facebook page or website beginning January 2.

Mountain Line's Zero-fare project will continue to run through the end of 2017, but Pfeiffer is hopeful the program will continue in honor of the agency's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary next December.

"It would be a great birthday present for Mountain Line to continue Zero-fare so I think it's imperative that riders let the partners know how much the community appreciates their contributions and the difference it is making for regular people. This is only possible with their continued support."

Mountain Line's Zero-fare partners include the University of Montana, Associated Students of the University of Montana, City of Missoula, County of Missoula, the Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization, St. Patrick Hospital, Community Medical Center, Missoula County Public Schools, Missoula Aging Services, Missoula Downtown Association, Missoula Parking Commission, the Missoulian,



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Southgate Mall, Homewood, and Destination Missoula. To leave a “Thank You Zero-fare” message for Mountain Line’s funding partners, visit Mountain Line’s Facebook page or [www.mountainline.com](http://www.mountainline.com).

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## MOUNTAIN LINE YEAR IN REVIEW – 2016

### January

- Continued 2<sup>nd</sup> year of 3-year Zero-Fare Demonstration Project
  - Made possible by over \$460,000 in sponsorship money from 15 different community partners: The University of Montana, Associated Students of the University of Montana, City of Missoula, County of Missoula, the Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization, St. Patrick Hospital, Community Medical Center, Missoula County Public Schools, Missoula Aging Services, Missoula Downtown Association, Missoula Parking Commission, Missoulian, Southgate Mall, Homeward Inc., and Destination Missoula.
  - Added a new Zero-fare partner, Destination Missoula.
  - Project expected 45 percent increase in ridership over the next three years
  - Zero Fare increased ridership 44% in the first 12 months
- Celebrated the one-year anniversary of Zero-fare by unveiling a new display honoring the supporting partners in City Council Chambers. The unveiling was attended by the Mayor John Engen, members of City Council and the County Commission, Zero-fare partner representatives, and members of the community. The new display was installed in the Downtown Transfer center in August 2016.
- Hired new service staff for bus maintenance and cleaning.
- Instituted full-scale update to Mountain Line Operator Training Program.
- Updated and revised Senior Van and Paratransit Rider Guides.
- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - January 2016 ridership finished 9% higher than January 2015 and an estimated 39% above January 2014.
  - Highest January ridership in agency history.

### February

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership increased 18% from February 2015 and an estimated 45% above February 2014.
    - Temporarily set the highest monthly ridership in the agency's history (broken March 2016)

### March

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - **143,765 rides in March 2016 according to automated passenger counter estimates, a new all-time one month ridership record.**
  - **Highest March total ever.**
  - 13% increase from March 2015, and a 44% increase from March 2014.

- Mountain Line Administrative Staff hires a new Customer Service Representative and Project Management Specialist.
- Three new operators join Mountain Line operations staff.
- Added full-time security staff to the Downtown Transfer Center and completed a number of design improvements to the facility to deter loitering and improve safety.
- Mountain Line operations and service staff adopt new uniform policy to ensure agency is well represented and easily identifiable to members of the public.
- Community Events
  - Participated in the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade in Downtown Missoula with the Missoula Trolley and BOLT!, the Mountain Line mascot.

## April

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership increased 1% from April 2015, and an estimated 44% from April 2014
  - Highest April ridership on record
- Participated in MUD's annual Earth Day Celebration on April 23 in Caras Park.
- Worked with City of Missoula and Bike Pedestrian Office to install a crosswalk on Palmer near Montana State offices to improve safety for bus passengers and pedestrians.

## May

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership increased 11% compared to May 2015 and an estimated 57% from May 2014
  - Highest May ridership on record.
- Community Engagement
  - Began our 14<sup>th</sup> season of Zero-fare Trolley service to Missoula's Saturday Markets
- Hired a new mechanic to Mountain Line service staff.

## June

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership increased 12% increase compared to June 2015 and an estimated 68% from June 2014.
  - Highest June ridership on record.
- Community Engagement
  - Began our 12<sup>th</sup> season of Zero-fare Trolley service to Missoula's Out to Lunch in Caras Park
  - Began a pilot Rider Survey project to test data collection methods in order to gain a better understanding of new Mountain Line ridership. Mountain Line Bus Ambassadors and Community Outreach Coordinator interviewed 240 riders in late June and early July.

## July

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership decreased slightly from July 2015 (under 6%) but was still an estimated 40% above July 2014 levels.
- Two new operators join Mountain Line service staff.
- Standardized flashing yield signs and added reflective indicator arrows to all buses in fleet.

## August

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership increased 13% August 2015 and an estimated 62% from July 2014.
  - Highest August ridership total ever.
- Transfer Center Improvements
  - A number of new improvements were added to the Downtown Transfer Center including:
    - Zero-fare Community Partner Thank You display
    - Extra-large route map and bus schedule to aid route finding
    - Large digital clock for easier reading
    - Installed new route signs on bus depot island
    - New anti-bird netting and anti-nesting devices
- Community Engagement
  - Served as a Green Sponsor for the River City Roots Festival, Missoula's end of summer music and art festival held downtown.
  - Mountain Line sent a team of three operators to the annual Montana State Bus Rodeo. Operator Brian Usury placed fourth.

## September

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership increased 2% from Sept. 2016 and an estimated 52% from Sept. 2014.
  - Highest September ridership on record.
- Community Engagement
  - Collaborated with Missoula In Motion and ASUM Transportation for Walk and Roll Missoula: Celebrating 25 years of Bike Walk Bus Week.
    - Held the first Amazing Race Missoula, a city-wide bike and bus scavenger hunt. Road Rascals from Homeward, Inc. were the first contest winners of a \$100 Missoula Downtown Association gift card. All contestants received prizes for participating.
    - Served free breakfast at the Transfer Center for area commuters.
    - Gave away one new Torker T-29 cruiser bicycle from nearly 5,000 entries in our giveaway raffle

- Participated in the annual UM Homecoming Parade
- Supported partners ASUM Transportation in unveiling the first all-electric bus in Missoula at an event with Gov. Steve Bullock, UM President Royce Engstrom and other dignitaries. MUTD Board President Andrea Davis addressed the crowd.
- Worked with local businesses to reduce littering near Target on the Route 2 by purchasing a trash receptacle and setting up a pick-up schedule to be performed by the business.

## **October**

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership dropped slightly from October 2015 (under 1%) but was still an estimated 40% above October 2014 levels.
- Community Engagement
  - Released a promotional video with Missoula's favorite band, modern acoustic recording artists, the Lil' Smokies, performing their new song, 'Winded,' live on a Mountain Line bus. The video received more than 43,000 views in one week and was shared around the country on social media in music and transit circles alike.
  - Finished construction of bus shelter using reused glass bottles located at 39<sup>th</sup> St. and Reserve St.

## **November**

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership increased 6% from Nov. 2015 and an estimated 47% increase from Nov. 2014.
  - Highest November ridership on record.
- Community Engagement
  - Held three 'Stuff the Trolley' events in support of the Missoula Foodbank's Can the Bobcats Food Drive, contributing over 1,000lbs of food and over \$500 in cash donations to help feed local families.
  - Launched a 'Yield to the Bus' public awareness campaign in support of Missoula yield ordinance to increase safety and efficiency of the system. Standardized all flashing yield signs and added reflective indicator banners to every bus in the fleet.
- 2016 Ridership Survey
  - Launched a system-wide ridership survey project with the help of 3 part-time Bus Ambassadors. Ambassadors interviewed over 500 riders in 5 weeks. Data collected will help inform future MUTD board decisions, improve our service, and will be used in development of the 2017 Long Range Strategic Plan.
  - Worked with several classes of urban planning students at University of Montana on reducing survey bias, survey design, and collection methods. Students benefitted from real-world application of survey theory.
- Financial Audit

- Hired JCCS of Kalispell to perform an annual agency wide financial audit. MUTD undertakes this effort each year to maintain high standards of financial tracking and procurement protocols.
- Automated Passenger Counter (APCs) Approved by FTA
  - Received approval from Federal Transportation Administration to begin using APC data for reporting to the National Transit Database. Automatic counters improve accuracy, reduce human counting errors, and improve operator efficiency. APCs have been installed on all ML buses for several years and will now be the primary source of rider and stop usage data.
- Brooks St. Corridor Development Plan
  - Completed a joint project with Missoula Redevelopment Agency and the City of Missoula looking to advance a vision of transit-oriented development for the Brooks St. Corridor.

## December

- Zero Fare Project Ridership Report
  - Ridership increased 9% from December 2015 and an estimated 68% from Dec. 2014.
  - Highest December ridership on record.
- Community Engagement
  - Participated in the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Parade of Lights in Downtown Missoula in conjunction with Missoula In Motion and Free Cycles.
- Began reviewing proposals from firms to undertake a new Long Range Strategic Plan process for MUTD scheduled for Spring 2017. Winning bid to be announced in early 2017.

## Year End Summary

- Record Ridership Continues
  - **Mountain Line provided more than 1.5 million rides in 2016 according to automatic passenger counters, a new calendar year record.**
    - **Ridership increased 7% from 2015, which was a record breaking year.**
    - **March 2016 was the highest monthly ridership total in agency history with over 140,000 rides.**
  - **Zero-fare Project continues to be an astounding success with a cumulative ridership increase of 50% in just 24 months.**
    - **Project goal at outset was 45% growth over 36 months, which the agency reached in mid-2016.**
  - Paratransit and Senior Van Ridership increased 14% from 2015 levels and 28% since the launch of Zero-fare, providing an additional 6,000 rides a year.
  - Mountain Line provided more than 100,000 rides on fixed route service in every month of 2016 for the first time in agency history.
  - **Since 2006, Mountain Line ridership has doubled, a remarkable 10-year increase.**

- Community Engagement
  - Participated in 4 Stepping On Classes to keep seniors and disable persons active and mobile but orienting them to Mountain Line’s fixed-route, Paratransit, and Senior Van services
  - Created a new part-time Bus Ambassador program, hiring several new employees to promote Mountain Line’s services and provide community travel education. Bus Ambassadors are trained in bus, bike, and pedestrian route planning and travel safety and will be an asset to the community moving forward.