

## ON TRACK WITH MDT

Late last fall, at the suggestion of the Montana Contractors Association and the Montana Motor Carriers Association, Deputy Director Jim Currie, Motor Carrier Services (MCS) Administrator Drew Livesay, MCS Technology Manager Dennis Hult and I spent three days visiting MCS customers up and down the eastern side of the state.

The purpose of this “MCS road trip” was to gather information about permitting problems our customers were experiencing so that we could formulate appropriate solutions. As the road trip progressed, however, the conversations with our customers took on a life of their own. By the time we’d finished, we’d touched on just about every segment of commercial vehicle operation and enforcement in Montana.

Looking back on the road trip, I am struck by two things. First, face-to-face interaction between providers of governmental services and their customers is a very good thing – and one that does not happen as often as it should. As anyone operating a commercial vehicle knows, our MCS staff provides specialized commercial motor carrier licensing, registration and permitting services that are not available anywhere else. Without the required credentials and permits, MCS customers are subject to enforcement action, citations and unexpected delays – experiences that became real to us as we sat in our customers’ offices in Miles City and Forsyth and heard their stories firsthand.

From those conversations we compiled a list of needs that is being addressed as I write. It includes the following: 1) improve MDT’s Vehicle Weight Analysis process; 2) resolve customer problems caused by the MCS Helena automated phone system; 3) reduce confusion about non-divisible load requirements; 4) provide better training and technical support for MDT customers who rely on “self-service” technology applications; 5) rethink DW-21 operating requirements; and 6) address a host of issues too numerous to include in this article. It may take some time, but we will work to address each of the issues that came up during the trip.

Second, I was struck by how friendly and interested everyone was. Having been born and raised in Montana, I know this is a friendly state. . Even so, the reception we received from Sidney to Billings was wonderful!

Every carrier and contractor we visited laid out the red carpet and took time out of his or her busy day to show us around the office, introduce us to staff, and share concerns and problems in a constructive way. My impression was that these folks were pleased that we had taken the time to come out and sit down for a visit. We had a great time, and we learned a lot.

So what happens next? First, each carrier and contractor we visited will receive a summary report listing all the primary road trip issues we discussed and explaining what MDT plans to do about each one.

Second, MDT will continue to work from this list, in compliance with the timelines stated in the report, until we have done our best to satisfy our customers' needs. Some are easy fixes, like Duane Mitchell's request that MCS patrol officers put out orange traffic cones when Type A portable weighing sites are open so drivers have time to react. Others, like Mike Wilson's request for a 35,000-pound annual overweight permit, will need the approval of the 2005 Legislature to become reality. For the few requests that aren't doable, the report states this clearly and explains why. (A copy of the report will be placed on MCS' website at [www.mdt.state.mt.us/mcs](http://www.mdt.state.mt.us/mcs) in the near future.)

Third, as a result of this road trip, MCS has decided to make a few annual customer visits from now on. I am pleased with this decision, and I hope that these trips continue to be beneficial for all parties involved.

To all who took the time to visit with us, thank you for sharing your time, your knowledge and your hospitality. With your input, we can and will continue to streamline our MCS program. Our customers are our future, and your input is key to staying "on track." Thanks for your help!

Dave Galt  
Director