

**April 2006
Project Update**

For the
US 93 - Somers to Whitefish West
(Kalispell Bypass Only)

***Re-Evaluation of the Final
Environmental Impact Statement***

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is completing a re-evaluation of the 1994 US 93 Somers to Whitefish West Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) as it relates to the proposed US 93 bypass around the City of Kalispell, Montana. The purpose of this update is to inform community members about the project and provide the results of recent MDT activities.

Background

The US 93 Somers to Whitefish West FEIS was completed in September 1994 with extensive public involvement and covered an approximately 50-mile long corridor of US 93 from Somers to Whitefish. The FEIS recommended a number of highway improvements to US 93, including an 8-mile long bypass around the west side of the City of Kalispell. The purpose of the bypass was to remove traffic from the congested areas of Kalispell by providing a direct north-south route for truck traffic and others for whom Kalispell was not a destination. In November 1994, the findings from the FEIS were documented in a Record of Decision (ROD) with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that identified the preferred bypass route along the western side of Kalispell.

Since the ROD was signed in 1994, MDT has been steadily implementing actions agreed to in the FEIS and ROD by designing and constructing segments of the US 93 Somers to Whitefish corridor. MDT also began a corridor preservation project to identify the specific right-of-way needs for the bypass. The corridor preservation project recommended two alignment modifications to allow better traffic flow: 1) the south terminus of the bypass was shifted away from Snowline Lane to Gardiner Auction, and 2) the alignment at the northern end was shifted east of Stillwater Road. A third alignment modification was also recommended based on the results of a supplemental noise analysis performed by MDT. The analysis recommended that the alignment be shifted

away from neighborhoods along West Reserve Drive and toward a nearby power line to reduce potential noise impacts.

In August 1997, the Montana Transportation Commission passed an access control resolution designating the Kalispell Bypass as a limited access highway. This resolution was revisited by the Commission in August 2004 when, with support of the City of Kalispell and Flathead County, the Commission reaffirmed the desire for private access restrictions and proposed public road connection treatments.

Lastly, in early 2001, MDT recognized that traffic conditions evaluated in the 1994 FEIS only considered forecasts to the year 2015 and that recent population increases in the Kalispell area could negatively impact future traffic conditions. To accommodate the changed traffic conditions, MDT began considering design modifications to accommodate year 2030 projected future traffic increases, thereby increasing the service life of the facility. Potential modifications include replacing at-grade signalized intersections with grade-separated interchanges (overpasses and underpasses) to allow unimpeded traffic movement along the bypass. With these intersection and alignment modifications, however, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that changes to actions contained in an FEIS be re-evaluated to determine if they create significant new environmental impacts. Therefore, MDT initiated a process to re-evaluate the 1994 FEIS to determine if the proposed design modifications to the bypass would create new significant environmental impacts.

MDT kicked off the NEPA re-evaluation process during Spring 2004. During June and August 2004, MDT and its consultants hosted two public scoping meetings to re-familiarize community members with environmental issues that arose during the FEIS process and to discuss implications of proposed design modifications to the bypass. MDT received numerous comments during these meetings and revised the proposed design to incorporate many of the comments. Design revisions included 1) reconfiguring the West Reserve Drive and US 93 intersection to better accommodate traffic volumes, 2) providing pedestrian underpasses to access Lone Pine State Park and Ashley Creek Trail, 3) recommending low-impact lighting, and 4) depressing the

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Contact Information

**Environmental and Public
Comments:**

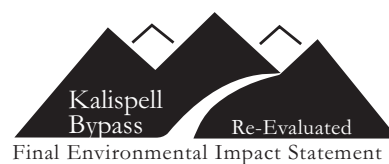
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roadway where feasible to reduce noise impacts. MDT's consultants also conducted an analysis of potential environmental impacts that would result from all of the proposed changes to the bypass concept since the 1994 FEIS (discussed below).

The design revisions and potential environmental impacts were presented to the Kalispell Technical Advisory Committee in July 2005. Because many community issues were addressed and environmental impacts reduced over the 1994 FEIS bypass concept, the design changes were approved and adopted by the City of Kalispell and Flathead County in August 2005. Also in August 2005, MDT held a third public meeting to review the revised design and disclose overall environmental impacts of the proposed changes. Final public comments received during the August 2005 meeting were primarily split between a majority who approved of the design and wished to expedite construction and those who wanted MDT to relocate the bypass to another part of the community.

Since the public meeting in August 2005, MDT and its consultants have been documenting the re-evaluation in a report and working to advance the bypass design. The draft of the re-evaluation report has been reviewed by MDT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and is in the process of being finalized.

Current Bypass Concept

The currently proposed alignment for the bypass route has not changed since the August 2004 public meeting (see figure at center). It remains along the abandoned Burlington Northern Railroad at the south end, curving northwest across Foys Lake Road and US 2, and continuing north across 3 Mile Drive and 4 Mile Drive (east of Stillwater Road). The bypass route travels north until it intersects a northeast/southwest power line,

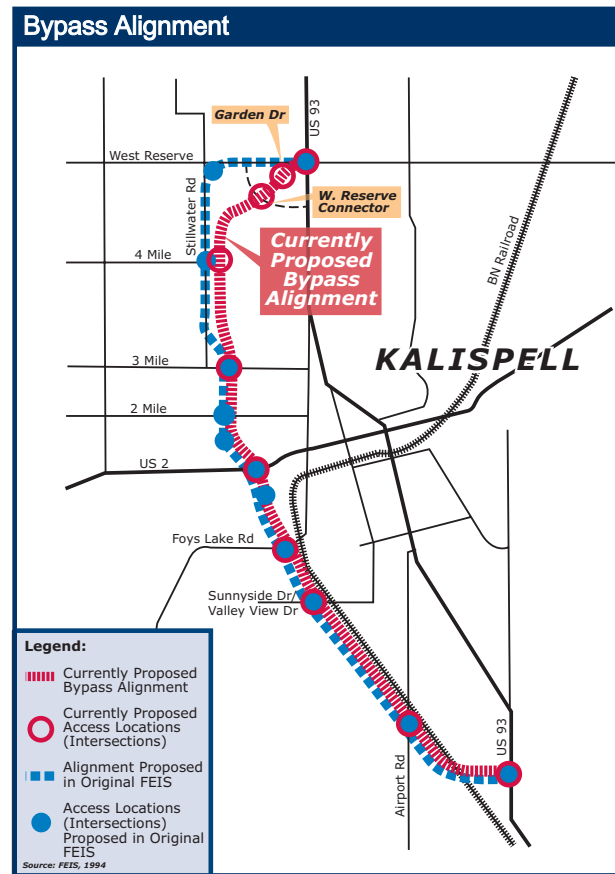
which the bypass follows back to US 93 at West Reserve Drive.

Access to the bypass will be by six grade-separated interchanges (at Airport Road, Foys Lake Road, US 2, Three Mile Drive, Four Mile Drive, West Reserve connector), two at-grade intersections (at the north and south ends), and one exit only ramp (at Sunnyside Drive).

Next Steps

The NEPA re-evaluation process is in the final stages and FHWA anticipates signing off on the environmental re-evaluation during early summer 2006. There will not be any additional large public meetings to discuss the environmental aspects of the project since all environmental impacts were disclosed at the August 2005 public meeting and there have been no new significant environmental issues raised. Copies of the final re-evaluation document will be made available summer/fall 2006 at the City of Kalispell Planning Department and the local MDT Kalispell office for review.

The next phase of the project involves meetings and decisions about which segment of the bypass to prioritize for available funding. MDT plans to discuss this important aspect with the community and is planning a public meeting in early May. Please watch for newspaper announcements and flyers from MDT announcing the meeting time and location.



Summary of Environmental Findings

Potential environmental impacts resulting from the design changes were disclosed to the community at the August 2005 public meeting. Since that time, some analyses have been refined (for example noise impacts), but there have been no additional environmental impacts identified. **The overall conclusion is that there are no new significant environmental impacts caused by the design changes.** A summary of the environmental findings by resource disclosed in August 2005 is provided below.

Resource	Finding
Land Use	No new impacts over the 1994 FEIS. The bypass has been considered in the City's and County's land use planning activities since 1995 and is included in the Kalispell 2020 Growth Policy. City and County subdivision and development approvals in the bypass corridor have been consistent with the bypass location.
Farmlands	No substantial change from the 1994 FEIS expected. Urbanization of the bypass corridor with residential and commercial development has already caused conversion of agricultural lands.
Social/Economic	No new impacts. Population and employment forecasts were updated from year 2015 to 2030 using recent growth rates. Design changes will accommodate a facility that meets vehicle demands for an additional 15 years.
Relocations	1994 FEIS identified displacement of 3 residences, 3 businesses, and 1 outbuilding. Proposed design will displace 8 residences, 3 businesses, and 2 outbuildings.
Pedestrians and Bicycles	No new impacts over the 1994 FEIS. Will see improvements over FEIS with 2 additional grade-separated pedestrian crossings.
Air Quality	No new impacts over the 1994 FEIS. May see improvement in air quality by replacing controlled stop/go intersections in FEIS with free-flowing grade separated interchanges, thereby reducing stop/start emissions and vehicle idling.
Noise	Impacts reduced from 51 receptors in 1994 FEIS to 39 receptors by realigning north end of bypass away from residential area and depressing roadway in several locations.
Water Resources	Impacts reduced from 1994 FEIS by replacing culverts on Ashley Creek with bridge structures.
Wetlands	Impacts reduced from approximately 4 acres to less than 2 acres.
Wildlife/Fisheries	No new impacts from 1994 FEIS identified.
Threatened and Endangered Species	Since the FEIS was completed, the Bull trout has been listed as a Federal threatened and endangered species. Evaluation of Bull trout habitat in the area determined that there would be <i>no effect</i> to this species.
Floodplains	No substantial change from 1994 FEIS expected.
Historic/Cultural	One new sited identified, but will not be impacted.
Parks and Recreation	No new properties impacted.
Hazardous Materials	No new sites identified.
Visual Quality	Alignment shifts at the north and south ends away from residential properties reduced localized visual impacts. Grade-separated interchanges would create a new permanent visual element, but design includes measure to reduce and minimize impacts (such as routing the bypass under some local cross roads and minimizing ramps).
Energy	No substantial change from 1994 FEIS expected.
Implementation	No substantial change from 1994 FEIS expected.
Cumulative Impacts	No substantial change from 1994 FEIS expected.
Publicly-Owned Lands (Section 4[f])	No new impacts from 1994 FEIS.