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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 conducting 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 status 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 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 the City of Kalispell was not a destination. In November 1994, the findings from the FEIS were documented in a Record of Decision (ROD) 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. Projects include Ashley Creek to Kalispell, Montana 40 South and North, Grandview North, and Somers/Ashley Creek South and North. Also around this time, MDT 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 around this time based on the results of public involvement and 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. Once the corridor preservation project was complete, MDT was able to begin passive acquisition of property needed for the Kalispell Bypass right-of-way. Passive acquisition means that MDT purchased land from willing owners who contacted MDT about selling. Today, approximately 40% of the land needed for the Bypass has been acquired through passive acquisition.

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. As a result, the Commission amended the 1997 resolution to allow for public road approaches at Airport Road, Sunnyside Drive, Foy's Lake Road, US 2, 3 Mile Drive, 4 Mile Drive, Section 36 Connector, and Garden Drive only.

Lastly, the environmental process used in the 1994 FEIS considered a 20-year traffic planning horizon to the year 2015. During early 2001, MDT recognized that this planning horizon would not meet the original Level of Service (LOS) standards when evaluated with recent increased growth and began evaluating traffic projections to the year 2030. The evaluation revealed a significant increase in projected volumes for side streets that would result in increased congestion. To accommodate the updated 2030 traffic conditions, MDT began considering design modifications to increase the service life of the facility and mitigate congestion. Potential modifications include replacing at-grade signalized intersections with grade-separated interchanges (overpasses and underpasses) to allow unimpeded traffic movement along the

Contact Information

Environmental and Public Comments:

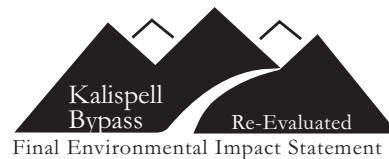
Brian Werle
Carter & Burgess, Inc.
707 17th Street, Suite 2300
Denver, CO 80202
303-223-5844 (phone)
303-820-2401 (fax)
brian.werle@c-b.com

Engineering and Design:

Mitch Stelling
Stelling Engineers, Inc.
406-452-8600
mail@stellinginc.com

Montana Department of Transportation:

Dwane Kailey
Interm District Administrator
406-523-5800
dkailey@mt.gov
TTY: 800-335-7592
or 406-444-7696



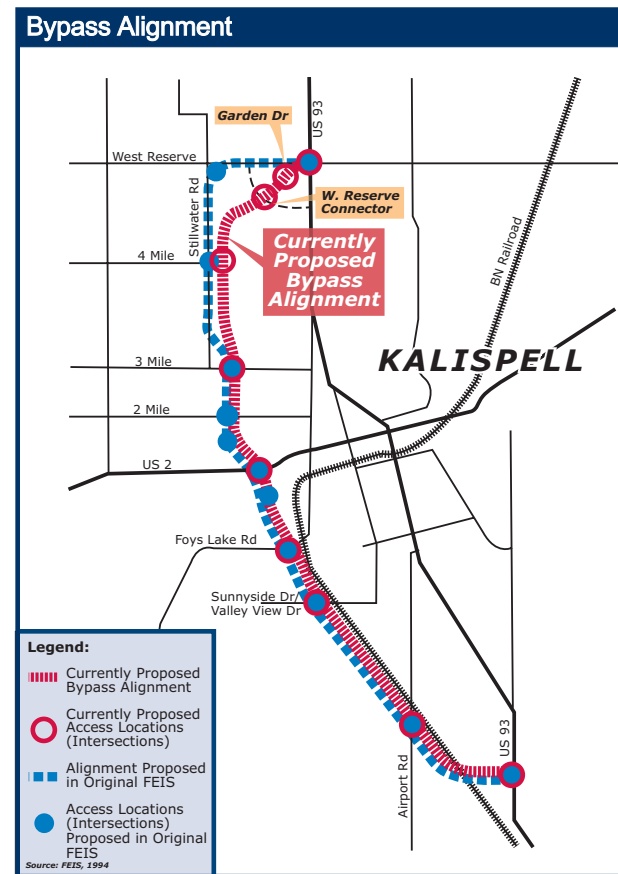
Bypass. With these intersection and alignment modifications, however, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that changes to actions contained in an FEIS be re-evaluated to determine if they create significant new environmental impacts. Therefore, MDT initiated a process to re-evaluate the FEIS to determine if the proposed design modifications to the Bypass would create significant new environmental impacts.

MDT kicked off the NEPA re-evaluation process during Spring 2004. During June and August 2004 as part of the re-evaluation process, MDT 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 Kalispell Bypass segment of the US 93 project. Community members were encouraged to provide comments to help MDT focus the re-evaluation. Comments received during and after the scoping meetings primarily focused on three areas: 1) traffic congestion at the intersection of West Reserve Drive and US 93; 2) continued access to public recreation facilities at Lone Pine State Park and Ashley Creek Bike Path; and 3) adding a pedestrian/bike path along the Bypass.

Since the public meeting in August 2004, MDT has been addressing financial challenges facing the project. After the public meeting, MDT prepared more detailed estimates to determine the cost of the proposed modifications to the Bypass. The estimates revealed that including grade-separated interchanges substantially increased the cost of the project from original estimates of \$28 million to nearly \$93 million. With this

challenge in mind, MDT went back to the engineers and planners to come up with a conceptual design that could be funded within a reasonable time frame while continuing to meet the desire for unimpeded traffic flow around the City of Kalispell.

This is where MDT is today with the Bypass project. Although funding is uncertain at this time, MDT remains fully committed to seeing the project through to completion and is actively seeking ways to fund and construct the project.



Proposed Bypass Concept

The currently proposed alignment for the Bypass route has not changed since the August 2004 public meeting (see Figure). It remains along the abandoned Burlington Northern Railroad at the south end, curving up north through Foy's Lake Road and US 2, and north through 3 Mile Drive and 4 Mile Drive to the 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.

Changes to the project currently being considered by MDT primarily regard access concepts. Access concepts discussed at the August 2004 public meeting included grade-separated interchanges with full north-south access to the Bypass at Airport Road, Foy's Lake Road, US 2, 3 Mile Drive, 4 Mile Drive, and the West Reserve Connector. Partial access was proposed at Garden Drive (right in, right out) and at Sunnyside Drive (right in only). In an effort to address funding challenges, MDT is currently looking at a variety of design and construction concepts, including a phased construction approach.

Access concepts currently proposed by MDT include:

South End:	At grade signalized intersection, full access
Airport Road:	Future access from Airport Road to the northbound Bypass Future access from southbound Bypass to Airport Road Future access from Airport Road to southbound Bypass No access from northbound Bypass to Airport Road
Sunnyside Drive:	Access from northbound Bypass to Sunnyside Drive only
Foy's Lake Road:	Diamond interchange with future full north-south access all directions
US 2:	Diamond interchange with full north-south access all directions
2 Mile Drive:	No access
3 Mile Drive:	Future access from northbound Bypass to 3 Mile Drive Future access from 3 Mile Drive to southbound Bypass No access from 3 Mile Drive to northbound Bypass No access from southbound Bypass to 3 Mile Drive
4 Mile Drive:	Future diamond interchange with full north-south access all directions
West Reserve Connector:	Diamond interchange with full north-south access all directions
Garden Drive:	Access from southbound Bypass to Garden Drive Access from Garden Drive to southbound Bypass No access from northbound Bypass to Garden Drive No access from Garden Drive to northbound Bypass
North End:	At grade signalized intersection, full access

Plans for the Future

The NEPA re-evaluation process is anticipated to be complete by winter 2005 or spring 2006. As part of the NEPA process, MDT will be hosting its third public meeting on August 9, 2005 to discuss whether the currently proposed Bypass concept creates any significant new environmental impacts not previously evaluated in the FEIS. Please watch for newspaper announcements and a flyer from MDT announcing the meeting time and location.

After the NEPA re-evaluation is complete, MDT anticipates that the design for the Bypass will require approximately 2 years. Once the design is complete, MDT can proceed with the remaining right-of-way purchases and begin utility relocation, which may take another 2 years. Therefore, the first phase of construction may not begin for 4 years. How long the construction will take after that is dependent on overall costs and availability of funding sources.

MDT encourages and appreciates your comments. Please contact Brian Werle at Carter & Burgess with questions or comments.