

6.0 COMMENTS AND COORDINATION

This section describes the integrated program of agency and public coordination and involvement activities conducted during the re-evaluation process. These activities were specifically planned and conducted to accommodate the intent of a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) re-evaluation, the Montana Environmental Protect Act (MEPA) and to provide a commensurate level of public awareness and participation. The activities were open, inclusive, and ongoing throughout the re-evaluation. The objectives of the agency and public involvement program included:

- Conduct outreach to all segments of the community.
- Provide opportunities for timely agency and public review and comment.
- Educate agencies and the public about the project, thereby enabling them to make knowledgeable and thoughtful comments.
- Provide Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the City of Kalispell, and Flathead County with well-defined and clearly stated agency and public input.

The activities of the agency and public involvement program included focused meetings with affected landowners and public interest groups, public meetings, agency briefings, mailed announcements to the project mail list, and project newsletters.

6.1 AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Agency coordination provided for the timely flow of project information between MDT, FHWA, the City of Kalispell, Flathead County, and other local agencies. MDT and/or the project team conducted meetings with these agencies to provide regular updates, identify project issues, and to coordinate the overall project. A summary of agency coordination activities is provided below.

6.1.1 Kalispell Technical Advisory Committee

Throughout the course of the re-evaluation, the project team provided regular briefings and updates to the Kalispell Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The Kalispell TAC addresses a wide range of local issues and topics and is made up of representatives from the City of

Kalispell, Flathead County, the local Chamber of Commerce, Flathead Safety Council, MDT, and citizens from both the city and county.

The project team met with and obtained input from the TAC on the following dates:

- June 21, 2004
- August 24, 2004
- April 21, 2005
- July 21, 2005

During July 2005, the TAC formally recommended to the Kalispell City Council and the Flathead County Commissioners that the proposed bypass configuration dated July 21, 2005, be approved through resolution. Subsequently, the Kalispell City Council and the Flathead County Commissioners unanimously passed resolutions approving the configuration on August 1 and 3, 2005, respectively.

6.1.2 Local Agency Coordination

The project team also held a series of meetings with City and County representatives and affected service providers and local agencies to discuss the project and obtain input. The following meetings were held:

- City and County Bypass Access Meeting: June 28, 2004
- City and County Bypass Traffic Forecasting Meeting: June 28, 2004
- Local Emergency Services Meeting: August 23, 2004
- City and County Socio-Economic Growth Allocation Meeting: October 21, 2004
- Preliminary Geometrics and Traffic Forecasting: December 14, 2004
- City, County, DNRC & School Design Issues in Section 36: January 11, 2005
- City, County and MDT Conceptual Alignment Review: April 20 and 21, 2005
- Department of Natural Resource Conservation: May 13, 2005, June 2, 2005, October 14, 2005, December 1, 2005, and miscellaneous other dates
- County Briefing Meeting: July 15, 2005
- Flathead Valley Community College: May 13, 2005, and October 12, 2005
- City, County and MDT Jurisdiction Meeting: October 13, 2005

- West Valley Fire Department: October 13, 2005
- Kalispell Fire Department: October 13, 2005

Meetings with local emergency service providers focused on identifying potential impacts to emergency response times in the vicinity of the bypass corridor. The current bypass and access locations were discussed as well as future traffic projections and congestion estimates. The overall conclusion was that response times for most providers would not be impacted by the proposed bypass configuration. The West Valley Fire Department believed that an increased response time would result from the bypass construction because of their boundaries (which overlap across the bypass), the possibility of signalization of intersections, and increased response distance from their western facility. Based upon increasing congestion, it is believed that their response time would continue to increase because there is a lack of alternative routes and increasing demand upon major arterials. The Kalispell Fire Department and Ambulance Response is planning a new station within 1,640 feet (500 meters) of the proposed bypass and would see a beneficial increase in response time with the bypass construction.

Meetings with City and County representatives were held to discuss the project and to coordinate future plans and growth needs. The meeting with City and County planners to allocate future growth in October 2004 revealed that population, employment, and traffic projections in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) were generally accurate. This meeting further allocated growth in the greater Kalispell area to 2030 to assess how the bypass would function with a longer planning horizon than the 2015 planning horizon used for the FEIS.

6.2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement activities were conducted during the FEIS re-evaluation to provide widespread awareness of the project and opportunities for timely public input to proposed design changes. Activities included newsletters, public meetings, and advertisement in local newspapers. Participants included concerned and interested citizens, property owners, special user groups, and the general public.

6.2.1 Project Mail List

A mail list was developed and maintained for the mailing of the project newsletters and announcements of project public involvement activities. The mail list was derived from a listing of affected property owners from MDT right-of-way and previously interested parties. In addition, it includes local agencies, attendees signing in at the public meetings, local groups and organizations in the area, and other individuals contacting the project team (via e-mail, fax, calls, and letters). The mail list contains approximately 350 entries.

6.2.2 Newsletters

Three project newsletters were published during the re-evaluation process. An introductory newsletter was mailed on June 19, 2004, to entries on the mail list to inform them of an introductory public meeting held on June 21, 2004. The newsletter contained an introduction to the project history and the proposed design and a general reference map, as well as contact and meeting information. The second newsletter was mailed in early August 2004 to entries on the mailing list to inform them about the second public meeting on August 24, 2004. The newsletter contained information about the FEIS re-evaluation, FEIS environmental topics, a project location map, details about the upcoming public meeting location and time, and contact information.

A third newsletter was mailed in mid June 2005 to entries on the mail list to provide an update on project activities and issues that had occurred since the August 2004 public meeting. The newsletter included descriptive text regarding the project background and history, factors leading to the decisions for the recently proposed design changes, a description of the currently proposed design concept, access concepts, and plans for the future. A map was also included that depicted the current bypass and access locations.

6.2.3 Postcard Announcement

A postcard announcing the August 2005 public meeting was mailed to all entries on the mail list for receipt 10 days in advance of the meeting. In addition to announcing the meeting, the postcard indicated the purpose of the meeting, the types of information to be available for public review and comment, a map of the bypass corridor, location of the meeting, and directions on obtaining special access or other accommodations to attend.

6.2.4 Public Meetings

Three public meetings were conducted to provide timely project information to the public and to obtain input on the proposed design changes to the bypass from the original design presented in the 1994 FEIS. A fourth public meeting is planned at the completion of this re-evaluation process. Announcements of the public meetings were mailed to entries on the project mail list. Announcements were also provided in the *Daily Interlake*, with 2-week and 1-day advance notice for each meeting. All of the public meetings were held between 5:00 pm and 8:00 pm at the West Coast Kalispell Center Hotel at 20 N. Main Street in downtown Kalispell.

Public Meeting #1 (June 21, 2004). The purpose of this kickoff meeting was to announce startup of design for the bypass and to re-familiarize the community with the project. A formal presentation was provided by the project team to summarize the project history, FEIS re-evaluation process, schedule, and design. Contact information was provided, as well as an initial opportunity for questions and comments by attendees. Sixty-seven members of the community and local officials attended this meeting.

Comments were received from the public during the question and answer period after the presentation and during the open house portion of the meeting. Attendees expressed both support for and concerns about the proposed project. Those in support indicated preference to expedite completion of the project, which has been discussed and planned for more than 20 years. Concerns about the bypass included recommendations for other bypass corridors, traffic congestion at the US 93 and West Reserve Drive intersection, reconstruction of other east-west roadways, addressing recent growth patterns, impacts to regional trails, impacts from noise to residential properties, where and how access to and from the bypass would be provided, and impacts to emergency response times.

Public Meeting #2 (August 24, 2004). The purpose of this meeting was for members of the community to provide input on scoping environmental issues and concerns for the project. The format for the meeting included an open house with a formal presentation by the MDT project team and a question and answer period at the end of the presentation. Sixty-four members of the community and local officials attended this meeting.

Project officials were available throughout the meeting to answer questions or concerns and to receive comments on the project. During the meeting, attendees viewed and commented on the currently proposed design for the bypass and environmental resources in the study area. Scoping comments were received from the public in a number of ways: personal comments given to project officials were summarized on 5 x 8 cards that were immediately displayed for public review; comment forms were completed and placed in a comment box or mailed at to the project team at a later date; and comments were received during the question and answer period at the end of the presentation. Additional comments were provided to project officials via Email after the meeting.

Similar to the first public meeting, attendees expressed both support for and concerns about the proposed project. Those in support continued to indicate a preference to expedite completion of the project as currently proposed. Concerns about the project mirrored those provided at the first public meeting, with many of the comments regarding current and future traffic conditions at the US 93 and West Reserve Drive intersection. The majority of those who were concerned about how this intersection would operate in the future preferred to have MDT consider a new bypass alignment that terminated farther north on US 93.

The majority of other concerns mentioned at the meeting included providing safe pedestrian and bicycle access to recreational sites, using low-impact lighting, reducing noise impacts to residential properties, limiting access at Sunnyside Drive/Valley View Drive, less signalization, including landscaping or other aesthetic improvements, traffic safety and congestion, and increased population growth. There were no other major concerns raised about environmental resources located in the bypass corridor.

Open House #3 (August 9, 2005). The purpose of this meeting was to update the public on design changes and improvements to the proposed bypass design since the last public meeting and to disclose preliminary environmental findings. The format for the meeting included an open house with a formal presentation by the MDT project team and a question and answer period at the end of the presentation. One hundred and twenty members of the community and local officials attended this meeting.

Materials available during the open house portion of the meeting included large-format maps detailing the current bypass and access locations and configurations, maps of environmental resources and potential impact areas, educational information and criteria regarding noise impacts, and project background and history information. The presentation provided an overview of the project background, public comments received to date, the currently proposed design, traffic conditions, preliminary environmental findings, funding constraints, and a statement from the Kalispell TAC.

Comments were received from the public in a similar manner as the second public meeting. Similar to the first two public meetings, attendees expressed both support for and concerns about the proposed project. Concerns this time, however, were more narrowly focused since MDT and the project team made revisions to the design presented at the August 2004 public meeting to address public concerns. For example, prior to the August 2005 public meeting, meetings were held with emergency services to address response time issues, pedestrian and bicycle improvements were proposed to allow safe access to recreational sites, and a major design revision was made to the US 93 and West Reserve Road intersection to improve future traffic conditions (adding a loop road). Remaining concerns raised by community members at this meeting primarily regarded relocating the bypass alignment to other locations in the community and the effects on property values along the bypass corridor.

6.2.5 Meetings with Affected Landowners and Public Interest Groups

Throughout the re-evaluation, the project team conducted meetings with affected landowners and public interest groups to obtain their feedback. Major meetings held include the following:

- Non-Motorized Groups—August 25, 2004 and October 14, 2005.
- Affected Landowners (including developers)—Ongoing meetings between June, 2004 and continuing through final design.

6.2.6 Project Advance Notification Signs

MDT recognized the need to inform persons traveling in the vicinity of the bypass, yet not aware of its planned location. In spring of 2005, MDT installed nine large signs at the major roadway intersections planned with the bypass. The signs provide visual notification of the

planned roadway and are planned to remain in place until construction of the bypass. The signs provide telephone and Email contacts.

The signs were placed at the following planned bypass intersections:

- US 93 South
- Airport Road
- Sunnyside Drive
- Foy's Lake Road
- US 2
- Two Mile Drive
- Three Mile Drive
- Parkridge and Stillwater Road (approximately at Three and half Mile Drive location)
- US 93 North/West Reserve Drive