

KALISPELL GETS FEDERAL MONEY FOR BYPASS CONVERSION

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The city of Kalispell will get a \$12.75 million slice of a \$1.5 billion federal grant program to expand a portion of the southern half of the U.S. 93 bypass around Kalispell.

The money will allow the state Department of Transportation to expand a roughly 2-mile section of the bypass from two to four lanes. The Foy's Lake roundabout will be removed and an interchange will be added, according to Kalispell Chamber of Commerce President Joe Unterreiner.

Funding is through the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development, or BUILD program that replaced the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery or TIGER grant program.

In September the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce organized a trip to Washington, D.C., to lobby for the federal money, and was joined by several community leaders including Kalispell Mayor Mark Johnson, Flathead County Commissioner Pam Holmquist and a dozen other business and civic leaders.

"What a wonderful early Christmas present for Flathead County as we continue our efforts to make the alternate route a true bypass," Holmquist said.

The bypass work is expected to be done over the next two construction seasons, according to Ed Toavs, district administrator for the Montana Department of Transportation.

"We're set up to start the RFP (request for proposal) process in January if we get the green light," Toavs said. "It all depends on how they unfold the process."

Toavs played a pivotal role in pointing local government officials toward the BUILD program, meeting early on with county and city leaders and encouraging them to explore the federal grant program. Toavs said he believed the U.S. 93 bypass was a perfect candidate for the federal funding.

The state intends to split the four-lane construction of the south-end bypass into two projects, the first starting just north of the Foy's Lake roundabout and going to the south end of the sound wall, tapering back to two lanes right before the Airport Road roundabout. The BUILD grant will pay for the first half of the project.

Toavs said funding was sought for the first 2 miles because the project essentially was build-ready, with all of the right of way acquired.

With further funding, a four-lane highway would be built from the Airport Road roundabout to the Siderius roundabout. The state still has some property to acquire in that area for that portion of the project can move forward. However, the state has selected a consultant and is getting ready to scope that work. Toavs said funding for the Airport Road to Siderius roundabout likely would go through the state's normal funding process, although grant funding could be a possibility.

The roundabouts were always intended to be temporary traffic-calming devices, Toavs said.

Kalispell Mayor Mark Johnson said "the citizens of Kalispell, and all of Flathead Valley, will benefit significantly from this grant as we continue our work to complete the Highway 93 bypass and improve the flow of traffic in our fast-growing community.

"Couple this with the TIGER grant we received to redevelop the core area of Kalispell and we are well-positioned to grow into the future and improve the lives of those who live in our community," Johnson added.

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