8.0 FUTURE PROJECT CONSIDERATIONS

Both the Contra-Flow and Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configurations maintain US 93 traffic on Spokane Avenue and 2nd Street, incorporate portions of Baker Avenue between 2nd and 13th Street, and rely on east-west connections at either 7th or 13th Streets to help meet future travel demands within the corridor. The following sections discuss general operational recommendations for each configuration and highlight future project development considerations for improvements to the US 93 corridor.

Design recommendations from past planning efforts—including the U.S. Highway 93 Somers to Whitefish West FEIS/ROD and local plans—were considered in the identification of project development considerations for corridor roadways. Since this study is a planning-level document, it does not provide details about specific design items or features. These design details would be identified during project development activities for improvement projects. A desired sequencing for making major corridor improvements associated with each configuration is presented.

8.1 Spokane Avenue Improvements

8.1.1 General Operational Recommendations

Both the Contra-Flow and Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configurations would provide a three-lane roadway accommodating two northbound driving lanes and one southbound driving lane along Spokane Avenue north of 7th Street.

South of 7th Street, the Contra-Flow Configuration provides an additional travel lane for southbound traffic and dedicated turn lanes at the 13th Street intersection. The Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configuration maintains a three-lane roadway south of 7th Street and includes widening for dedicated turn lanes at the 13th Street intersection.

8.1.2 Project Development and Design Considerations

- Preserving boulevards and the mature trees along Spokane Avenue north of 6th Street are important to local residents.

- The use of raised, landscaped medians and left turn provisions for northbound traffic may be desirable at several locations to serve commercial uses west of Spokane Avenue between 7th and 13th Streets.

- Local plans include recommendations for design elements and streetscape enhancements along portions of Spokane Avenue. Coordination with the City will be necessary during the development of improvements to consider the recommendations and determine the extent to which they can be incorporated without adversely affecting the future operation of US 93 and funding availability.

- The large-diameter culverts conveying the Whitefish River beneath Spokane Avenue have considerable remaining service life; however, local preferences are to install a new bridge when the culverts are replaced.

- Consideration must be given to whether the pavement on Spokane Avenue needs to be reconstructed or can be sufficiently rehabilitated by milling the existing surface and installing a new asphalt overlay. Reconstruction would likely ensure the roadway is capable of withstanding the demands of traffic for well over 25 years with the pavement preservation activities routinely performed by MDT. Assuming there are no significant foundation problems, milling and overlaying the existing pavement may add 10-15 years of life to the roadway.

8.2 2nd Street Improvements

8.2.1 General Operational Recommendations

The Contra-Flow and Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configurations would maintain 2nd Street as a two-lane facility but include widening for dedicated turn lanes at 2nd Street's intersections with Spokane and Baker Avenues. Both configurations would improve the street within its existing "footprint" and retain some on-street parking along both sides of 2nd Street.

8.2.2 Project Development and Design Considerations

- Providing appropriate dedicated turn lanes on 2nd Street at the intersections of Spokane and Baker Avenues and prohibiting left turns from 2nd Street onto Central Avenue is required to facilitate traffic operations with either option.

- With either configuration, there is a need to evaluate traffic signals and upgrade them as required bringing the system to current standards. Making such improvements would likely require replacing the existing traffic signals and controllers at each intersection, adding sensors to detect vehicles, and interconnecting the new signals to coordinate the operation of the three intersections along 2nd Street. An updated traffic study would needed at these intersections to obtain current peak hour turning movement data for the analyses required to establish appropriate signal timings.

- Both configurations require minor right-of-way acquisitions on the southeast corner of the intersection of 2nd and Spokane and the southwest and southeast corners of 2nd and Baker to implement intersection modifications and accommodate truck turning movements.

- A 2006 District Court ruling prohibits MDT from acquiring right-of-way through condemnation from the First American Bank property (located on the northwest

corner of the 2nd and Baker intersection). Since the Court's determination is conclusive on the issue, future improvements to the intersection of would have to be completed without acquiring any right-of-way from American Bank.

- Roadway widening for the recommended right turn lanes at 2nd Street and Baker Avenue cannot occur until the City Hall property on the northeast corner of the intersection is redeveloped and additional right-of-way becomes available. While the City has plans to relocate from the existing City Hall building, when and if the property will be redeveloped is uncertain at this time. Adding left turn lanes for east and westbound traffic will benefit operations at the intersection; however, analyses show operations at the intersection of 2nd Street and Baker Avenue will continue to operate at LOS D into the future until the right turn lanes are provided.

- Local plans include recommendations for desired design elements and streetscape enhancements along 2nd Street. Coordination with the City of Whitefish will be necessary during the development of improvements for 2nd Street to consider the recommendations and determine the extent to which they can be incorporated without adversely affecting the future operation of US 93 and impact funding availability.

- Consideration must be given to whether the pavement on 2nd Street needs to be fully reconstructed or can be sufficiently rehabilitated by milling the existing surface and installing a new asphalt overlay.

8.3 Baker Avenue Improvements

8.3.1 Operational Recommendations

The Contra-Flow and Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configurations provide a three-lane roadway with two southbound driving lanes and a northbound driving lane between 2nd and 7th Streets. The Contra-Flow Configuration then directs corridor traffic east to Spokane Avenue along a new 7th Street connection.

The Modified Alternative C (Offset) option continues the three-lane configuration on Baker Avenue south of 7th Street to 13th Street.

8.3.2 Project Development and Design Considerations

- Areas of new right-of-way acquisition are anticipated along Baker Avenue south of the Whitefish River to accommodate roadway widening.

- There is a need to add capacity (roadway width) to the existing bridge over the Whitefish River on Baker Avenue by either widening the existing structure or building a new bridge.

- Areas of new right-of-way acquisition are anticipated along Baker Avenue south of the Whitefish River to accommodate roadway widening.

- The Modified Alternative C (Offset) configuration would require widening to provide dedicated turn lanes at Baker Avenue's intersection with 13th Street.

- The City's Transportation Plan has identified the intersection of Baker Avenue and 13th Street as a potential location for a new traffic signal. The Modified Alternative C (Offset) configuration would incorporate a new traffic signal and dedicated turn lanes at the intersection of Baker Avenue and 13th Street.

- Design features like landscaped boulevards and decorative street lighting exist on Baker Avenue between 10th and 13th Streets.

- Consideration must be given to whether the pavement on affected sections of Baker Avenue needs to be reconstructed or rehabilitated by milling the existing surface and installing a new asphalt overlay.

8.4 7th Street Construction

8.4.1 Operational Recommendations

The Contra-Flow Configuration would provide a three-lane roadway accommodating two eastbound driving lanes and a westbound driving lane between Spokane and Baker Avenues. The Contra-Flow Configuration would also extend 7th Street between Spokane and Kalispell Avenues.

The Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configuration would not provide a roadway connection between Spokane and Baker Avenues at 7th Street or extend 7th Street east of Spokane Avenue to Kalispell Avenue.

8.4.2 Project Development and Design Considerations

- The installation of traffic signals and the addition of appropriate turn lanes would be required at 7th Street's intersections with Spokane and of Baker Avenues.

- New right-of-way (including a business acquisition) would be needed to accommodate the construction of 7th Street between Spokane and Kalispell Avenues and the new 7th Street river crossing.

8.5 13th Street Improvements

8.5.1 Operational Recommendations

The Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configuration would provide a three-lane roadway accommodating one westbound driving lane and two eastbound driving lanes between Spokane and Baker Avenues.

The Contra-Flow Configuration would not require any improvements to 13th Street since 7th Street would serve as the east-west connection between Spokane and Baker Avenues.

8.5.2 Project Development and Design Considerations

- As noted previously, the Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configuration would incorporate a new traffic signal and dedicated turn lanes at the intersection of Baker Avenue and 13th Street.

- Additional right-of-way, most notably on the northeast corner of the intersection of Baker Avenue and 13th Street, would likely be needed to accommodate roadway widening for dedicated turn lanes. The City of Whitefish has been approached regarding a project to construct a new gas station on the northeast corner of the intersection of Baker Avenue and 13th Street.

- Commercial buildings along 13th Street between Spokane and Baker Avenues limit available right-of-way.

- Consideration must be given to whether the pavement on 13th Street between Spokane and Baker Avenues needs to be reconstructed or can be adequately rehabilitated by milling and overlaying the roadway.

8.6 Pedestrian and Bicyclist Facilities

Within the corridor, sidewalks currently parallel both sides of Spokane Avenue, 2nd Street, Baker Avenue and 13th Street. Marked pedestrian crosswalks exist at four signalized intersections along Spokane Avenue and 2nd Street, at 4th and 5th Streets on Spokane Avenue, and at four locations along Baker Avenue.

Spokane and Baker Avenues between 2nd and 13th Streets and 2nd Street are designated as proposed bicycle routes in the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. 13th Street is not part of a designated bicycle route. Only Baker Avenue between 10th and 13th Streets has marked bicycle lanes along each side of the roadway. Bicyclists must use the roadway or its shoulders/parking areas for travel on other corridor roadways.

Both configurations seek to perpetuate and/or enhance existing pedestrian and bicyclist facilities within the corridor.

8.6.1 Design and Project Development Considerations

- Consider the policies and recommendations for pedestrian and bicyclist facilities within the corridor found in local plans and coordinate with the City about how future corridor improvements can facilitate their implementation.

- Local preferences are to install a new bridge and provide grade-separated pedestrian/bicyclist trail connections at the Whitefish River crossing on Spokane Avenue when the existing culverts are replaced.

- Accepted design guidance for bicycle facilities indicates that on streets with two-way traffic, a one-way bicycle lane should be provided on each side of the roadway. With this in mind, consider providing 5-foot wide bicycle lanes along each side of Spokane and Baker Avenues.

- Right-of-way limitations, the need to accommodate through traffic and turning movements, and the desire to retain some on-street parking makes it difficult to add bicycle lanes along both sides of 2nd Street between Spokane and Baker Avenues.

- Ensure that sidewalks at least 5-feet wide are perpetuated along each side of corridor roadways and modify or install curb ramps at intersections where needed to meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

8.7 Improvement Priorities and Suggested Sequencing

Since implementing a single comprehensive project to upgrade the entire Whitefish Urban corridor and other affected roadways is unlikely, this study outlines a desired sequencing for implementing corridor improvements under each design configuration.

The recommended sequencing recognizes that federal and state funding for corridor improvements will likely be limited over the foreseeable future. Additionally, providing left turn lanes for eastbound and westbound traffic at the intersection at 2nd Street and Baker Avenue and installing a new coordinated signal system, are high priorities for the City of Whitefish and can notably enhance the operation of the corridor. Another consideration for determining a desired sequencing for improvements was the need to have adequate alternate routes for local and through traffic in place during reconstruction activities on Spokane and Baker Avenues.

Given the funding situation currently facing MDT and other uncertainties related to the timing of downtown redevelopment projects, there was no attempt to identify when the recommended corridor improvements should be implemented over the planning

horizon for this study. It is recognized that the funding situation could change or other factors may ultimately influence the how corridor improvements were implemented.

The following general priorities were established for implementing corridor-related improvements under the configurations of interest:

CONTRA-FLOW CONFIGURATION

PRIORITY 1: 2nd Street Improvements and Signal Upgrades
PRIORITY 2: Add Capacity to the Baker Avenue Bridge
PRIORITY 3: Baker Avenue Reconstruction/Upgrades
PRIORITY 4: 7th Street Bridge and 7th Street Connection
PRIORITY 5: Spokane Avenue Reconstruction/Upgrades

MODIFIED ALTERNATIVE C (OFFSET) CONFIGURATION

PRIORITY 1: 2nd Street Improvements and Signal Upgrades
PRIORITY 2: Add Capacity to the Baker Avenue Bridge
PRIORITY 3: Baker Avenue and 13th Reconstruction/Upgrades
PRIORITY 4: Spokane Avenue Reconstruction/Upgrades

The suggested sequencing would help address some of the long-standing operational problems at the intersection of 2nd Street and Baker Avenue intersection and enhance traffic flows along 2nd Street. Traffic would likely have to be detoured off 2nd Street at Spokane and Baker Avenues at times to accommodate to reconstruction activities.

Adding capacity at the bridge across the Whitefish River on Baker Avenue would eliminate a "bottleneck" created by the existing structure. A project to widen the Baker Avenue bridge would provide a new structure capable of accommodating the preferred lane configuration on Baker Avenue under either configuration. This would allow the structure to be in place before reconstruction efforts were undertaken on the remainder of the street. Traffic could be detoured around the Baker Avenue bridge project area by using Spokane Avenue and 2nd Street or 7th Street and Karrow Avenue to access West 2nd Street.

Adding the 7th Street bridge and 7th Street connection as called for under the Contra-Flow Configuration is an improvement that could happen at almost any time during implementation. However, some of the operational benefits made possible by making this new street connection would not be realized until after capacity improvements were completed on Baker Avenue. Having the 7th Street bridge in place would provide opportunities for detours around work areas during the reconstruction of Spokane Avenue.

Under the Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configuration, rebuilding Baker Avenue and 13th Street may best be accomplished in two phases using 7th Street as a possible split point to help minimize traffic disruptions. Work north of 7th Street could be accomplished relatively quickly since the recommended improvements north of the

bridge would all occur within the existing "footprint" of Baker Avenue. South of the river, Baker Avenue and 13th Street require right-of-way acquisition and more extensive reconstruction work. Phasing the work on Baker Avenue in this manner would allow for the opportunity to use 7th Street and Karrow as a detour route around the work area. Other than using Spokane Avenue, detour options are limited for Baker Avenue in the area south of the Whitefish River.

Because a specific timeline for implementing improvement projects has not been identified, periodic monitoring of corridor conditions is important to help determine when further improvements or actions might be needed. The monitoring effort could be focused on readily available measures of performance like traffic volumes and crash data and tied to performance thresholds that indicate the need for action. The City's review of new developments or major redevelopment proposals and MDT's System Impact Assessment Process (SIAP) reviews could also be used to help signal the need for corridor improvements.