The Dern Road and Springcreek Road intersection along Highway 2 West has seen too many crashes in the Flathead Valley. Between 2003 and 2014, there were 48 crashes at this intersection, including one fatality.

This trend must stop.

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is committed to developing a solution to eliminate serious injuries and deaths across our state’s roadways and at the Dern and Springcreek intersection.

To reduce the risk of future crashes, the Montana Department of Transportation is in the process of completing plans to install a roundabout that functions well for large vehicles while simultaneously reconfiguring the surrounding landscape to provide a flatter hillside and increased line of sight for drivers.

CONSTRUCTION TIMING & ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

Construction for the Dern and Springcreek project is tentatively scheduled to begin in the spring of 2021. Because the area is being reconfigured, drivers will not experience delays throughout the majority of construction. Work will be occurring to the north of the Dern and Springcreek Road intersection and will be away from the current flow of traffic.

Once the roundabout is in place, drivers will slow to 15-20 MPH to navigate through the intersection. As upwards of 90% of commuters are traveling east and west, the roundabout is estimated to handle current and anticipated traffic volumes for 20 years by providing an intersection that meets current standards and driver expectations. Flaggers or pilot cars will be on hand to direct traffic through the construction zone as needed. Drivers on West Springcreek Road may experience more delay due to the realignment of the intersection, but these impacts are temporary.
Alternatives such as a traffic signal or four-way stop serve as a device to assign right-of-way to traffic; they aren’t effective in reducing crashes. At the Dern/Springcreek intersection, the points of conflict will be reduced from 32, as it sits now, to just 8 once the roundabout is installed.

DESIGNED TO SAVE LIVES: WHY A ROUNDABOUT REDUCES THE RISK OF CRASHES

Twelve alternatives were examined for the Dern and Springcreek Road intersection. This project’s primary goal is saving lives. A roundabout is the only alternative that can bring this goal to reality.

When navigating roundabouts, drivers slow to 15 - 20 MPH and travel in the same direction, significantly reducing the likelihood and severity of a crash. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that on average, roundabouts reduce fatalities by 90%, serious injury crashes by 75%, and all crashes by 37%.

In addition, based on 50 years of traffic data assessed and a thorough analysis of projected growth, a roundabout will efficiently handle traffic volumes for the next 20 years without additional investment.

REDUCED INJURY CRASHES BY 75% at intersections where stop signs or signals were previously used for traffic control.

90% REDUCTION in fatal accidents

40% REDUCTION in pedestrian accidents

37% REDUCTION in overall collisions

*When compared to traditional intersections.

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The current plan is to relocate the intersection approximately 120 feet northwest of its current position, so that the intersection cuts into the hillside, providing a flatter intersection for the roundabout to be built upon. By the time drivers get to the roundabout, they’ll be on a much more level approach. This doesn’t apply just to vehicles approaching the roundabout on Highway 2 West. Shifting the intersection will allow a realignment on West Springcreek Road to provide a much more reasonable grade leading into the intersection. In addition, MDT will level out some of the hillside around the intersection. To reduce the “sag” in Highway 2 east of the intersection, MDT will move some of that hillside dirt under the main roadway, raising the low point east of the intersection up approximately seven feet. This will reduce the big dip that could create an issue for both cars and large/long rigs coming through a roundabout in this area.
The preliminary estimate at this time is $3.9 million to construct the roundabout and improve the grade of the roadway at the Dern/Springcreek intersection, the vast majority of which will be funded using federal safety improvement dollars. This means the project does not take from the state budget.

**BUDGET & COST ESTIMATE:**
THE DERN AND SPRINGCREEK PROJECT IS ESTIMATED TO COST $3.9 MILLION.

**THIS INVESTMENT WILL PROVIDE:**

- A new roundabout at the Dern and Springcreek Road intersection
- A flattened hillside and slope on Highway 2
- Pedestrian crossings to the roundabout with signage alerting drivers of pedestrians
- Visibility improvements
- A proven measure for a safer roadway

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MDT has always planned to replace the Foys Lake roundabout and the Airport Road roundabout with overpasses and expand the south half of the bypass to four lanes. After the completion of the north end of the bypass, traffic volumes increased dramatically to reach the 2030 projections. The increase in traffic volume creates challenges at the Foys Lake roundabout, where the bypass transitions from four lanes to two lanes.

The Dern and Springcreek roundabout is on an established highway, where traffic trends are well tracked and future traffic volumes can be predicted accurately. Traffic volumes at the Foys Lake roundabout are 50% more than those clocked at the Dern/Springcreek intersection. The roundabout has the capacity to accommodate the project traffic up to 2040 at a minimum.

The vast majority of traffic will be traveling through the roundabout on Highway 2 West traveling either east or west. A very small percentage will enter from either Dern Road or West Springcreek Road, which will allow for a free-flow of traffic on Highway 2 through the intersection. When vehicles do need to enter from either Dern Road or West Springcreek Road, the roundabout offers those vehicles an option with significantly reduced risks for a severe injury or fatal crash.
Slowing traffic traveling through the intersection on Highway 2 West will make a safe crossing for pedestrians to access the shared-use path along the south side of US 2. This crossing does not exist today. For pedestrians, another safety benefit of the roundabout are median refuges in the crosswalk on each of the roundabout's four intersecting legs. Pedestrians only cross one lane of traffic at a time, allowing them to focus on a single lane of oncoming traffic (instead of traffic coming from two directions at the same time), cross into the raised median refuge, and then stop to focus to cross the other lane while they are in the refuge island. Pedestrian crossings will be placed at each entrance/exit to the roundabout with signage alerting drivers of pedestrian traffic. Pedestrians are advised to look both ways for crossing, wait for a break in traffic and cross using the designated crosswalk.

Cyclists should navigate the roundabout just like they would any other stretch of roadway by traveling with the flow of traffic, yielding at the entrance to the roundabout like a car would, and by proceeding through the roundabout without stopping. Those on the trail system will utilize the crosswalks in the same manner as a pedestrian. Cyclists have all the rights and responsibilities of a pedestrian and can also use the pedestrian facilities along the shared-use path.
HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO DESIGN AND BUILD A MDT PROJECT?

**LONG RANGE PLANNING**
This can take 5 – 20 years, depending on the project size and complexity, amount of community engagement, budget required, etc.

**PROJECT IDENTIFIED**
A project is identified, such as a congested thoroughfare that needs additional capacity, a road that needs to be completely rebuilt due to age, or one that has been identified as needing significant safety upgrades.

**DEVELOPMENT PHASE**
12 months to get the project on the short list of upcoming road construction projects.

**SURVEY PHASE**
8 – 24 months to make sure everything above and below ground is properly mapped and understood.

**DESIGN PHASE**
15 – 36 months to take all of the information MDT has carefully collected and use that info to design the best possibly facility for our community.

**RIGHT OF WAY PHASE**
6 – 12 months to secure all the necessary space to build the right facility and amenities (like accessible pedestrian paths and adequate lighting for safety).

**CONSTRUCTION PHASE**
8 – 24 months to start the work that you see every day on Montana roads, like excavation, paving, and other road construction.

Residents are encouraged to get involved in the planning process as early as possible; the earlier you engage with MDT on a project, the more influence you can have on the outcome of that project. By the time construction starts, most plans are already in motion.
1. SLOW DOWN when approaching a roundabout, and be prepared to stop.

2. LOOK TO THE LEFT as traffic flows in a counter-clockwise direction. Yield to ALL vehicles already in the roundabout, they have the right of way.

3. STAY IN YOUR LANE when entering a roundabout. Merge into the traffic flow when it is safe.

4. TRAVEL AROUND THE CIRCLE in a counterclock-wise direction until you reach your desired street. Use your right-turn signal to exit the roundabout.

ALL VEHICLES MUST YIELD TO PEDESTRIANS WHO ARE IN THE ROUNDABOUT

The Montana Department of Transportation understands that not all Montana drivers have had formal roundabout driving education. We’re stepping in to try and lessen that learning curve.

Additional resources, including fun how-to videos, can be found online by visiting http://bit.ly/MTRoundabouts.
The Dern/Springcreek project is being designed to save lives. We want to hear from you as to how we can best work as a community to transition our Vision Zero goal into a reality. Share your thoughts with us, sign up for updates, and be part of the solution.

**EMAIL UPDATES**
Contact Katie at katie@bigskypublicrelations.com to subscribe.

**SMS TEXTING UPDATES**
Text DERN to 41411.

**PROJECT HOTLINE**
406-207-4484 during business hours.

**WEBSITE**

Without good roads, bridges, and intersections, traveling safely and efficiently through Montana would be very difficult. More deaths and injuries would occur, and it would be harder to do business, visit family or organize public events such as sporting events and concerts. Having good roads, bridges, and other transportation systems and educating drivers how to use them, is critical to building strong communities and a strong state. This is a big job, especially in a huge, rural state with many highways.

Fortunately, the public has tasked the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) with this job. MDT is responsible for providing transportation systems and services that are safe and affordable and that protect the environment and support economic growth for our state.