Chapter 1  Project Introduction and Coordination

1.1  Introduction

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), Lake County, and the City of Polson-- in partnership with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) -- initiated a community-wide transportation planning process both to evaluate existing transportation system performance and to examine future system needs over a 20-year planning horizon. The Polson community has experienced considerable growth not only within the City but also in the outlying areas of the County. Through collaboration and outreach to the greater Polson community, this transportation planning document was developed to provide guidance to decision makers on transportation system improvements.

A Technical Oversight Committee (TOC) was established to help guide the transportation planning process, establish goals and priorities for the Plan, and to review the findings. Included in the TOC were representatives from CSKT, Lake County, the City of Polson, MDT, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). During the Plan development process, the TOC solicited input from the citizens of the greater Polson community who commonly use the area’s street and highway system. The Plan was a positive step in assessing and planning for the area’s transportation infrastructure.

This plan also drew from the US 93 Polson Corridor Study (2011) which was a parallel effort developed in conjunction with this Plan. The outcome of the US 93 Polson Corridor Study identified two potential alternate routes of US 93 as being feasible if and when funding becomes available. Therefore, as part of any alignment discussion through or around Polson the existing US 93 corridor will need to be considered as an option.

Included in this Plan are an examination of traffic operations, the roadway network, the non-motorized transportation system, trip reduction strategies, and growth management techniques. This document also identifies concerns with the existing transportation system and offers recommendations in the form of improvement projects and programs that will address existing concerns and/or meet future needs.

1.2  Study Area

All transportation plans begin by defining the study area. Sometimes this study area follows governmental boundaries such as city limits, but most often study areas include areas outside city limits in which future growth may occur. As part of the planning process, the study area boundary was developed for the following two purposes:

1.  To include areas where growth has recently occurred, or is anticipated to occur, in the foreseeable future, and

2.  To contain the study area originally used in the 2006 Polson Growth Policy.

In the 2006 Polson Growth Policy, the planning area included a two-mile radius of the incorporated city limits of Polson (excluding Flathead Lake). This generally is adequate to capture those areas surrounding the City that are anticipated to grow over the 20-year planning period. However, several areas not
formally included in the Plan’s study area boundary may exert development pressure which could affect the transportation system within the study area boundary. These generally include most of the unincorporated area of Lake County that may seek services or recreational opportunities in Polson. Even though these areas may be outside of the boundary, travel back and forth into Polson will have an impact on the transportation system and thus has been captured in the analysis techniques for the Plan. This phenomenon was captured primarily via land use forecasting inside the study area boundary and analysis of historic traffic volume growth along US 93 outside the study area boundary. Results of the forecasting became one of the inputs into the TransCAD travel demand model, which was used to evaluate impacts to the transportation system.

Figure 1-1 shows the Plan’s study area boundary, which includes all of the major employers in the area, and consists of all the areas that may be used for employment centers in the next twenty years. It also involves residential land uses that may develop in the area, and those areas likely to increase the housing supply in the future and subsequently add traffic onto the transportation system. Areas outside the formal study area boundary will still have an effect on the transportation system within the study area boundary. Land use changes outside of the “formal” boundary are still accounted for and incorporated into the travel demand model; however precise transportation system impacts are not identified outside of the “formal” study area boundary.
Figure 1-1 Transportation Plan Area Boundary
1.3 Community Transportation Goals and Objectives

The community of Polson has several transportation concerns that affect the efficiency and operations of the existing system because transportation is a major concern to area residents. Thus, various Plan partners expect this concern to remain high as growth continues and as the challenges of accommodating travel needs become more difficult.

Overall, this Plan created an opportunity for tribal, city, county, state officials, and residents to work together in developing the kind of approaches necessary for a transportation system which will not only serve the community’s citizens well into the future but which will also comply with state and federal requirements. To achieve this, existing goals and objectives currently in place by each of the Plan partners were reviewed. These goals and objectives were garnered from local planning documents and have been presented to the public via the entities’ public review processes. In addition, the existing goals and objectives were reviewed with the community at the first informational meeting held on this planning effort. After this meeting, a set of goals and objectives for this Plan were developed, reviewed by the Plan partners and community, and utilized to guide the Plan. The goals and objectives for this Plan are as follows:

Goal #1: Provide a safe, efficient, accessible, and cost-effective transportation system that offers viable choices for moving people and goods throughout the community.

Objectives:

- Plan and implement an efficient, long-range transportation system which will ensure that both public and private investments in transportation infrastructure will support land use decisions of the community.
- Plan a logical, efficient long-range transportation system that can be systematically implemented by right-of-way preservations and by advance acquisition procedures.
- Meet both the current and the future transportation needs of the greater Polson area that can be maintained with available resources.
- Provide adequate emergency service access to residents in and around the Plan’s Study Area Boundary.
- Develop a “Major Street Network” that classifies existing roadways or future corridors by functional usage.
- Address the transportation needs of business and commerce both locally and regionally.
- Recognize the cultural diversity found within the Plan’s Study Area Boundary.
- Plan for adequate access and egress to high volume traffic generation points.
- Conduct a comprehensive data collection effort that will include vehicular counts, truck counts, bicycle movements, and pedestrian usage at the intersections identified for the Plan.

- Review the most recent three-year accident history and crash statistics to evaluate potential safety concerns and possible mitigation efforts that can improve and/or resolve identified concerns on the existing transportation system.

- Identify comprehensive safety measures, other than engineering and construction, that may educate the public on safety matters and improved safety conditions within the community.

- Examine population and employment growth trends to assess demographic changes and how those changes may affect transportation system users over the 20-year planning horizon.

- Develop a 20-year traffic model that can be used to predict future transportation system needs as growth occurs within the Plan’s Study Area Boundary.

- Identify current and foreseeable traffic concerns based on engineering analysis and planning projections.

**Goal #2:** *Make transit and non-motorized modes of transportation viable alternatives to the private automobile for travel in and around the community.*

**Objectives:**

- Support alternatives to single occupancy vehicles such as implementing TDM strategies and providing alternative travel modes.

- Establish safe pedestrian and bicycle access in designated areas by:
  
  - *Considering pedestrian/bicycle needs when new roads are planned and designed.*
  
  - *Considering the improvement and dedication of bikeways and pedestrian paths through developing areas.*
  
  - *Providing widened shoulders where practicable to accommodate pedestrians/bicycles on existing roadways.*
  
  - *Preference to provide for physical separation between motorized and non-motorized traffic where practicable.*

- Encourage the kind of mixed-use development that integrates compatible residential, office, and commercial uses which can reduce the need for automobile trips.

- Encourage walkable neighborhoods, both within existing developed areas and new residential and commercial subdivisions.
- Identify and incorporate, as applicable, Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies to provide alternatives to private vehicle travel.

- Integrate climate change strategies into the transportation planning process to the extent practicable by providing an assessment of alternative travel modes.

**Goal #3:** Provide an open public involvement process in development of the transportation system and in implementation of transportation improvements so community standards and values (such as aesthetics, cultural and environmental resources, and neighborhood protection) are incorporated.

**Objectives:**

- Provide for citizen involvement in the planning and implementation of transportation plans and projects.

- Respect the area’s natural, cultural, and historic context and minimize adverse impacts to the environment and existing neighborhoods.

- Minimize negative transportation effects upon residential neighborhoods.

- Encourage the kind of transportation improvements that preserve the natural panorama of skylines and sightlines and that are compatible with historic, cultural, and environmental resources.

- Evaluate and identify transportation system needs of area schools, and address existing and future transportation issues as appropriate.

- Meet the unique transportation needs of the area’s elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged populations.

- Carry forward the design philosophy contained in the US 93 Evaro to Polson Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that recognizes the unique “Spirit of Place” found within the Flathead Reservation. Here, key concepts include “the road as a visitor to the land”, and through unique design solutions “the spirit of place” can be preserved and respected to provide inspiration and guidance.

**Goal #4:** Provide a financially sustainable Transportation Plan that can be actively used to guide the transportation decision-making process throughout the course of the next 20 years.

**Objectives:**

- Review all existing and on-going planning reports and studies for compatibility during development of the Plan.

- Identify funding mechanisms that may be viable to the traditional funding programs currently used to fund transportation system improvements.
Goal #5: Identify and protect future road corridors to serve future developments and public lands.

Objectives:

- Develop a Plan to address forecasted transportation growth needs.
- Identify future corridors and future connections to existing roadways in order to acquire appropriate right of way and improvements. This includes coordination with the US 93 Polson Corridor Study results.

1.4 Previous Transportation Planning Efforts and Information

In the course of data collection, past plans and studies were obtained. From the review of these documents, applicable issues were incorporated into this Plan. These contributing documents are as follows:

- Polson Growth Policy (2006);
- Flathead Reservation Transportation Plan (2007-2017);
- Flathead Reservation Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) (2010-2014);
- City of Polson Standards for Design & Construction (2008);
- Polson Development Code;
- Lake County Subdivision Regulations;
- Montana Department of Labor and Industry data;
- U.S. Census Bureau data;
- Polson Fire District;
- 1996 US 93 Evaro-Polson FEIS;
- 2001 Re-evaluation of US 93 Evaro-Polson FEIS; and
- Socioeconomic data.

1.5 Community Involvement Strategy

A Public Participation Plan was developed to identify community involvement activities necessary for successful completion of the Plan. The Public Participation Plan ensured a proactive community involvement process that involved the public in all phases of the planning process. This was accomplished by providing complete information, timely public notice, opportunities for making comments, and ensuring full access to key decisions.
1.5.1 Goals of Public Involvement & Outreach Effort

Community participation was a key component in this transportation planning process. Numerous community participation strategies were utilized to reach as many people as possible and to gather essential information which would guide the study team.

The goal of the study partners and the consultant was to have ongoing public involvement for the planning process. Education and public outreach were an essential part of fulfilling the local entities’ responsibility to inform the public about the transportation plan processes. All four contracting entities (CSKT, Lake County, the City of Polson, and MDT) sought to encourage public involvement and meaningful participation.

1.5.2 Community Participation Procedures

This Plan encouraged community participation in identifying and commenting on transportation issues at every stage of the planning process. Participants in this process included:

- The general public – residents of the City of Polson, the Flathead Reservation, and adjacent unincorporated areas (Lake County) affected by the planning efforts;
- Landowners and business owners affected within the study area boundaries;
- The Technical Oversight Committee (TOC) – made up of 11 representatives of the study partners, including the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA); and
- Stakeholders and Outreach Groups.

The general public was kept informed of all aspects of the planning process, and their input was sought throughout the process.

1.5.3 Publications

Meeting announcements were developed and advertised in local papers, three weeks, and again one week, prior to meetings. The ads announced the meeting location, time, and date, the format and purpose of the meeting, and (when applicable) the locations where documents were available for review.

Also newsletters were made available one month prior to each of the informational meetings. Newsletters described work in progress, results achieved, preliminary recommendations, and other related topics. Each newsletter was delivered in electronic medium to CSKT, Lake County, the City of Polson, MDT, and to select stakeholders for use in posting to their individual internet sites.

1.5.4 Radio and Television

Meetings were also announced on local radio and television stations. Input from the TOC identified the most popular radio and television stations on which announcements were made.
1.5.5 Stakeholder Contact List
A stakeholder contact list was produced that included individuals, businesses, and groups identified by the CSKT, Lake County, City of Polson, and by MDT. The intent of developing the stakeholder list was to identify those individuals and groups to actively seek out and engage in all phases of the development of the Plan. Individuals who attended informational meetings were also added to the stakeholder list.

1.5.6 Document Availability
Documents and newsletters were made available in hard copy format at the offices of CSKT, Lake County, City of Polson, and MDT. In addition, electronic copies of plan deliverables were posted on the study website at:

http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/polsontransplan/

1.5.7 Meetings

Technical Oversight Committee Meetings
TOC meetings were scheduled every month for the duration of the fifteen-month planning process. Individuals included in the meetings were the Consultant, CSKT, Lake County, City of Polson, FHWA, MDT personnel, and others as needed. Meetings were intended to track progress and to address plan development issues and questions and were considered an important way to exchange information and ideas during the entire development of the plan. Throughout these meetings, many issues, problems, and possible solutions were identified and discussed.

Informational Meetings
Three formal informational meetings were held throughout the duration of the planning process. The first informational meeting was a combined Transportation Plan and US 93 Corridor Study meeting to discuss and identify the issues and visioning to help focus community perceptions and goals, as well as to identify issues that should be addressed as part of the transportation planning effort. This initial effort was very interactive and proved to be very effective in gaining community attention and input.

The second informational meeting was also a combined Transportation Plan and US 93 Corridor Study meeting that occurred after initial field studies were completed and the transportation-related problems were defined. The purpose of this gathering was to review the identified areas of concern with the community and to assure that all major transportation problems had been included in the analysis.

The third and final informational meeting was held to present the draft transportation plan, take questions, and solicit input from the community. The purpose of the meeting was to highlight the recommended transportation improvement options including major street network (MSN) projects, transportation system management (TSM) projects, and non-motorized network recommendations for the community of Polson.
1.6 **Coordination Summary**

The following table (Table 1.1) summarizes the formal coordination that occurred over the course of this planning project. This includes all scheduled meetings, including TOC meetings and workshops, and formal informational meetings. Additionally, informal dialogue occurred regularly between agency partners and the consultant.

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