



NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES

TONGUE RIVER ROAD (S-332) – Corridor Planning Study

FINAL



Prepared for:

Montana Department of Transportation

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CORRIDOR NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES

1.0 CORRIDOR NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES

Needs and Objectives for the Secondary Route 332 (S-332) corridor within the study area were identified based on a comprehensive review of existing data, and input from resource agencies, stakeholders and the public. The needs and objectives are important in explaining why an improvement option, or options, may be necessary. The discussion and analysis leading to the development of these needs and objectives recognizes the diverse nature of the corridor and takes into account social, economic and environmental conditions.

The following needs and objectives will be used in the development of improvement options. Note that needs and objectives will be met to the extent practicable given financial, public preference and environmental constraints within the corridor. Improvement options identified in this study may lead to future projects. The “Purpose and Need” statement for any future project should be consistent with the needs and objectives contained in this study. However, not all of the needs and objectives at the corridor level are required to be included in a project-level “Purpose and Need” statement. For example, a simple gravel road resurfacing project may have little to no effect on wildlife connectivity objectives, thus rendering compliance with the intent of that particular objective unnecessary.

1.1. NEED NUMBER 1: IMPROVE SAFETY AND OPERATION OF S-332

At the current time, S-332 primarily serves adjacent landowners by providing a travel route for various agricultural and ranching operations to the economic hub of Miles City. S-332 also provides a crucial link between Ashland and Miles City. In the future, and depending on the development of coal mining operations at the Otter Creek coal tracts, S-332 may realize increased passenger and vehicular traffic. Need number 1 recognizes that the roadway must be safe and efficient to meet the travelling needs of the public, both for through traffic and local traffic. To address this need, improvement options and /or management strategies are necessary for the corridor to achieve a higher level of safety and improve operations. This can be achieved by improving the roadway to meet current design standards (to the extent practicable), providing adequate clear zones, improving drainage conditions, providing consistent road and bridge widths for “all-weather” travel, and properly maintaining the roadway.

Objectives (To the Extent Practicable)

- Improve geometric elements to meet current MDT design criteria.
- Accommodate existing and future capacity demands within the corridor, including potential increases in semi-truck traffic.
- Provide adequate clear zones to meet current MDT design criteria.
- Provide appropriate drainage facilities throughout the corridor to minimize water on the roadway.
- Provide consistent roadway and bridge widths.
- Provide appropriate surfacing to allow for “all-weather” travel.
- Improve maintenance practices, given limited funding, to address washboards, potholes, and dust issues.

1.2. NEED NUMBER 2: PRESERVE THE ENVIRONMENTAL, SCENIC, CULTURAL, RECREATIONAL AND AGRICULTURAL NATURE OF THE CORRIDOR

S-332 has high scenic value, and provides access to agricultural and recreational lands. Because of the corridor's location, wildlife and aquatic connectivity, as well as historic, cultural and archaeological integrity, are areas of concern. All improvement options should be evaluated for their ability to reduce animal-vehicle collisions. Improvements should be considered that provide both wildlife and aquatic connectivity. Numerous animal-vehicle collisions are realized within the corridor. There must be sensitivity to the rich historic, cultural and archaeological integrity of the area. All improvements should be reviewed for their potential impact to the environmental, scenic, cultural, recreational and agricultural aspects of the corridor.

Objectives (To the Extent Practicable)

- Respect the scenic nature of the corridor with respect to view sheds and landscape features.
- Avoid adverse impacts to the extent practicable, otherwise minimize the environmental resource impacts of improvement options.
- Evaluate and incorporate “best practice” mitigation strategies as appropriate to promote wildlife connectivity across S-332.
- Evaluate and incorporate “best practice” mitigation strategies as appropriate to reduce animal-vehicle conflicts.
- Evaluate fish (aquatic organism) passage issues and incorporate appropriate solutions to improve aquatic connectivity and stream function through structures and culverts.
- Avoid adverse impacts to the extent practicable, otherwise minimize adverse impacts to historic, cultural, and archaeological resources that may result from improvement options.
- Provide reasonable access to recreational sites in the corridor.

1.3. NEED NUMBER 3: MINIMIZE CONFLICTS ALONG THE CORRIDOR

This need recognizes the rural nature of the corridor and the predominately agricultural operations adjacent to the route. The presence of the Amish community, the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation and the St. Labre Indian School located south of the southern termini of S-332 are also noted. Improvement options should be sensitive to the day-to-day operations of adjacent landowners and the potential effect improvements may have on diverse populations near Ashland.

Objectives (To the Extent Practicable)

- Minimize impacts to existing residential and agricultural uses along the corridor.
- Minimize impacts to the Amish community, the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation and the St. Labre Indian School, all located south of the southern termini of S-332.
- Consider all modes of transportation in the corridor.

1.4. NEED NUMBER 4: OTHER

Improvement options should be sensitive to the availability of funding for construction, and also recurring maintenance costs. Limiting disruptions to adjacent properties during construction would be desirable, especially during harvest periods.

Objectives (To the Extent Practicable)

- Reduce roadway maintenance costs.
- Limit disruptions during construction as much as practicable.
- Availability and feasibility of funding.