



US 212 – Red Lodge to Roberts Questions and Answers

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General Project Questions

What about other areas on US 212? Will those be improved?

- Yes. MDT is also planning the US 212 – Roberts to Boyd project, which will accomplish many of the same things as the Red Lodge to Roberts project.
- MDT is also working on the Red Lodge – Two Mile project, which is located on the north end of Red Lodge between Robinson Lane and Two Mile Bridge Road.
- Many members of the US 212 – Red Lodge to Roberts team are working on these other projects and will have more updates on this surrounding work in the near future. Feel free to reach out with Takami Clark at takami@bigskypublicrelations.com for more information.

How much right-of-way is being acquired to do this project?

- MDT is still negotiating this with landowners. We will not split up plots or acquire large amounts of land to do this work.
- One of the major factors impacting right-of-way acquisitions is water. Many ponds, irrigation ditches, and underground aquifers are located on the west side of the road and flows east towards Rock Creek. We are shifting the road in some areas to avoid impacts to the environment.

Will any changes occur to the speed limit? Can you lower the speed limit?

- No permanent changes are occurring to the speed limit through this project. However, it should be noted that lowering the speed limit temporarily during construction is expected.
- Speed limits are not set by MDT; therefore, MDT cannot make long-lasting changes to the speed limit. Changes to limits occur via a separate process that begins with a speed study. The Transportation Commission, a group appointed by the governor, sets speed limits throughout the state based on speed studies.
- A recent speed study has been conducted and recommended no change to the speed limit.

How does this project fit into MDT's Vision Zero mission?

- MDT's Vision Zero mission is the goal of zero deaths and zero serious injuries on Montana roadways. Changing road designs in order to engineer a safer drive is a key part of Vision Zero.
- This project has a number of safety improvements that tie into the mission of Vision Zero, including:
 - Eight-foot shoulders: Whether it's a bicyclist, buggy, or broken-down vehicle, more space on the shoulder means less opportunity for vehicles traveling at high speeds to sideswipe or crash into slow-moving shoulder traffic. It also provides an area for emergency workers to address crashes or pull over a vehicle without impeding the flow of traffic.
 - Passing lanes: Without passing lanes, vehicles need to merge into oncoming traffic in order to pass a slower moving vehicle, which creates the potential for a deadly head-on crash. Creating a lane for these vehicles to pass removes that potential.
 - Improved drainage/ditches: Flooding, snow drift, and piles of snow on shoulders that block vision can create hazards for drivers and lead to crashes. By improving the way water drains off the highway and providing ditches for snow storage, we make travel on the highway drier and safer, leading to reduced crashes.
 - Adjusting curves and intersections: Certain intersections have blind spots that make it difficult to see far down the highway, even despite the relatively flat landscape. We will improve how roads and driveways connect to the road and adjust the curves of the highway in key areas to ensure that drivers can see well and make safe, informed driving decisions.

I have questions about how my property will be impacted. Who should I contact?

- Takami Clark of Big Sky Public Relations is the main point of contact for this project. She will get you connected to the right project staff at MDT, whether it be Right of Way personnel or anyone else. Use the following methods to reach her:
 - Project Hotline: 406-207-4484; answered by a staff member of Big Sky Public Relations from 9 AM to 5 PM.
 - Email: takami@bigskypublicrelations.com.

Design Questions

How are you making things safer for the Amish?

- We appreciate the care that many have for these members of the community and value their safety as well. The 8-foot-wide shoulders are wide enough to accommodate horse and buggy travel and will help these members travel safely on the side of the road.
- We will evaluate additional areas on the highway to place buggy warning signage and continue to review this issue and how it can be improved.

Why is a weigh station being added?

- The Motor Carriers of Montana, Montana's trucking association, requested a weigh station in the area.
- As an agency, we serve the entire traveling public, and that includes truckers. We have a duty to balance everyone's needs and this was one they identified.
- This is a combination bus stop/weigh station. The weigh station will not be operating 24/7 and will not interfere with parents picking up students at the bus stop.

How does this project address flooding?

- Flooding is a major concern for both residents and MDT. We are working to address this primarily by installing ditches and box culverts (pipes that allow water to flow under the road).
- The ditches throughout most of the corridor will be a trapezoid shape and not as deep as what residents have observed in the Roberts projects. These ditches require less maintenance as water moves more slowly through them and also provide more room for snow storage.
- Six box culverts will be installed. These structures direct water to flow safely under the road into irrigation canals and stormwater ditches. Adding this piping in the project ensures that water flows properly where it should rather than find its own way on the road.

What improvements are happening for bicyclists? Can a shared-use path be added?

- MDT understands that US 212 is a well-used corridor for bicyclists. The eight-foot shoulders will provide plenty of room away from fast-moving vehicles, making it safer for these travelers.
- Unfortunately, a shared-use path cannot be added through this project. Maintenance and funding are major factors in this decision. This project is nearly 10 miles long and would require significant negotiation with landowners on right-of-way. Beyond that, MDT would need to increase costs over time for maintenance of the path. We appreciate the safety of these paths but have a responsibility to be as cost-effective as possible.
- Shared use paths are being considered for other sections of US 212, namely the Robinson to Two Mile Bridge section.

How is MDT addressing animal collisions? Can an overpass or underpass be included?

- MDT has seen through crash data and conversations with residents that animal collisions are a major concern for this corridor. To help with this, we are trimming brush near the highway to provide better sight for animals, especially those that like to hide and jump out at the last second.
- We are also implementing box culverts which help with the travel of smaller amphibious animals.

- Implementing an overpass or underpass for animal crossings is costly and requires significant maintenance. An underpass would likely not be feasible given flooding and how much water is flowing under the road. Significant fencing would be needed to funnel animals to use the pass. Given our responsibility to be cost-efficient stewards of public money, it is not likely that a structure like this could be added.

Will a center-turn lane or turn lanes at intersections be added through this work?

- No center-turn lanes or turn lanes will be added through this project.
- MDT found through our research on crashes and traffic patterns that there were not enough turning vehicles to justify adding a center turn lane throughout the project or a turn lane at an intersection. These decisions are based in guidance from the Federal Highway Administration on the recommended threshold for establishing these types of lanes.
- We are also cognizant of our responsibility in managing public funds as we make these decisions. To enact this even against recommendations would cost more money and land from landowners and it would be hard to do so without the proven need.

Where exactly are the passing lanes?

- A northbound passing lane is going to be roughly from mile markers 72 to 74. It starts around two miles north of Red Lodge.
- The southbound passing lane will be located at approximately mile markers 79 to 81. It starts around a mile south of Roberts.

How is MDT addressing turns where it is difficult to see?

- MDT is making turns safer by ensuring that all major road connections intersect with the highway at a 90-degree angle. When roads do not meet this standard, one side of the highway is inevitably more difficult to see around when turning.
- We will also trim shrubs and vegetation at intersections to allow drivers to see around the intersection better. Currently, there are a few blind spots due to plant growth.

Will rumble strips be added? Where will they be placed?

- Rumble strips are being added through this project and we will place them on the centerline and shoulders of the highway.
- These safety improvements are critical in notifying the driver that they are leaving their lane and help reduce off-road and head-on crashes. They're also useful in getting drivers to notice their lane when visibility is low. On days where there is frost on the road and difficulty seeing the lane, rumble strips remind drivers that they're nearing the edge of their lane.

Why are passing lanes being added to this project?

- Passing lanes are critical safety improvements. We found through our research of the highway that traffic flows had increased to the point where this design was needed. Currently, vehicles bunch up or pass so often on this highway that it is safer to create a lane where they can pass rather than require them to merge into oncoming traffic. This reduces the potential for deadly head-on crashes.

Are utilities going to be improved through this work?

- No utilities are going to be improved through this work.

Will the road be relocated or significantly realigned?

- This project will introduce no major relocations or realignments. That said, there are some smaller shifts in the highway (e.g., moving the road six feet to the east) to allow for better sight or to protect important environmental features, such as wetland habitats, as the highway expands.

Construction Questions

When will construction occur?

- As of spring 2021, we do not have a confirmed construction start date. We anticipate the project to be shovel-ready (i.e., completely finished from a planning perspective and ready to build) by 2022 or 2023.
- Beyond that time, funding will dictate when the project is built. We have not yet identified a funding source and thus it is difficult to determine when it will be built.

Have you chosen a contractor yet? Will construction be done by local contractors?

- As of 2021, a contractor has not yet been chosen. This selection won't happen until funding is identified and we approach the date where funding is available.
- Being a local contractor is a factor we consider for every construction project, especially since it can be more cost effective. We try to source local labor and contractors from the community as much as possible and will look at it for this project as well.

What should I do if I notice potholes forming during construction?

- Please contact the project hotline at 406-207-4484 if you notice potholes forming. Takami Clark will work with the crew to address them.
- Potholes often form when it rains, and a rainy season can make smooth travel through the area difficult. We ask for your patience as well as we work to improve the road.

Will you create a detour around construction?

- The traffic control plan will not become available until a contractor has been identified. That said, no detours are currently being planned for construction, and we anticipate being able to do our work while keeping at least one lane moving at all times.
- If you notice traffic detouring to avoid construction delays, please feel free to reach out to the project hotline at 406-207-4484. We will see what we can do to help.
- One of the ways we can discourage detouring is by limiting delay times. If delay times are lower and manageable, people will be more likely to navigate the construction area than find another way around.

How long will delays be?

- It is our goal to keep delays to less than 15 minutes.
- There may be instances where delays stretch longer. If you notice longer delays, feel free to reach out to Takami at takami@bigskypublicrelations.com. She will discuss this with the crew and see what can be done to reduce delay times.

Can you work at night?

- Night work is not anticipated for this project.

- There are a number of residents who live close to the highway on this stretch of road. Working at night would be a large disturbance from both a lighting and a noise standpoint.
- Working at night is also riskier than working during the day. There is no substitute for daylight. From a worker safety standpoint, the potential for injury and error increases greatly in areas that aren't well lit.
- All of that said, it remains an option crews can consider if needed.

Will you close the highway or any nearby roads to do this work?

- As of 2021, MDT does not yet have a traffic control plan finalized and therefore cannot say for certain what traffic will look like during construction.
- Once a contractor is selected, they will determine a traffic control plan and collaborate with MDT to implement it.
- However, we do not anticipate full closures at this time.

How much time will construction take?

- We anticipate this work to be done over two years with the bulk of work being done during one construction season. Construction season is typically from spring through fall.

How will MDT address dust from construction?

- MDT understands that construction can bring impacts beyond travel delays. If you notice a dust problem, please reach out to Takami Clark at takami@bigskypublicrelations.com. She will work with the crew to see what can be done to mitigate the issue.

Will construction start at the north or south end?

- As of 2021, we do not have a construction plan finalized and therefore cannot say for certain where construction may begin. This information will become clearer as a contractor is chosen. They will submit their plans and schedule, including where construction will begin, to MDT for approval.

What will the construction staging area look like?

- Unfortunately, as of 2021, it is still too early to tell. Once MDT begins seeking contractors to work with, they will look into local staging areas. Once a contractor is chosen, we will have more information on their anticipated staging area.