

Montana Business Process to Link Planning Studies and NEPA/MEPA Reviews



Planning



Project Development

Montana Department of Transportation



final report

Montana Business Process to Link Planning Studies and NEPA/MEPA Reviews

prepared for

Montana Department of Transportation

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1.0 Linking Planning Studies and NEPA/MEPA Reviews

This document is designed to provide guidance to the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and its partners on how to link their current transportation planning processes and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), as provided for in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). The revised Corridor Planning Process presented here is intended to strengthen the MDT's current Corridor Planning Process to feed directly into the NEPA/MEPA process, help advance viable alternatives into NEPA/MEPA, and provide the opportunity for partner involvement at all stages.

Revisions to the Corridor Planning Process were made in consultation/via joint efforts between MDT Division of Rail, Transit and Planning; MDT Engineering Division; MDT Districts; and resource agencies, including the U.S. Corps of Engineers; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Montana Department of Environmental Quality; Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; Montana Environmental Quality Council; and the Montana Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and other agencies. Prior to revising the Corridor Planning Process, a literature review and interviews were conducted to evaluate practices linking planning and NEPA in Montana and across the country. Technical Memorandum #1, Literature Review and Interviews, presents findings from a series of inter- and intra-departmental staff involved in the Montana Corridor Planning Process and a scan of available Federal and peer state resources. Technical Memorandum #2, Review of Statewide Corridor Planning Processes, provides additional detail about practices in Colorado, Idaho, and Ohio. MDT has implemented the Corridor Planning Process, as described in this document; and the results have included a significant decrease in the time and money spent developing and evaluating alternate improvement options¹.

The recommendations, documentation, and information developed from planning studies must be consistent with the standards of NEPA/MEPA. This allows the planning study products to be used in the project development process.

¹ Zanto, L., J. Riley, and L. Eggertsen-Goff, "Libby North Corridor Study: Implementation of Planning Assistance and Standards, Appendix A, Linking the Transportation Planning and National Environmental Policy Act Processes." *Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting 2009 Paper #09-0564*, 2009.

1.1 SAFETEA-LU GUIDANCE

The final transportation planning regulations issued by the FHWA and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on implementing the changes in the SAFETEA-LU (23 CFR Part 450) include new guidance on integrating transportation planning and NEPA. The guidance is found in Appendix A of the federal planning regulations and is nonbinding (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/HEP/section6002/appx.htm>). It is designed to clarify the circumstances under which planning decisions and information can be relied on in the NEPA process. The guidance presents environmental review as a continuum of sequential study, refinement, and expansion performed in transportation planning and during project development/NEPA, with information developed and conclusions drawn in early stages utilized in subsequent (and more detailed) review stages. The guidance does not extend NEPA requirements to transportation plans and programs.

Corridor or Subarea Study Regulation

The SAFETEA-LU planning regulations also provide for preparation of a “corridor or subarea planning study” as a tool for linking planning and NEPA. These provisions are contained in 23 CFR Sections 450.212 (statewide planning) and 450.318 (metropolitan planning). The Corridor Planning Study can be used to produce a wide range of analyses or decisions for adoption in the NEPA process for an individual project, including the following²:

- Purpose and need or goals and objective statement(s);
- General travel corridor and/or general mode(s) definition;
- Preliminary screening of alternatives and elimination of unreasonable alternatives;
- Basic description of the environmental setting; and/or
- Preliminary identification of environmental impacts and environmental mitigation.

Federal Criteria for Linking Planning and NEPA

The guidance defines criteria that a federal agency must consider in deciding whether to adopt planning-level analyses or decisions in the NEPA process, including the following³:

² 23 CFR Section 450.212(a), 450.318(a).

³ 23 CFR Section 450.212(b)(2), 450.318(b)(2).

- Involvement of interested state, local, tribal, and federal agencies;
- Public review;
- Reasonable opportunity to comment during the statewide or metropolitan transportation planning process and development of the corridor or subarea planning study;
- Documentation of relevant decisions in a form that is identifiable and available for review during the NEPA scoping process, and can be appended to or referenced in the NEPA document; and
- Review by the FHWA and FTA, as appropriate.

The intent is not to start NEPA during the planning process, but rather to encourage planning-level analysis be used to satisfy parts of NEPA.

1.2 SAFETEA-LU PLANNING REQUIREMENTS

The SAFETEA-LU planning regulations also include two new planning requirements (these are binding) that particularly affect corridor planning and linking planning and NEPA:

1. **The need to include a discussion of environmental mitigation activities in the state and metropolitan long-range transportation plans.** The discussion of environmental mitigation can be different than the mitigation in NEPA documents. It can be regional in scope and not necessarily address project-level impacts⁴.
2. **The need to consult with state, tribal, and local agencies, which must include a comparison of transportation plans and resource plans, maps, and inventories.** States must now develop their long-range plans in consultation with state, tribal, and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation. The metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) have to consult with the same agencies, except that they do not have to compare plans and maps with tribal agencies. It is important to point out that this consultation is meant to be more than just involvement as part of public participation. It also includes the comparison and sharing of data and inventories, if available. This consultation is suggested early in the process so that environmental, regulatory, and resource agency concerns can be identified and addressed early in the process⁵.

SAFETEA-LU also strengthened early coordination with land use planning agencies by stating that the long-range transportation plan should “promote

⁴ 23 CFR Section 450.214(j) and 23 CFR Section 450.322(f)(7).

⁵ 23 CFR Section 450.214(i) and 23 CFR Section 450.322(g).

consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns.” The plan must also be developed in consultation with local agencies responsible for land use management.

These new planning provisions have been addressed further in MDT’s update of their long-range transportation plan, TranPlan 21.

1.3 KEY ELEMENTS IN LINKING PLANNING STUDIES AND NEPA

Based on Appendix A of the federal planning regulations, there are some key elements to be included in the planning process to enhance the linkage between planning and NEPA, including purpose and need; public involvement; consultation; affected environment; development and evaluation of alternatives; discussion of environmental mitigation activities; elimination of alternatives; and documentation. Here is a brief summary of those key elements:

Purpose and Need

- Analyze existing data to determine current and future deficiencies and needs, such as congestion, safety, pavement, or bridge conditions;
- Review federal, state, local or tribal plans for purpose and need documentation of the corridor;
- Involve the general public and property owners within the corridor in the development of purpose and need;
- Involve key stakeholders, such as local officials, resource agencies, and the FHWA in the development of purpose and need; and
- Clearly state purpose and need and document its rationale in the Corridor Study Report.

Public Involvement

- Include the general public in development of the Public Involvement Plan and Corridor Study Report through public meetings;
- Involve the general public, state, local, tribal, and federal environmental, regulatory, and resource agencies;
- Include public review of purpose and need, development and evaluation of alternatives, and elimination of alternatives; and
- Document the public involvement process, including comments received and responses given.

Consultation

- Consult with federal, state, tribal, and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation in developing the corridor plan;
- Document the consultation process, including comments received and MDT responses; and
- Utilize the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) executed on April 1, 2008, between the MDT and federal and state resource agencies. This MOU is an understanding of early coordination and dispute resolution regarding the development of safe, efficient, and environmentally sensitive transportation system in the State of Montana. The MOU is included in Appendix D.

Affected Environment

- Utilize the environmental scan and available resource agency data and information to identify the potentially affected environment;
- Include current and planned land uses in and near the study corridor;
- Incorporate regional visioning that incorporates input from transportation, economic development and resource agencies, and stakeholders; and
- Identify environmental issues within the corridor, and environmental areas that require further analysis.

Development and Evaluation of Alternatives

- Develop a full range of possible alternatives based on the analysis of deficiencies and input from consultation with key stakeholders;
- Maintain consistency with statewide, MPO, and other locally developed transportation plans;
- Involve the general public, state, local, tribal, and federal environmental, regulatory, and resource agencies in the development and analysis of alternatives;
- Ensure the use of reliable, defensible, and consistent data and analytical methods when evaluating alternatives;
- Consider the cost of implementing the alternatives and the availability of funding in the evaluation process; and
- Document the results of the development and evaluation of alternatives.

Discussion of Environmental Mitigation Activities

- Discuss the types of potential mitigation activities that might be necessary, such as wetland banking and preservation of habitat, as well as where the mitigation could potentially occur;

- Include consultations with the appropriate agencies as identified under the consultation requirements, including federal, state, local, and tribal agencies responsible for land management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation; and
- Document the potential environmental mitigation discussion in the corridor plan.

Elimination of Alternatives

- Consider the elimination of alternatives based either on purpose and need or the analysis of alternatives;
- Ensure that the data, analytical methods, and modeling techniques are reliable, defensible, reasonably current, and meet the data quality requirements;
- Include early and continuous involvement of environmental, regulatory, FHWA, and resource agencies in development of the planning products;
- Include the general public in reviewing the analysis used to determine the elimination of alternatives; and
- Document the rationale for eliminating alternatives in the corridor plan including documentation of the public participation activities and agency consultation.

Documentation

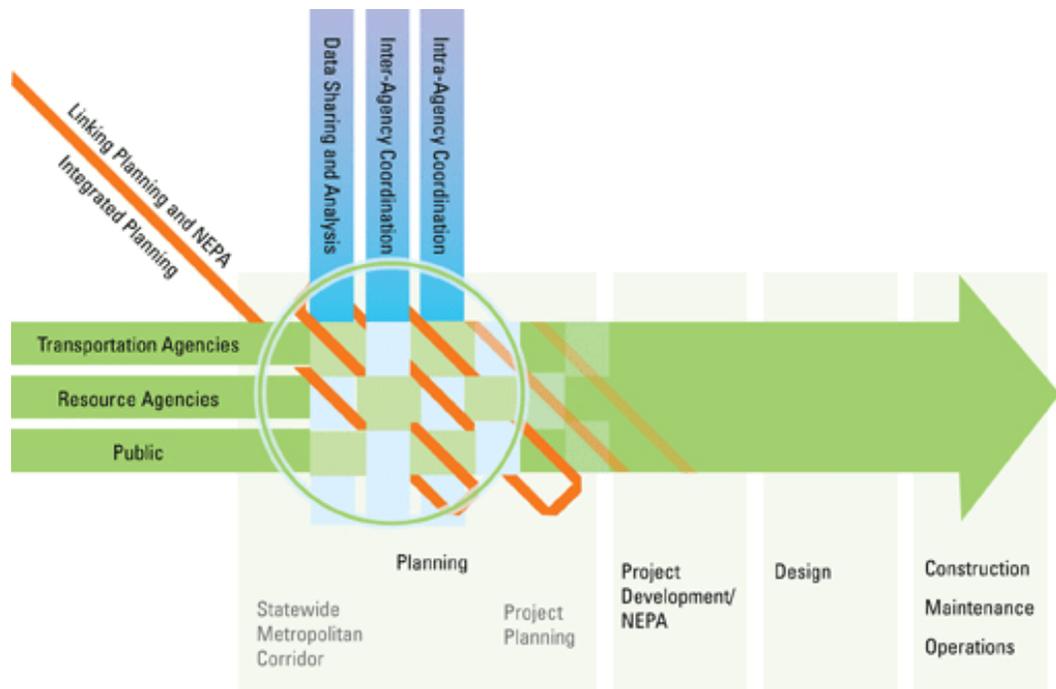
- Document purpose and need, including the goals and objectives and the analysis of needs on which the purpose and need is based;
- Document consistency with other state, MPO, and local transportation and land use plans;
- Document public involvement and consultation with resource and regulatory agencies;
- Document improvement costs and available funding; and
- Document the development and analysis of alternatives, including the methodology, data, and rationale used to eliminate some alternatives from further study.

Figure 1.1 is from the FHWA Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) *Implementation Resource Guide* which was developed to help practitioners understand how to implement PEL. This graphic shows how PEL weaves planning and environmental linkages throughout the transportation decision-making process. Planning and the environment can be linked early in the decision-making process. This linkage should then be carried forward into project development, environmental review, design and ultimately construction, maintenance and operations. The process includes transportation agencies, resource agencies and the public working together.

1.4 MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

MEPA was patterned after NEPA. MEPA is procedural and only applies to state agencies and state actions. MEPA requires state agencies taking an action to provide for adequate review in order to ensure that environmental attributes are fully considered. Corridor Planning Studies are plans for future projects. As the studies only make recommendations, the full requirements of MEPA are completed during project development. Following the process outlined in Appendix A of the federal planning regulations for linking planning and NEPA will also apply for MEPA, as long as the preparers of the study are referenced.

Figure 1.1 Weaving Planning and Environmental Linkages



Source: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/pel/howpelwork.htm>.

2.0 Corridor Planning in Montana

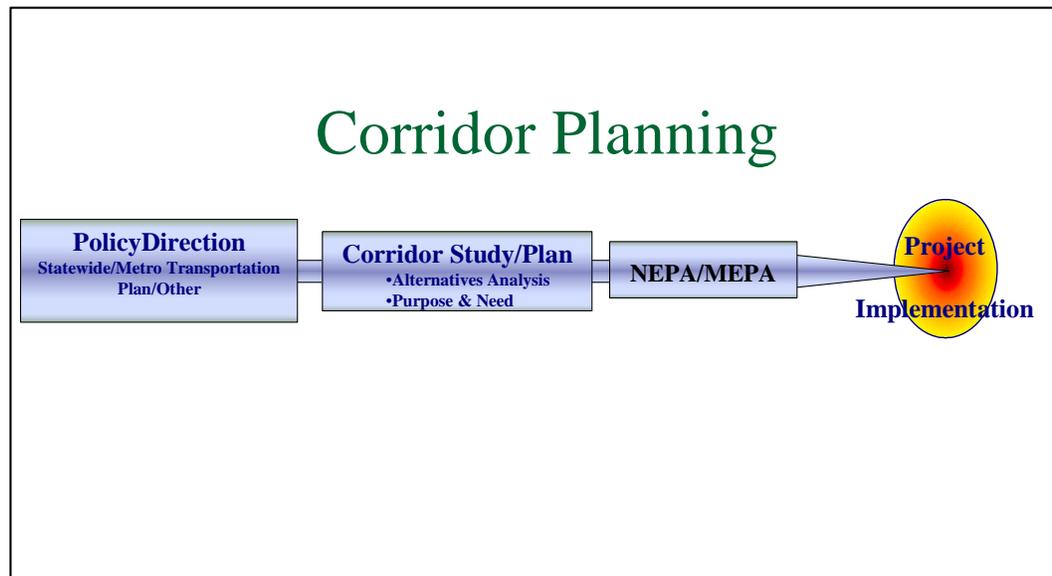
This section describes where the Corridor Planning Process fits in the overall planning and project development process. It also describes how MDT decides to conduct a Corridor Planning Study and who is involved. A more detailed step-by-step description of linking the Corridor Planning Process with NEPA/MEPA is provided later in Section 3.

2.1 BACKGROUND

The Montana Corridor Planning Process was developed in an effort to better coordinate the planning processes with the NEPA/MEPA process. Historically, when an engineering deficiency was identified, the highway project was advanced to a preliminary design concept, and an environmental document under NEPA/MEPA was developed. This document, among other things, identified and analyzed alternatives and their associated impacts. Many times, this process was controversial, costly, and required significant amounts of time, and may have resulted in a no-build because of fundability. The Corridor Planning Process allows for earlier planning-level coordination with the public, resource and other agencies, and develops specific products that can be used in the environmental review process. This includes goals and objectives, development and analysis of alternatives, elimination of alternatives, public involvement, identification of potential environmental impacts, and potential mitigation opportunities. An important consideration in this process is the cost of any improvements and the availability of funding, since they will affect the nature of the improvements and their phasing.

Figure 2.1 illustrates how the Corridor Planning Process is integrated into the Montana statewide transportation planning processes and the environmental review. As an example, the need for a corridor improvement may originate from the State or one of the MPO long-range plans. MDT Districts, local agencies, or the public also may identify the need for a corridor improvement. MDT will then conduct a Corridor Planning Study in consultation with resource and other agencies, local governments, businesses, and the public; and decide if it should proceed further and the type of environmental review necessary. After all these considerations, the project can move forward into project development.

Figure 2.1 Montana Statewide Transportation Planning and Project Implementation Process



2.2 WHEN TO CONDUCT A CORRIDOR PLAN STUDY

MDT has identified factors for consideration in guiding the decision to conduct a Corridor Planning Study. These include determining if the candidate:

- Is regionally significant;
- Has environmental constraints and a strong potential for an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA);
- Is costly and if funding is questionable;
- Is likely to generate substantial public controversy;
- Is likely to have many alternatives;
- Has substantial ambiguity about the alternatives; or
- Has a need to preserve the corridor for future transportation improvements.

2.3 WHO IS INVOLVED IN CORRIDOR PLAN STUDY

The administrator of the MDT Rail, Transit and Planning Division will establish a Corridor Planning Team after consulting with other divisions, MDT Districts, operations managers, and the FHWA. The core members of the Corridor Planning Team will include representatives from the Division of Rail, Transit, and Planning (including the Environmental Services Bureau); Engineering Division; and the MDT District(s) where the corridor is located. It also shall

include a member of the FHWA Division Office and the consultant, if one is retained. The core team also will decide if other members are needed on the Corridor Planning Team, such as a regional or local planning agency representative. It also may be appropriate to include one or more federal or state resource and other agencies.

The final representation on the Corridor Planning Team will depend on the issues that may arise in the corridor. As the Corridor Planning Process progresses, additional staff may be added to address specific issues. For example, during the environmental scan, additional expertise may be required to assess biological, historical, or other issues. In addition, the Director's Office will be involved and apprised of progress throughout the planning process.

3.0 Steps in Linking Corridor Planning Process and NEPA/MEPA Reviews

The MDT Corridor Planning Process is designed to help facilitate a smooth and efficient transition from transportation planning to project development/environmental review.

Steps of the MDT Corridor Planning Process are illustrated in Figure 3.1. An overview of each step is provided in the following section. Appendix A of this report includes a detailed description of each step, including parties involved, inputs, and outputs. The steps also include consideration of the cost of improvements and the availability of funding. The Corridor Planning Process outlined here illustrates two public meetings and one resource and other agency meeting, which is the recommended minimum for a Corridor Planning Study. Well-documented public and resource and other agency involvement help to ensure that work done during the planning phase can be effectively utilized during project development/environmental review. Depending on the magnitude or complexity of issues in the corridor, the number of public meetings and amount of resource and other agency consultation can be increased. Also, other forms of public involvement may be considered rather than public meetings depending on the nature of the corridor issues. This decision will be addressed during development of the Public Involvement Plan.

For controversial or more complex corridors, a third public meeting and round of resource and other agency consultation might be added after Step 5, Analysis of Alternatives. This will allow resource and other agencies and the public to review and offer comments on the analysis of alternatives and those advanced or not advanced prior to development of a package of alternatives.

The steps in the process are highlighted below.

1. *Identify Corridor Study Candidate*

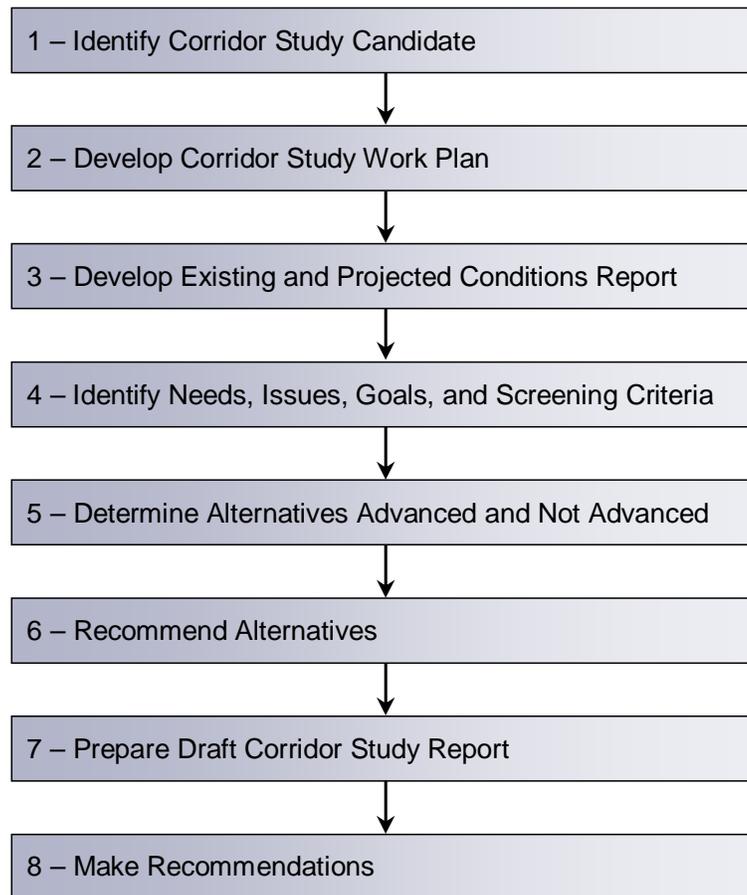
Decision made to conduct a Corridor Planning Study. The Rail, Transit and Planning Division Administrator, in consultation with the other MDT divisions, will make the decision to conduct a Corridor Planning Study, as opposed to an engineering/operational study or NEPA/MEPA study. The decision should:

- Consider known deficiencies and concerns in the corridor;
- Consider factors in Section 2.2 of this document; and

- Demonstrate consistency with current statewide, tribal, MPO, and other local transportation plans.

The Corridor Planning Team is Identified. The Corridor Planning Team will include core team members from the Division of Rail, Transit and Planning, the Engineering Division, MDT Districts, and FHWA. Additional members representing affected parties will be included, as appropriate.

Figure 3.1 Steps to Link the Corridor Planning Process and NEPA/MEPA Reviews



2. *Develop Corridor Study Work Plan*

Develop the Corridor Study Framework. The Corridor Planning Team will assess the complexity of issues in the corridor and level of effort required to address these issues. The Corridor Study Framework should include an initial schedule, milestones, deliverables, and preliminary corridor boundaries. Some large corridors may ultimately be divided up into a number of projects. Federal regulations allow larger projects to be divided into smaller independent segments, but each must have independent utility and logical termini. The MDT

Corridor Planning Study Checklist in Appendix C of this report provides guidance on elements to include in the Corridor Study Work Plan.

Assemble the Corridor Setting Document. The Corridor Planning Team, with additional planning staff as needed, will compile data and findings on corridor conditions from ongoing data collection efforts, previous studies, and other sources. The Corridor Setting Document will be used in the existing and projected conditions analysis.

Develop the Draft Public Involvement Plan. The Corridor Planning Team will develop a Draft Public Involvement Plan in accordance with federal and state guidelines. The Public Involvement Plan may be revised as the Corridor Planning Study progresses. The Draft Public Involvement Plan will identify the following:

- The number of and appropriate project milestones for public meetings and resource and other agency consultation sessions;
- Other methods to obtain resource and other agency and public involvement, as needed;
- Continuous public outreach efforts, including a study website; and
- Required public involvement documentation.

Develop the Scope of Work. The Corridor Planning Team will hold a formal scoping meeting with stakeholders to develop the Scope of Work and Public Involvement Plan for the Corridor Planning Study. A decision on Integrated Transportation Ecosystem Enhancements for Montana (ITEEM) process integration will be made. The Scope of Work will be based on the Corridor Planning Framework; the Public Involvement Plan will be based on the Draft Public Involvement Plan.

Note: The corridor boundaries, Public Involvement Plan, and Scope of Work will not be considered final until after resource and other agency and public review and comment.

3. Develop Existing and Projected Conditions Report

Develop the Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report. The Corridor Planning Team will conduct an environmental scan, and analyze existing and projected conditions to develop the Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report. A draft list and description of corridor transportation deficiencies will be included in the report findings.

The Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report should incorporate information in the Corridor Setting Document and findings from the environmental scan (e.g., key environmental resources and potential impacts). It should consider the community context, as well as state, tribal, MPO, and other local community vision, goals, and objectives. Existing and projected transportation system conditions (e.g., geometrics, level of service, crash analysis, etc.); initial identification

of corridor deficiencies; and known impacts and potential mitigation opportunities should be documented as part of the report.

Consult with resource and other agencies. The Corridor Planning Team will obtain resource and other agency perception of corridor deficiencies. Resource and other agencies will be asked to review and comment on the Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report, including the description of corridor transportation deficiencies. They also will be asked to identify initial avoidance areas, mitigation needs, and opportunities and review corridor boundaries.

Conduct public involvement. The Corridor Planning Team will obtain the public's perception of corridor deficiencies and their vision and goals for the corridor. The public will be asked to review and comment on the Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report, including the description of corridor transportation deficiencies, needs and the identified initial avoidance areas, mitigation needs and opportunities and corridor area boundaries.

4. Identify Needs, Issues, Goals and Screening Criteria

Identify the corridor transportation needs, issues, and goals. The Corridor Planning Team will identify corridor transportation system needs, issues, and goals, including actions needed to address the identified corridor deficiencies. The process should consider the comments received from consulting with resource and other agencies and conducting public involvement. The information on goals and needs may be used in later steps when developing the purpose and need.

Develop screening criteria and objectives. The Corridor Planning Team will develop screening criteria and objectives for alternatives and/or options analysis. Screening criteria should relate to the identified needs, issues, goals, costs, and funding and resource availability. Funding and resource availability includes available funds and resources, as well as those reasonably expected to be available in the desired timeframe. This includes implementation of policies, such as land use and access control, etc. Development costs and available funding could influence the alternatives and/or options that are adopted and how they will be phased in over time. Criteria may include transportation performance measures, environmental criteria, and local concerns. Project programming and environmental document timeframes should be considered here.

Note: Identified corridor transportation needs, issues, and goals, as well as developed screening criteria and objectives, will not be considered final until after resource and other agency and public review and comment.

5. Determine Alternatives Advanced and Not Advanced

Develop preliminary alternatives and/or options. The Corridor Planning Team will develop a full range of alternatives and/or options for analysis based on the identified corridor transportation needs, issues, and goals. A no-build case,

including transportation system management (TSM) strategies, should be included as an alternative and/or option.

Analyze alternatives and/or options and potential impacts. The Corridor Planning Team will conduct a planning-level analysis of each alternative and/or option using the identified screening criteria.

Select preliminary alternatives and/or options advanced and not advanced. The Corridor Planning Team will select alternatives and/or options advanced based on analysis results using the identified screening criteria. Documentation of alternatives and/or options advanced and not advanced, along with the rationale for decisions will be prepared. The evaluation of alternatives is not usually intended to result in just a single improvement and will consider short and long term improvements.

Note: The development, analysis, and selection of alternatives and/or options will not be considered final until after resource and other agency and public review and comment.

6. *Recommend Alternatives*

Recommend a package of alternative(s) and/or option(s) for improving the corridor. The Corridor Planning Team will recommend a complete package of alternative(s) and/or option(s) for improving the corridor.

Identify potential impacts and mitigation opportunities. The Corridor Planning Team will conduct a planning-level identification of potential impacts and mitigation opportunities in the corridor. The initial avoidance areas, mitigation needs, and opportunities identified by resource and other agencies and the public will be incorporated.

Note: The recommended package of alternatives and/or options and identification of potential impacts and mitigation opportunities will not be considered final until after resource and other agency and public review.

7. *Prepare Draft Corridor Study Report*

Prepare Draft Corridor Study Report. The Corridor Planning Team will develop a Draft Corridor Study Report, which documents the entire Corridor Planning Process, key findings, needs, screening criteria, draft recommendations, and next steps. The Draft Corridor Study Report should include the following:

- Documentation of the alternatives and/or options considered, as well as potential impacts and mitigation opportunities;
- Draft recommendations and next steps, including a package of alternatives and/or options; and
- Draft statement of purpose and need.

The MDT Corridor Planning Study Checklist in Appendix C of this report can be used to confirm necessary elements included in the Corridor Study Report.

Develop draft statement of purpose and need. Develop the draft statement of purpose and need that can be used in the NEPA/MEPA analysis based on identification of needs, issues, and goals and analysis from previous steps. Developing the statement of purpose and need is an iterative process. The Corridor Planning Process will not always result in development of a single purpose and need. Draft statement of purpose and need, along with rationale for determining the need, will be included in the Draft Corridor Study Report discussed above, and documented for use in the environmental review. As mentioned earlier, a large corridor may ultimately be implemented as smaller independent projects.

Consult with resource and other agencies. The Corridor Planning Team will obtain resource and other agency review and comment on the Draft Corridor Study Report and draft statement of purpose and need. The review also will include the development and analysis of draft alternatives and/or options advanced and not advanced; the draft package of alternatives; and the identified potential impacts and mitigation opportunities if prior review and comment was not obtained.

Conduct public involvement. The Corridor Planning Team will obtain the public's review and comment on the Draft Corridor Study Report and draft statement of purpose and need. The public involvement process may entail public meetings or other forms of public involvement. The review also will include the development and analysis of draft alternatives and/or options advanced and not advanced; the draft package of alternatives; and the identified potential impacts and mitigation opportunities if prior review and comment was not obtained.

Note: The Corridor Study Report will not be considered final until after resource and other agency and public review and comment. The draft statement of purpose and need should also be revised, as needed, to reflect resource and other agency and public review and comment.

8. Make Recommendations

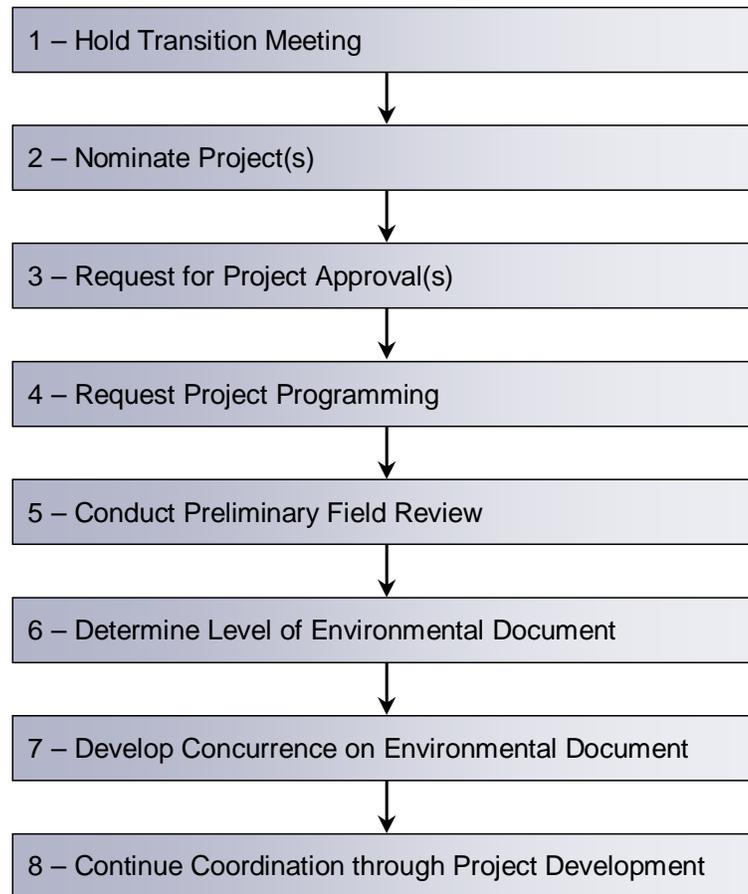
Recommend a corridor plan. The Corridor Planning Team will finalize the Corridor Study Report, which will serve as the recommended corridor plan. Recommendations should include specific action items and identify responsible parties to carry them out. This recommended corridor plan will transition forward to project development and environmental review.

Evaluate the Corridor Planning Process. The Corridor Planning Team will evaluate the Corridor Planning Process used, focusing on implementation and lessons learned.

4.0 Transition to Project Development/Environmental Review

This section describes how elements of the Corridor Planning Process can be incorporated into the subsequent environmental review and project implementation, reducing the required time and cost. It should be emphasized that keeping staff from the Corridor Planning Team involved during subsequent project development efforts is imperative to leveraging corridor planning efforts, as is documentation of public involvement and resource and other agency consultation processes. The steps of the handoff or transition process from corridor planning to environmental review and project implementation are illustrated on Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Corridor Planning Process Transition to Project Development/
Environmental Review



1. **Hold Transition Meeting.** The Corridor Planning Team and the FHWA will meet to ensure data and products developed during the Corridor Planning Study are consistent with environmental review criteria. This review should consult the MDT Planning Corridor Study Outline provided in Appendix C of this report. Recommended statement of purpose and need and level of environmental document may be discussed at this time. Certain products developed during the Corridor Planning Process are highly time sensitive, and should receive priority during project development. The MDT Division of Rail, Transit and Planning, in conjunction with the MDT District(s), will be responsible for timeliness of moving recommendations into project development. Again, it will be important to keep staff from the Corridor Planning Team involved in project development.
2. **Nominate Project(s).** The MDT District(s) will nominate project(s) for inclusion in the MDT draft projects list consistent with Corridor Planning Study recommendations/products.

3. **Request for Project Approval(s).** The MDT Division of Rail, Transit and Planning will request Transportation Commission approval of the nominated project(s) in the projects list for inclusion in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and for the FHWA approval of the STIP process.
4. **Request Project Programming.** The MDT Division of Rail, Transit Planning will request programming of Preliminary Engineering (PE) consistent with nominated project(s).
5. **Conduct Preliminary Field Review.** The project design manager will conduct the preliminary field review (PFR) with an interdisciplinary team that considers data, analysis, and findings from the Corridor Planning Study, along with additional information from project design team members. The PFR report will then be developed and distributed for comments following the review.
6. **Determine Level of Environmental Document.** The MDT Environmental Services Bureau in concert with the FHWA will propose the level of environmental document and initiate the environmental review process. Recommendations and draft statement of purpose and need developed during the Corridor Planning Process may be incorporated, as authorized by the FHWA. Data, information, and analysis from the corridor study can be used to inform the decision.
7. **Develop Concurrence on Environmental Document.** FHWA will concur on level of the Environmental Document.
8. **Continue Coordination through Project Development.** All Preliminary Engineering (PE) activities will be conducted consistently with data and products developed during the Corridor Planning Process. The project implementation team will review reports generated during various phases of PE including initial and final reports, such as the PFR; Environmental Document; Alignment and Grade Review (AGR) report; Scope of Work (SOW) report; Plan in Hand (PIH) report and Final Plan Review (FPR) report.

Appendix A. Corridor Planning Process Description

Table A.1 Corridor Planning Process Description

Process Step	Descriptions	Who	Inputs	Outputs
1. Identify Corridor Study Candidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A decision is made on whether to conduct a corridor study. This decision should be consistent with current state, tribal, and local transportation plans.¹ An important consideration in the study will be the cost of improvements and the availability of funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Planning Administrator in consultation with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MDT Operations Managers, MDT Engineering Division, Affected MDT District(s), and FHWA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance on when to do a corridor study.² MDT Mission Statement. TRANPLAN 21 and other state, tribal, and local transportation plans. Existing transportation system conditions and concerns. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision to conduct one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engineering/Operational Study, Corridor Study, or NEPA/MEPA study. Identify the manager and members of the Corridor Planning Team.³
2. Develop Corridor Study Work Plan				
a. Develop Corridor Study Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct an internal scoping process to develop the Corridor Study Framework (including preliminary corridor boundaries).⁴ Identify the general complexity and magnitude of corridor study issues.⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAFETEA-LU guidance. MDT Corridor Planning Study Checklist.⁶ ITEEM Final Report.⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determination of the need for a consultant. Corridor Study Framework (including preliminary corridor boundaries). Determination of ITEEM process integration.
b. Assemble Corridor Setting Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assemble previously developed corridor information into the Corridor Setting Document.⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. Additional Planning staff, as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available information about the transportation system (roadway and multimodal operating conditions, safety, etc.), as well as land use, socioeconomic, and environmental conditions in the corridor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Setting Document.

Process Step	Descriptions	Who	Inputs	Outputs
c. Develop Draft Public Involvement Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Draft Public Involvement Plan that identifies:⁹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of and milestones for public meetings and resource and other agency consultation sessions. - Other methods to obtain resource and other agency and public involvement, as needed; - Continuous public outreach efforts; and - Public involvement documentation requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing MDT public involvement processes. • SAFETEA-LU public involvement guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Public Involvement Plan. • Draft Corridor Study web site.
d. Develop Scope of Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT will hold a formal scoping meeting with the Corridor Planning Team to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confirm the corridor boundaries; - Develop the scope of work based on the Corridor Study Framework; - Reassess ITEEM process integration; - Formalize the Public Involvement Plan; and - Review the corridor study web site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corridor Planning Team including non-MDT team members.¹⁰ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultant, if utilized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corridor Study Framework (including preliminary corridor boundaries); • Initial assessment of ITEEM process integration. • Draft Public Involvement Plan. • Draft corridor study web site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmed corridor boundaries. • Scope of work. • Decision on ITEEM process integration. • Draft Public Involvement Plan. • Corridor study web site.

Process Step	Descriptions	Who	Inputs	Outputs
3. Develop Existing and Projected Conditions Report				
a. Develop Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct environmental scan.¹¹ Map environmentally sensitive areas within corridor boundaries during this process. Analyze existing and projected conditions. Develop Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report, incorporating environmental scan findings.¹² Develop draft list and description of corridor transportation deficiencies based on Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. Additional MDT staff, as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Setting Document. Additional data for the environmental scan and existing and projected conditions analysis.¹³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report. Draft list and description of corridor transportation deficiencies. Maps of known environmentally sensitive areas within corridor boundaries.
b. Consult with Resource and other Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource and other agencies are asked to review and offer comments about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report; Draft list and description of corridor transportation deficiencies; and Known environmentally sensitive areas within corridor boundaries. Resource and other agencies are asked to identify initial avoidance areas, mitigation needs, and opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. Additional Environmental Services Bureau staff, as needed. Resource and other agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report. Draft list and description of corridor transportation deficiencies; Maps of known environmentally sensitive areas within corridor boundaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of resource and other agency comments received. Revised Existing and Projected Conditions Report. Revised list and description of corridor transportation deficiencies. List of initial avoidance areas, potential mitigation needs, and opportunities.

Process Step	Descriptions	Who	Inputs	Outputs
c. Conduct Public Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public is asked to review and offer comments about¹⁴: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report; Draft list and description of corridor transportation deficiencies, issues and goals; Known environmentally sensitive areas within corridor boundaries; and List of initial avoidance areas, potential mitigation needs, and opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. Affected tribal and local transportation planning agencies. Public and stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report. Draft list and description of corridor transportation deficiencies. List of initial avoidance areas, potential mitigation needs, and opportunities. Resource and other agency comments. Public Involvement Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of public involvement actions and comments received. Revised Existing and Projected Conditions Report. Revised list and description of corridor transportation deficiencies, issues and goals. Revised list of initial avoidance areas, potential mitigation needs, and opportunities.
4. Identify Needs, Issues, Goals and Screening Criteria				
a. Identify Corridor Transportation Needs, Issues, and Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify corridor transportation system needs, issues, and goals.¹⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List and description of corridor transportation deficiencies. Resource and other agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of analysis methods used to identify transportation system needs, issues, and goals. Draft list and description of corridor transportation system needs, issues, and goals.
b. Develop Screening Criteria and Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop screening criteria that will be used to evaluate alternatives. These should include the cost of the potential improvements and the available funding.¹⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MDT Fund Distribution Plan. MDT Corridor Planning Study Checklist. Resource and other agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft list of screening criteria.

Process Step	Descriptions	Who	Inputs	Outputs
5. Determine Alternatives Advanced and Not Advanced				
a. Develop Alternatives and/or Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop alternatives and/or options based on the identified corridor needs, issues, and goals.¹⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft list and description of corridor transportation system needs, issues, and goals. Resource and other agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft list and description of the range of alternatives and/or options under consideration for analysis.
b. Analyze Alternatives and/or Options and Potential Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct an analysis of each alternative and/or option based on screening criteria.¹⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft list and description of the range of alternatives and/or options under consideration for analysis. Draft list of screening criteria. Resource and other agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of the analysis (methods and findings) of alternatives and/or options based on the screening criteria.
c. Select Alternatives and/or Options Advanced and Not Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select alternatives and/or options advanced based on screening criteria and analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of the analysis (methods and findings) of alternatives and/or options based on the screening criteria. Resource and other agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of alternatives and/or options advanced and not advanced along with rationale for decisions.
6. Recommend Alternatives				
a. Recommend Package of Alternative(s) and/or Option(s) for Improving the Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommend a complete package of alternative(s) and/or option(s) for improving the corridor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternatives and/or options advanced and not advanced. List of initial avoidance areas, potential mitigation needs, and opportunities. Resource and other agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommended package of alternative(s) and/or option(s) for improving the corridor.

Process Step	Descriptions	Who	Inputs	Outputs
b. Identify Potential Impacts and Mitigation Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential impacts and mitigation opportunities.¹⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. Additional Environmental Services Bureau staff, as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommended package of alternative(s) and/or option(s) for improving the corridor. Resource and other agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List and description of potential impacts and mitigation opportunities.
7. Prepare Draft Corridor Study Report				
a. Prepare Draft Corridor Study Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Draft Corridor Study Report which documents the entire Corridor Planning Process and reports key findings, recommendations, and next steps.²⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation on developing, analyzing and prioritizing alternatives as well as potential impacts and mitigation opportunities. MDT Corridor Planning Study Checklist. Resource and other agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Corridor Study Report.
b. Develop Draft Statement of Purpose and Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the draft statement of purpose and need which can be used in the NEPA/MEPA analysis based on analysis in previous steps. The corridor study may result in more than one improvement project and/or a phasing of projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List and description of corridor transportation deficiencies. List and description of corridor transportation system needs, issues, and goals. Resource and other Agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft statement of purpose and need along with rationale.
c. Consult with Resource and other Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource and other agencies are asked to review and provide comments about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Corridor Study Report²¹ and Draft statement of purpose and need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. Additional Environmental Services Bureau staff as needed. Resource and other agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Corridor Study Report. Draft statement of purpose and need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of resource and other agency comments. Revised Draft Corridor Study Report. Revised draft statement of purpose and need.

Process Step	Descriptions	Who	Inputs	Outputs
d. Conduct Public Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public is asked to review and provide comments about:²² <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Corridor Study Report; and Draft statement of purpose and need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. Affected tribal and local transportation planning agencies. Public and stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Corridor Study Report. Draft statement of purpose and need. Resource and other agency comments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of public involvement actions and comments received. Revised Draft Corridor Study Report. Revised draft statement of purpose and need.
8. Make Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A list of recommendations, including:²³ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Necessary environmental documents; and Other items facilitating transition. Compare Corridor Study Report to the MDT Corridor Planning Study Checklist and make necessary revisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor Planning Team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Corridor Study Report. Draft statement of purpose and need. Resource and other agency comments. Public and stakeholder input. MDT Corridor Planning Study Checklist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Corridor Study Report. Draft statement of purpose and need. List of recommendations and next steps. Evaluation of Corridor Planning Process.²⁴

- The decision to conduct a Corridor Planning Study should consider deficiencies and concerns in the corridor and consult the guidance on when to do a Corridor Planning Study.
- This guidance describes criteria about when a Corridor Planning Study is needed.
- The Corridor Planning Team will include core team members from the Division of Rail, Transit and Planning, the Engineering Division, MDT Districts, and the FHWA. Additional members from affected stakeholder groups will be included, as appropriate.
- The Corridor Study Framework should include an initial schedule, milestones, deliverables, and preliminary corridor boundaries. Corridor boundaries will be mapped and logical corridor limits and widths defined. The corridor boundaries may be refined as the corridor study progresses.
- The Corridor Planning Process outlined here illustrates two public meetings. However, the actual number of public meetings may increase depending on the corridor complexities. For example, resource and other agencies and the public may be asked to offer comments about the analysis of alternatives and those advanced or not advanced. This will be determined during development of the public involvement plan.
- The MDT Corridor Planning Study Checklist was developed in consultation with FHWA to address elements to consider and include in a corridor study. It is included as Appendix C of this report.
- The Integrated Transportation and Ecosystem Enhancements for Montana (ITEEM) process is documented in the ITEEM Final Report, January 2007.
- The Corridor Setting Document will be used in the existing and project conditions analysis.
- The Public Involvement Plan will be developed in accordance with federal and state guidelines. The Final Public Involvement Plan may be revised as the corridor study progresses.

10. Non-MDT team members may include affected state, tribal, and local agencies responsible for transportation and land use management.
11. A windshield survey may be conducted as part of the environmental scan.
12. The Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report should incorporate information in the Corridor Setting Document and findings from the environmental scan (e.g., key environmental resources and potential impacts). It should consider the community context as well as state, tribal, and local community vision, goals, and objectives. Existing and projected transportation system conditions (e.g., geometrics, level of service, crash analysis, etc.); initial identification of corridor deficiencies, and known impacts and potential mitigation opportunities should be documented as part of the report.
13. This may include information on the condition of the affected transportation system, fish and wildlife, habitat connectivity, threatened and endangered species, wetlands, water quality, cultural resources, historic properties, etc.
14. Public involvement will be conducted in accordance with the developed Public Involvement Plan. This process will be used to identify public perception of the highest level of deficiencies in the corridor. The federal requirement on consultation includes comparison of mutual plans, maps, and data where available. Resource/ and other agencies will be given maps of sensitive environmental areas in the corridor to review.
15. Corridor transportation system needs, issues, and goals include actions needed to address the identified corridor deficiencies. This draft list will consider comments received during resource and other agency consultation and public involvement.
16. Screening criteria should relate to the identified needs, issues, goals, and funding and resource availability. Funding and resource availability includes available funds and resources as well as those reasonably expected to be available in the desired timeframe. This includes implementation of policies such as land use and access control, etc. Criteria may include transportation performance measures, environmental criteria, and local concerns. Project programming and environmental document timeframes should be considered here.
17. The alternatives and/or options should include a no-build, transportation system management (TSM) alternative and/or option.
18. This analysis of alternatives is done at the planning level which can be at a lower level of detail than at the project development level.
19. This is a planning-level identification of potential impacts and mitigation opportunities, including avoidance. This step should be conducted consistently with standard Environmental Services Bureau practices.
20. Recommendations and next steps should include a package of alternatives and/or options and purpose and need. The document may refer to more detailed documents produced throughout the process (e.g., alternatives advanced and not advanced, the public involvement process and comments received) to allow for subsequent inclusion into NEPA/MEPA.
21. The Draft Corridor Study Report includes the range of alternatives and potential impacts and mitigation opportunities.
22. Public involvement will be conducted in accordance with the developed Public Involvement Plan.
23. The recommendations should include actions items and responsible parties required to carry them out.
24. The evaluation of the Corridor Planning Process should include comments on how well it worked and identify lessons learned.

Appendix B. Glossary of Terms

Alternatives - Potential transportation improvements that meet the corridor plan goals and objectives by addressing the transportation deficiencies and needs in the corridor. Examples might include alternate routes or alignments, using the same alignment but widening the road, or a no-build alternative with low cost improvements, such as Transportation System Management. Alternatives might also include the use of other modes such as transit, bike and pedestrian.

Environmental Documents - These include social, economic and environmental studies prepared for Categorical Exclusions (CE), Environmental Assessments (EA), and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) under the NEPA and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). For the purpose of this report, all of the above documents are considered environmental documents.

Categorical Exclusion (CE) - A classification for projects that will not induce significant environmental impacts or foreseeable alterations in land use, planned growth, development patterns, traffic volumes, travel patterns, or natural or cultural resources.

Consultation - Activities performed by the states and the MPOs in comparing the long-range statewide transportation plan and the metropolitan transportation plan, respectively, to state and tribal conservation plans or maps or inventories of natural or historic resources.

Corridor Planning Study - A process analyzing the existing deficiencies and future needs in the corridor with the consideration of the social, economic, and environmental impact on the natural and human environment. It uses a collaborative approach that involves federal, state, tribal, and local agencies, including resource agencies. It is conducted such that products from the study can be used in subsequent environmental documents.

Environmental Assessment (EA) - A study that may serve a number of purposes:

1. To determine if the environmental impacts of a project are significant, thus requiring the preparation of an EIS;
2. A document to disclose environmental impacts for an action which is not categorically excluded and a EIS is not warranted;
3. A document to disclose environmental impacts and allow for public review and comment on a proposed action, including alternatives, when an EIS is not warranted; and
4. A document to disclose environmental impacts when statutory requirements do not allow sufficient time to prepare an EIS.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) - A document prepared when it has been determined that a project will have a significant impact on the environment.

Environmental Scan - An environmental scan typically identifies key environmental resources in the corridor, such as demographics, land use, socioeconomic, community facilities, natural resources, water quality, cultural resources and tribes, vegetation, wildlife, sensitive species, aquatic resources, wetlands, and air quality. An environmental scan identifies the environmental setting or context within which a corridor plan is being developed.

Existing and Projected Conditions Report - This report usually describes the roadway characteristics, such as existing and future travel demand, level of service (LOS), crash analysis, physical characteristics, roadway geometrics, signing/pavement markings, roadway deficiencies, multimodal data and access issues; and is instrumental in defining the transportation deficiencies and needs of a corridor.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) - An agency of the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) responsible for federally funded highways.

Goals - These are measurable desired outcomes designed to meet the corridor vision and needs. In general, they describe standards that the future transportation system should meet. The corridor plan's recommended alternatives are expected to meet the goals established for the corridor.

Level of Service (LOS) - A qualitative concept that has been developed by traffic engineers to characterize and describe varying degrees of congestion as perceived by motorists.

Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) - This is the official statewide or MPO, multimodal, transportation plan that covers a period of no less than 20 years developed through the statewide or MPO transportation planning process.

Integrated Transportation Ecosystem Enhancements for Montana (ITEEM) - Modeled after the FHWA Eco-Logical approach, ITEEM is a process developed in Montana by transportation and environmental agencies to streamline transportation program delivery, while focusing mitigation efforts where they are most needed.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) - The policy board of an organization created and designated by the Governor to carry out the metropolitan transportation planning process.

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) - The state law to provide adequate review of state actions to ensure environmental attributes are fully considered (MCA 75.1.102).

Mitigation - Action taken to avoid or to minimize adverse environmental impacts.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - The national charter and legislative framework for decision-making, which appropriately considers the effects on physical, biological, economic, and social concerns as they relate to the quality of the human environment.

Objective - Specific measurable actions describing how to accomplish goals.

Options - Various actions within or specific features of an alternative that help that alternative meet the transportation goals and needs. An example might be a menu of low-cost options within a TSM alternative that would enhance the existing system. These options might include incident management programs, traveler information, demand management techniques, traffic signal upgrades, and operational improvements. A safety focused alternative might include options, such as wider shoulders, improved signing and stripping, guardrails, median cables, passing lanes, or rumble strips.

Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) - Signed by the President on August 10, 2005, it authorizes the federal surface transportation programs for highways, highway safety, and transit for the five-year period from 2005 through 2009.

Preliminary Field Review (PFR) - An initial field review meeting held after a project has been nominated for programming to determine the major design features, and to discuss other project-related issues and any potential problems.

Public Involvement - The process by which the public is informed, made aware, and involved in the transportation planning and project development processes.

Public Involvement Plan - An integral part of a planning or environmental study, which outlines procedures and protocols for presenting information to the public, obtaining public comment, and considering public opinion.

Purpose and Need - Used in environmental documents, a project purpose is a broad statement of the overall objective to be achieved by the proposed action. Need is more detailed explanation of the specific transportation problems that exist, or are expected to occur in the future,

Regionally Significant - A transportation project that is on a facility which serves regional transportation needs and would normally be included in the modeling of the metropolitan area's transportation network. In Montana's rural areas, regionally significant projects include all projects on principal arterial highways that add potential capacity or significantly change the highway's operational characteristics.

Resource Agencies - Federal, tribal, and state agencies charged with protecting natural and human resources. In Montana, this includes agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife; the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; the Montana State Historic Preservation Office; the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

Scoping - A formal or informal process for identifying issues, concerns and alternatives for planning studies and environmental documents.

Screening Criteria - Measurable factors used to evaluate the extent to which transportation alternatives meet the identified corridor goals and objectives. The criteria might include such factors as traffic volumes, LOS, crash rates, environmental impacts, etc.

Stakeholders - Groups or individuals having an interest in the outcome of corridor planning, including elected officials, appointed officials, planning agencies, businesses, economic associations, environmental organizations, and neighborhood associations.

Statewide Transportation Improvement program (STIP) - An official statewide prioritized listing/program of transportation projects covering a period of four years that is consistent with the long-range statewide transportation plan, metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs, and required for projects to be eligible for federal funding.

TranPlan 21 - This long-range transportation plan establishes Montana's preferred future transportation system and the policy goals and action that define MDT's role in moving Montana toward that future. The preferred future developed through *TranPlan 21* provides Montana with a long-range statewide vision for the management and development of the transportation system.

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) - Measures to reduce the proportion of single-occupant vehicles (SOV) commuters. TDM measures include proportion of non-SOV modes, car, and vanpool formation assistance, transit subsidies, and a variety of other measures.

Transportation Improvement program (TIP) - A four-year transportation investment strategy required at the metropolitan level, which addresses the goals of the long-range plan and lists priority projects and activities in the region.

Transportation Systems Management (TSM) - Strategies that will contribute to the more effective use and improved safety of existing and future integrated multimodal transportation systems. These include demand management measures, traffic operational improvements, and public transportation improvements.

Vision - A vision defines the desired future for a geographical area, such as a transportation corridor in terms of how it should function and serve the people and economy of the area.

Appendix C. MDT Corridor Planning Study Checklist

The purpose of this checklist is to provide guidance to the development and documentation of the Corridor Planning Study to ensure that it is conducted in such a way as to ensure the products and decisions resulting from the study process can be relied upon in NEPA/MEPA without having to be “redone.” The checklist can be used as guidance at the beginning of the Corridor Planning Process and for confirmation at the end of the study. It is meant to be used as an integral part of the overall MDT business process to link planning studies and environmental review.

Introduction

Introductory information documenting:

- Identification of the Corridor Planning Study candidate;
- Reason(s) to conduct corridor planning;
- Study area definition (include a map of the corridor boundaries and study area);
- General goals, objectives, and purpose of the study; and
- Members of the Corridor Planning Team.

Documentation and information from development of the work plan can be incorporated here.

Background

Background information on the corridor documenting:

- A summary of the review and documentation of previously developed information on conditions in the study corridor. Information gathered as part of the Corridor Setting Document may be used here.
- A summary of existing conditions in the study corridor. Detailed information, analysis, and results may be documented with Technical Reports and Data.

Identified Corridor Needs and Issues

Explain identified corridor needs and issues, documenting:

- Previously developed corridor needs, issues, and goals;
- Known corridor needs and issues; and
- Input from public involvement and resource and other agency consultation.

Information presented here can be used in developing the draft statement of purpose and need.

Public Involvement and Resource and Other Agency Consultation

Provide documentation of how and when the public involvement and resource and other agency consultation was conducted and completed. This can be documented as a summary of what occurred with detailed information included in an appendix or a technical report. Information from the Public Involvement Plan may be used here. Documentation should include the following:

- Public Involvement
 - How many and when public meetings were held;
 - Newsletters, press releases, presentation materials, sign-in sheets, minutes, and summary of discussion and comments at public meetings; and
 - Documentation of any decisions, findings, or commitments at public meetings.
- Resource and other Agency Consultation
 - How and when resource and other agency consultation was conducted including coordination methods and contacts;
 - The federal, tribal, state, and local agencies included; and
 - Documentation of information gathered including attendance, issues, responses, decisions, resolutions, commitments, and concurrences.

Technical Reports and Data

Reports developed and used as part of the Corridor Planning Process should be summarized in the Corridor Study Report and included in the appendix. The types of reports should include: existing and projected conditions including social and economic, an environmental scan, design standards, corridor geometrics, traffic data, accident information, travel demand forecasting, and economic data. Other information may be included depending on the type of study. Information from the Existing and Projected Conditions Report may be used here. At a minimum, reports/data should include:

- Where information was derived, summary of analytical methods used, forecast information assumptions, projections, and data collection dates (maps, visual aids, and other graphics should be included for clarification);
- Description of findings, recommendations, and conclusions from previous studies and reports; and
 - Sources for review and documentation include existing planning or engineering studies, land use plans, projects both initiated and complete, and other local planning documents appropriate for this study area. The report should reference sources of information.
 - Information gathered may include transportation system conditions (roadway and multimodal operating conditions, safety, etc.), as well as land use, social, economic, and environmental conditions in the corridor.
 - Any conclusions, recommendations, or actions brought forward from previously developed documents or projects and considered for inclusion in the Corridor Planning Study.
- Disclosure of missing or unavailable information.

Analysis Methods and Findings

Information from the technical reports/data and public/agency involvement to develop and eliminate alternatives. The section should include:

- Description of alternatives and/or options developed;
- Description of selection or screening criteria (this may include cost);
- Alternatives and/or options advanced and eliminated with a summary of the rationale; and
- Description of possible phasing of alternatives or interim solutions.

Funding

Description of funding scenarios. Include information documenting:

- Planning level cost estimates or projections for alternatives and/or options, both short and long term and phases;
- Concerns with funding of alternative(s) due to excessive cost;
- Sources and types of funding available including partnership opportunities with other agencies, private developers or other groups; and
- Funding challenges and possible solutions.

Summary/Recommendations

A summary of the Corridor Planning Process; the identified need, issues, and goals; the recommended alternatives and/or options to be carried forward; the

draft statement of purpose and need; and an implementation strategy for moving to the project development stage should be documented.

Project Development

Documentation of the elements listed here should be developed and included in the Corridor Study Report or as a stand-alone report. These elements bring the Corridor Planning Study into project development. The following elements should be considered and documented:

- Describe which alternatives should be carried forward into a NEPA/MEPA study;
- Include any recommended coordination or steps to be taken with resource and other agencies during NEPA/MEPA process;
- Identify resource issues that need additional consideration and evaluation;
- Describe any additional data or gaps in data that must be supplemented during the NEPA/MEPA process;
- Describe any resources that were not reviewed and why;
- Forward any possible mitigation strategies (include avoidance); and
- Describe any other issues that should be brought to the attention of the future project team.

Appendix D. Memorandum of Understanding

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

BETWEEN

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION;
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION,
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION;
UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY;
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, CORPS OF ENGINEERS;
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR, FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE;
UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE;
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH WILDLIFE AND PARKS;
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY; AND
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SAFE, EFFICIENT AND ENVIRONMENTALLY
SENSITIVE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM IN THE STATE OF MONTANA

This MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) is entered into for the purposes of memorializing the understanding between the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT); United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA); United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Department of Army, Corps of Engineers (COE); United States Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); United States Forest Service (USFS); Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP); Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ); and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) regarding the development of a safe, efficient and environmentally sensitive transportation system in the State of Montana. All signatories to this MOU are collectively known as the "Parties."

Recitals

WHEREAS, the Parties have been involved on the Interagency Review Team (IRT) developed as a result of the US-93 corridor being selected as a priority project pursuant to Executive Order 13274, "Environmental Stewardship and Transportation Infrastructure Project Reviews;" and

WHEREAS, the Parties have realized the benefits from early coordination and dispute resolution resulting from the IRT efforts; and

WHEREAS, the Montana Department of Transportation is committed to delivering a safe, efficient, and environmentally sensitive transportation system in the State of Montana; and

WHEREAS, the Parties are also committed to delivering their respective programs while effectively contributing to the delivery of a safe, efficient, and environmentally sensitive transportation system in the State of Montana: and

WHEREAS, the Parties agree that early agency involvement, supported by effective public involvement, should reduce conflicts in transportation decision making and result in better transportation decisions; and

WHEREAS, this agreement is an internal agreement among the signatories, is not enforceable between the Parties, and does not create or confer any right or benefit on any other person or party, private or public. Nothing in this MOU is intended to diminish, modify or otherwise affect the statutory or regulatory authorities, obligations or discretionary responsibilities of the Parties.

WHEREAS, as required by the Antideficiency Act, 31 USC 1341 and 1342; all commitments made by the Federal parties in this MOU are subject to the availability of appropriated funds. Nothing in this MOU, in and of itself, obligates the Federal or State Parties to expend appropriations; to enter into any contract, assistance agreement, interagency agreement; or to incur other financial obligations that would be inconsistent with respective Party budget priorities. Each Party will carry out its separate activities in a coordinated and mutually beneficial manner.

WHEREAS, nothing in this Agreement supersedes information sharing requirements in Federal law or regulation.

NOW, THEREFORE, the parties hereto agree as follows:

Section 1. General Commitments

- A. The Parties commit to actively work together with MDT on transportation projects in Montana.
- B. The Parties agree to senior management involvement at an appropriate decision making level to facilitate fast, efficient resolution of outstanding issues to satisfy 1.A. above.
- C. The Parties agree to meet on a semi-annual basis to discuss transportation and environmental issues in an effort to improve:
 - o Transportation decisions;
 - o Protection of Natural and Human Environment;
 - o Efficiency and Cost Savings; and
 - o Early input by the agencies in transportation planning.
- D. The Parties agree that one of the semi-annual meetings in 1.C. will be to discuss and compare plans and upcoming projects in an effort to work cooperatively and integrate agency programs and projects where appropriate.

Section 2. Agency Management Involvement/Conflict Resolution

- A. If the Parties' staff and supervisors cannot reach agreement on any issue, the Parties agree to elevate the decision to successively higher levels within each organization until consensus is reached. The Parties will make every effort to expeditiously resolve outstanding issues at the lowest possible level of their respective agencies. If after opportunity for review, the Parties' staff and/or first-level supervisors cannot achieve resolution, the issue will be immediately elevated. A meeting or conference call will be held within twenty (20) working days from the date the issue was elevated.
- B. Any Party may elevate the issue to the following individuals or their designee with appropriate decision making authority:
- Director
Montana Department of Transportation
 - Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
 - Director Montana Office
Environmental Protection Agency
 - Montana State Program Manager
US Army Corps of Engineers
 - Field Supervisor
US Fish and Wildlife Service
 - Director of Engineering for the Northern Region
US Forest Service
 - Director
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
 - Director
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
 - Director
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

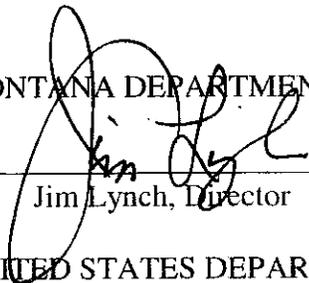
Section 3. Execution

This MOU, when signed by all signatories representing all of the organizations listed below, is expected to continue for five (5) years from the date of the last signature. This MOU may be extended or amended at any time per the mutual written consent of the Parties. However, any signatory to this MOU may terminate its participation herein at any time. If appropriate to do so, signatories may provide ninety (90) days of written notice to the other participants.

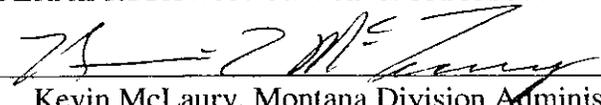
By signature below, each Party certifies that the individuals listed in this document, as representatives of the Parties, are authorized to act in their respective areas for matters related to this MOU.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Parties hereto have executed this Memorandum of Understanding.

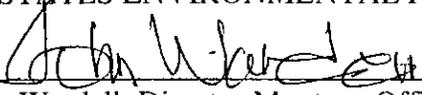
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

By:  Date 4/1/2008
Jim Lynch, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION,
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

By:  Date 4/1/08
Kevin McLaury, Montana Division Administrator

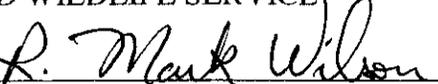
UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

By:  Date 4-1-08
John Wardell, Director Montana Office

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, CORPS OF ENGINEERS

By:  Date 4-1-08
Allan Steinle, Montana State Program Manager

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR,
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

By:  Date 4-1-08
Mark Wilson, Field Supervisor

UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE

By:  Date 4-1-08
Joel Krause, Acting Director of Engineering Northern Region

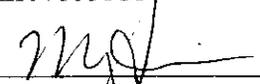
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

By: Tom Lewis Date 4/1/08
for Richard Opper, Director

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS

By: Mr. Jeff Hagener Date 4/1/08
Jeff Hagener, Director

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

By:  Date 4/1/08
Mary Sexton, Director