

Chapter 1

Department of Transportation

General Information

1.1 Background and History

Montana's first Highway Commission was created in 1913. It was composed of three members and had a yearly budget of \$5000. By the 1930s, Montana and other states in the nation launched an effort to upgrade major roads to "get out of the mud."

A burst of activity occurred in the mid-1950s when the interstate system began. The federal program continued with the state-funded Reconstruction Trust Fund Program of 1983 and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act in 1991. The reauthorization of the Transportation Act in June of 1998 was titled the Transportation Equity Act of the Twenty-first Century (TEA-21) and is in affect through 2003. Federal-aid under TEA-21 increased available federal funding from \$161 million to \$260 million annually. TEA-21 also provided more flexibility in usage. Because of the changes, the maintenance division was able to implement federal-aid into its program.

The Federal-Aid Highway Program is extremely important to Montana's economy. In Montana, the federal aid program provides a very large percentage of the funding needed to preserve and improve the state's most important highways.

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) currently maintains more than 24,500 lane miles of roads including 5,300 lane miles of secondary for which the Department became responsible as a result of legislative actions. The secondary roadway maintenance program was fully implemented January 1, 2001.

1.2 Administration

The Governor of the State of Montana is the chief executive officer of the state. The Governor appoints a Director to administer the Transportation Department.

The Director's duties include but are not limited to the following:

- supervise, direct, account for, organize, plan administer and execute the functions vested in the Department of Transportation by law,
- establish policy to be followed by Department and employees,
- compile and submit reports and budget for the Department as required by law or requested by the Governor,
- maintain a central office in Helena for the Department and maintain other facilities throughout the state as may be required for the effective and efficient operations of the Department,
- represent the Department in communications with the Governor,

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- prescribe rules consistent with law made by the Legislature and rules established by the Governor.

1.3 The Transportation Commission

The Transportation Commission is composed of five members appointed by the Governor. Each Commissioner must be a resident of and represents one of the five transportation districts. The terms of the Commission members are staggered. The duties of the Commission are defined by state statute and include but are not limited to the following:

- prioritize and select construction and reconstruction projects. Let contracts for state and federal-aid highways,
- award contracts in competitive bidding process,
- abandon highways (public notice required),
- allocate funds for projects,
- designate which highways MDT maintains.

1.4 Program Authority and Objectives

The Department of Transportation was created as part of the executive branch of state government by the Montana Constitution, Article VI, section 7 and Montana Statutes:

1. The legislature intends, through the creation of a Department of Transportation within the executive branch of state government to:
 - a. provide the means to plan for the present and future transportation needs of the citizens of Montana.
 - b. assure that transportation remains a viable element in the private sector of the economy, and
 - c. provide energy-effective and ecologically compatible transportation services with optimum efficiency, effectiveness and economy.
2. It is the policy of the State of Montana that adequate, safe, efficient transportation facilities and services of all modes are essential to the economic growth of the state and the well being of its people and that the planning and development of those facilities and services be coordinated by a Department of Transportation that has overall responsibility for balanced transportation policy and planning. Montana State Statute, MCA 2-15-2505

1.5 Montana Department of Transportations Mission Statement

The Montana Department of Transportation's mission is to serve the public by providing a transportation system and services that emphasizes quality, safety, cost-effectiveness, economic vitality and sensitivity to the environment.

1.6 Program Responsibilities

The Department of Transportation is primarily responsible for the following duties:

- Planning public transportation and rail programs,
- Planning general aviation and airports,
- Planning fiscal programs (budgeting and accounting),

- Administering the highway traffic safety program.
- Planning and designing the state's highway system,
- Testing and designing materials,
- Administering contracts,
- Maintaining highways, bridges and appurtenances,
- Building and maintaining Department facilities,
- Enforcing vehicle weight and dimension laws,
- Managing the state motor pool,

1.7 Department Funding

The Department's primary funding is derived from user fees collected by the state and reimbursements from the federal government. State funds are used for Department operations, federal matching requirements and preservation of existing state and federal highway system. Federal funds are primarily available for construction, reconstruction and preservation of federal-aid highways and selected maintenance activities.

State Funding

State funding comes primarily from gasoline and diesel fuel taxes, motor vehicle taxes, registration fees and gross vehicle weight fees. State funding is referred to as State Special Revenue (SSR).

Maintenance Program Funding

The maintenance program has funding from two primary sources state and federal reimbursement. The largest portion of the maintenance programs funding is from state funds. The federal portion is for federal-aid eligible pavement preservations and safety-related activities.

1.8 Federal Highway Administration

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is a division of the United States Department of Transportation. It administers the federal-aid program, which funds highway improvements on the Federal-Aid Highway System throughout the nation.

FHWA's responsibility is to ensure that the state departments of transportation comply with all applicable federal laws and engineering requirements for projects to be eligible for federal-aid reimbursement. The FHWA is responsible for the following areas:

- Construction and maintenance,
- Environment and design,
- Traffic and safety,
- Motor carrier safety,
- Right-of-way,
- Administration and auditing,

FHWA makes federal funds available to the state for construction, reconstruction and preservation of highways and other approved activities. The transportation acts have various funding criteria depending on federal-aid system.

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Federal Funds for Maintenance

Changes in TEA-21 made it possible for maintenance to request federal reimbursement of selected activities. The maintenance program reviewed potentially eligible activities and received Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approval. The FHWA will reimburse the Department for activities that are conducted within federally acceptable guidelines. Federal-aid reimbursement does not mean the maintenance program received any additional funding, but determined the distribution of the funding. Eligible activities are traffic line striping, safety projects, chemical de-icers, seal and cover projects and crack sealing. The list of activities is reviewed annually by FHWA and can change from year to year.

1.9 Highway System

The state-maintained highway system consists of distinct route types such as the following:

- National Highway System (NHS) – I-Routes, P-Routes and selected P-Routes.
- State Transportation Program (STP) - Selected P-Routes and S-routes.
- Urban System-U-Routes
- Local routes-x-routes such as frontage road and connector roads