

# Newsline

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January 1997



Montana's highways will be better maintained and some might become scenic byways if Montana's 55th Legislature approves legislation supported by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT).

## Maintenance Issues, Scenic Byways Top MDT Legislative Agenda

### Improved Highway Maintenance

The maintenance of Montana's major highways is critical to Montana's economic health and the safety of residents and nonresidents who drive these highways. For example, over 8 million out-of-state visitors enter Montana each year by highway. These visitors contribute over \$1 billion to the State's economy. These highways also carry Montana's agricultural products to rail lines and manufactured goods and food to Montana's communities.

MDT is pursuing two legislative initiatives that will help insure these highways continue to meet these critical needs in the future.

### Additional Maintenance Positions



Since 1980, MDT has lost 115 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions from its Maintenance Program. Of these reductions, 76 of them came during the 1995 legislative session when MDT was asked to reduce overall FTE levels by five percent. During the same period, the department has added more than 1700 lane miles of maintenance responsibility. This means that each

maintenance employee is now responsible for approximately eight more miles of highway than an employee in 1980. Although MDT's Maintenance employees "work smarter" than they did in 1980, maintaining current level winter maintenance is a constant challenge. In fact, for FY96 the only way to maintain at current levels was by overrunning our Maintenance Program personal services budget. A similar overrun is projected for FY97.

To address this problem, MDT is seeking approval from the Legislature to restore 48 of the Maintenance FTE's lost over the last 16 years. These positions would be filled throughout Montana to insure each area maintains the current level of highway maintenance.

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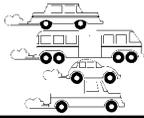
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**Special Insert MDT Contacts**

MDT's Information Handbook for the 55th Legislature is now available.

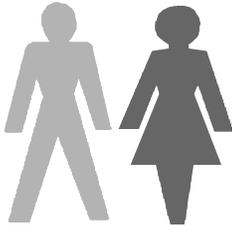
Call 1-800-714-7296 to request a copy or download from our Internet Homepage at:  
<http://www.mdt.mt.gov>



# MDT Planning Division Updates



## MDT's Guide to Public Involvement Now Available



The "Draft Public Involvement Process Handbook" was distributed for public review and comment in August and September. We received over 200 requests from readers who received notification via postcards, newspaper ads and MDT's Internet Homepage. More than 14% of the requests came via the Internet.

In response to questions and suggestions, the revised publication includes more project specific information. The name was changed to avoid confusion with another MDT publication which provides guidance to department employees responsible for developing public involvement plans for highway projects. Other changes include improved graphics and more information on how to contact key MDT offices.

Thanks to everyone that provided comments and suggestions!

Please call 1-800-714-7296 to request the revised version

or download from our Internet Homepage at:

<http://www.mdt.mt.gov>.

## Why was MDT's First Annual Transportation Planning Conference Cancelled?

Although more than 700 people were notified via postcards and flyers of this planning-oriented conference, only 14 registrants had confirmed by the registration deadline. The goal of this conference was to provide our customers an opportunity to learn more about many of the programs the division is involved in, and give participants a chance to ask questions, share their concerns, and discuss ways we can improve the way we manage these programs.

The division felt the cost and time involved to proceed with the conference would far outweigh the benefit to the few people that registered. Therefore the decision was made to cancel.



We are now soliciting comments from you - **OUR PUBLIC** on what we can do to better inform you. Call our toll free line at 1-800-714-7296 with your thoughts and comments.

THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING NEWSLINE is published quarterly by the Montana Department of Transportation, Transportation Planning Division. The preparation of this newsletter is financed through the Federal Highway Administration's Statewide Planning and Research Program. Articles appearing in the Transportation Planning Newsletter are contributed by the staff of the MDT Transportation Planning Division.

## Passenger Assistance Classes Given Across State

John Robinson, Training and Development Specialist in MDT's Transit Section, conducted nine "Passenger Service and Safety" workshops during 1996.

More than 100 transit drivers across the state attended courses this year. The training focused on the proper handling of the physically disabled passenger who must use walkers, canes, crutches, or wheelchairs. "Hands on" training includes everything from assisting the visually impaired to proper hydraulic wheelchair lift operating procedures.

Upon completion of the course, participants must pass a test with 90% accuracy before they receive a diploma and become fully certified in Passenger Service and Safety.

For further information regarding this class contact John Robinson at (406)444-6120.

## Great Falls Transit Driver Competes at National Bus Roadeo

Dick Dahlen of Great Falls Transit competed in the 35-foot bus class October 8 in Anaheim, California after winning the Montana full-size bus class.

He placed 26th out of 46 drivers entered in the 1996 American Public Transportation Association International Bus Operators Roadeo. The roadeo was a tremendous experience." Dahlen said. "It was a great honor to represent Montana and Great Falls Transit."

Congratulations Dick!



# MDT Planning Division Updates



## Straehl Receives National Award



Sandra Straehl, Program and Policy Bureau Chief of MDT's Planning Division, received the President's Special Award of Merit at the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Annual Meeting in Buffalo, New York. She was recognized for her work on the AASHTO ISTEA reauthorization initiative. Straehl served as

chair of the Planning Issues Task Force which formulated policy positions serving as the basis for planning policies ultimately adopted by the AASHTO Board of Directors. Straehl also served on the Reauthorization Steering Committee Editorial Board which reviewed, planned, and edited AASHTO reauthorization positions.

Congratulations Sandy!

## Missoula-Ravalli TMA Presents Mid-Year Report

The Missoula-Ravalli Transportation Management Association presented a mid-year report to its advisory board and MDT staff on October 30. MR TMA is a one-year MDT-funded pilot project to implement transportation demand management (TDM) strategies in Missoula and Ravalli Counties.

Executive Director Noel Larrivee reported on the status of the goals and objectives, noting the success in garnering support in Missoula and throughout the Bitterroot Valley. Larrivee also reported the first Park and Ride lot in Montana has been established in Hamilton. He then presented three budget plans to the board for the continuation of MR TMA in 1997-1998.

## Did You Know Anyone Can Nominate a Project?

Most people don't realize anyone can submit a highway project nomination. The general perception is only influential people or highway officials can nominate a project. The fact is - anyone can nominate a project at any time during the year. These project nominations can be for any of Montana's highway systems as well as for reconstruction, resurfacing, bridge rehabilitation or replacement, safety improvements, or any other aspect of Montana's transportation system.

Generally, projects submitted by the public have already been identified by MDT personnel as needed projects, *but not always*. MDT is always willing to accept input from the public. Additionally, we encourage anyone to call to find out if a project has already been identified and its tentative contract date. Due to funding constraints, even though a project has been put into the program, it could

be years before it is let to contract.

Upon receiving suggestions for highway projects, we acknowledge receipt with a letter. Next, MDT staff will see if it's identified in the three-year Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), or the long-term tentative construction program. If the nominated project is not in the program, it may be included in the next draft version of the STIP which is presented for public comment in June of each year. Finally, if the proposed project receives favorable public comment, meets the requirements of state and federal regulations, and receives approval from the Montana Transportation Commission, the project will enter the preliminary engineering phase of development.

For questions or further information contact Jeff Ebert at (406)444-7639 or 1-800-714-7296 or E-Mail U2424@long.mdt.mt.gov

### Transportation Planning Division Telephone Numbers

Only the most frequently requested numbers are listed here. For an area or person not listed, call **1-800-714-7296** (in Montana only), or **(406) 444-3423**.

**TDD** (406) 444-7696 or 1-800-335-7592

Administrator (Patricia Saindon) .	444-3143
CTEP (Mike Davis) .....	444-4383
Mapping (Joe O'Neil) .....	444-6119
Multimodal Planning	
(John Craig) .....	444-6370
Projects (Jeff Ebert) .....	444-7639
Public Involvement	
(Dave Dreher) .....	444-6245
Rail Planning (Jan Vogel) .....	444-4262
Secondary Roads (Gary Larson) ..	444-6110
Statistics (Rick Rogne) .....	444-6111
Traffic Safety (Albert Goke) .....	444-7301
Traffic Statistics (Dan Bisom) .....	444-6122
Transit (Janis Winston) .....	444-4210
Urban Planning (Ross Tervo) .....	444-3445
ITS Planning (Dennis Hult) .....	444-9237
Newsline Editor (Sally Yarnall) ...	444-3475
Newsline Distribution	
(Kathy Covert) .....	444-7239



# Special Focus

## Montana's

### How Fast Should You Drive?

In Montana there are two types of speed limits:

#### Statutory Speed Limits

Under legislative control defined by Montana statutes.

- ◆ Safe and prudent
- ◆ Daytime speed limits for trucks
- ◆ Nighttime speed limits for all vehicles
- ◆ Limits for urban districts
- ◆ Limits for survey crew work projects

#### Special Speed Limits or Speed Zones

Are based on recommendations of traffic engineering professionals on specified section of roadway.

- ◆ School speed zones
- ◆ Senior citizen centers
- ◆ Roadways where the adjacent environment is transitioning between rural and urban
- ◆ Temporary work zones
- ◆ Segments where the combination of roadway design features and intensity of adjacent development tend to cause the traffic stream to travel at other than statutory limits.

The intent of speed zones is to influence as many drivers as possible to operate at or near the same speed, thus reducing conflicts created by wide differentials in operating speeds. These conflicts, and the resultant accidents, are substantially less when the majority of vehicles are traveling the same speed.

There is a common misconception that posting lower speed zones reduces the speed of vehicles. This is not true. An article titled "Traffic Engineering Myths and Realities" in the January, 1990 issue of Public Works Magazine confirms this. The section on speed zones tells us that: "One of the most prevalent myths around is that motorists will adjust their speed in response to the numbers posted on speed limit signs regardless of roadway and traffic conditions. Before-and-after studies consistently demonstrate that there are no significant changes in traffic speeds following the posting of new or revised speed limits."

The article continues, "Further more, no published research findings have established any direct relationship between posted speed limits and accident frequency,..."

Regulatory speed limit signs should identify the maximum speed limit, enabling law enforcement to target those who are driving outside the normal pace of traffic.

Another common misconception about speed zones is lower speed zones decrease accidents. In fact, speed zones which are set arbitrarily low are often less safe than speed zones which have been recommended based on a thorough traffic and engineering study of the roadway and its environment. Setting speed zones below the normal traffic pace can result in a wider range of traffic speeds on the roadway, and potentially more hazardous conditions.

**Appropriate speed zones are aids to law enforcement to target the smaller number of high risk motorists in the traffic stream who drive at a speed other than that deemed prudent by the majority of the drivers.**

The use of engineering and design tools is the best way to target and reduce accident trends. These tools include modified roadway alignment, intersection design, traffic signals, pavement markings, and signage. Properly applied, these tools result in a more uniform pace, reduced conflicts, and fewer accidents.

**Studies show speed limit signs have little or no effect on the speed of traffic.**

# Speed Zones

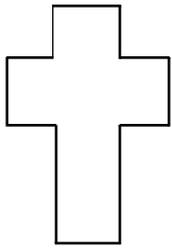
## Procedures for Revising Speed Zones On MDT Highways

1. MDT encourages any requests for changes in a speed limit to be submitted to the department by local governments or state agencies. If a local individual submits a request, MDT will contact the appropriate local governing authority for approval.
2. Following receipt of a request, MDT sends a letter to the requestor explaining the specific procedures. MDT staff then meets with the local government body to explain the law, department and Montana Transportation Commission responsibilities, and the traffic and engineering study used to develop recommendations.
3. The local government body has 30 days after the meeting to decide whether to sign a letter saying the officials want the study to continue.
4. If the local government body gives its approval, traffic engineers conduct a traffic and engineering study as required by law and then prepares recommendations for the local government. Recommendations are based on several factors, including the 85th percentile speed and pace.

The pace is a 10 MPH range of speed containing the largest proportion of the traffic stream. Both radar and automated counters are used to measure vehicular speeds in both directions. Engineers review the distribution of speed within the traffic stream to determine the speed most drivers are driving. The greater the percentage of vehicles in the pace, the fewer conflicts the driver has to deal with and the safer the roadway. Other factors considered are road surface and condition, curves and hazards, roadside development, such as business and advertising signs - sometimes called roadside friction, parking and pedestrian activity, and accident records for the area.



- Since motorists take most of these things into account when determining their speed, the best measurement for speed zone setting is still the speed most drivers are driving. This is referred to as the 85th percentile and is based on the principle that 85 percent of the drivers are safe and prudent and adjust their speed to the conditions regardless of the posted limit. Studies have also shown motorists driving at or right below the 85th percentile speed are the most alert and least likely to be involved in an accident.
5. MDT staff provides the study results to the local government within 30 days of the study completion.
  6. The local government has 60 days after receiving the results to comment. A copy of the results is also sent to local law enforcement officials and the Montana Highway Patrol.
  7. At the end of 60 days the results and the department's recommendation are presented to the Montana Transportation Commission at its next regular meeting. The local government receives written notification of recommendations and is also informed of the Commission meeting date. The local government is advised of the opportunity to appear before the Commission.
  8. If the Transportation Commission approves the change, MDT personnel make the necessary signing changes.



## Montana's White Crosses A Brief History

For 43 years, white crosses have marked the scenes of fatal traffic accidents along the highways of Montana. These crosses remind passing motorists of the dangers of the roads, as well as the lives which have been lost on the highways.



The white cross program began after six lives were lost in the Missoula area over the Labor Day Holiday in 1952. Floyd Eaheart, a member of the American Legion in Missoula, felt the crosses would act as a reminder to the hazards of the roads.

After being approved by the Montana Highway Commission in January of 1953, other American Legion posts around the state took up the cause and had placed over 2000 crosses by 1965 (This represents a cemetery of over five acres).

Most of the 122 American Legion posts in Montana have been assigned an area in which they are responsible for placing and maintaining the white crosses.

Each post assembles its own crosses by the standards set by the American Legion, and places them as close to the exact scene of the fatal accident as possible.

The American Legion's White Crosses can be found on state highways, secondary roads, city streets, and in abiding by federal law, far off the interstate highway.

Even though the signs are self-explanatory to Montanans who have lived around them for generations, the American Legion has placed signs explaining the program at several entrances to the state. For example, the sign near Libby says "Each white cross represents a highway fatality, please drive carefully - American Legion Post #97 Libby".

The American Legion has experienced few difficulties with the program, but on rare occasions, the white crosses have been torn down by grieving families.

Quite often, families place wreaths and other decorations on the crosses, which many times are considered a memorial to a loved one lost in an accident.

*Adapted from the Active Montanan Magazine April/May 1996*

## Some Transportation related WWW sites you may want to visit

- Montana Department of Transportation Homepage*  
<http://www.mdt.mt.gov>

### ASSOCIATIONS

- ITS America*  
<http://www.itsa.org>
- Institute of Traffic Engineers*  
<http://www.ite.org>
- American Trucking Associations*  
<http://www.trucking.org>
- Assoc. of American Railroads*  
<http://www.aar.org/>

### GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

- USDOT*  
<http://www.dot.gov>
- Transportation Research Board*  
<http://www.nas.edu/trb/>
- ITS Joint Program Office*  
<http://www.its.dot.gov>
- Environmental Protection Agency*  
<http://www.epa.gov>
- Federal Aviation Administration*  
<http://www.faa.gov>
- Federal Highway Administration*  
<http://ct1.volpe.dot.gov/ohim/>
- Federal Railroad Administration*  
<http://www.fra.dot.gov>
- Federal Transit Administration*  
<http://www.fta.gov>
- National Highway Transportation Safety Administration*  
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>
- National Transportation Safety Board*  
<http://www.nts.gov>
- US DOT Bureau of Transportation Statistics*  
<http://www.bts.gov>

**\*\* Now Available \*\***

**Wallet Size Version of Special Insert  
MDT's Phone Contact Card  
To Request, Call 1-800-714-7296**



*continued from page 1*

### Additional Preventive Maintenance Funding



MDT is also seeking approval from the Legislature to redirect \$1 million in current level funding to establish a proactive preventive maintenance program on Montana's most important highways.

Montana's highway system has an estimated replacement value in the billions of dollars. As in the case of any product, highways cannot be made to last forever. Roadways deteriorate and disintegrate at an accelerated rate unless they are properly and consistently maintained. While the department has a substantial program designed to maintain our highway infrastructure, it's largely a "reactive maintenance" program. The system needs are so great compared to the limited resources, MDT is forced to apply the available resources to those areas with the worst problems.

This funding request will allow the department to begin moving to a mode of preventive rather than reactive maintenance. MDT will use these funds on cost-effective thin

## MDT Legislative Agenda (cont'd)

overlay, chip seal, and crack sealing projects. This minor and inexpensive investment will pay off over time by delaying the need for expensive overlay and reconstruction projects, and increasing the life span of our highways.

### **Montana Scenic/Historic Byway Program**

Montana has many roads with noteworthy scenic and historic features that would be of interest to out-of-state visitors. However, unlike most states, Montana has never developed a program that identifies and promotes these routes to benefit Montana's communities.



Proposals for a Montana scenic byway program have come up often in the last 30 years, but have never resulted in the development of a program. MDT finally addressed this issue in a comprehensive manner in the 1994 Scenic Byway Feasibility Study. The Study concluded a program which recognized noteworthy routes and encouraged visitors to extend their visits would be beneficial to Montana's communities. MDT is therefore asking the 55th Legislature for the authority to develop a Montana Scenic/Historic Byway Program.

The Feasibility Study also determined that Montana would benefit most from a "two-tiered" scenic and historic byway program that includes less-developed "backcountry" routes

as well as traditional major highways. This type of program, which has been very successful in Utah, would allow all areas of Montana to participate.

Scenic and Historic Byway designation wouldn't provide any additional funding for reconstruction or maintenance. However, enhancements to these routes, such as interpretive signs and guides, bike and pedestrian facilities, and scenic pullouts, would be eligible for funding under Montana's Community Transportation Enhancement Program.

Development of a Montana program would also allow Montana's best routes to be eligible for nomination for designation as All-American Roads or National Scenic Byways through a Federal program designed to promote routes nationally and internationally.



*Logan Canyon Byway - Utah*

## MDT Upcoming Events....

Legislative Session Begins - Helena

January 6

Legislative Session Ends - Helena

April 30

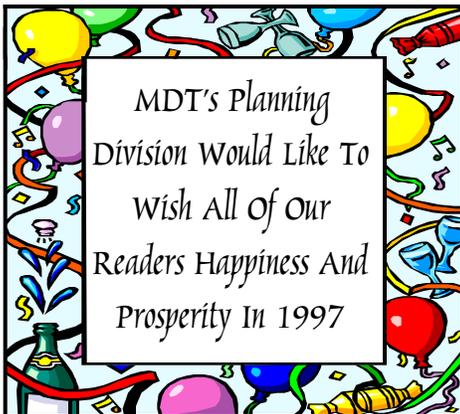
Transportation Commission Meetings -

January 22-23 - Helena

March 12-13 - Helena (Tentative)

For More Information on Any of These Events

Call 1-800-714-7296



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## Montana

### Community Transportation Enhancement Program Progress Report As of December 1996

There are currently 246 CTEP projects under development or in place. To date, \$22.5 million in federal aid enhancement funds have been suballocated to 107 local governments. Local governments have obligated \$17.3 million in CTEP funds toward projects and have received \$2.2 million in reimbursements from the MDT for work completed.

The following is a summary of projects within each phase of the CTEP process

**Phase I - There is currently 1 project in the Proposal and Development Stage.**

**Phase II - There are currently 46 projects in the Agreement Development Process.**

**Phase III - There are currently 129 projects in the Project Development Process.**

**Phase IV - There are 44 Projects in the Ad/Award & Construction Stage.**

**Phase V - There are 26 Substantially Completed / Completed Projects.**

For further information regarding CTEP projects contact Mike Davis (406)444-4383 E-Mail U1972@long.mdt.mt.gov or Ed Hedlund (406)444-0809 E-Mail U3589@long.mdt.mt.gov

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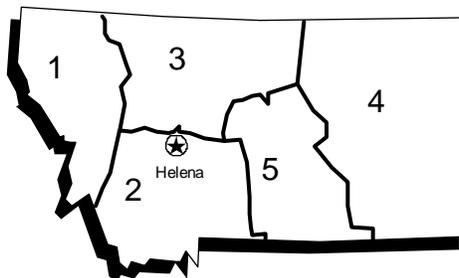
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# Transportation Commissioners and Related Montana County License Plate Prefixes



### **District 3**

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Helena, MT 59604-5953  
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Home: 443-2591

- 2. Cascade
- 5. Lewis & Clark
- 12. Hill
- 19. Chouteau
- 21. Toole
- 24. Blaine
- 26. Pondera
- 31. Teton
- 38. Glacier
- 48. Liberty



### **District 4**

Ed Smith  
HC 44  
Dagmar, MT 59219

Home/Fax: 483-5484

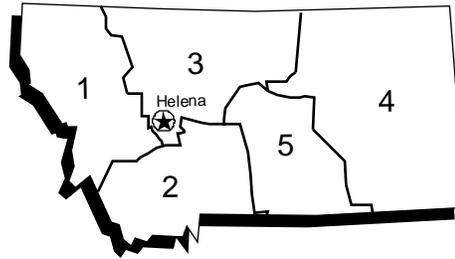
- 9. Powder River
- 11. Phillips
- 14. Custer
- 16. Dawson
- 17. Roosevelt
- 20. Valley
- 27. Richland
- 29. Rosebud
- 34. Sheridan
- 37. Daniels
- 39. Fallon
- 41. McCone
- 42. Carter
- 45. Prairie
- 50. Garfield
- 52. Wibaux



### **District 1**

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Home: 293-3304

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- 7. Flathead
- 13. Ravalli
- 15. Lake
- 28. Powell
- 35. Sanders
- 46. Granite
- 54. Mineral
- 56. Lincoln



### **District 2**

Patricia Abelen  
1612 West Olive #4  
Bozeman, MT 59715

Office/Home: 587-0134

- 1. Butte/  
Silver Bow
- 6. Gallatin
- 18. Beaverhead
- 25. Madison
- 30. Anaconda/  
Deer Lodge
- 47. Meagher
- 43. Broadwater
- 49. Park
- 51. Jefferson



### **District 5**

Thorm Forseth, Chairman  
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Home: 259-3147

- 3. Yellowstone
- 8. Fergus
- 10. Carbon
- 22. Big Horn
- 23. Musselshell
- 32. Stillwater
- 33. Treasure
- 36. Judith Basin
- 40. Sweet Grass
- 44. Wheatland
- 53. Golden Valley
- 55. Petroleum

## Aeronautics Board



**Ron Mercer, Chairman**

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