Don’t Crowd the Plow

TowPlows
The TowPlow is a steerable trailer-mounted plow that is pulled behind a plow truck. The TowPlow can be rotated to one side of the truck, which doubles the plow width. The 26-foot-wide plow gives the operator the ability to move snow from two lanes of roadway in one pass. Don’t try to pass the TowPlow when it is clearing two lanes. The operator will periodically rotate the TowPlow back in line with the truck to allow vehicles to pass.

The TowPlow shown above is a steerable trailer-mounted plow that is pulled behind a plow truck.

Every winter vehicles collide with snowplows. Drivers often overestimate the speed plows are traveling and do not allow time to slow down. Other drivers take the chance and drive through the snow cloud created by the plow, then strike the wing plow that extends to the right or left side of the truck or ram into a second plow truck working ahead of the plow truck being passed. Some drivers even attempt to drive through the snow berm being created by the plow truck.

Whatever the cause, these collisions are dangerous and costly. The plow truck and plow operator are taken out of service, passenger vehicles are often totaled, and vehicle occupants may be seriously injured or killed. Please drive with caution near snow plows.

Tandem Plowing
MTD crews often work in tandem to plow snow from the median and other areas where snow accumulates or can cause thaw/freeze ice conditions. The first plow clears the left shoulder of the road, pushing snow into the driving lane. The middle plow follows to the side and pushes that snow to the right where the third plow pushes the snow off the roadway. When approaching a snow cloud caused by a plow truck, slow down and back off. That cloud may obscure the wing plow extending to the left or right of the truck. The snow cloud may also obscure other plows working in tandem.

When approaching a snowplow from the rear, reduce speed immediately. When approaching an oncoming plow, don’t crowd the centerline. The plow operators know the road well and will pull over as soon as it is safe to do so, to allow vehicles to pass.

iPhone, iPad or Android Users
MTD’s travel info mobile app is available in Google play, the App Store or on Amazon. The app includes roadway conditions, cameras, travel alerts, construction details, and more. Use the online content and get the latest road condition information at roadreport.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo mobile or dial 511.

Tandem Plowing

Surface Transportation Program Funding Status Update

The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act surface transportation bill was passed by Congress on Thursday, December 3 and signed into law by President Obama on Friday, December 4. The FAST Act authorizes five years of funding for the nation’s transportation infrastructure. Roughly, the bill retains the MAP-21 program structure at about the same level of funding and gradually increasing over the life of the authorization. One of the few notable changes in the Act is a new stand-alone national highway freight program, which provides states an annual allocation of funds and requires increased emphasis on freight planning. At first look, the FAST Act is very good for Montana as it retains Montana’s share of the federal program and has minimized additional program regulations. In the coming weeks, MDT staff will be looking at the bill in more detail to identify any impacts on the program.

Of special note—having a long-term authorization bill in place allows MDT to better develop and plan the program of projects, which in turn results in more safe and efficient transportation systems for the traveling public. We extend our thanks to Montana’s Congressional Delegation and their staffs for all of the hard work and effort on Montana’s behalf in developing this legislation.
Looking Back at MDT’s 2015 Highway Program Challenges and Successes

As the new year begins, MDT has an opportunity to look back and reflect on the department’s challenges and successes in delivering the highway program for 2015.

Since the majority of Montana’s highway program is funded by federal aid, MDT develops and manages a construction plan called the Tentative Construction Program (TCP) based on the federal fiscal year (FFY) - October 1 through September 30.

When developing the 2015 TCP in October 2014, the federal program under MAP-21 had expired and MDT was operating under a partial-year program extension through May 31, 2015. At the same time, federal appropriations were extended under a partial-year Continuing Resolution through December 11, 2014. Combined, these short-term stays of the federal program resulted in considerable uncertainty in both the FFY 2015 funding level and payments MDT would receive to cover federal program expenditures.

To ensure that MDT was positioned to deliver a full-year program of projects when authorization and appropriation bills were passed, the department developed the TCP based on conservative growth, knowing program adjustments would be needed throughout the year depending on the outcome of federal legislation.

Shortly after completion of the TCP, MDT’s administrative staff began meeting with program managers and district offices to assess risks and identify mitigations to manage state cash flow, federal program reimbursements, and project lettings throughout the year. These program management decisions relied on the department’s mission and long range transportation plan, TranPlan 21, for guidance, which resulted in MDT prioritizing safety and system preservation, followed by capacity and mobility enhancement, and then new construction and reconstruction.

These efforts shifted the timing of projects in the letting schedule, but ultimately no projects were pushed out of the 2015 plan as a result of funding. Some of the larger projects with modified schedules included the Kalispell Bypass/Four Mile Drive projects in Kalispell, the Fort Peck North East project in Valley County, and the Deer Lick Creek Bridge on US-2 east of West Glacier in Glacier County.

In July, Congress passed a program extension that provided funding through the end of the fiscal year that allowed MDT to make final program adjustments, obligate all of the funds, and deliver the FFY 2015 program as planned.

Looking forward, Congress has addressed the federal program instability for five years with the recent enactment of the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (see cover article). However, the status of the Highway State Special Revenue account remains dire. A near-zero balance is projected for the account by the end of the biennium. This account, funded through the Montana fuel tax, provides the required state matching funds for the federal program and funds MDT snow plowing, chip sealing, and other critical highway maintenance activities. MDT will continue to diligently manage activities within the available cash, but demands are growing, and system condition is declining.

Implementing MDT ADA Transition Plan, 2015 Update

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 builds upon the foundation set by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities. To comply with the Act, public entities responsible for streets must develop an ADA Transition Plan outlining steps necessary to complete structural changes to pedestrian curb ramps.

Along with Federal Highway Administration partners, MDT successfully completed an ADA Transition plan in September of 2012 and began developing a programmatic improvement approach to statewide ADA needs. In October 2015, MDT completed a statewide inventory of routes to identify ADA needs. The inventory establishes MDT ADA needs and will serve as the basis for future ADA work.

Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) flexible funds will be used for some needed ADA improvements, in line with the transition plan and inventory, and as approved by the Montana Transportation Commission in September 2015. MDT Planning and Civil Rights staff will work to identify projects through a systematic approach. MDT’s ADA Coordinator, Matt Maze, can be contacted at mmaze@mt.gov or 444-5416.

MDT Transit Hosts Annual Fall Transit Management Training

The MDT Transit Section hosted the annual Fall Transit Management Training September 30 and October 1 in Helena. The training covered: procurement, goal setting, marketing, civil rights, a legal update, and the new Webgrants system that applicants will use for the first time to apply for operating and capital funding.

Fifty-five participants from different agencies serving the general public and the elderly and disabled attended. Nationally known speaker Charles Rutkowski from the Community Transportation Association of America gave an in-depth presentation on procurement of small purchases, effective marketing, and goal setting for transit systems. The training generated good discussions and participants were provided the opportunity to network.

For more information about the workshop, contact David Jacobs at 444-9192 or dajacobs@mt.gov.

MDT Transit Section hosted the Fall Transit Management Training in Helena.
West Coast Ports Study

A report commissioned by the Rail Service Competition Council entitled West Coast Ports Study was completed in December 2015.

The report examines recent events at west coast ports, including labor issues and the reduction of overseas container shipping from the Port of Portland that have had a negative effect on Montana specialty grain and pulse crop producers. Strategies for improving shipping and transportation logistics are identified, along with a review of various shipping methods.

For more information, contact Diane Myers at dmyers@mt.gov or 444-7252.

New Bearmouth Rest Area Open

Over the past several years, public comment has indicated a desire for improved, state-maintained rest areas across Montana. In response, MDT prioritizes rest area reconstruction and rehabilitation to serve the safety needs of travelers. The most recently completed rest area is Bearmouth located on Interstate 90, between Drummond and Missoula. Originally constructed in 1972 with rehabilitation completed in 1989, the 2014 site reconstruction replaces the old facility with expanded parking, additional lighting, and a new pet area. It opened April 27, 2015.

WGM Contracting Group, Bjerke Architects, and Diamond Construction helped make the new Bearmouth rest area a success. MDT Project Managers, Sheila Sullivan and Billy Maart, coordinated construction.

To review public opinion of the Bearmouth rest area, MDT staff conducted an on-site survey. The survey provided travelers an opportunity to “grade” the rest area and offer feedback to MDT on the new facility design, services and amenities offered, and share how the spacing of this rest area fits within their trip purpose and distance. The information gathered will be considered in future rest area design and investment. Overall, travelers rated this facility excellent with 99 percent of respondents rating it an A or B. One hundred percent of travelers surveyed felt they were safe and secure using the new facility.

This facility and the survey results demonstrate success of the rest area program.

New Bearmouth rest area on I-90 between Drummond and Missoula.

TranPlan 21 Plan Update

In the coming months, MDT will be reaching out to transportation stakeholders and Montana citizens to weigh in on what Montana’s transportation future should be. This public involvement process will guide the update to Montana’s statewide, long-range multimodal transportation plan, TranPlan 21.

The plan covers a 20-year horizon and guides MDT in the development and management of a multimodal transportation system. The update will examine emerging issues and priorities of the public and stakeholders to guide department goals and actions based on resource availability.

This is a chance for all Montanans to weigh in on what the future holds for the transportation system in the state. Watch MDT’s website, Facebook page, and your e-mail box for more information on how to let your voice be heard.

The current version of TranPlan 21 is available at www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/TranPlan 21.shtml.

For more information, contact Charity Watt at cwatt@mt.gov or 444-3439.

Montana Transportation Commission 2016 Schedule

The Montana Transportation Commission meets at 8:30 a.m. in the Montana Department of Transportation Commission Room at 2701 Prospect Avenue in Helena six times a year. The meeting dates are listed below and are subject to change.

- January 28
- March 24
- May 26
- July 28
- September 22
- October 26

For more information, contact Commission Secretary Lori Ryan at 444-6821 or lryan@mt.gov.
Annual Transportation Safety Planning Meeting

Safety partners across the state convened in Helena on October 28 and 29 for the annual Transportation Safety Planning Meeting. This two-day event provided an opportunity for state, federal, tribal, county, city, and other safety practitioners to network, attend a grant management workshop, and discuss Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP) strategies to reduce severe injury crashes.

MDT Director Mike Tooley provided opening remarks on the importance of Montana’s vision of zero deaths and serious injuries on roadways. Success in achieving Vision Zero is dependent on the involvement of safety experts within the 4Es of transportation safety – Education, Enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, and Engineering. In working toward Vision Zero, Director Tooley called on the necessity of a fifth E – Everyone. An Executive Leadership Team will lead Montana towards Vision Zero, shifting the culture in this state to not accept or tolerate risky behavior that results in traffic fatalities and serious injuries.

This year’s keynote speaker, Lieutenant Governor Angela McLean, stated both the governor and lieutenant governor are committed to making Montana a safer place and believe that Vision Zero can be achieved in Montana.

The meeting provided an overview of the updated CHSP and statewide crash data and trends. Crash reduction trends continue downward, reflecting that Montana is on track to achieve the interim goal to reduce severe injuries from 1,704 in 2007 to 852 by 2030. This interim goal is used to measure progress in moving towards Vision Zero. Montana’s CHSP has three emphasis areas:

- Roadway departures and intersection crashes
- Impaired driving crashes
- Occupant protection

The leader of each emphasis area facilitated breakout sessions with calls to action. Participants discussed agency, resource, and individual commitments; identified priority strategies for collaboration; and identified gaps in efforts, such as unrepresented agencies and organizations that prevent full implementation of strategies.

An annual meeting report will be posted on the CHSP website within the coming month. For more information on the CHSP emphasis areas, the meeting presentations, or if you are interested in participating in an emphasis group, visit the website at www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/chsp-meetings.shtml or contact Pam Langve-Davis at 444-7646 or plangvedavis@mt.gov.

Holiday Parties Mean Taking Care of Your Guests

‘Tis the season when calendars are filling up with holiday parties and gatherings of friends and family. The Montana Department of Transportation reminds hosts that taking care of guests doesn’t just mean making sure everyone has a great time. It means making sure your guests don’t over indulge in alcoholic beverages.

Not only is there a social responsibility to ensure guests don’t drink too much, it is also illegal in Montana to provide alcohol to an obviously intoxicated person. A prevailing misconception is that this is okay as long as this person is not driving. Adults who serve alcohol to minors or anyone who is obviously intoxicated can be held liable if the person who was provided the alcohol kills or injures another person.

It is commonly known that establishments that sell or serve alcohol have potential liability, but most people don’t realize the law extends to a “social host” – anyone who hosts a social gathering, including private individuals, employers, and organizations. To ensure the safety of your guests, when you are planning your holiday party, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Know who is planning to be a “designated driver,” and provide non-alcoholic beverages.
- Limit your guests to those you know well.
- Serve drinks yourself, and stay sober so that you know which guests are reaching their limit.
- Have plenty of food available, including protein-rich foods, which slow the absorption of alcohol.
- Provide several alternatives to alcoholic beverages. Tasty blender “mocktails” or spiked up fruit juices are usually very well received.
- Take fresh coffee and a dessert around to guests mid-way through the evening.
- Arrange for cab service or enlist a trusted friend to transport those who should not be driving.
- Only serve to guest you know are over the age of 21.
- Avoid “pushing” drinks on your guests or mixing strong drinks.
- Provide entertainment, games or activities so guests have something to do besides drink.
- If you hire a bartender, oversee the service closely. Make sure the bartender is taking these precautions, following the directions you set, and keeping aware of alcohol consumption by guests.
- Stop serving alcohol at least an hour before guests will be leaving.
- Do not serve alcohol to anyone who is visibly or noticeably intoxicated.
- Be prepared to take someone’s keys if you feel he or she should not drive.
- Do not serve someone a beverage containing alcohol without his or her knowledge.
- Make sure all guests have a sober driver to get home.
MDT Awards Safety Grants to Support Vision Zero

This fall, MDT awarded over $3 million in state and federal grant funds through two programs as part of the strategy to reach Vision Zero—zero deaths and zero injuries on Montana roads.

Emergency Medical Services Grant Program Nearly $982,000 in emergency-response-related equipment and vehicles were awarded through the State Emergency Medical Services grant program. The purpose of the grant program is to provide mostly volunteer, Medicare-level billing providers with ambulances or emergency response vehicles, and to purchase equipment for training, communication, or providing medical care. In Montana, funding to properly equip trained volunteers falls on communities and local governments.

“When you’re traveling in Montana’s rural areas, take a minute to think about who will help you and how long it will take for that help to arrive if you’re involved in a crash,” urged MDT Director Mike Tooley. “Trained volunteers are the backbone of Montana’s rural emergency response network.”

This annual program is funded through the state highway special revenue account and awarded through a competitive grant process. For more information, contact Chad Newman at chnewman@mt.gov or 444-0856, or go to www.mdt.mt.gov/business/grants_ems.shtml.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Grants—MDT awarded $2.66 million in federal grants from NHTSA October 1, 2015. The focus of these grants is enforcement and education to improve traffic safety. Law enforcement agencies throughout the state are receiving grants to participate in the Selective Traffic Enforcement Program that funds overtime patrols and equipment purchases to concentrate on enforcement of seat belt and impaired driving laws. Funding for DUI task forces, DUI courts, and a 24/7 Sobriety Program are other mechanisms to improve traffic safety through enforcement and education. The Native American Safe On All Roads (SOAR) program is active on reservations throughout the state and many Buckle Up coalitions continue to receive funding.

“Montana is a big state with thousands of miles to travel,” said MDT Director Mike Toolely. “Funding safety programs throughout the state is vital to saving lives and preventing injuries.”

Grant funding is limited and awarded through a competitive application process. MDT administers these federal grants from the NHTSA funded through the Federal Highway Trust Fund. For more information, go to: www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/grants/ or contact State Highway Traffic Safety Section Supervisor Janet Kenny at 444-7417 or jakenny@mt.gov.

Federal Transit and Highway Traffic Safety Grant Applications Due March 1, 2016

Note: applications will only be accepted through the Montana Grant and Loans Web-based system at fundingmt.org. Register in the system and apply when the opportunity becomes available on January 1, 2016.

For information regarding Transit grants, contact Eric Romero at eromero@mt.gov or 444-7645. For information regarding Highway Traffic Safety grants, contact Kevin Dusko at kedusko@mt.gov or 444-7411.

US-2 Rut Fill Project Complete

MDT Wolf Point Maintenance Division completed a maintenance rut fill project east of Nashua on US-2 in the Glasgow section of Valley County in August 2015. The department hauled, placed, and compacted hot mix asphalt at various locations between Mile Post 555.0 and Mile Post 561.5.

The project’s purpose was to extend the life of the pavement based upon pavement condition and severe rutting, and to maintain the highway surface in a condition that provides reasonable safety. Performing this pavement preservation treatment extends the life of this roadway and postpones a costly reconstruct for many years, thereby preserving the state’s capital investment.

Stationary hot plants are scarce in Eastern Montana. When contractors are within these areas with a portable hot plant, it is the ideal time for MDT to purchase mix for pavement preservation. For this project, Wolf Point Maintenance was able to buy approximately 2,500 tons of 1/2” hot mix asphalt containing PG 58-28 binder from Century Companies, which had a portable hot plant located 40 miles from the project.

Because of the haul and the amount of patching needed, 24 trucks were used to meet the needs of the rut filler. Maintenance personnel and equipment from Malta, Opheim, Jordan, Flowing Wells, Circle, Scobey, and Wolf Point assisted the Glasgow section. A 20-ton roller rented from Century Construction helped improve the compaction and ride on the surface of the road.

The Wolf Point Division takes pride in the speed and quality of the finished product that was accomplished with the rut filler. This operation is just one of the many tools that MDT Maintenance has in its toolbox to stretch the dollars for pavement preservation.
High Friction Surface (HFS) treatments are pavement surfacing applications that provide skid-resistant properties not typically associated with conventional materials. Applying a thin layer of durable, high friction aggregates on top of specially engineered resin or polymer binder allows long-lasting traction and greater friction for safety, and offers longer service life for the bridge deck. In making the pavement surface more resistant to wear and polishing, the process also seals the pavement from moisture and chloride penetration. HFS treatments may be used on either Portland concrete or asphalt surfaces.

MDT applied these treatments on four bridge decks located in Roundup, Big Timber, Kalispell, and Bigfork. The Kalispell and Roundup sites incorporated the Poly-Carb Mark process using their 135 Safe-T-Seal as an initial crack seal repair, followed by the 163 Flexogrid Overlay System. The Big Timber and Bigfork sites used the Unitex High Surface Friction components.

Both procedures applied two layers of aggregate using a two-part epoxy binder for each lift of aggregate. The first critical element was sand and metal shot blasting to clean the deck surface for adequate adhesion.

One main difference between the Poly-Carb and Dayton processes is that Poly-Carb promotes the addition of an initial crack-welding polymer (135 Safe-T-Seal) prior to the overlay system. The Dayton approach is to apply an initial heavy coat of epoxy to seal any existing cracks.

Each layer requires a curing time based on ambient atmospheric conditions and judgment based on the vendor’s knowledge of the product. Traffic may be allowed in as little as three hours after the second lift is cured.

MDT’s Experimental Project Program will conduct a long-term analysis on the treatments’ efficiency and performance.

More detailed information regarding these projects may be found at: www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/polycarb.shtml.
In 2011, the State Legislature passed Senate Bill 3, the State-owned Montana Heritage Properties Act. The legislation requires all state agencies and the Montana University System to submit a biennial report to the Legislature on the status and maintenance needs of agency heritage (historic) properties. The agency reports include a list of known historic properties including bridges, road and trail segments, buildings, archaeological and rock art sites, abandoned railroad grades, the Aeronautics Division headquarters, and airway beacons. MDT’s historic properties also include the district and area offices and some of the maintenance section shops. To be “historic,” a property must be at least 50 years old and retain enough historic significance and structural integrity to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Twenty of MDT-owned historic properties have been listed in the National Register in compliance with agreements with FHWA and the Montana State Historic Preservation Office.

Among the many gems owned by MDT are four of the five district offices and shops: Missoula, Great Falls, Glendive, and Billings. The Butte District Office is not yet 50 years old, but will likely join the group when it becomes old enough in 2020. The Great Falls and Missoula District Offices were built in 1959 and 1964 respectively. The design of those buildings was based on the Billings Office, which was developed by Billings’ architects Harry Loners and Frank Stroebe in 1957. The architectural style of the buildings is very much post-World War II modernistic and represents the time when the old Montana Highway Department ramped up its operations to handle the Interstate highway program. Grounds of all three offices include prefabricated metal buildings that were erected on the sites soon after construction of the administration buildings. The Missoula District Office complex hosts an ersatz log port of entry building that was built in 1936 and once stood on old U.S. Highway 10 at Saltese. It now houses the Missoula Maintenance Section. In 1963, the Highway Department also adapted the design of the Billings office for the Lewistown Area Office. That site also includes several metal buildings funded by the U.S. Air Force in the 1960s. These structures housed snowplow equipment used for maintaining roads to missile silos.

The Glendive District Office has a slightly different history than the others. It was built by Glendive contractor John Sterhan in 1947 when Glendive was a sub-district of the main district office in Miles City. The design, based on one developed by MDT in the 1930s, sports a barrel arch roof and brick walls with decorative features. The architecture of the Glendive District Office and the 1953 Havre Area Office are based on a design developed by the Highway Department in 1932 for the Wolf Point Area Office and the old Great Falls District Office on 1st Avenue North, adjacent to the Missouri River.

Other MDT-owned National-Register-eligible sites include the Deep Creek Section House (1937), a few miles east of Deep Creek Canyon in Meagher County, and the MacDonald Pass Section House, the first section house built by the Highway Department. In 1935, the highway commission obtained a permit to construct a section house on MacDonald Pass west of Helena to station snowplows and serve as a “refuge for motorists meeting trouble on the snowy pass.” In keeping with Forest Service guidelines, the section house and ancillary buildings were built to look rustic and included wood shingle walls, wood shake roofs, and the type of casement windows often seen on Forest Service cabins. Although composition siding has since been placed over the wood shingle walls, the building and the site retains enough integrity to qualify for the National Register.

A circa 1936 cobblestone roadside water fountain, although no longer functional, sits adjacent to the highway and a few feet from a unique outhouse built of what appears to be overlapping railroad ties.

There are, undoubtedly, many more MDT-owned historic sites in districts that haven’t been identified yet and more are found each year. Many of the department’s 119 maintenance section shops, sand houses, airway beacons, and buildings acquired for right-of-way purposes are historic, but unrecorded. Documenting and evaluating MDT’s historic properties is a continuing project with new sites added to the list each year as they are discovered or when known sites, like the Butte District Office, reach the requisite 50-year age mark. The list, so far, provides a remarkable inventory of MDT’s history since the early twentieth century up through the 1960s. It is a document of how engineering standards have changed and architectural styles developed over the years to accommodate MDT’s responsibilities.

Stay tuned, there’s more to come!
MDT’s mission is to serve the public by providing a transportation system and services that emphasize quality, safety, cost effectiveness, economic vitality, and sensitivity to the environment.

Newsline is a quarterly publication of the Rail, Transit, and Planning Division, Montana Department of Transportation.

MDT Wants Your Comments
To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, visit www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/docs/trans_comm/proposed_proj.pdf, or call 1-800-714-7296. You can mail comments on proposed projects to MDT at the following address or e-mail them to mdtnewprojects@mt.gov.

MDT Project Analysis Manager
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

Inside This Issue
Don’t Crowd the Plow.......................................................... 1
Surface Transportation Program Funding Status .......... 1
Looking Back at MDT’s 2015 Highway Program Challenges 2
Implementing MDT ADA Transition Plan—2015 Update .......... 2
MDT Transit Hosts Annual Fall Transit Management Training .......... 2
West Coast Ports Study .................................................... 3
New Bearmouth Rest Area Open........................................... 3
TranPlan 21 Plan Update .................................................... 3
Montana Transportation Commission 2016 Schedule ............ 3
Annual Transportation Safety Planning Meeting ................. 4
Holiday Parties Mean Taking Care of Your Guests ............... 4
MDT Awards Safety Grants to Support Vision Zero .............. 5
Federal Transit & Highway Traffic Safety Grant Applications ........ 5
Due March 1, 2016 .......................................................... 5
US-2 Rut Fill Project Complete .......................................... 5
Bridge Deck High Friction Surface Treatments .................... 6
MDT’s Legacy of Historic Sites .......................................... 7

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Only the most frequently requested numbers are listed here. For an area or person not listed, call 800-714-7296 (in Montana only) or 406-444-3423. The TTY number is 406-444-7696 or 800-335-7592.

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