

Newsline

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Newsletter of the Montana Department of Transportation Rail, Transit & Planning Division

June 2017

MDT TranPlanMT Update

MCA 60-1-104. Good Roads Day. The third Tuesday in June is hereby designated "Good Roads Day." The governor may annually by public proclamation request the people of the state to contribute toward the improvement and safety of public highways. En. Sec. 11-101, Ch. 197, L. 1965; R.C.M. 1947, 32-4401.

The third Tuesday in June is designated in Montana Code as "Good Roads Day", so it is fitting that Montana's draft long-range policy plan update, TranPlanMT, is available for public review. On Good Roads Day the people of the state are asked to "contribute toward the improvement and safety of public highways." You can do this by commenting on the draft plan.

TranPlanMT is focused on evaluating policy areas shaping the direction for operating, preserving, and improving Montana's transportation system with priority goals in the areas of:

- safety,
- system preservation and maintenance,
- mobility and economic vitality,
- accessibility and connectivity,
- environmental stewardship, and
- business operations and management.

Comments from people in nearly every county in Montana and careful evaluation of Montana's transportation needs and priorities were considered in drafting the update. Documents available for review explore the current and predicted conditions for Montana's transportation assets, user groups, context, and MDT structure and management of the system.

These documents and a plan summary are available online at <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/tranplan>, and copies are also available at MDT's district offices, tribal and county government offices, and the MDT Rail, Transit and Planning Division. Comments will be accepted until July 12, 2017.

Once TranPlanMT is finalized, it will be used to guide MDT decisions and work.

For questions regarding MDT's TranPlanMT effort, contact Charity Watt at cwatt@mt.gov or 444-3439.

Legislature Supports Transportation Infrastructure

The 65th Montana Legislature adjourned on April 28, leaving the state and local government entities better positioned to preserve the safe and efficient operation of Montana's transportation infrastructure. House Bill 473 (HB 473), signed by the Governor on May 3, will incrementally raise both gasoline and diesel state fuel taxes in the coming years to provide revenue for better roads and bridges across the state.

Infrastructure condition and funding has been an ongoing discussion in states and at the national level for the past decade. Surface transportation infrastructure is front and center in this discussion as the foundation for the economy, connectivity, safety, and overall quality of life for the nation's citizens.

Generally, revenue to pay for roads and bridges is raised through user fees in the form of fuel taxes. With the nation's infrastructure aging, increasing construction costs, and the improved fuel economy of today's cars, revenues have fallen behind needs.

Evidence of this gap is apparent in Montana, based on findings of a recent Reason Foundation report on "The Performance of State Highway Systems". Find the full report at:

http://reason.org/files/22nd_annual_highway_report.pdf

Montana ranks 6th in the nation in terms of performance and cost effectiveness, but is ranked 34th in terms of percent of rural principal arterial routes in poor condition (not including the Interstate). Ranking high in efficient use of funding – but in the lower third in terms of roadway condition is directly related to insufficient resources. Still, the most critical indicator - Montana ranks 50th in fatalities per 100 million vehicle-miles traveled.

Montana's Legislature, with broad support from private and public entities, recognized the important role of transportation in Montana and passed HB 473. HB 473, championed by Representative Frank Garner-Kalispell, evolved in terms of revenue raised and

Continued on next page

GAS TAX HISTORY.....

The gasoline tax has been critical to Montana's highways. Although the legislature passed a 1.0 cent per gallon fuel tax in 1921, the revenue mostly went to the counties, with the State Highway Commission retaining a small percentage for administration purposes. In 1925, the legislature changed the rules, and all the money derived from the fuel tax went to the counties. With no money to match federal funds, Montana was the only state in the union to return Federal Aid money to the US government. Montana soon gained the reputation of having the worst highways in the nation.

In 1926, the highway commission and other grassroots organizations, began a determined effort to establish a 3.0 cent per gallon gasoline tax where the revenue went into a fund to provide matching money for federal aid allocations. Led by the Montana Good Roads Association and the Montana Automobile Association, the campaign to establish the fund reached Montana voters in November 1926. The proposal, called the Good Roads Law, passed by a wide margin. Money derived from the tax went into the Highway Trust Fund that assured Montana would have matching funds in the future. It sparked an \$11 million highway program that resulted in the improvement of a little over a thousand miles of highway and the construction of over 350 bridges by 1930. Over the years, there have been surcharges to the gas tax and a few increases – all intended to maintain a high level of highway construction and maintenance.

Legislature Supports –continued from previous page

requirements for performance and accountability from the recipients as the bill made its way through the two legislative bodies before ultimately arriving as the version signed into law by the Governor. The final bill is a reasonable compromise between providing additional transportation infrastructure investment and minimizing additional tax burden on Montana's citizens.

HB 473 materially consists of two components; revenue generation and distribution for projects and reporting and accountability. Revenue generation under the bill consists of increasing gasoline and diesel fuel taxes gradually between state fiscal years 2018 and 2023. The gasoline increase ranges from an initial 4.5 cents per gallon in 2018 to a total 6.0 cents per gallon in 2023, while diesel will initially increase 1.4 cents per gallon in 2018 to a total of 2.0 cents per gallon in 2023. Diesel is increased less overall to minimize the impact of increased transportation costs on consumer goods.

Distribution of the additional revenue generated is relatively simple, with MDT receiving a set amount of \$12.5 million in 2018, and the greater of \$9.8 million or 35 percent of the revenue raised by the tax increase in the following years. The revenue provided to MDT is directed to be used as match for the federal aid construction program. The remaining revenue generated by the tax will be allocated to local governments (cities and counties) for road construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of rural roads, city/town streets, Alleys, and bridges. The allocations between the local entities is based on the existing fuel tax allocation formula and requires the local entities to provide \$1 in local matching funds for every \$20 of HB 473 funds distributed.

Finally, for reporting and accountability, the bill mandates that MDT develop and maintain websites with data about revenues raised, funds distributed, and specific information about the projects receiving HB 473 funding. The local entities are required to provide MDT an annual report of the status of their funding/projects. The bill also directs a legislative audit of MDT's process of funding prioritization, efficiency, and staffing levels.

The bill text provides more detail of the mechanics of the allocation and use of these funds. MDT is currently working with the League of Cities and Towns and Montana Association of Counties to develop rules for implementation. The initial fuel tax increase goes into effect July 1, 2017 and initial fund allocations will be made on March 1, 2018.

Enacting HB 473 supports future investment in the state and local transportation infrastructure for the benefit of the economy, safety of the traveling public, and quality of life for Montana's citizens.

Did you Know?

During the 2017 Session, the Legislature passed House Bill 415 requiring vehicles to be driven in the right-hand lane on roadways having two or more lanes of travel in the same direction (i.e. four and five-lane roads). The bill does provide exceptions in cases where driving in the left lane is warranted, such as when passing other vehicles, traveling at a speed greater than the traffic flow, moving left to allow traffic to merge, when making a left turn, or moving over for safety reasons (provide room for vehicles stopped on the shoulder, snow removal equipment, etc.) The bill also doesn't apply to roads within the boundaries of a city or town except for the Interstate, unless signing directs traffic to use the left lane.

This change takes effect October 1, 2017. Begin changing your habits now to drive in the right lane – and stay on the right side of the law!

New Transportation Commissioners Appointed

Governor Steve Bullock appointed Greg Jergeson and David Schultz to the Montana Transportation Commission.

Butte District Commissioner David Schulz replaces Rick Griffith. He hails from the Ruby Valley and served on the Sheridan School Board, Sheridan City Council, and numerous community and state positions such as: Madison County Weed Coordinator and Madison County Commissioner. While Commissioner, he sat on numerous boards, committees, and councils with other commissioners and officials from around the state. He is past president of the Montana Association of Counties Executive Board. David enjoys spending time with his wife, Nancy, and their two children.

Great Falls District Commissioner Greg Jergeson replaces John Cobb. He is a retired chairman of the Montana Public Service Commission, elected State Senator for 24 years, and served on the Montana Board of Investments, Blaine County Planning Board, Montana Energy Share Board, Montana Ag Development Council, Director of Grants, Business-Industrial linkages, MSU-North Foundation, and Blaine County Conservation District Board. He attended the University of Montana, has been a Montana family farmer-rancher and enjoys spending time with his wife, Barb, in Chinook.

Other Transportation Commission members are Chair Barb Skelton-Billings District, Carol Lambert-Glendive District, and Daniel Belcourt-Missoula District.

MDT Wins Inaugural AXIAM Award

MDT claimed first place honors for the new AXIAM award at the AgileAssets 2016 International Users Conference in Austin, Texas. This award is given to a public or private client for demonstrating excellence in infrastructure asset management.

MDT won for the new safety information management system (SIMS) implemented to support Montana's strategic safety program. The system is based on the AgileAssets® Safety Analyst™ software and has proven to bring great value to system users and Montana citizens.

"Montana is a Vision Zero state. The goal is to cut fatalities and serious injuries by 50 percent by the year 2030. The new SIMS program is moving Montana in the right direction towards that goal," said MDT Safety Engineer Patricia Burke. "SIMS improves MDT's ability to identify and propose mitigation measures for identified crash locations along Montana's roadway network. The single system gathers data from multiple internal and external sources. It is then used to identify "hot-spots" along Montana's roadway network and recommend mitigation measures. It also allows MDT the ability to share statistics, reports, maps, and details to reduce the severity and number of crashes."

Based on AgileAssets Safety Analyst, SIMS provides comprehensive access to crash data, including police reports, maps, notes, and vehicle and driver information. All data is treated as confidential and forms the basis for corrective projects in cases where the infrastructure can be part of the problem. The system also compares crashes with roadway characteristics and tracks the impact of traffic safety programs.

Responsible for the success of this project are Kraig McLeod, Aaron Dennis, Shelley Haslip, Mark Keeffe, Michelle Coster, Roy Peterson, and Patricia Burke.

Work Zone Safety is in Your Hands: Drive Towards Zero Crashes

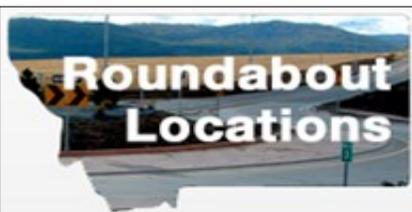
Summer driving means venturing through highway construction zones, a necessary inconvenience to improve Montana's transportation system. MDT does everything possible to reduce inconvenience and asks motorists to play a part in keeping themselves and workers safe.

- Stay alert and give your full attention to driving.
- Turn on headlights so workers and motorists see your vehicle.
- Do not drive faster than the posted speed.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Read road signs and follow instructions from work zone flaggers.
- Do not tailgate.
- Unless instructed to do so, do not change lanes in work zones.
- Be patient.

In 2016, there were 74 work zone crashes reported by Montana Highway Patrol. Most work zone crashes are caused by distracted driving and not obeying posted speed limit signs. Get additional work zone safety information and tips for traveling during the construction season at www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/people/workzones.shtml.

A Few Upcoming Construction Projects Around Montana

Area	Project Name	Description
District 1 Missoula	Kalispell: US 2 Hungry Horse Bridge	new bridge on a new alignment, grading, paving, chip seal, shared use path
	Kalispell: US 2 Columbia Falls Urban	mill, paving, chip seal, pavement markings, curb & gutter, sidewalks, signing, electrical improvements
	Orange Street Interchange	new roundabout with new roadway alignment, pavement, chip seal, curb and gutter, sidewalks, signing, electrical, pavement markings
	I-90 Frenchtown E & W	crack and seal concrete pavement, paving overlay, median slope flattening, median cable guardrail, bridge repair, rumble strips, chip seal, pavement markings
	Madison Street	bridge deck rehab, new bridge beams and deck, paving, lane realignment, bike lanes, curb and gutter, sidewalks, shared use path, pavement markings
District 2 Butte	Red Rock-Clark Canyon, and Bernice-Basin	bridge rehab, surface overlay, signing, guardrail, pavement markings
	US 89 – Mission Interchange North	road reconstruction, fencing, signing, guardrail, pavement markings
	I-90 Homestake	guardrail replacement, Pipestone to Whitehall seal and cover, guardrail, curb, bridge deck rehab, signing and pavement markings
District 3 Great Falls	I-15 Emerson Jct to Manchester	rehab of both lanes, bridge rehab, fencing, signing and electrical
	US 89 – W of Browning and North of Bynum	road reconstruction, drainage structures
	Helena Capitol and Cedar Interchanges	replace structures over railway, widening, reconstruct Interstate
District 4 Glendive	East of Ashland-East	reconstruction, new alignment, drainage, surfacing.
	SF 129 – Roundabout Lame Deer	reconstruction of US 212 and Highway 59 intersection to include a roundabout and sidewalks
	SF 139 – Roundabout S of Sidney	reconstruction of MT 16 and Highway 200 intersection to include a roundabout
District 5 Billings	Rockvale-Laurel	new road alignment, guardrail, fencing, drainage, irrigation, stock passes, chip seal, pavement markings
	Beartooth Highway	milling, paving, guardrail, reinforce soil slope
	Billings downtown state signals	new signals, sidewalk, curbing, storm drain, electrical, signing



A statewide roundabout map shows where all roundabouts are open to traffic, being considered, or are under design or construction at: <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/roads/roundabouts/locations.shtml>

Centerline Rumble Strips

Save Lives

MDT is conducting a five-year statewide installation of centerline rumble strips designed to prevent roadway departure crashes, particularly head-on and sideswipe opposite-directional crashes that occur when a vehicle crosses the median of a two-lane highway into the oncoming lane of traffic. Between 2006 and 2015, 67 percent of fatalities and 56 percent of serious injuries on Montana roadways were due to roadway departure type crashes. Rumble strips are a low-cost strategy to move this statistic toward zero.

Rumble strips are grooves in the pavement that produce a rumbling noise and vibration when a vehicle drives over the strip. Shoulder rumble strips have been used on Montana's highways for decades to alert

drivers veering off the side of the road.

Rumble strips installed along the centerline of two-way highways are the newest addition to Montana's rumble strip safety implementation and are a



Centerline rumble strips are shown above.

key measure in MDT's Vision Zero initiative to reach zero deaths and zero serious injuries on Montana's roads.

Centerline rumble strips:

- Provide immediate and direct feedback to drivers or motorcyclists unintentionally crossing the centerline of two-lane highways, giving distracted or drowsy drivers time to correct course.
- Act as a guideline to vehicles and snowplows in winter whiteout conditions and other low-visibility conditions.
- Effective in lowering the number of highway fatalities and serious injuries in other states where implemented — reducing total roadway departure crashes as much as 42 percent and fatal and severe injury crashes as much as 73 percent.
- Are a low-cost safety measure. Compared to \$1 million per mile of total highway reconstruction cost, centerline rumble strips cost \$5,000 per mile to install.

Montana drivers should be aware of the following when driving on two-lane highways with centerline rumble strips:

- Passing is allowed in passing zones. Centerline rumble strips are installed in both passing and non-passing zones. They are not meant to deter safe passing by car, truck, or motorcycle.
- Don't hug the shoulder. This makes bicyclists nervous. Be sure to give bicyclists plenty of shoulder room.
- Centerline rumble strips may seem louder when you drive over them compared to shoulder strips. This is because the vehicle and driver's body is right over the strip.

MDT is dedicated to making the state's roadways safe for all those that use them. As with cars and trucks, rumble strips are effective in keeping motorcyclists alert and in their lanes.

In MDT's design of rumble strip installations, they have consulted with bicycle advocate groups, such as Bike Walk Montana, to design a rumble strip width that leaves plenty of space for bicyclists. The width of the centerline rumble strip is modified based on the size of the road's shoulder.

The centerline rumble strip installation schedule is:

Butte District - 2015 Billings District - 2016
Great Falls District - 2017 Glendive District - 2018
Missoula District—2019

For more information, go to: <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/rumblestrips/> or contact Roy Peterson at 444-9252 or roy.peterson@mt.gov.

Montana's Safety Performance Targets

Montana's vision is Zero Fatalities and Zero Serious Injuries on our roadways. MDT in coordination with statewide safety partners have set 2018 safety performance targets, consistent with federal requirements, to assist in evaluating progress towards reaching our vision of zero.

Federal Performance Measures	Current 5-Year average	2018 5-year Average Targets
Number of Fatalities	208.4	192.6
Fatality Rate, per *100m AVMT	1.712	1.527
Number of Serious Injuries	1006.2	925.2
Serious Injury Rate, per *100m AVMT	8.283	7.338
Non-Motorized Fatalities & Serious Injuries	71.0	72.5

*100 million annual vehicle miles traveled

MDT Wins Grant Award to Improve Traffic Safety

Montana's Highway Traffic Safety program has been awarded two grants through the Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA). GHSA has collaborated with traffic safety partners to offer grants to state highway traffic offices to implement programs to improve traffic safety.

- The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility (Responsibility.org) and GHSA offers grants to help states combat increased drug use by motorist. The grants are intended to provide training for law enforcement to implement or sustain states' drug impaired driving programs. Montana was awarded \$20,000 to enhance Montana's Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) program. These funds will help train and certify up to 15 law enforcement officials as DRE's. Participants will complete 80 hours of classroom training and 40 hours of practical experience. The application process opens late July and participants will be selected based on geographic location, past performance, recommendation from current DRE's, and active participation in the program. For more information, contact Chad Newman at 444-0856 or chnewman@mt.gov.
- Montana was awarded a grant of \$15,000 from the Ford Driving Skills for Life (Ford DSFL) and the GHSA to expand on the existing student based teen-peer-to-peer program underway with the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) chapters of Montana. The FCCLA student groups will have the opportunity to apply for grants to "jump start" their own traffic safety projects in their communities. MDT's Highway Traffic Safety Section, in collaboration with FCCLA will introduce the grant opportunity to students and teacher advisors during the FCCLA's Leadership Rally in October 2017. For more information, contact Sheila Cozzie at 444-7301 or scozzie@mt.gov.

MDT's New Seat Belt Message—Just one reason

In the first five months of 2017, 58 people died on Montana roads. Preliminary data from the Montana Highway Patrol shows that almost half (47 percent) were not properly wearing a seat belt. This isn't a new problem in Montana. In 2011 through 2015, fatal crash data shows 67 percent of vehicle fatalities were not using seat belts. As part of MDT's effort to address traffic safety issues and driver behavior, a new media campaign focusing on seat belt use was launched in late April, just prior to the start of busy summer travel time and will continue into July.

The messages remind people to buckle up, as historically June through August is when the highest number of fatalities occur.

As part of the Vision Zero effort, the "Just one reason" campaign features two new videos. One video shows a dad and his daughter and his reason to buckle up is for his child. Another video features three friends shooting hoops and discussing their reasons to wear their seat belts, including one who survived a crash because of his decision to buckle up. The "just one reason" campaign appeals to each driver and passenger to consider their "one reason" to arrive safely at their destinations. The messages air on television, radio, and social media platforms. The news videos and more information are available at <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/onereason/>.



VISION ZERO
zero deaths · zero serious injuries

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Summer Bicycle Safety Reminders

The summer season has reached the Big Sky State and with that, school is out with more folks choosing to walk and ride bicycles. MDT reminds all road users to be respectful, obey traffic rules, and avoid distractions. Safety for all users on the transportation system is of utmost importance; everyone is responsible for safely interacting on Montana roads.

Motorists should keep their attention on the road, as a collision with a bicycle or pedestrian could easily become deadly. Share the road, and expect cyclists at anytime. Be considerate when passing cyclists and pedestrians by giving three-to-five feet of space. Look both ways for cyclists and pedestrians before entering intersections and when opening car doors. This includes looking at your side view mirrors for oncoming cyclists.

Cyclists should avoid distractions and listen to your surroundings; don't wear headphones and be aware of motorists. In Montana, cyclists are considered a vehicle and are required to obey traffic rules, signals, and signs applicable to motor vehicles. Be visible and predictable. Wear a helmet, bright clothing, and signal your turns.

Pedestrians should always look left, right, left before crossing. Cross at intersections and obey instructions of all traffic and pedestrian control devices. Be predictable, and wear bright clothing and reflective material, especially at night.

Vision Zero cannot be accomplished without the support of every Montanan.

It's Motorcycle Season – Let's Share the Road!

Summer brings nice weather, longer days, and more travelers on Montana roadways including motorcyclists. In the last ten years, 286 motorcyclists have died and nearly 1,500 have been seriously injured in motorcycle crashes, occurring mostly during the months of May through September. MDT reminds you to take a second look before pulling out into traffic or turning left. Give these fellow travelers extra room to help them make their way safely along our roads.

These tips can help avoid crashes with motorcycles:

Tips for drivers:

- Respect all other vehicles on the road
- Keep your full attention on driving and avoid distractions
- Allow motorcyclist the full lane width – never try to share a lane
- Perform visual checks for motorcycles by checking mirrors and blind spots at intersections and before entering or exiting lanes
- Always signal your intention to change lanes or when merging
- Allow more following distance behind a motorcycle so they have enough time to maneuver or stop in an emergency
- Never drive impaired

Tips for motorcycle riders:

- Wear a DOT- compliant helmet
- Be highly visible; wear brightly colored or reflective protective gear and turn on your headlight
- Strategically use your lane position to see and be seen
- Stay alert – and slow down when approaching left turns or intersections in anticipation of other driver's actions
- Use turn signals in advance when changing lanes or making a turn
- Never ride impaired
- Observe speed limits – over half of fatal motorcycle crashes are speed related
- Participate in a motorcycle safety course (<http://motorcycle.msun.edu>)



MDT partners with the Montana Motorcycle Rider Safety program out of MSU Northern. Training courses are available and space is open in the Basic Rider Course 15 hours of training for novice or beginning riders; the Basic Rider Course 2 designed for experienced riders to brush up skills and experience street riding traffic experiences and; the Advanced Rider Course advanced skill development based on sport bike riding techniques and safety awareness.

For more information and to register for a course visit: <http://motorcycle.msun.edu> or call 1-800-922-BIKE.

Safety Impact of Differential Speed Limits on Rural Two-Lane Highways in Montana

Montana's rural roadways have had a diverse speed limit history ranging from reasonable and prudent to the current law of differential speed limits between commercial and passenger vehicles enacted on May 28, 1999. Montana is currently the only state that maintains a differential speed limit for passenger cars and heavy trucks on undivided rural highways. Although a considerable amount of prior research has investigated the impacts of speed limits on traffic safety and operations, much of this research, and nearly all of the research related to differential speed limits has been specific to limited access freeways. To address this gap in knowledge, a comprehensive study related to the safety impacts of differential speed limits on rural two-lane highways was performed for MDT.

The primary objective of this study was to assess differences in traffic operational and driver behavior characteristics along high-speed, two-lane highways in Montana. Across most of the state-maintained rural two-lane highway systems in Montana, a maximum daytime speed limit of 70 mph for passenger vehicles and 60 mph is in effect for trucks and buses with greater than one-ton payload capacity. However, in April 2013, speed limits were changed along 55 miles of portions of two eastern Montana highways (MT-16 and MT-200) to a uniform 65 mph for all vehicles.

Data were collected at numerous locations from across Montana, where 70/60 mph differential speed limits are common, and included the limited Montana two-lane roadway segments with uniform 65 mph speed limits. To provide additional uniform 65 mph highway locations, data were also collected on rural highway segments in the neighboring states of Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The data were collected during a two-week period in August of 2014 during daylight hours and clear weather conditions using high-definition video cameras attached to roadside sign posts. Assessment of the relationships between crash occurrences and various traffic and roadway factors (cross-sectional and geometric) was completed. An interview-style survey of road users was performed at ten MDT rest areas and weigh stations statewide. Lastly, an online survey to gain additional insight from members of the Montana trucking industry was administered.

The findings from this study provide substantial evidence in support of uniform 65 mph speed limits for two-lane rural roadways in Montana. Speed variability will likely be reduced due to the reduction of passenger vehicle speeds. Reduction in the variability of speeds between passenger cars and trucks is expected to reduce platoon lengths and subsequent high-risk passing behavior,



High definition video cameras used to collect data.

thereby reducing the risk of passing-related crashes. Although data for the post-implementation period of 65 mph uniform limits along MT-16 and MT-200 are limited, the crash data analysis provided some indication that use of the 65 mph uniform limits may provide safety benefits over the previous 70/60 mph limit. Furthermore, road users appear to generally be supportive of uniform two-lane roadway speed limits of 65 mph and the trucking industry was found to be overwhelmingly supportive of uniform speed limits, particularly 65 mph. Based on the collective findings, uniform 65 mph speed limits are recommended for further implementation on two-lane highways in Montana. Although the findings from this research support statewide implementation of 65 mph limits, it may be initially advisable to continue selective implementation of the speed limit on certain candidate segments. Initial candidates would include roadways with high traffic volumes (i.e., greater than 3,000 annual average daily truck traffic), high truck percentages (i.e., greater than 10 percent), and limited passing opportunities (i.e., greater than 40 percent no passing zones, with few passing relief lanes).

To learn more about this project, visit http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/traffic/differential_speed.shtml.

Montana Accessibility Inventory and Investment Program

Accessible facilities and rights-of-way provide critical access to services and employment, improve safety, facilitate independence, improve quality of life, and allow meaningful contributions to communities. MDT is strategically eliminating barriers for disabled individuals to use MDT right-of-way facilities through its Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plan, an ADA inventory and investment program.

The program started by pre-screening 14,000 intersections statewide using aerial photography and street view coverage to identify dedicated pedestrian facilities. Roughly 56,000 vehicle miles were then traveled while conducting a field inventory of 3,700 intersections in 190 communities. ADA compliance for 16,000 curb ramps and 150 building facilities were assessed. This was completed in just three months in partnership with DOWL by summer interns.

This field inventory along with existing information resulted in some 7,000 intersections identified as needing modifications for ADA compliance. The estimated total cost of \$46 million seemed impossible to fund in a state where infrastructure needs are outpacing funding by three to one, but the department secured Montana Transportation Commission approval to use about \$4 million annually of non-mandatory/flexible Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds for these upgrades.

Using a process for prioritizing funding and advancing ADA projects, the first five projects are slated for construction in the communities of Billings, Great Falls, Missoula, Glasgow, and Bozeman-Livingston. Strategically and systematically, MDT is upgrading intersections to make the system more accessible and safe.

Roadside Attractions: The Smith Mine By Jon Axline, MDT Historian

That Montana's roads were important to its rich history is borne out by the large number of historic sites that can be seen adjacent to them. Motorists may note them, but often they don't know the history behind these sometimes significant, but often ordinary places.

On a lonely stretch of Montana Secondary 308 east of Red Lodge, there is a collection of deteriorated corrugated metal structures standing sentinel across a gulch near the highway. The structures are all that remain of one of the state's most important and most tragic industrial sites, the Smith Mine. In 1889, a group of Boston entrepreneurs, headed by Elijah Smith, formed the Montana Coal & Iron Company to mine coal in the Bear Creek mining district. Although it was only one of several coal mines in the district, the Smith Mine boasted the most extensive network of tunnels and an impressive complex above-ground to process the coal.

Bear Creek coal was the gold standard for high grade coal mined in Montana. It was well-suited for use in the Anaconda smelter, by the Northern Pacific Railway, and for homes and businesses across the state. The mines drew hundreds of men and their families to the district. Most were immigrants from eastern and northern Europe. Two communities, Washoe and Bearcreek, grew up near the mines. Both were rough and tumble mining camps. By 1920, the district boasted a population of a few thousand-people living near the mines. The Montana, Wyoming and Southern Railroad built a short line railroad from Bridger to the mines in 1906.

During the Great Depression, the Smith Mine was the largest employer in the district. Coal mining suffered during the depression, but rebounded in 1942 after the US became embroiled in World War II. By 1943, the mine was operating seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Many of the miners worked double shifts or on their usual days off to make as much money as possible before peace ended the boom. The working conditions in the Smith Mine, however, were not the best and the Montana Coal & Iron Company was far from a responsible employer. Water was a problem in the mine and there were pockets of methane gas to make things even more dangerous. The company, anxious to maximize its profits, failed to provide adequate safety measures. Men working underground still utilized open-flame carbide lamps and many smoked while on shift.

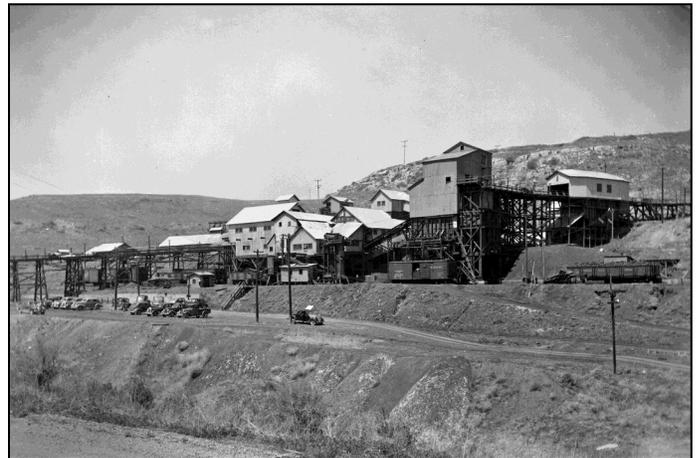
At 9:37 a.m. on February 27, 1943, smoke followed by a hurricane-force wind blew from the entrance to the No. 3 mine, the first indication of trouble underground. "There's something wrong down here. I'm getting out," the hoist operator called up. He and two nearby miners were the last men to leave the mine alive. A pocket of methane apparently ignited underground, causing an explosion that killed many men instantly. Others were soon overcome by carbon monoxide gas; many survivors barricaded themselves in side tunnels waiting for rescue.

The families of the men trapped underground anxiously waited as rescue crews from as far away as Butte and Cascade County worked around the clock to clear debris and search for survivors. There were none. Some men died as a result of the explosion, but most fell victim to the deadly carbon monoxide gas released by the

blast. The historical marker describing the Smith Mine Disaster follows a simpler message left by two miners trapped underground after the explosion, waiting for the poisonous gas they knew would come.

"Walter & Johnny. Good bye.
Wives and daughters. We died
an easy death. Love from us both.
Be good."

The tragedy sparked investigations at the state and national level that resulted in improvements in mine safety. The mine carried on for only a few more years, permanently closing in the early 1950s. The disaster pretty much caused Bearcreek to become a near ghost town; little remains today of Washoe. The Smith Mine, the site of the worst underground coal mine disaster in Montana history, is a memorial to the 74 men who died in the mine on the morning of February 27, 1943. The Smith Mine is located at Milepost 6.6 on Secondary 308 about five miles east of Red Lodge.



Taken just before the Smith Mine disaster in 1943.



Smith Mine today.

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.

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**Rail, Transit & Planning Division
Montana Department of Transportation**

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MDT attempts to provide accommodations for any known disability that may interfere with a person participating in any service, program, or activity of the Department. Alternative accessible formats of this information will be provided upon request. For further information, call (406)444-3423, TTY (800)335-7592, or the Montana Relay at 711.

MDT Wants Your Comments On New Projects

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, <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.shtml> or call 1-800-714-7296. You can mail comments on proposed projects to MDT at MDT Project Analysis Manager, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620-1001 or e-mail them to: mdtnewprojects@mt.gov.

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