

Summer 2025

Teaming Up for Teen Traffic Safety

Pro linebacker Troy Andersen and Buckle Up Blue for Laurn Founder Pat Goldhahn teamed up in April to spread the Engage traffic safety message to teens. Students at Beaverhead County, Bozeman, and Gallatin high schools listened intently to their message centered on the importance of making good decisions while driving and always wearing a seat belt.

Andersen, a Beaverhead County High School and Montana State University – Bozeman alum, has worked with MDT for the past three years to spread the Engage traffic safety message. He is featured in a series of short videos about buckling up, driving distraction free, and not driving aggressively. (*Watch at MontanaDOT - YouTube: youtube.com/montanadot*)

Goldhahn has been sharing the story of his daughter, Laurn, since she was killed in a car crash in 2016. She was not wearing a seat belt.

Over the past decade, young drivers between the ages of 15 and 20 accounted for roughly 20% of all passenger vehicle fatalities in Montana. Educating students on the importance of responsible and safe driving habits is key to preventing fatalities and serious injuries among teens. For more information about MDT's Traffic Safety campaign, Engage, visit engage-mt.org.



Troy Andersen speaks to students about the importance of safe driving at Bozeman High School.

MDT's Jon Axline Named Montana Heritage Guardian

Words by Laura Evilsizer and Kira Axline

MDT's renowned historian, Jon Axline, was awarded the Montana Historical Society's highest honor, the Montana Heritage Guardian Award, for his statewide contributions to the field of Montana history. This is truly a unique award that the Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees gives for outstanding achievements. Jon has dedicated over three decades to preserving and interpreting Montana history. As this award attests, he is one of the superstars of the Montana history profession. There isn't a topic of Montana history that he hasn't touched upon at some point in his research. Union history in Butte, the history of paleontology sciences, The Montana Ground Observer Corps, and the Smith Mine disaster are just a few of his topics. One of Jon's perennial focuses has been to tell Montana history stories that were ignored or forgotten by others. Of course, what Jon is most well-known for is his writing on transportation history. The story of Montana's roads and bridges might sound like a boring topic, until you listen to Jon tell the story. He weaves together his sense of humor and deep knowledge of Montana's people and places to reach all audiences.



Jon Axline, MDT Historian

Jon was born in 1958 as a fourth-generation Montanan. He spent his early years in Billings and later moved to Helena, graduating from Helena High School. Jon's early life had a profound impact on his interest in history. Experiences such as watching John F. Kennedy's motorcade from his grandparent's front yard in Billings in 1963 to visiting his great-grandparents homestead outside of Helena set him on the course for a long and distinguished career as one of Montana's top Historians. Jon attended Montana State University where he earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in American history. Before settling into his Historian position at MDT in 1990 he also worked for the Museum of the Rockies, the Montana State Prison Museum, the Bear Paw Development Corporation, and the Powell County Museum and Arts Foundation.

Jon is a prolific author and presenter with many books, articles, National Register Nominations, and public presentations under his belt. This includes being a regular contributor to the *Newsline* since 2005. The Montana Historical Society will be hosting an award ceremony in Helena on August 1, 2025, to celebrate Jon's outstanding contributions to the field of Montana History. The ceremony is open to the public and will be held at Reeder's Alley from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., followed by a social hour.



Federal Surface Transportation Program Status

While the current federal surface transportation bill (IIJA/BIL) runs through September 30, 2026, work has been underway for over a year on reauthorization. "Reauthorization" is the term used for the legislative process where the federal surface transportation program is renewed, setting all policies, priorities, and funding levels for multiple years. Reauthorization is typically for five to six years but may be longer or shorter. For the federal program to continue beyond September 30, 2026, Congress must pass either a long-term bill, or a program extension. Over the past 25 years, every expiring federal surface transportation bill has needed a program extension of more than a year before reauthorization was complete. Through the reauthorization process, stakeholders provide data and information to members of Congress to influence what is included in the next federal surface transportation bill. Montana's Congressional Delegation works with a variety of stakeholders statewide to ensure our rural state's needs are addressed, and that Montana continues to get the federal funding and programmatic changes necessary to support transportation infrastructure across the state.



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- **By phone*:** 406-444-7614

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SAVE THE DATES AUGUST 13 & 14

2025 Annual Transportation Safety Meeting

Carroll College
All Saints Hall
1601 North Benton Avenue, Helena, Montana

This year's event is an opportunity for state, local, tribal, and federal safety partners to come together to learn about Montana's Comprehensive Safety Plan (CHSP) Update and discuss the development and implementation of emphasis area strategies.

Emphasis Areas:

- Safe Roads
- Safe Speeds/Safe Vehicles
- Safe Road Users
- Emergency Response-Post-Crash Care

The agenda is under development and will be posted at mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/chsp-meetings.aspx.

For additional information, please contact Pam Langve-Davis at 406-444-7646 or plangvedavis@mt.gov.



Celebrating Good Roads in Montana

There are over 73,500* miles of roads open to public travel in our state (including 12,906 miles of MDT routes) that accommodate over 13 billion annual vehicle miles traveled (AVMT). Simply put, roads and roadways (including bridges) keep our great state connected and moving forward! The third Tuesday in June marks Good Roads Day, designated by the Montana Legislature in 1947, whereby the people of the state are asked to contribute toward the improvement and safety of public highways (MCA 60-1-104). For MDT, building "good roads" takes

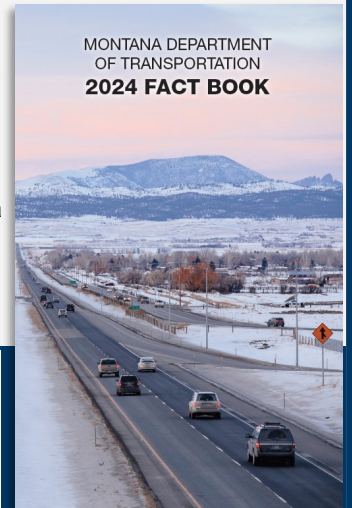
time and means a continuous planning process that is underway long before ground is ever broken on a project. It can take four to eight years to complete a road project, but long-range planning starts anywhere from one to 20 years prior to the project start date.

Join MDT in celebrating and share what #GoodRoads mean to you! See the footer below for information on how to connect with MDT on our social media channels.

***Find more transportation-related facts in the 2024 Fact Book, available online at mdt.mt.gov/fs/factbook/, or by scanning the QR code to the right with your mobile device.**



MONTANA DEPARTMENT
OF TRANSPORTATION
2024 FACT BOOK



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Montana Department
of Transportation

MDT's Pam Langve-Davis Recognized for Service and Presented with Star Quilt

When it comes to a commitment to safety and serving the public, Pam Langve-Davis, MDT's Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP) Manager, is a name that comes to mind as exemplary of both – not just to her colleagues at MDT, but to Montana's statewide network of traffic safety partners and stakeholders. Over the years and many miles traveled, she has selflessly and tirelessly promoted the importance of safety on our state's roadways. Whether she's assisting safety partners in their communities, collaborating with federal partners on Montana's behalf, or giving friendly "reminders" to ALWAYS buckle up in MDT's parking lot, Pam truly cares about the people around her.

At the 2025 Rocky Mountain Region Tribal Symposium on April 17, the Fort Belknap Indian Community recognized Pam for her dedicated service by honoring her with a beautiful star quilt. The star quilt was gifted to her by Vice President Judy King, Elizabeth Horsecapture Azure (Transportation/Disaster Emergency Services (DES)), Kevin Hawley (Road Maintenance Director), and Bill Main, Jr. (Transportation Director). As the quilt was presented, Bill said it was "as a thank-you for all the work you do and the help you give to us in Indian Country. You are always thinking of safety and thinking of us and always include us."

Congratulations, Pam! Through your care, compassion and dedication, you continue to be an example to us all.



Pam Langve-Davis hugs Elizabeth Horsecapture Azure after being presented with a beautiful star quilt. (Also pictured, from left to right: Judy King, Kevin Hawley and Bill Main, Jr.)

Highway Delineators Installed to Improve Safety and Response

Montana Representative Scott DeMarios, House District (HD) 71, knows it doesn't always take legislation to solve problems. During the recent legislative session, he and MDT Director Chris Dorrington had a conversation about the difficulty in spotting authorized vehicle crossings on the interstate.

As a retired captain of the Anaconda Fire Department, Rep. DeMarios has some 29 years of experience using these crossovers, signed as "Authorized Vehicles Only." He explained that after dark and during times of low visibility, the opportunity to turn around on the interstate using the crossovers can be hard to find. This slows response time and can result in travelling extra miles to the next safe place to change direction.

To address the problem, MDT Maintenance staff devised a simple, low-cost solution. MDT is installing blue delineators about 500 feet before the turnaround point and then another blue and yellow delineator at the turnaround point. This will help first responders when time is critical - like responding to a crash or other emergency.

"We all get elected, and we come up to Helena with all these grand ideas, and we think that everything requires a bill," Rep. DeMarios told KTVH reporter Allie Kaiser in an interview. "I think what I've learned from this is everything requires communication. If we can start there across the board, we can get ahead."

MDT thanks our state legislators for their hard work on behalf of all Montanans! Your continued partnership to best serve the traveling public is truly appreciated.



Rep. DeMarios (center) chats with Sign Shop Foreman, Bart Coulter (right), during a visit to MDT's Sign Shop with Director Dorrington (left) and Maintenance Division Administrator, Jon Swartz (far left).

Beartooth Highway Opens for 2025 Season

Each spring, MDT is responsible for clearing the Beartooth Highway to the Montana/Wyoming border, where the National Park Service (NPS) takes over maintenance responsibilities through Wyoming, back into Montana, and into Yellowstone Park. MDT and NPS coordinate closely to keep the road open throughout the summer. (Watch at MontanaDOT - YouTube: [youtube.com/montanadot](https://www.youtube.com/montanadot)) The highway opened Memorial Day weekend for the 2025 season, but weather-related closures or travel impacts on this seasonal route are not uncommon. Visit 511mt.net to plan ahead for your Beartooth Highway adventure.



100 Deadliest Days of Summer: Stay Safe in Your Travels!

Montanans are ready to get out and travel our great state! As residents and visitors head out on the roadways to explore Montana, MDT is urging travelers to remember the serious nature of driving and join the commitment to Vision Zero – zero deaths and zero serious injuries on our roadways.

Summer is one of the best seasons for road trips, but did you know that it's also one of the deadliest? Due to increased traffic fatalities and serious injuries nationwide, there's a period known as the "100 Deadliest Days of Summer" that takes place between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Let's make summer travel safer for everyone by buckling up, and driving sober, within the speed limit and distraction-free.

While higher speeds and traffic volumes can contribute to the severity of highway crashes, drivers need to remember that crashes – including severe and fatal crashes – don't just happen on the highway. When traveling in town, on unpaved roads, as well as on the highway, all drivers, riders, bicyclists and pedestrians must take care to be safe. Drivers should always:

- Follow posted speed limits and keep in mind changing road conditions.
- Be rested and give full attention to driving.
- Keep their vehicle in safe running condition.
- Scan their travel area for safety hazards such as wildlife and debris. Expect the unexpected.
- Buckle up and drive sober.
- Share the road. Watch for motorcyclists, pedestrians and bicyclists.

Each of us has at least one reason to reach our destination safely! The impact of losing just one person to a preventable motor vehicle crash is devastating for family, friends, and communities. If we can each remember that we have a reason to buckle up, watch our speed, arrange a sober ride, and drive distraction-free, arriving safely can be achieved for all travelers. Check out the Engage website to learn more about MDT's traffic safety campaign efforts: engage-mt.org/.

MDT is committed to safety on Montana's roadways. To learn more about Vision Zero, contact Kevin Dusko at 406-444-7411 or kedusko@mt.gov.

MDT and FCCLA Traffic Safety Partnership

For the past nine years, MDT has partnered with the Montana Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) to promote teen traffic safety. FCCLA is a student organization for young men and women in Family and Consumer Sciences education grades 7 through 12. There are 65 Chapters across Montana. This is a peer-to-peer project that gives teens the opportunity to educate their peers on traffic safety issues facing their communities.

During the last five years, teen drivers represented approximately 13% of all fatalities and 22% of all serious injuries on Montana's roadways. Yet, teens only account for approximately 6.7% of the state's population. MDT has made this issue a priority.

During 2024/2025 school year, MDT awarded approximately \$20,500 to 11 FCCLA chapters across the state to create their own local teen traffic safety campaigns. These campaigns ranged from school assemblies on traffic safety issues, to billboard development, community signage improvements, newspaper and radio ads, and YouTube videos. As in past years, prizes were given to the top three projects and were awarded as follows:

1st Place: \$2,000 grant to Power FCCLA

2nd Place: \$1,500 grant to Moore FCCLA

3rd Place (tie): \$500 grant to Fergus County FCCLA

3rd Place (tie): \$500 grant to Jefferson County FCCLA

Winners were announced during the Statewide Leadership Conference held in Bozeman on March 14, 2025. Take a look at some of the campaign material created by these outstanding students at mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/people/teen-peer-to-peer.aspx.

MDT is excited to continue this partnership for the 2025/2026 school year, and applauds these teens and their efforts to educate their peers on local traffic safety issues. For more information, contact Sheila Cozzie at 406-444-7301 or scozzie@mt.gov.



Power FCCLA chapter members pictured with their 1st place speed campaign signs.

Share the Road with Motorcycles

Montana's scenic views invite motorcyclists to hit the open road when warmer weather arrives. Safe driving and motorcycle riding behaviors include observing the speed limit, staying alert for other drivers and driving sober. Safe driving and riding can mean the difference between a memorable summer and the tragedy of life lost on our roads.

Motorcyclists remain an at-risk group for crashes and fatalities in Montana. "Motorcycles are some of the most vulnerable vehicles on the road," said Casey Redder, Director of Montana Motorcycle Rider Safety (MMRS). "It is very important for drivers to remember that a motorcycle has all the rights of the road as any other motorist."

Preliminary numbers for 2023 indicate there were 29 motorcycle fatalities in Montana, representing approximately 14% of the state's total fatalities that year. Ten of the 29 total fatalities, or 34%, were not wearing helmets. These numbers are down from 2022 which had an annual total of 37 motorcycle fatalities - the highest annual total reported in the last decade.

In addition to making Montana's drivers more aware of motorcycles, MDT's annual safety awareness campaign also targets motorcycle riders. This includes targeting the riskiest rider, those over the age of 45. Almost 66% of all motorcycle fatalities are aged 45 or over, making this a priority traffic safety issue in Montana.

If you would like additional information on MDT's motorcycle traffic safety program, contact Sheila Cozzie at 406-444-7301 or scozzie@mt.gov.

HIT THE OPEN ROAD

Without actually **hitting** the open road.

Your safety is up to you.

- Take a safety course
- Wear your seatbelt
- Don't drink and drive
- Stay focused
- Don't speed
- Don't tailgate
- Don't use your phone
- Don't drink and drive

ENGAGE



Montana Traffic Safety Dates

⇒ **May 1, 2025 - September 30, 2025**

National Heatstroke Prevention Awareness

⇒ **June 30, 2025 - July 6, 2025***

4th of July Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over Law Enforcement Impaired Driving Mobilization

⇒ **July 7-31, 2025**

National Speeding Prevention Campaign

⇒ **August 13, 2025 - September 1, 2025***

Labor Day Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over Law Enforcement Impaired Driving Mobilization

Note: There are Selective Traffic Enforcement Programs (STEP) participating across the state that conduct intensive enforcement of specific traffic safety laws with extensive communication, education, and outreach informing the public about the enforcement activity. For more information, contact Kevin Dusko, MDT State Traffic Safety Section Supervisor, at 406-444-7411 or kedusko@mt.gov.

⇒ **September 21-27, 2025**

Child Passenger Safety Week (National Seat Check Saturday is September 27, 2025)

⇒ **September 15-21, 2025**

See Tracks? Think Train® Week (Operation Lifesaver)

⇒ **October 1-31, 2025**

National Pedestrian Safety Month

***Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP) Mobilization Periods**

Summer Safety Tips for Traveling Through Work Zones

Summer highway construction and maintenance are underway, and MDT urges motorists to use extra caution when traveling through work zones. In 2023, there were 282 crashes in Montana work zones. To keep yourself and workers safe, please:

- Be patient.
- Stay alert and give full attention to driving.
- Obey road signs and instructions from work zone flaggers.
- Turn on headlights to be more visible to workers and other motorists.
- Follow a safe distance behind other vehicles.
- Drive the posted speed.

MDT attempts to minimize inconveniences, but travelers should expect delays, slower travel, and rougher surfaces. To stay informed about road conditions and construction, incidents, restrictions, weather, cameras, and more, go to 511mt.net, dial 511 (800-226-7623 / TTY, 800-335-7592), or download the mobile app, *MDT 511 Travel Info*.

How to Start Walking or Biking for Transportation: A Beginner's Guide



Summer in Montana is an ideal time to try walking or biking for your daily transportation needs—whether it's commuting to work, running errands, or even visiting friends. With longer daylight hours and roads free of snow, getting out of your car can be both refreshing and practical. Here's how to get started:

1. Start Small

Begin with short trips. Try biking to a nearby store or walking to a weekly event. You'll quickly get a sense of what's feasible and how long it takes.

2. Plan Your Route

Google Maps offers biking and walking directions, but local knowledge helps too. Avoid high traffic areas if you can and look for dedicated non-motorized infrastructure like sidewalks, shared use paths and marked crosswalks. This will make your commute more comfortable and safer!

3. Gear Up!

You don't need a snazzy bike or gear to start. A dependable bike with reflectors, a helmet, and a backpack is enough. For walking, good shoes and a sun hat go a long way. If you commute at dawn or dusk, make sure to wear reflective gear and light clothing. Bicycles must be equipped with a front white light and a rear red light.

4. Prepare for Weather and Sun

Montana's summer weather can change quickly. Carry water, wear sunscreen, and check forecasts before heading out.

6. Know the Rules of the Road

Bicyclists must follow the rules of the road. Walkers should use sidewalks where available and cross at marked intersections. Be courteous and predictable. Safety is of the utmost importance.

Making the switch to active transportation takes a bit of planning, but the rewards—fresh air, better health, and fewer fuel expenses—are well worth it.

SLOW FOR THE ZONE.

GIVE WORKERS A BRAKE.



Stay alert.
Better roads ahead!



Encroachment Permitting Process

MDT uses encroachment permitting to track and manage encroachments within the highway right-of-way. An encroachment is defined as any privately owned installation or occupancy that is on, under or over the MDT right-of-way. Examples of encroachments include buildings or structures, fences, mailboxes, sidewalks, curb and gutter, signs or markers, privately owned water lines, storm drains, exploratory boring, contamination cleanup and utilities. An encroachment permit may also be needed to perform work within MDT right-of-way, such as tree removal, construction, and installation of traffic signals or other facilities such as lighting or signage.

All encroachment permit applications are assigned to the MDT District Maintenance Chief to begin the review process. The applications may be forwarded to the Systems Impact Action Process (SIAP) at the district's discretion depending on various criteria, such as if the encroachment has environmental impacts indicated on the Environmental Checklist, other Agency coordination is necessary, Transportation Commission approval is needed, or an agreement/bond is required.

Once an encroachment permit application is submitted to SIAP, MDT will coordinate a review and approval of the permit with appropriate staff and other agencies, if necessary. These reviews may include a traffic study for a signal, rapid rectangular flashing beacon (RRFB) or signage; Hydraulics Report; Geotechnical Report; Design/Construction Plans and other state/federal agency permits. SIAP staff will prepare an agreement or bond when needed for work performed within the MDT right-of-way. The Systems Impact Coordinator will ensure that the required Maintenance coordination, Transportation Commission approval, and Chief Engineer concurrence are obtained, if needed, prior to any work taking place within MDT right-of-way.

Most encroachments that will be installing facilities, such as sidewalks, curb and gutter, storm drains, and lighting within MDT right-of-way, will require a maintenance agreement. All maintenance agreements are between MDT and the local government, and must be signed and executed prior to installation of any facilities within the right-of-way and release of the requested encroachment permits.

When the SIAP review is complete, the encroachment permit is returned to the District Office for a final approval and issuance, similar to the process for approach permitting.

Encroachment permit applications can be submitted through MDT's Maintenance Permits portal: app.mdt.mt.gov/mntencr/.



Stay safe during your travels this summer, and remember to always buckle up: every person, every trip, every time.

Blackfeet Transit Facility Upgrades

Blackfeet Transit provides a general public transit service to residents in Browning, with scheduled trips to Kalispell, Great Falls, and Cut Bank. To assist with meeting growing transportation needs, Blackfeet Nation successfully pursued grant funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and MDT to add bus bays, a conference room, and office space to their existing facility. The much-anticipated grand opening is tentatively scheduled for the first week in June.



Photo Credit: Warran Blackman, Blackfeet Transit Manager



MDT's summer maintenance activities include mowing highway right-of-way across the state.

Highway Safety Improvement Program: Not Just for State Highways

For MDT and the greater transportation industry, the last two decades have arguably seen the largest shift towards a specific focus on highway safety. 2025 marks the 20th year since the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) changed from a set-aside of the Surface Transportation Program into a specific core Federal-aid program. The HSIP requires a data-driven, strategic approach to improving highway safety with a focus on performance. The goal is to achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads. This last phrase is important: it means we gather data and consider projects not only on all state highways, but also on all other public roads statewide. Over the last five years, our local HSIP projects have ranged from \$10,000 to \$5.8 million in construction costs and span the state geographically. The following are a few current and past examples:

- Larger projects include a signal at Mary Jane and Broadway (Missoula); a roundabout at Central and 56th St. West (Billings); road & curve realignment through a railroad crossing (Wibaux); signing and guardrail on Airport Rd. (Dawson County); intersection improvements on Rodeo Rd. (Wolf Point); and curve reconstructions (BIA routes – Fort Peck Reservation).
- Smaller signing projects include City and County roads (Jefferson County, Lewis & Clark County, Cascade County, and Roosevelt County to name a few).

Learn more about MDT's HSIP Program on the Vision Zero web page at mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/, or find more information on the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)'s HSIP website: highways.dot.gov/safety/hsip.

For questions or additional needs, please contact Patricia Burke at 406-444-9420 or pburke@mt.gov.

The Haunted Bozeman Trail

By Jon Axline, MDT Historian

One day in 1864, a failed prospector and day laborer named George Foreman stood on the Bozeman Trail on the hillside above Montana Territory's largest mining camp. He later wrote "On the high ridge I turned and took a last look at Virginia City and cursed the place and the day I had seen it, all my high hopes there being blasted." Foreman condemned the mining camp while standing on the heavily traveled road between Virginia City and the Gallatin valley. That segment still exists in much of its original condition and bears all the characteristics of a frontier road. A person standing there today can still see Virginia City much as Foreman did over 160 years ago. It may also be haunted by one of the territory's darker events.

In the winter of 1862-1863, John Bozeman, along with former mountain man, John Jacobs and his 11-year-old daughter, set out to blaze a new trail to the Gallatin valley and the camps on Alder Gulch. Intended as a short cut to the mining camps, Bozeman and Jacobs hoped to cut the time it took immigrants to reach southwestern Montana. It would be a shorter route than the well-established overland trails from Minnesota and Utah. Both men hoped to profit from the new road by leading wagon trains along it and by selling supplies to its users.

Bozeman and Jacobs' new trail left the Overland Road near today's Casper, Wyoming and then traveled north through the Powder River basin to the Yellowstone River. It then followed the river west, crossing the Bridger Mountains into the Gallatin Valley through Kelly Canyon (not Bozeman Pass). From the valley and the new settlement of Bozeman a branch of the trail terminated at Virginia City.

The road passed through the lush Powder River basin in northern Wyoming and southcentral Montana, where there was plenty of grass and water for the animals. The problem, as it turned out, was that it was also the last great bison hunting ground for the indigenous people living in the area – and they didn't want a road through it. A group of seventy-five Crow Indians confronted Bozeman and Jacobs and asked them not to continue on. The Indians knew what would happen should the trail become a popular wagon road.

The trail would be hotly contested by the Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes when the trail, named for John Bozeman, opened to wagon traffic in 1863. The following year, an estimated 1,500 people bound for the mining camps traversed the trail to the Gallatin valley. Travelers on the Bozeman cutoff soon found themselves in the middle of a conflict between the US Army and the tribes.

The Indians turned back Bozeman's first wagon train in 1863, but others made it through, some after being attacked by the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne. The Bozeman Trail war began in earnest in 1866 when the military established three forts along the route. A battle in December 1866 resulted in the deaths of Captain William Fetterman and his entire command. Native American pressure on the forts and the few wagon trains that dared to attempt the crossing eventually forced the federal government to close the Bozeman Trail in the Powder River country to all non-Indians in 1867. Portions of the trail in Montana, however, remained open to travelers.

The trail from Bozeman to Virginia City left an indelible mark on the landscape and can be easily seen from the vantage point of the Norris Hill turn-out. The section of the trail above Virginia City displays all the hallmarks of a frontier wagon road. Unlike the Mullan Road, it wasn't designed by an engineer. This road likely originated as an aboriginal trail and just kind of developed from use. It's easy to spot on the hillside above town and is reached today by Old Stage Road near the intersection of Pfouts Street. The road is about ten feet in width and follows the contours of the hillside. The road was heavily traveled for many years and now looks like a sunken road. It's delineated by rocks that were pushed to the sides to make the road bed as smooth as possible. In its heyday in the 1860s, ox-pulled freight wagons, stagecoaches, horsemen, and those traveling on foot were common

sights on this segment. Its quiet now, but at one time it was an important thoroughfare in Montana's early history.

Historic roads are often haunted by the people who once used them. In the case of this road, however, it may be a little more haunted than others. In early March 1864, Joseph Alfred Slade went on a bender in Virginia City. Slade and his wife, Maria or Virginia (nobody seems sure what her name was), had come to Virginia City in 1863 and established a ranch about twelve miles north of town. Slade had gained a particularly violent reputation as the superintendent of the Mountain Division of the Overland Stage Line in previous years.



Joseph Alfred Slade

Slade was a binge drinker and a "reckless demon" when drunk. While on a spree in March 1864, he managed to outdo himself. When the sheriff handed Slade a writ of arrest, Slade tore it up, stomped on it, and went after the man who issued it, the Peoples' Court Judge, Alexander Davis. Slade found him and pointed his pistol at the judge, threatening to kill him.

That proved to be the last straw for the local vigilance committee. They arrested Slade, tried him, convicted him of disturbing the peace, and condemned the man to death. The crossbeam of the Elephant Corral's gate behind the Pfouts and Russell store on Wallace Street served as the scaffold. It was within sight of the Bozeman Trail segment described above.

Slade's friend, Jim Kiskadden, quickly rode to Slade's stone ranch house and told his wife what had happened and what was about to happen to her husband. She jumped on the back of her Thoroughbred racehorse, Billy Bay, and thundered down the Bozeman Trail to try to save her husband's life. She didn't get there in time. On this trail segment she looked down on Virginia City and saw her husband's lifeless body dangling from the corral's gate. She retrieved Slade's body, put him in a metal-lined coffin filled with whiskey and shipped him to Salt Lake City for burial in the city cemetery.

Some say on a dark night you can still see and hear the apparitions of Mrs. Slade and Billy Bay racing down this segment of the Bozeman Trail in a futile attempt to save her husband's life. This historian believes all old roads have some spiritual connection to the past. This segment, however, has more of a connection to the past than other old roads.



Photo of the featured segment of the Bozeman Trail, as it appears at present-day.

MDT Wants Your Comments on New Projects

To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, please visit mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/planning/proposed_proj.pdf, mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.aspx, or call 800-714-7296. You can mail comments on proposed projects to MDT Project Analysis Manager, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620-1001 or email them to mdtstip@mt.gov.

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Contact Information

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 800-335-7592.

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