



NEWSLINE

Montana Department of Transportation
mdt.mt.gov



Summer 2026

MDT Hosts Mock Work Zone to Promote Safety

On April 21, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) along with AAA and Montana Highway Patrol (MHP), hosted a Mock Work Zone to support National Work Zone Awareness Week (NWZAW). This event emphasized the importance of safety and humanized those who work on Montana highways every day. At the work zone, attendees were guided through by MDT employees and stopped at check points to learn more about specific equipment and types of work zones drivers may see throughout the state.



A group of attendees learn about the importance of safety while touring the Mock Work Zone.

Always remember: watch for **Humans Working** and **Safe Actions Save Lives**.



Governor Gianforte (middle) joined MDT in promoting work zone safety by participating in the Mock Work Zone on April 21.

MCS Officers Honored with Governor's Outstanding Service Award

In March, Governor and First Lady Gianforte honored MDT Motor Carrier Services (MCS) employees Corporal (Cpl.) Emily Verbanac and Corporal (Cpl.) Megan Vinyard during a ceremony held in Missoula. On January 23, 2026, Cpl. Vinyard and Cpl. Verbanac were on duty at the Haugan Weigh Station when they were notified of and responded to a single vehicle injury crash on Interstate 90 in Mineral County. A patrol vehicle was not available at the time of the crash notification, so the two MCS officers chose to respond using a personal vehicle. Upon arriving on the scene with local law enforcement, Cpl. Verbanac and Cpl. Vinyard immediately began lifesaving efforts for the vehicle occupants. Their training and swift response helped save lives that day.

Congratulations to Cpl. Verbanac and Cpl. Vinyard for this well-deserved honor! Thank you for your continued service and commitment to the safety of Montana's traveling public.



Governor and First Lady Gianforte honoring MDT employees Cpl. Verbanac (right) and Cpl. Vinyard (middle) during the award ceremony.



Federal Surface Transportation Program Status

In a state as vast and rural as Montana, strong, positive relationships with federal government partners are essential to building and maintaining a safe, reliable transportation system. With thousands of miles of public roads stretching across diverse and often challenging terrain, MDT depends on federal collaboration to meet the needs of communities, businesses, and travelers statewide.

Federal funding programs play a critical role in preserving Montana's infrastructure. Resources from the Federal-Aid Highway Program help repair aging highways, rehabilitate bridges, and improve key freight corridors such as Interstate 90 and Interstate 15. For a state with a relatively small population spread across long distances, these investments make projects possible that would otherwise be out of reach. Beyond funding, federal partners provide access to research, innovation, and technical expertise. MDT works closely with federal agencies on initiatives ranging from roadway safety improvements to wildlife crossings that reduce collisions and protect Montana's natural heritage.

These partnerships directly support Montana's economy. Reliable transportation networks are vital for agriculture, energy, tourism, and small businesses that depend on moving goods efficiently across state lines. They also ensure that rural communities remain connected to essential services, including health care and education. As Montana continues to grow and adapt, the importance of federal-state collaboration will only increase. By continuing to work together, MDT and federal partners will help ensure our state's transportation system remains safe, resilient, and ready for the future.



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SAVE THE DATE OCTOBER 6

2026 Annual Transportation Safety Meeting

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

Mark your calendar for the 2026 Annual Transportation Safety Meeting, where transportation safety program managers, analysts, and decision-makers will come together to explore how data shapes meaningful insights and drives safer outcomes across our transportation system.

This year's event will highlight the full data lifecycle—from collection and integration to communication and informed decision-making. Sessions will feature real-world applications, best practices, and collaborative opportunities to strengthen safety initiatives. Presenters will discuss the importance of data, how it is used, what gaps remain, and how improved data quality can enhance programs and support stronger decisions.

The meeting will open with a review of crash data and how it supports traffic enforcement, public safety communication, infrastructure safety improvements, emergency medical response coordination, integration with hospital data, and alignment with court adjudication, treatment, and driver licensing records. The day will conclude with a Call-to-Action for the coming year.

A full agenda and registration information are under development and will be posted at mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/chsp.aspx.

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

MDT Missoula District Operations Relocation

After 58 years on West Broadway Street, the MDT Missoula District headquarters is relocating. The first phase of the move was completed this spring, with office staff and Motor Carrier Services now working at 8350 US Highway 10, the MDT Wye site.



New Missoula District Headquarters building.

Shop staff, mechanics, machinists, and service combo equipment will move later this year when renovations are complete at the Wye site equipment shop. In early 2028, construction of equipment storage, welding shop, and construction testing laboratory will be complete and will house MDT's Missoula area highway maintenance crew, communications tech, carpenter, welder, and construction lab employees.

To find contact information for MDT's District Offices, including the Missoula District, visit mdt.mt.gov/contact/organization/districts.aspx.

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 Montana between 2020 and 2024, there were on average 235 crashes per year related to work zones, including 12 fatal crashes and 284 injury crashes. 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 / Montana Relay Service at 711), or download the mobile app, *MDT 511 Travel Info*.

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Montana Department of Transportation

New Statewide Planning Section Supervisor

Geof Streeer was selected as MDT's Statewide Planning Section Supervisor in February 2026. Geoff brings six years of experience as a District Transportation Planner with MDT to this new role, along with prior work in materials testing and construction inspections. He holds a Construction Engineering Technology (CET) degree from Montana State University in Bozeman.

During his time with MDT, Geoff has contributed to several key initiatives, including the Statewide Functional Classification Review, the Governor's Red Tape Relief Project, Montana Urban Boundary Adjustments, and supporting Helena, East Helena, and Lewis and Clark County in their establishment as one of Montana's newest Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

Leading the Statewide Planning Section, Geoff's focus is on providing excellent customer service to local partners and strengthening the professional relationships that he and his staff rely on each day.

Fun Fact: Outside of work, Geoff is known for his love of horror movies. He and his wife enjoy collecting memorabilia and attending conventions dedicated to the genre.

Contact Geoff at 406-444-9131 or gstreeter@mt.gov.



Geoff Streeer, MDT Statewide Planning Section Supervisor

New Missoula District Administrator

John Schmidt, P.E., currently serves as MDT's Missoula District Administrator. Prior to this role, John spent several years as the District Project Delivery Engineer, where he led construction operations, contract administration, and strategic project delivery. During his tenure, he managed District-wide construction activities, oversaw a \$125 million annual program, and provided senior leadership in staffing, resource allocation, and long-range planning. Known for his collaborative approach, John helped strengthen interagency coordination, supported emerging engineers, and represented MDT in public forums, legislative discussions, and local government engagement.

John joined MDT in 2005 and progressed through roles including Engineering Project Manager, Field Office Engineer, and Lead Inspector. Drawing on more than two decades of hands-on and managerial experience, he brings a deep understanding of construction practices, operational strategy, and community-focused transportation leadership. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Montana State University and is a licensed Professional Engineer in Montana.

Fun Fact: Outside of work, John spends much of his time coaching youth soccer and traveling with his son's competitive team. He recently completed his US Youth Soccer (USYS) grassroots coaching license.

Contact John at 406-523-5802 or johschmidt@mt.gov.



John Schmidt, MDT Missoula District Administrator

Montana Freight Plan Update

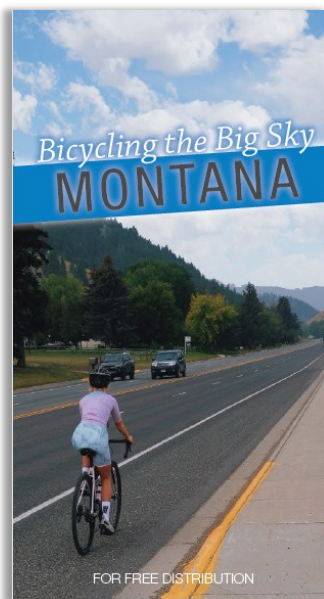
The Montana Freight Plan provides a comprehensive evaluation of freight transportation within the state including the identification of goals and strategies for planning and investing in the freight transportation system. The 2026 update to the Montana Freight Plan will be available for public comment late summer of 2026 and will be posted at: mdt.mt.gov/freightplan/2026-update.aspx.

Gear Up for Summer

MDT's Bicycling the Big Sky pocket map is updated for 2026! This handy resource complements the Official State Highway Map and includes highway information important for bicyclists, bicycling laws, and tips for sharing the road.

MDT's Geospatial Section and the Bicycle-Pedestrian Coordinator worked diligently to update the map after collecting the most recent data for shoulder widths, rumble strips, and average summer daily traffic.

Request a free print copy and additional safety materials by contacting mdtbikeped@mt.gov. You can also view the digital map and learn more at: mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/.



What do Good Roads Mean to You?

This year, Good Roads Day falls on June 16. To mark this important date, MDT asks travelers to take a minute to consider how their lives are made better because of Montana's good roads. It's easy to overlook the role a well-maintained network of roads and bridges plays in getting to work, shopping, medical, recreational, and other destinations. In Montana, this is paid for with about 87% federal funds, and 13% state funds. The state funds are generated by user fees including state fuel taxes and gross vehicle weight (GVW) permits. As Montana's infrastructure ages, travel demands grow, and costs rise, the pressure is mounting. Hats off to all the MDT employees and contractors working to keep good roads good, and the Montana Legislature for designating the third Tuesday in June Good Roads Day.



Hats off to MDT's "Humans Working" to keep Montana's good roads good!

100 Deadliest Days of Summer and Montana's SETT Team

The period between Memorial Day and Labor Day known as the "100 Deadliest Days of Summer" is one of the most dangerous times of the year on our roadways. Increased travel, teen drivers out of school, summer events, and impaired, speeding, or distracted driving all contribute to a rise in serious and fatal crashes during these months.

To help keep Montana's roads safer, the Montana Highway Patrol (MHP) deploys its Safety Enforcement Traffic Team (SETT). This specialized unit consists of five troopers and one sergeant, all trained in high-visibility enforcement with a focus on reducing impaired driving, speeding, distracted driving, and seatbelt violations. The SETT Team also works closely with and coordinates enforcement efforts with local law enforcement agencies, ensuring strong coverage and consistent safety messaging across communities.

Planned SETT Team enforcement locations during the 100 Deadliest Days period include:

- Missoula – Memorial Day Weekend
- Kalispell – 4th of July
- Great Falls – Montana State Fair
- Billings – Montana Fair
- Three Forks – Country Jam / Headwaters Event

In addition to MHP's efforts, city and county law enforcement agencies participating in STEP (Selective Traffic Enforcement Program) will also increase their patrols throughout the 100 Deadliest Days. These coordinated, statewide efforts help ensure more visibility, more deterrence, and safer roadways during the busiest travel period of the year.

By combining targeted enforcement with strong public awareness, the SETT Team and local STEP partners help reduce preventable crashes during the most hazardous stretch of the year. As we move into the summer season, please remember to buckle up, stay alert, avoid distractions, and drive sober.

To learn more about Montana's SETT Team and related enforcement efforts, contact Alison Malensek at 406-444-7417 or amalensek@mt.gov.



MDT and FCCLA Continue Traffic Safety Partnership

For the past 10 years, Montana Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) chapter members have been integral to the goal of Vision Zero, helping save lives across the state through local education and outreach. Through MDT's continued partnership with FCCLA, these chapters have created innovative projects that promote teen traffic safety within their own communities.



The "Safe Driving" bus wrap used by Three Forks FCCLA in their traffic safety campaign.

Teen drivers have been involved in approximately 14% of all traffic fatalities on Montana's roadways over the past five years. This statistic underscores MDT's commitment to prioritizing teen traffic safety initiatives.

During the 2025–26 school year, MDT awarded approximately \$21,600 to eight FCCLA chapters across the state to support the development of local teen traffic safety campaigns. These student-led initiatives included school assemblies, community signage improvements, billboard development, newspaper and radio outreach, YouTube videos, and even bus wraps. As in previous years, prizes were awarded to the top three projects:

- 1st Place: Three Forks FCCLA – \$2,000
- 2nd Place: Power FCCLA – \$1,500
- 3rd Place (tie): Roundup FCCLA – \$500
- 3rd Place (tie): Beaverhead County FCCLA – \$500

Award recipients were announced during the Statewide Leadership Conference in Bozeman on March 20, 2026. Examples of the outstanding campaign materials created by these students can be viewed at mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/people/teen-peer-to-peer.aspx.

MDT applauds the dedication of these teens in educating their peers about traffic safety and making a difference in their communities. For more information, contact Sheila Cozzie at 406-444-7301 or scozzie@mt.gov.

Remember to Share the Road with Motorcycles!

Montana's wide-open highways and breathtaking scenery make summer the perfect season for motorcycle riding. But as more riders take to the road, safe driving habits become even more essential. Observing the speed limit, staying alert, and riding and driving sober can be the difference between a memorable summer adventure and a preventable tragedy.

"Motorcycles are some of the most vulnerable vehicles on the road," said Casey Redder, Director of Montana Motorcycle Rider Safety. "It is very important for drivers to remember that a motorcycle has all the rights of the road as any other motorist."





Preliminary 2024 data shows a troubling trend: 38 motorcycle fatalities statewide — roughly 30% more than in 2023. Half of those riders, 19 in total, were not wearing helmets. These are some of the highest numbers Montana has seen in years, underscoring the urgent need for increased awareness and safer behaviors from both riders and drivers.

Motorcycle safety matters. Stay aware of your surroundings, share the road, and always look twice before you move. If you would like additional information on MDT's motorcycle traffic safety program, contact Sheila Cozzie at 406-444-7301 or scozzie@mt.gov.

Lane Filtering for Motorcycles



An operator of a two-wheeled motorcycle may engage in lane filtering when:

-  the road has lanes wide enough to pass safely
-  the motorcycle does not go above 20mph when overtaking the stopped or slow-moving vehicle
-  the vehicle being passed is stopped or is traveling no more than 10mph
-  the vehicle being passed is in the same direction of travel and the same lane

Montana Traffic Safety Dates

July 6-31, 2026

Speeding Catches Up to You National Speeding Prevention Campaign

June 20, 2026 - July 5, 2026*

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

August 19, 2026 - September 7, 2026*

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 Orry Hatcher, MDT Law Enforcement Program Manager at 406-444-0809 or ohatcher@mt.gov.

September 20-26, 2026

Child Passenger Safety Week (National Seat Check Saturday is September 26, 2026)

September 21-27, 2026

See Tracks? Think Train® Week (Operation Lifesaver)

October 1-31, 2026

National Pedestrian Safety Month

October 6, 2026

Montana's Annual Transportation Safety Meeting (see "Save the Date" on page 2 for information)

October 18-24, 2026

Teen Driver Safety Week

October 19-23, 2026

National School Bus Safety Week

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



Staying Safe While Staying Active

Summer is a great time to choose active transportation like walking or biking, but it also comes with unique safety challenges. Higher temperatures can lead to dehydration or heat exhaustion, especially during peak afternoon hours. Plan trips during cooler parts of the day. When it's possible, wear light and breathable clothing, and always carry water to stay hydrated.

Visibility is another important factor. With longer daylight hours, people may assume they're always easy to see but glare from the sun can reduce visibility for both you and drivers. Wear bright or reflective clothing and consider using lights or reflectors, especially if you're traveling at dawn or dusk.

Road and pathway conditions can change in summer due to increased traffic, construction, or recreational use. Stay alert and avoid distractions like headphones. If you're bicycling, make sure your bike is in good condition, check brakes, tires, and chains regularly. Following traffic rules and signaling your movements clearly helps keep everyone predictable and safe.

Lastly, be mindful of your physical limits. Heat can affect your energy and reaction time more than you might expect. Take breaks in shaded areas, listen to your body, and don't push through signs of fatigue or dizziness. A little preparation goes a long way toward making active transportation safe, enjoyable, and sustainable all summer long.



EMS Program and the Importance of Post-Crash Care

The 2009 Montana Legislature found that emergency medical services (EMS) supplied to patients prior to reaching the hospital, known as prehospital EMS, are critical elements of Montana's overall healthcare system. Both the availability and efficiency of prehospital EMS can improve health outcomes for those experiencing medical emergencies and may assist in improving the safety of motorists by providing vehicle crash-site responses.

The EMS Grant Program was created from this finding in the 2009 Legislature and seeks to fill the gaps in providing quality prehospital care, primarily to rural areas. The program became permanent in 2013, serving mostly volunteer and rural EMS providers, and has since awarded more than 120 grants totaling over \$6 million. These grants have been used to supply care providers with ambulances, medical emergency response vehicles, training equipment, communications equipment, and patient-care supplies.

MDT administers the EMS Grant Program through an annual appropriation of \$1.2 million. Each year, the program funds approximately 15 to 20 applications after a competitive application process. Grantees are required to contribute a 10% match for the total amount of grant funding.

These grant funds translate directly into more ambulances, quick response units (QRUs), stair chairs, and other EMS equipment and training that increase the survivability of crashes and other emergencies in Montana's rural environments. For more information on the EMS Grant Program, contact Bryce Shaneyfelt, MDT EMS Transportation Planner, at 406-444-3430 or bshaneyfelt@mt.gov.



Did you know? MDT's EMS Grant Program provides funding that enables rural and volunteer EMS to acquire transportation, care resources, and training equipment. In May, ambulances were delivered to Fiscal Year 2024 and 2025 grant recipients, including Roosevelt Medical Center (ambulance pictured above) and Jefferson Valley Emergency Medical Services & Rescue. For more information on this program, visit mdt.mt.gov/business/grants-ems.aspx.

Systems Impact Early Project Coordination and Preapplication Meetings

MDT encourages early coordination on developer led projects that will be impacting the MDT right-of-way. Early coordination with MDT ensures that the roles and responsibilities of all parties are clearly identified, outlines expectations and requirements for projects, and can assist with review timelines.

Early coordination can begin with the local government through Public Notices and Requests for Comments that are sent to MDT. These notices and requests often alert MDT to projects that are likely to impact the right of way and allow for the opportunity to refer developers to the appropriate MDT District staff to begin the review process. In addition, some local governments, such as the City of Bozeman, coordinate with MDT monthly on projects that have begun the city review process and are likely to also require MDT approval. By coordinating early in this way, it can be ensured that permitting requirements and expectations are shared with both the developer and local government at the beginning of the review process and often eliminates costly and time-consuming back-and-forth.

Another form of early coordination is scoping meetings, which allow a developer to connect with MDT subject matter experts on a project prior to beginning the review process. Scoping meetings can identify requirements, define construction plans and project phasing, and address any questions concerning MDT review process and timelines. Projects are often nominated to the Systems Impact Action Process (SIAP) when a scoping meeting is requested. Scoping meetings are optional, but encouraged, and are not required for every project that is nominated to SIAP as the level of review for each project can be a determining factor.

The Walmart Fuel Centers serve as an example of effective early coordination and the importance of scoping meetings. Early coordination began in October 2025, when one MDT District office reached out to SIAP's Section Supervisor about the project. From there, a Systems Impact Coordinator was assigned to this project, and a scoping meeting was scheduled with the Developer to garner a better understanding of the project scope and identify the requirements they must meet for MDT permitting. While Walmart is proposing five fuel centers across four MDT districts, the requirement for each project location differs based on a variety of factors. By having a scoping meeting with the developer, MDT was able to clearly identify each location's specific requirements and determine the next steps to be taken. Taking these early coordination measures eliminated any unnecessary and costly analysis or design efforts that were not applicable to every project location.

Early coordination is an integral and beneficial aspect of the SIAP review process, as seen with the Walmart Fuel Centers. Coordination efforts of this manner sets both MDT and developers up for success.

MWTP Updates 2026 Application Process; Now Accepting Project Proposals Year-Round

The Montana Wildlife & Transportation Partnership (MWTP) has updated its 2026 project application process and is now accepting proposals year-round: mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/mwt/program.aspx

MWTP seeks stand-alone, collaborative projects that can help reduce wildlife vehicle conflict (WVC) and improve wildlife connectivity across Montana's highways. Applications may be submitted at any time through the online form on the MWTP webpage. A full review cycle will occur annually from April through July, while smaller, less complex proposals may be reviewed throughout the year. Selected projects will receive support through subsequent development phases.

MWTP's Planning Tool was updated in 2025 with new species and habitat models, current WVC and traffic data, a wildlife accommodations layer, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) SO3362 priority areas. These resources are available online to help applicants prepare strong proposals. Project proponents are encouraged to coordinate early with local FWP and MDT biologists and to reach out to MWTP members at mdtmwtp@mt.gov for guidance. Collaboration, data sharing, and on-the-ground information gathering remain essential to developing effective wildlife accommodation strategies statewide.

Transit News and Updates

B2G now has acquired BlackCat, marking an important step in enhancing the platform's capabilities. MDT will transition from the current BlackCat site to a modern multi-tenant platform. This updated system will offer improved performance, faster updates, and greater long-term scalability while maintaining the reliable experience users have today. The MDT Transit Section will provide training and communicate key milestones as the transition progresses.

The Transit Section is also pleased to share that the team is now fully staffed and ready to support transit programs statewide. For transit-related questions, please refer to the contacts below:

- ▶ Jennifer Andrews – Transit Section Supervisor (jeandrews@mt.gov)
- ▶ Barb Sheridan – Northern Regional Planner; Drug and Alcohol; NTD (bsheridan@mt.gov)
- ▶ Melissa Burch – Southern Regional Planner; RTAP (mburch@mt.gov)
- ▶ Codi Northam – Western Regional Planner; Facilities (cnortham@mt.gov)
- ▶ Jer Ulsher – Urban Regional Planner; 5303/5304 Grants (julsher@mt.gov)
- ▶ Erin Root – Procurement and Rolling Stock (eroot@mt.gov)
- ▶ Natalie Wenzel – Capital Grants (nwenzel@mt.gov)
- ▶ Keenan Blake – Operating Grants and TransADE (kblake@mt.gov)



Paving on the Beartooth Highway in May 2026 (ahead of opening to seasonal traffic).



Highway History Near Augusta: The Elk Creek Bridge

By Jon Axline, MDT Historian

Montana is fortunate to have all types and sizes of historic bridges peppered around the state's landscape. The big steel truss bridges get the most attention, but the ordinary steel stringer, timber, and reinforced concrete structures were the true backbone of Montana's transportation system. Many of them were built during an eleven-year period from 1930 to 1941. The state experienced a profound modernization of its highway system during the Great Depression. Federal money funded the transformation and put the unemployed to work building roads and bridges. The Montana Highway Department designed and built well over a thousand bridges during that time. While timber bridges far outnumbered other types of structures, reinforced concrete bridges were also a critical component of the state's new highways.

The most common type of Great Depression era reinforced concrete bridges found on Montana's highways are T-Beam or concrete girder bridges. The design derives its name from the "T"-shaped configuration of the support beam or stringer. The head of the "T" is incorporated into the deck slab of the structure, which also functions as the floor of the bridge. While the reinforcing steel rebar was fabricated as separate units, the "T" beams and deck slabs were cast as a single unit at the construction site. Contractors cast the distinctive concrete post-and-beam guardrails separately and attached them to the curb pedestals. The bridge's soffits, which overhang the deck, were often supported by concrete brackets.

Prison labor built the first known T-beam bridge in Montana in 1909. It spanned the Clark Fork on Conley Street at the south end of the state penitentiary property in Deer Lodge. Unlike the classic T-beam bridges of the 1930s, the Conley Street Bridge displayed the T-beams flush with the sidewalls of the structure. In 1914, Carbon County built the first known T-beam bridge with the girders recessed under the deck. The Bluewater Creek Bridge still exists and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

While the highway commission's first bridge engineer developed a design for a reinforced concrete slab bridge in 1915, the Montana State Highway Commission's Bridge Department didn't develop a standard T-beam design until 1919. A Montana State Highway Commission bridge engineer known only by the initials "T.A.M." developed the standard design. The Post Creek Bridge on Fish Hatchery Road on the Flathead Indian Reservation was the first built under that design. From 1919 until 1928, T-beam bridges displayed the typical recessed girders, but had balustraded concrete guard walls with either rectangular or arched openings. What may be the first bridge built under the design utilized by the highway department in the 1930s and early 1940s spans Poindexter Slough at a fishing access site along an old US Highway 91 alignment a couple miles south of Dillon.

The Great Depression marked the high point of T-beam bridge construction from 1930 to 1935. During that period, the highway department built ninety-three T-beam bridges with most built from 1930 to 1932. The peak construction year was 1931 when the highway department built thirty-eight T-beam bridges. In all, standalone concrete bridges constituted 10% of the total number of structures built by the highway department. After 1935, standalone concrete bridges were rare. Instead, highway department bridge engineers utilized T-beam spans as approaches to steel truss and railroad grade separation structures. Built in 1942, the last standalone T-beam bridge spans the North Fork of American Creek on U.S. Highway 191 in Wheatland County.

Typical of reinforced concrete T-beam bridges of the 1930s is the two-span Elk Creek Bridge on Montana Highway 21 about a mile northeast of Augusta in Lewis and Clark County. The bridge is 79 feet long with the standard roadway width of 22 feet. The State Highway

Commission awarded a contract to John Coverdale and Elmer "Oscar" Johnson to construct a concrete bridge and five treated timber bridges on the Augusta "end" of the Augusta-Sun River Road on September 21, 1934. One of seven firms that bid on the project, Coverdale and Johnson won the contract with their low bid of \$15,615. The contractors obtained the labor for the project from the Helena office of the United States Employment Service as stipulated by federal New Deal regulations. The contractors began work on the project shortly after the highway commission awarded them the contract. Coverdale and Johnson completed the project by the April 30, 1935 deadline specified by the highway commission. The final cost of the Elk Creek Bridge was \$5,795.

Coverdale and Johnson were active highway contractors in Montana in the early 1930s. John Coverdale immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1898 and settled in Washington State. By 1925, he had gone to work as a road builder based in Anaconda. He and partner Carl Eiman obtained their first Montana Highway Department contract in 1929 when they widened two bridges on U.S. Highway 10-South between Butte and Anaconda. Between 1929 and 1935, Coverdale, either working on his own or with partners, won several contracts from the highway commission. All involved the construction of timber, reinforced concrete and steel girder structures. In September 1934, Coverdale formed a business partnership with Helena contractor Elmer "Oscar" Johnson. Coverdale and Johnson obtained three highway contracts together in 1934 and 1935.

In December 1934, while working on the contract for this bridge, Johnson was involved in a fatal car accident on Montana Highway 21 near the community of Simms. Johnson, George Bardon, the company's timekeeper, and sisters Roberta and Margaret Doheny had driven to Great Falls to make a delivery. On the way back to Augusta, with Bardon allegedly at the wheel, he apparently dozed off, lost control of the car and crashed into a tree at a high rate of speed. Bardon died instantly; the sisters died shortly afterwards. Only Johnson, who was asleep in the backseat of the car, survived the deadly crash.

Several months later, the sisters' mother filed a lawsuit against Coverdale and Johnson over the deaths of her daughters. Mrs. Doheny won the lawsuit, but didn't receive the \$100,000 she'd asked for. The accident spelled the end of Coverdale and Johnson's partnership and the men's contracting livelihoods in Montana. Coverdale went to work for the Anaconda Company smelter in Anaconda shortly after completing the Elk Creek Bridge. Johnson left the contracting business and worked as a farmhand near Toston, Montana.



Photo shows the Elk Creek Bridge as it appears today, near Augusta, Mont.

To request an alternative accessible format of this document, please contact MDT's ADA Coordinator at 406-444-5416, Montana Relay Service at 711, or by email at mdtaccessibilityrequest@mt.gov.

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 406-444-3423, 800-714-7296 (in Montana only), or Montana Relay Service at 711.

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