



I-15 Gore Hill to Emerson Junction

Corridor Planning Study

10-29-2014

Informational Meeting No. 1

Welcome and Introductions

2

- **Introductions**

- **Partners**
 - ▣ MDT
 - ▣ FHWA
 - ▣ City of Great Falls
 - ▣ Cascade County

- **Consultant team**



Meeting Outline

3

- Title VI considerations
- What is a corridor planning study?
- Study area boundary
- Study schedule
- Study background
- Transportation system
- Environmental setting
- Conclusion and next steps

Title VI Considerations

4

This meeting is held pursuant to Title VI of the 1964 Civil Right Act which ensures that no person shall, as provided by Federal and State Civil Rights law, be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination on the basis of a protected status during any MDT project.

Further information is available in Title VI pamphlets available at the sign-in table.

What is a Corridor Planning Study?

5

- **Corridor planning studies:**
 - ▣ Are a “high level scan”
 - ▣ Define transportation issues/areas of concern
 - ▣ Consider social, economic, and environmental effects at an early stage
 - ▣ Identify cost-effective and feasible strategies
 - ▣ Provide a level of analysis that can support informed and sustainable decisions
 - ▣ Provide opportunities for early and continuous involvement

What a Corridor Planning Study is Not

6

- **A corridor planning study is not:**
 - ▣ An environmental compliance document
 - ▣ A preliminary or final design project
 - ▣ A construction or maintenance project
 - ▣ A right-of-way acquisition project

Goal and Purpose of Study

7

- Engage constituents early and often!
- Identify potential impacts and constraints
- Identify needs and objectives
- Identify short-range and long-range improvements
- Develop planning level cost estimates
- Develop information and data to be forwarded into the environmental process if a project moves forward from the study (dependent on available funds)

8

Study Background

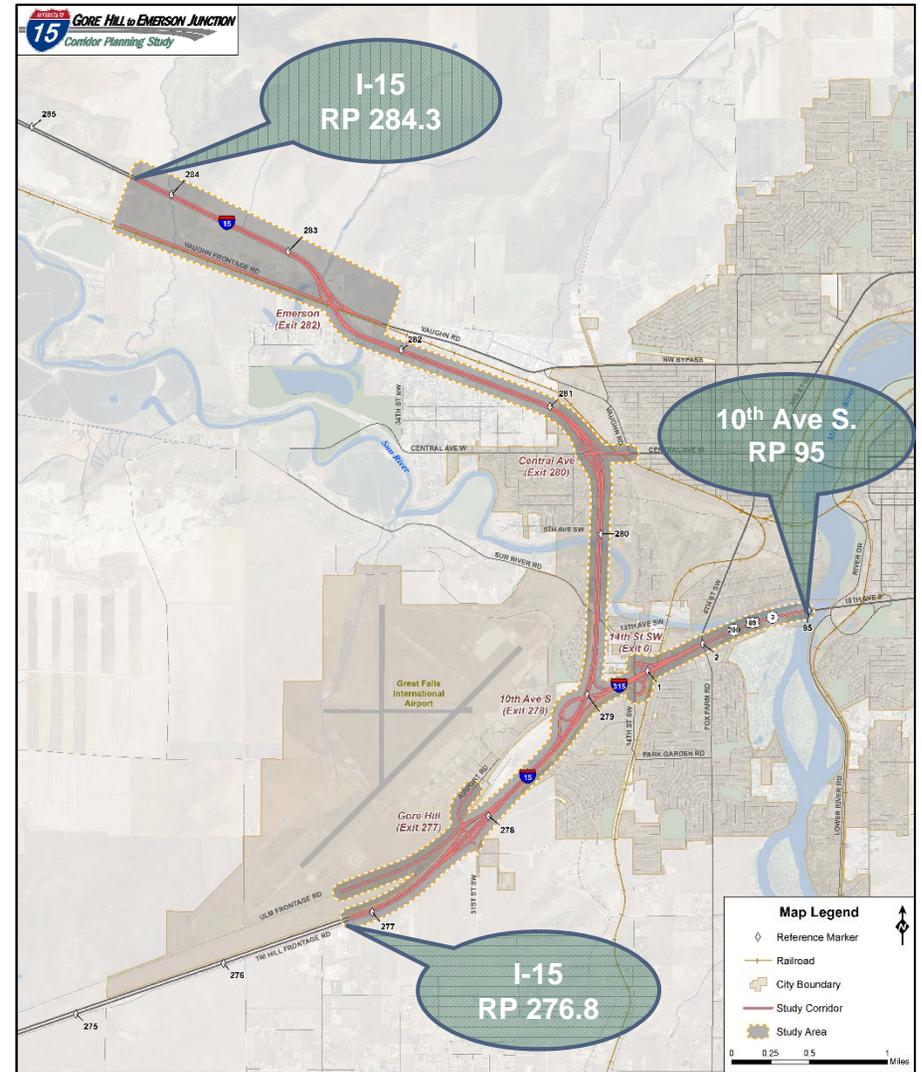
Study Area

9

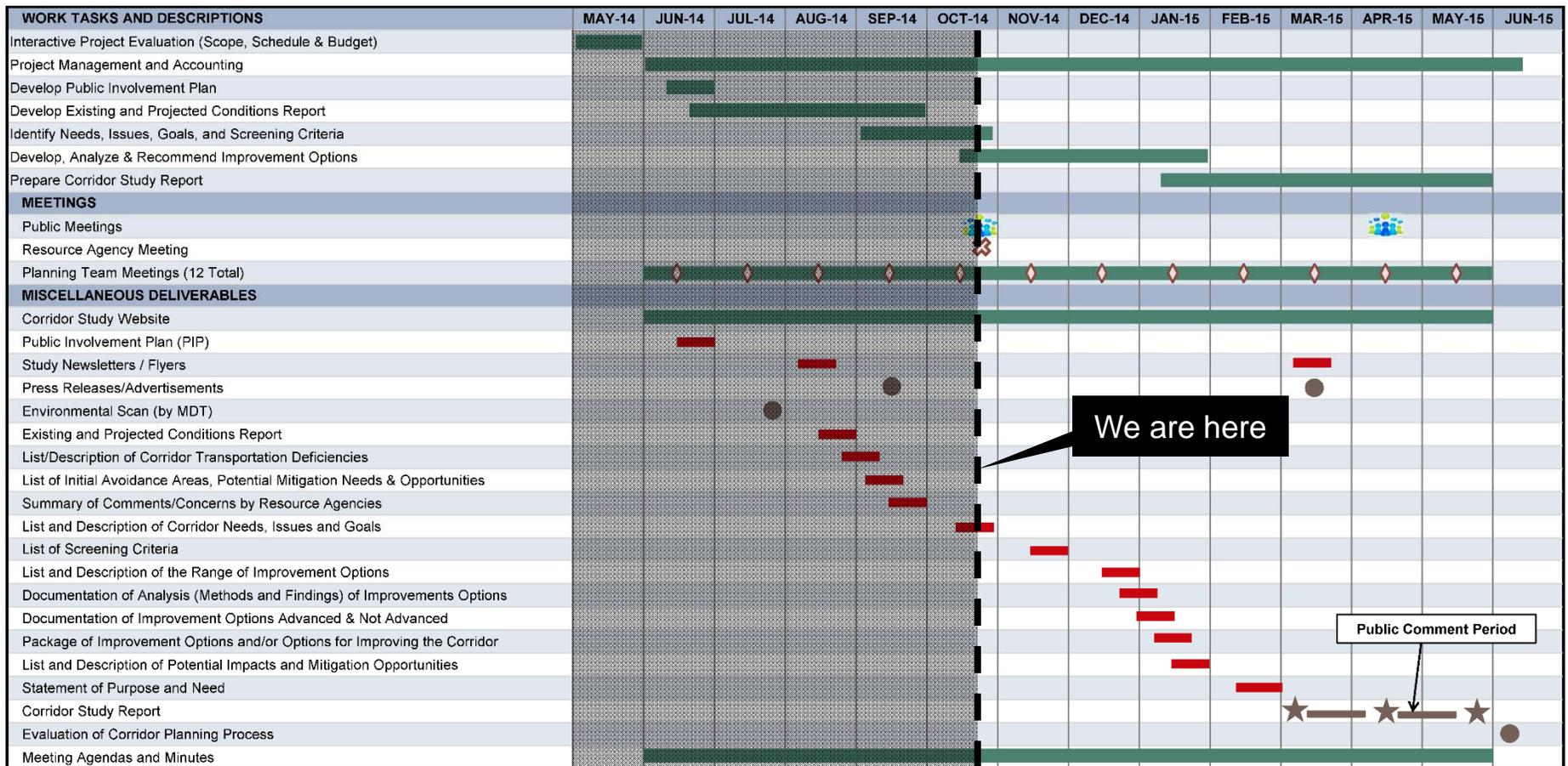
- **Interstate 15**
 - ▣ South of Gore Hill
 - ▣ North of Emerson Junction

- **Interstate 315**

- **10th Avenue South**
 - ▣ West of Missouri River



Study Schedule



We are here

Public Comment Period

Public Involvement Activities

11

- Two informational meetings
 - ▣ October 29, 2014
 - ▣ Spring, 2015
- Outreach to interested parties, stakeholders, resource agencies, as warranted
- Study newsletters
- Website
 - ▣ <http://mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/i15>
- Other as needed

MDT Mike Tooley, Director
about | careers | news | meetings & events | contacts

TRAVELER INFO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT DOING BUSINESS PUBLICATIONS

INTERSTATE 15 GORE HILL to EMERSON JUNCTION
Corridor Planning Study

Corridor Planning Study Focus

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and in coordination with the Great Falls MPO, is developing a corridor planning study of Interstate 15 (I-15) in the Great Falls Area. The Great Falls Area Long Range Transportation Plan (2014) identified the need for an Interstate corridor study. The LRTP states that, "due to the need for improvements to both Emerson Junction and Gore Hill interchanges and other identified needs for added lanes and operational improvements on I-15 and I-315, an Interstate Corridor Study for the Great Falls area is recommended."

The goal of the study is to identify short- and long-term improvements that address the needs and objectives developed for the study area. The study will identify feasible improvement options to address safety, operations, and geometric concerns within the study area and will include interchanges and ramps.

The study area includes Interstate 15 (I-15) through Great Falls, beginning southwest of the Gore Hill Interchange (I-15 Exit 277) near Reference Post (RP) 277 and ending northwest of Emerson Junction (Exit 282) near RP 284. The study area also includes Interstate 315 (I-315) and 10th Avenue South west of the Missouri River (RP 95).

[View Study Area](#)

Links

- Corridor Planning Study Focus
- Schedule
- FAQs
- Newsletters/Documents
- Comment on this Study
- Related Links

Contacts

Dave Hand
MDT Great Falls District
200 Smelter Avenue NE
PO Box 1359
Great Falls, MT 59403-1359
406-454-5880 | Email

Corrina Collins
MDT Project Manager
2701 Prospect Ave
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001
406-444-9131 | Email

Scott Randall
Project Manager
Robert Peccia & Associates
825 Custer Ave
Helena, MT 56904
406-447-5000 | Email

TOP

Identified Stakeholder Groups

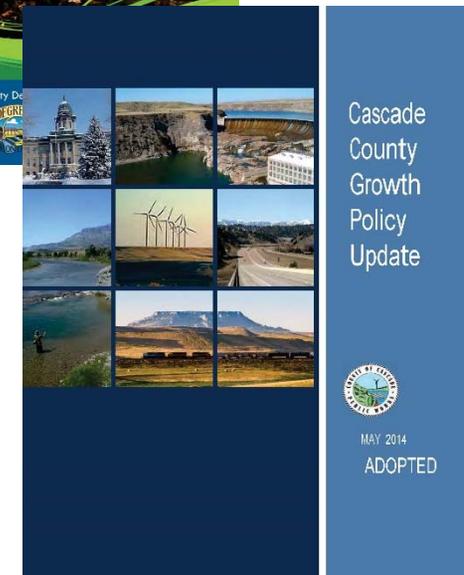
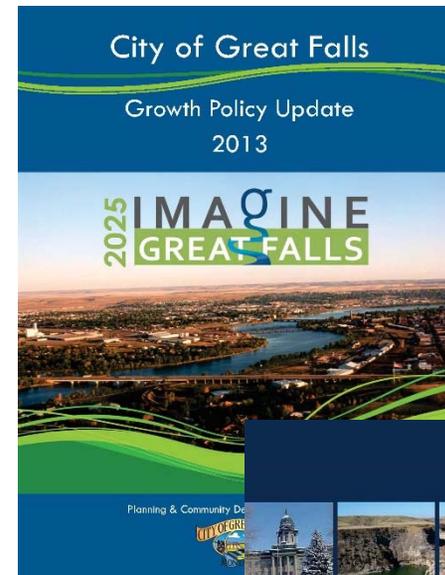
12

- Great Falls Air National Guard
- Malmstrom Air Force Base
- Great Falls International Airport Authority
- Great Falls Policy Coordinating Committee
- Great Falls Transportation Technical Advisory Committee
- Great Falls Northern Industrial Task Force
- Others as Requested

Local Planning

13

- **Review past, current, and future planning documents:**
 - ▣ Great Falls Area Long Range Transportation Plan - 2014
 - ▣ Cascade County Growth Policy Update (2014)
 - ▣ City of Great Falls Growth Policy Update (2013)
 - ▣ Great Falls International Airport Master Plan (Ongoing)
 - ▣ Great Falls Transit Development Plan (2010)



Planned Projects

14

- **Emerson Junction to Manchester**
 - ▣ Major rehabilitation of I-15 beginning at RP 282.54 and ending at 286.42

- **Bridge Preservation, Great Falls IM**
 - ▣ Bridge deck preservation on I-15 and I-315 at RP 208.60

15

Transportation System

Physical Characteristics

16

- **Interstate 15**
 - ▣ 65 mph speed limit
 - ▣ 4 interchanges

- **Interstate 315**
 - ▣ 55 - 45 mph speed limit
 - ▣ 1 interchange
 - ▣ Ends at Fox Farm Rd

- **10th Ave S**
 - ▣ West of Missouri River
 - ▣ 45 mph speed limit



Area Features

17

- **Land Use**
 - ▣ Private and public
 - ▣ Mix of urban and rural

- **Railroad**
 - ▣ Interstate crosses railroad at 2 locations

- **Airport**
 - ▣ Great Falls International Airport
 - ▣ Accessed primarily by Gore Hill Interchange



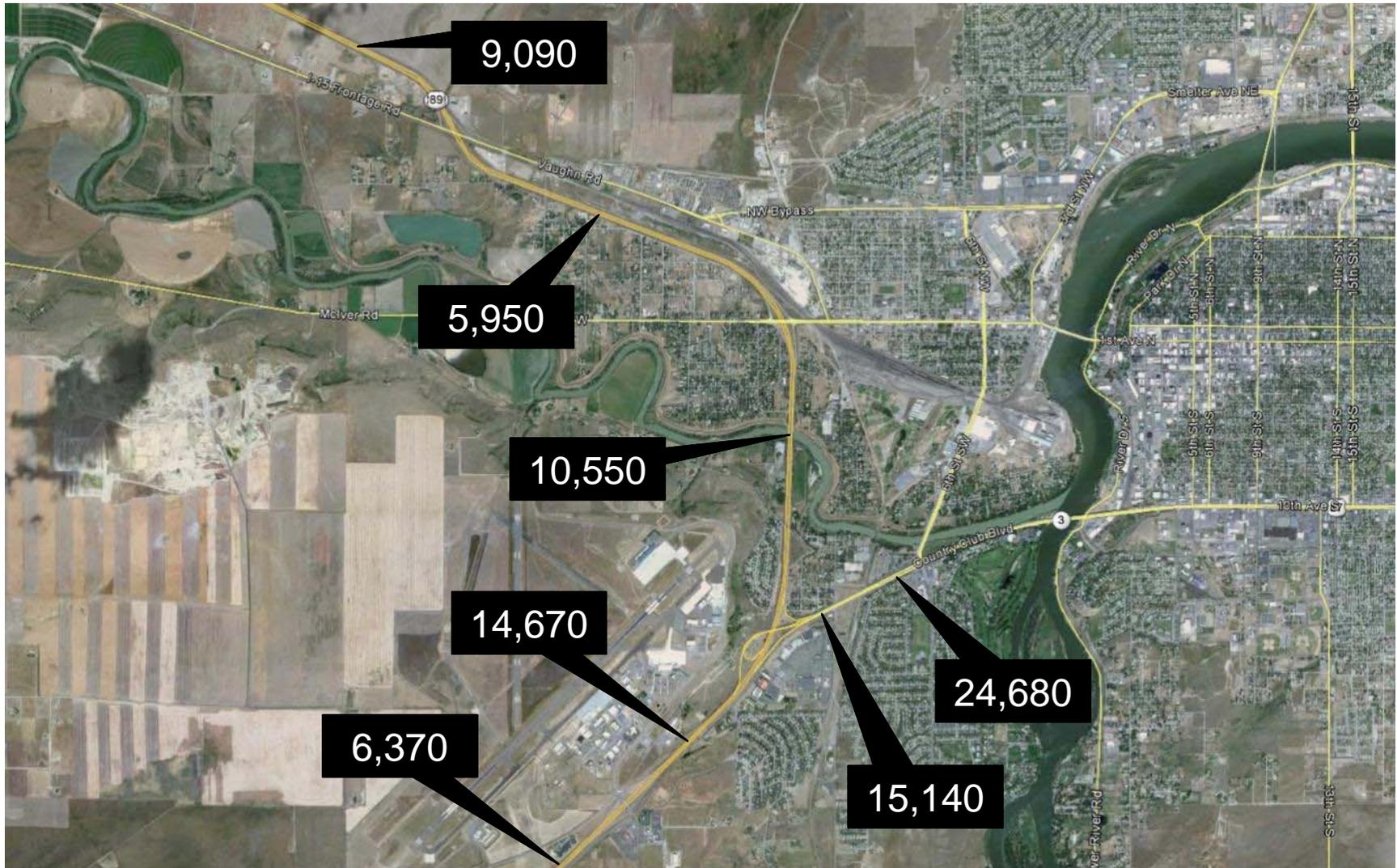
Bridges

	Location	Feature Crossed	Year Built	Width (ft)	Length (ft)	Structure Condition	Deck Condition
I-15	RP 279.35 (NB)	Sun River	1966	28 ^(a)	485	Good	Good
	RP 279.35 (SB)	Sun River	1966	28 ^(a)	485	Good	Good
	RP 279.47 (NB)	5th Ave SW	1967	37 ^(a)	125	Good	Good
	RP 279.47 (SB)	5th Ave SW	1967	37 ^(a)	125	Good	Good
	RP 281.91 (NB)	Vaughn Rd / BNSF RR	1967	28 ^(a)	354	Good	Fair-1
	RP 281.91 (SB)	Vaughn Rd / BNSF RR	1967	28 ^(a)	359	Good	Fair-1
	RP 283.6	Access Rd	1960	126	18	Good	Good
I-315	RP 0.01	I-15	1967	45	294	Good	Fair-1
	RP 0.34 (EB)	14th St SW	1967	36 ^(a)	150	Good	Fair-2
	RP 0.34 (WB)	14th St SW	1967	45	145	Good	Fair-1
	RP 0.34 (EB Off)	14th St SW	1997	23	136	Good	Good
	RP 1.06 (EB)	BNSF RR	1946	45	178	Good	Fair-2
	RP 1.06 (WB)	BNSF RR	1967	37 ^(a)	208	Good	Fair-2
	RP 1.06 (WB Off)	BNSF RR	1996	23	186	Good	Good
Central Ave	RP 0.16 (EB)	BNSF RR	1967	27	551	Good	Fair-1
	RP 0.16 (WB)	BNSF RR	1967	27	551	Good	Fair-1
10th Ave S	RP 94.61 (EB)	Missouri River	1983	40	2122	Good	Fair-1
	RP 94.61 (WB)	Missouri River	1951	28	2093	Good	Good

Source: MDT Bridge Management System, 2014
^(a) Width less than 38 feet on the Interstate System

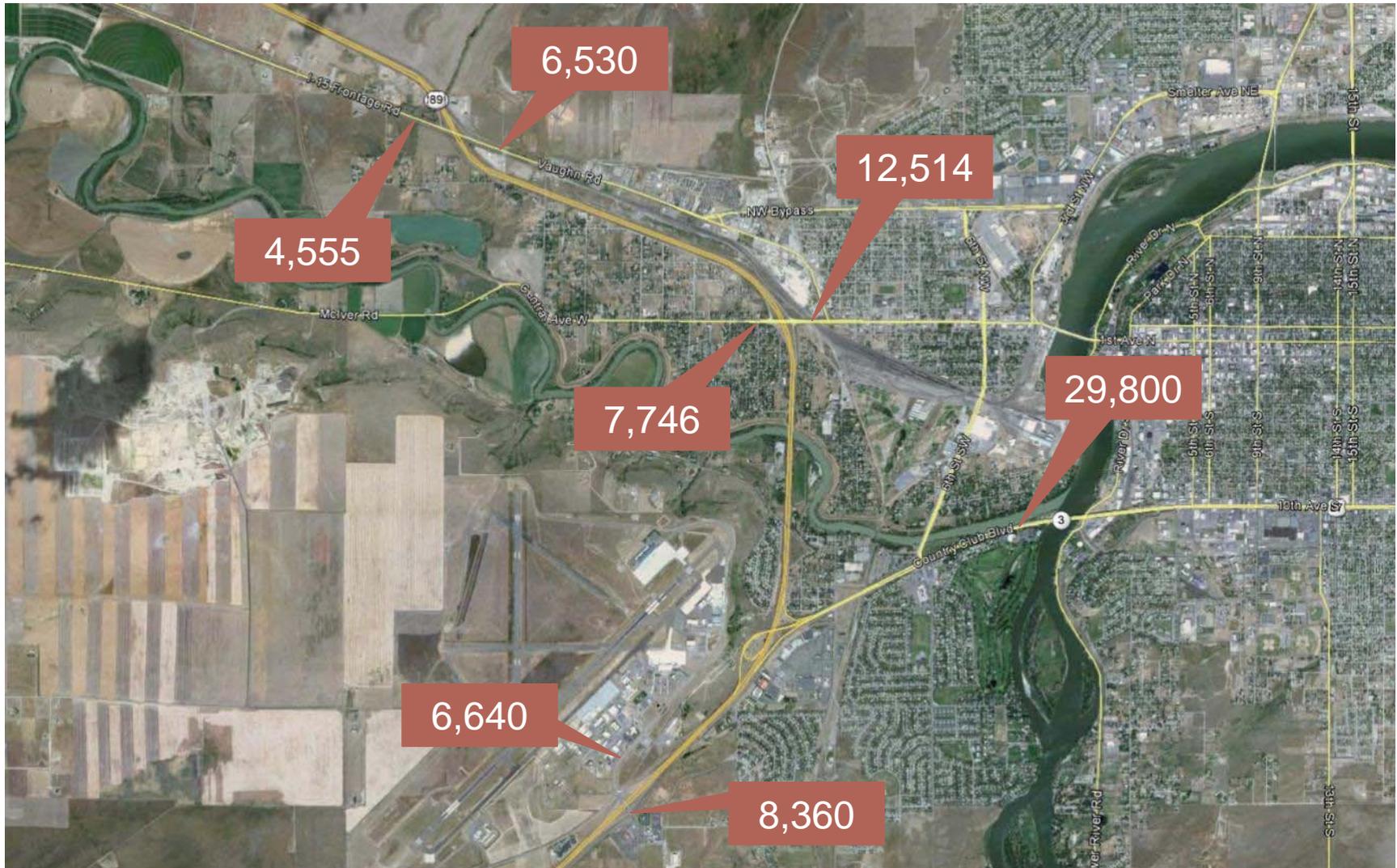
Existing AADT - Interstate

19



Existing AADT – Non-Interstate

20



Historic AADT Trends

Location		2013 AADT	1994-2013	2000-2013	2007-2013
I-15	S of Gore Hill	6,370	1.4%	0.4%	0.1%
I-15	N of Gore Hill	14,670	1.6%	1.3%	-0.1%
I-15	N of 10th Ave	10,550	1.5%	1.3%	0.3%
I-15	N of Central Ave	5,950	1.2%	0.5%	-1.8%
I-15	N of Emerson	9,090	0.9%	0.1%	-1.2%
I-315	W of 14th St SW	15,140	(a)	(a)	0.8%
I-315	W of Fox Farm	24,680	4.2%	1.8%	0.1%
31st St SW	S of Interchange	8,360	5.6%	4.7%	-0.8%
Airport Dr	N of Interchange	3,640	-0.1%	0.7%	2.3%
10th Ave S	Warden Bridge	29,800	1.5%	1.5%	0.4%
Central Ave	E of Interchange	12,514	0.0%	0.5%	3.0%
Central Ave	W of Interchange	7,746	0.6%	1.5%	4.4%
Vaughn Rd	E of Interchange	6,530	0.0%	-0.4%	1.5%
Vaughn Rd	W of Interchange	4,555	0.4%	0.7%	7.4%

Source: MDT Data and Statistics Bureau, Traffic Data Collection Section, 2014

(a) Data unavailable

Projected AADT

Location		2013 AADT	Traffic Model Projected AAGR ^(a)	2035 Projected AADT
I-15	S of Gore Hill	6,370	0.9%	7,681
I-15	N of Gore Hill	14,670	1.9%	22,358
I-15	N of 10th Ave	10,550	2.1%	16,693
I-15	N of Central Ave	5,950	0.6%	6,804
I-15	N of Emerson	9,090	0.9%	10,998
I-315	W of 14th St SW	15,140	0.8%	17,979
I-315	W of Fox Farm	24,680	0.7%	28,546
31st St SW	S of Interchange	8,360	2.3%	13,678
Airport Dr	N of Interchange	3,640	4.6%	9,887
10th Ave S	Warden Bridge	29,800	0.7%	34,630
Central Ave	E of Interchange	12,514	2.4%	21,270
Central Ave	W of Interchange	7,746	0.1%	7,974
Vaughn Rd	E of Interchange	6,530	1.4%	8,835
Vaughn Rd	W of Interchange	4,555	1.1%	5,762

^(a) Average Annual Growth Rates calculated from traffic model developed for Great Falls Area LRTP - 2014

Mainline Interstate

23

- Mainline traffic meets LOS performance standards
- One vertical grade does not appear to meet current standards
- Two horizontal curves do not appear to meet current standards
 - ▣ Radius
- Two vertical curves do not appear to meet current standards
 - ▣ Curvature
 - ▣ Stopping sight distance



Interchanges

24

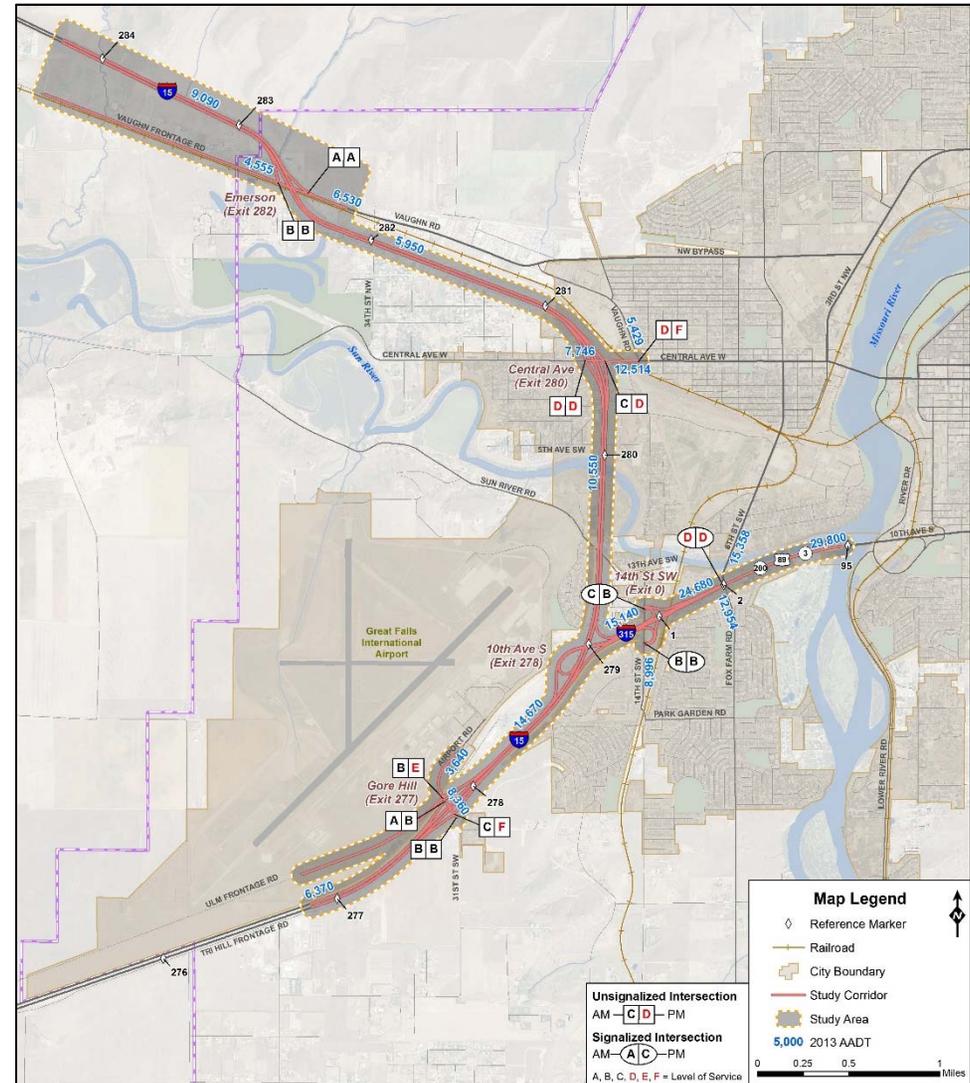
- Interchange traffic meets LOS performance standards
- 7 of 8 on-ramps do not appear to meet current standards
 - ▣ Acceleration length
- 3 of 7 off-ramps do not appear to meet current standards
 - ▣ Deceleration length
- Spacing between 10th Ave S and 14th St SW does not appear to meet current interchange spacing standards



Intersections

25

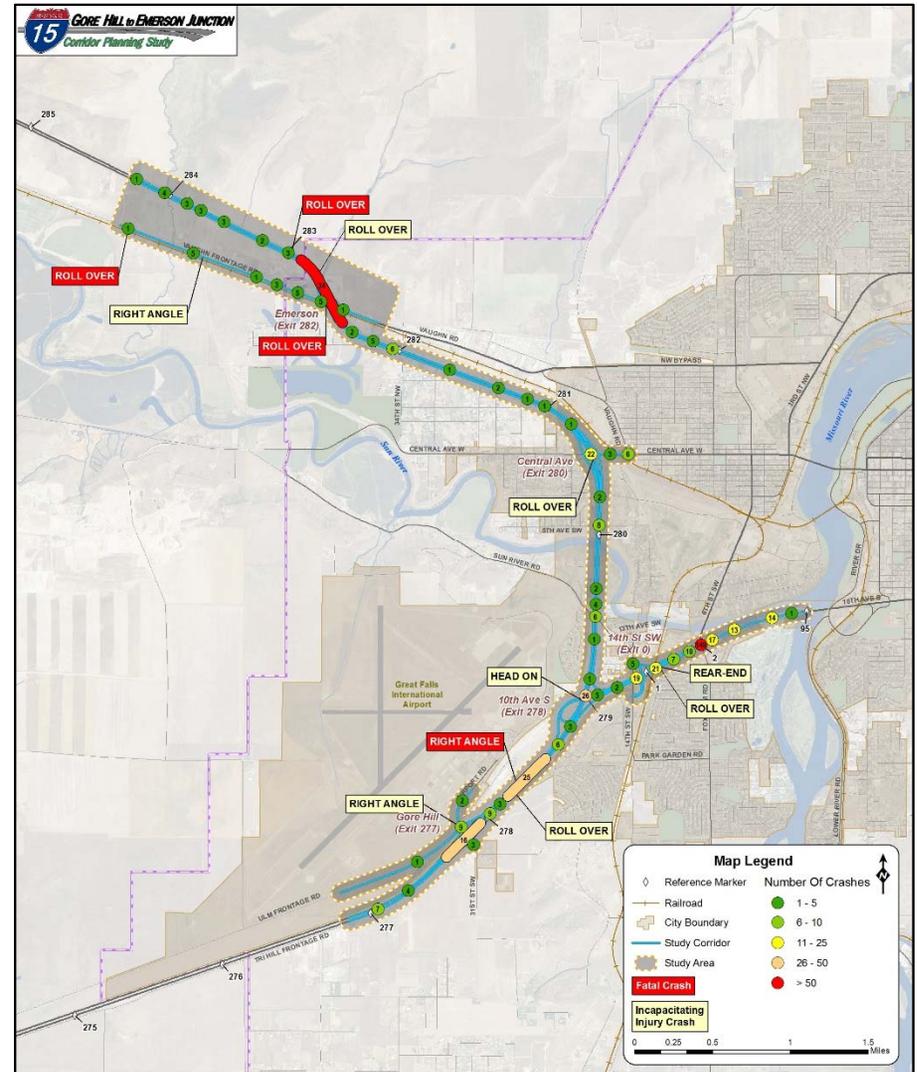
- Six intersections do not currently meet LOS performance standards
- One additional projected to not meet standards for traffic operations
- Three intersections do not appear to meet current standards
 - ▣ Queue length
 - ▣ Turn-bay length



Safety

26

- 5 years of data
- 525 total reported crashes
 - Four fatalities
 - Eight crashes produced incapacitating injuries
 - 53% multi-vehicle crashes
 - 14% involved alcohol and/or drugs
 - Most common types were rear-end and fixed object



27

Driver Interaction Videos

Gore Hill (Exit 277)

28

Aggressive Driving



Weaving / Merging / Diverging

29



Weaving / Merging / Diverging



32

Environmental Setting

Environmental Resources

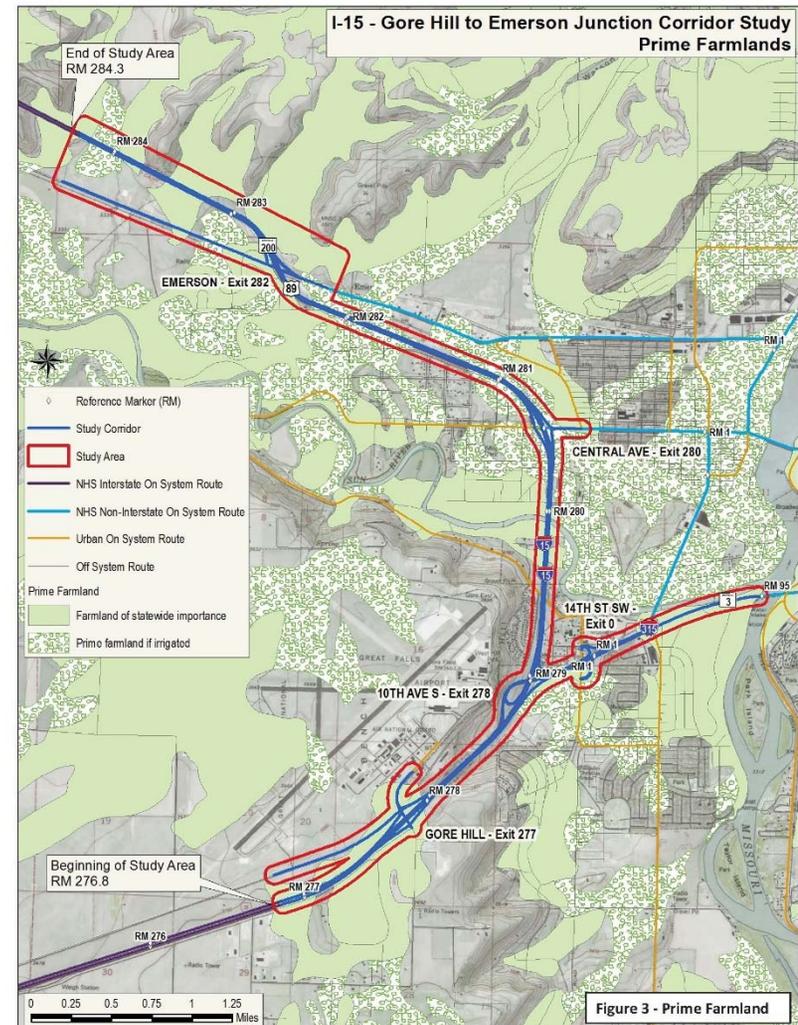
33

- Land Ownership
- **Soil Resources and Prime Farmland**
- Geologic Resources
- **Water Resources**
- Wetlands
- **Floodplains and Floodways**
- Hazardous Substances
- Air Quality
- Noise
- **Visual Resources**
- **Biological Resources**
- Vegetation
- **Cultural and Archaeological Resources**
- Social

Soil Resources and Prime Farmland

34

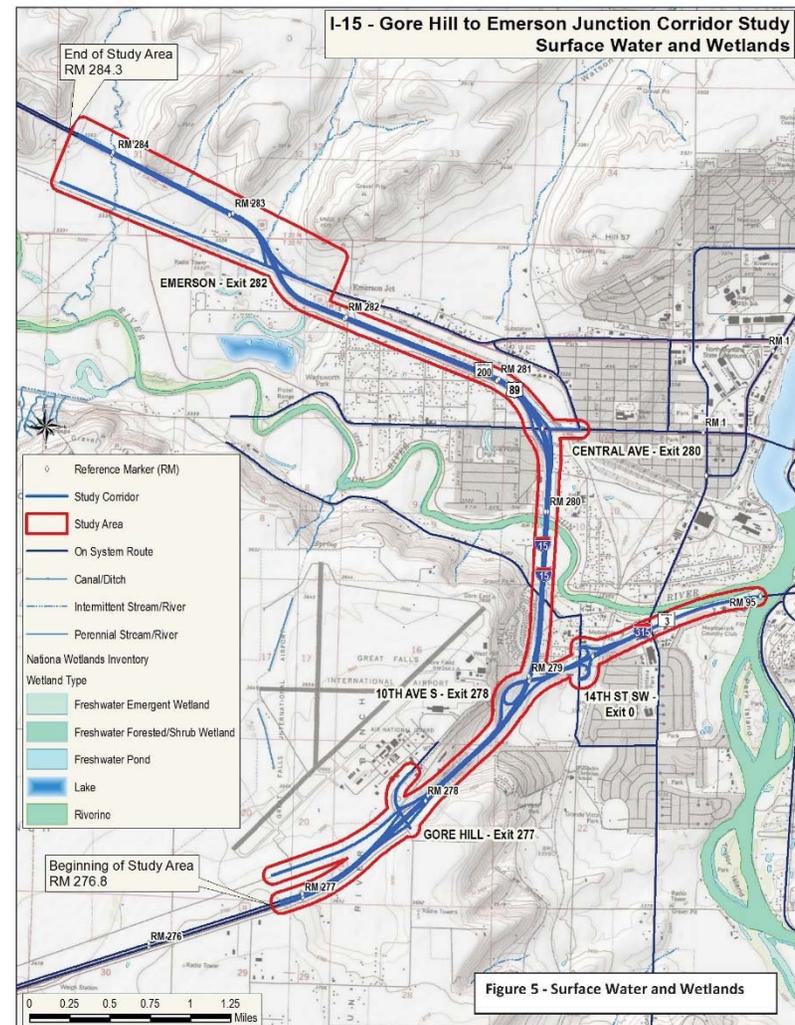
- Based on Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil survey
 - Prime if irrigated farmlands are found between RP 278.8-279.0 and 280.5-284.3
 - Farmlands of statewide importance are found between RP 266.8-278.0, 279.5-280.5, and 282.5-284.3



Water Resources

35

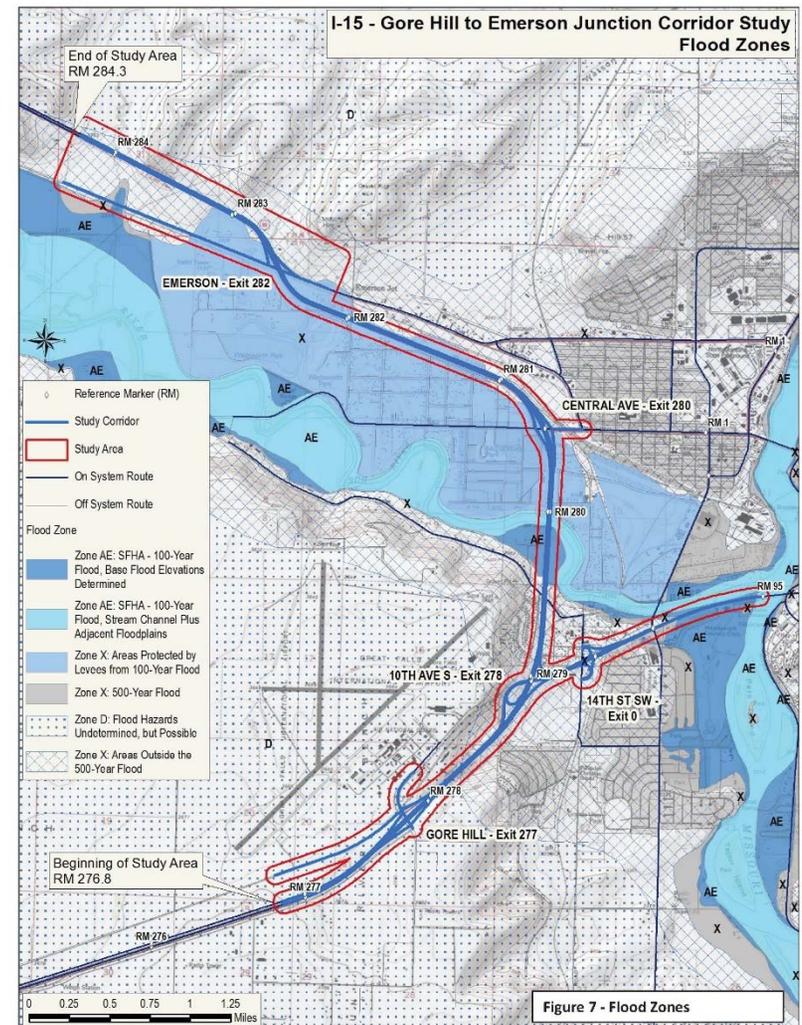
- Numerous drainage crossings
- Bridge across Sun River (RP 279.35)
- Steel drainage culvert (RP 283.4)
- Wetlands - delineated if and when a project is identified and advances



Floodplains and Floodways

36

- Avoid adverse impact to floodplains to the extent possible



Visual Resources

37

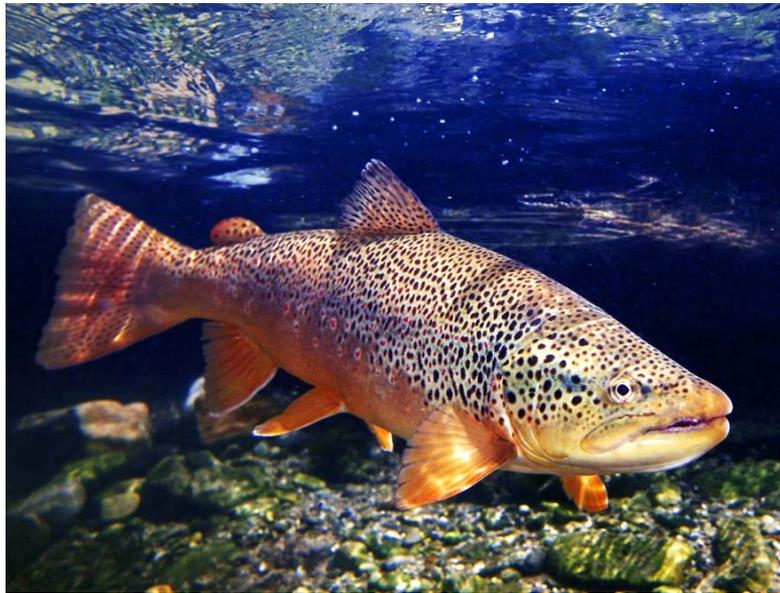
- Landscape character
- Visual Integrity
- Scenic Integrity
- Landscape visibility



Biological Resources

38

□ Fish and Wildlife



□ Vegetation



Fish and Wildlife

39

Cascade County

- **Canada Lynx**
 - ▣ Threatened
- **Red Knot**
 - ▣ Proposed
- **Wolverine***
 - ▣ Proposed
- **Sprague's Pipit**
 - ▣ Candidate
- **Whitebark Pine**
 - ▣ Candidate

**No longer proposed for listing*

Study Area

- No record of any threatened or endangered species found within the study area boundary^(a)
- No species of concern were found within the study area boundary^(a)

^(a)Montana Natural Heritage Program - Natural Heritage Map Viewer (report generated May 15, 2014)

Fisheries

40

- Missouri and Sun Rivers listed as a substantial fishery resources
- Common fish species
 - ▣ Brown trout
 - ▣ Longnose sucker
 - ▣ Longnose dace
 - ▣ Stonecat
 - ▣ Walleye
 - ▣ White sucker



Cultural and Archaeological Resources

41

□ Parks

- ▣ Westside Viaduct Park
- ▣ West Hill Park

□ Historic properties

- ▣ Missouri River Bridge
- ▣ At least 33 historic aged properties

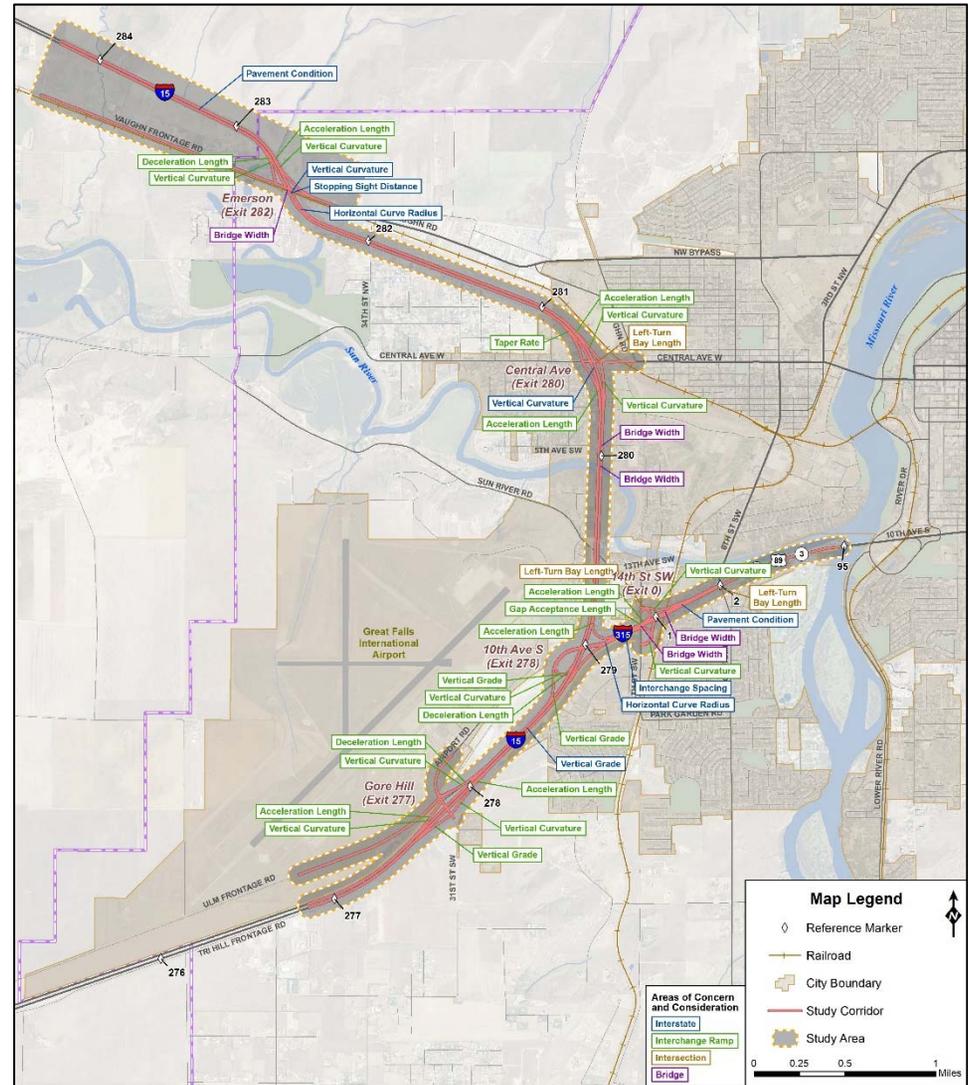


42

Conclusion and Next Steps

Areas of Concern Summary

- **Bridges**
 - ▣ Bridges with narrow widths
- **Mainline Interstate**
 - ▣ Existing geometrics
- **Interchanges**
 - ▣ Ramp length
 - ▣ Spacing
- **Intersections**
 - ▣ Traffic operation
 - ▣ Queue lengths
- **Safety**
 - ▣ Four fatal, eight incapacitating injury
 - ▣ Fix object collision trend
- **Physical Environment**
 - ▣ Farmlands
 - ▣ Water resources
 - ▣ Parks & historic properties
- **Biological Environment**
 - ▣ Threatened and endangered species



Next Steps

44

- Continue study coordination and outreach
- Finalize Environmental Scan
- Finalize Existing and Projected Conditions Report
- Continue analysis of transportation needs
- Identify potential improvement options
- Draft corridor study report

Conclusion

45

- Questions, answers and/or comments
 - ▣ Study website:
<http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/i15>
 - ▣ Study newsletters:
 - ▣ Study Contact
Corrina Collins
MT Department of Transportation
2701 Prospect Avenue
Helena, Montana 59620-1001
P.O. Box 201001
(406) 444-9131
ccollins@mt.gov



INTERSTATE 15 **GORE HILL to EMERSON JUNCTION**
Corridor Planning Study

ISSUE 1
September 2014

this issue

- Study Description # 1
- What is a Corridor Planning Study? # 1
- Study Area # 2
- Initial Considerations # 3
- Study Schedule # 3
- Public Involvement Opportunities # 4

Study Description

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and in coordination with the Great Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), is developing a corridor planning study of Interstate 15 (I-15) in the Great Falls Area. The 2014 Great Falls Area Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) identified the need for an Interstate corridor study. The LRTP states that, "due to the need for improvements to both Emerson Junction and Gore Hill interchanges and other identified needs for added lanes and operational improvements on I-15 and I-315, an Interstate Corridor Study for the Great Falls area is recommended."

The study will identify feasible improvement options to address safety, operational, and geometrical concerns (i.e. road width, horizontal curves, vertical grades, access density, etc.) within the study area based on needs identified by the public, the study partners, and resource agencies. Data examined will include geometric characteristics, crash history, operational characteristics, land uses, and environmental resources.

The study will include a comprehensive package of feasible short- and long-term recommendations intended to address the transportation needs of the corridor.

What is a Corridor Planning Study?

A *Corridor Planning Study* is a planning-level assessment undertaken before conducting project-level environmental compliance activities under the National and Montana Environmental Policy Acts (NEPA/MEPA). The study involves early communication with interested agencies and the public to help identify needs, constraints, and opportunities for a corridor and to determine if there are implementable improvements, given available resources and local support.

The *Corridor Planning Study* is a planning activity, rather than a design or construction project. The study is designed to facilitate a smooth and efficient transition from transportation planning to project development and environmental review if a project is forwarded from the study. The study includes consideration of multiple improvement options to address the needs and objectives within the study area. The planning process is distinct from NEPA/MEPA environmental compliance documentation and from the design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction phases of an individual project.

INFORMATIONAL MEETING #1
Please Join Us!

Great Falls:
Wednesday, October 29th
8:00 PM
Gloria Room
Great Falls Civic Center
2 Park Drive South

Purpose:
Informational Meeting #1 is intended to explain the planning study process, present information about existing and projected conditions, and gather feedback on issues and concerns related to the I-15 corridor.

MONTANA
MDT
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION