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## APPENDIX B: Public and Agency Involvement During the Corridor Study

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## Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 Public Information Meeting #1 Summary (04/16/07)

### Introduction

A public open house informational meeting for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects was held on Monday, April 16, 2007 in the Whitefish City Council Chambers, 402 East Second Street. The meeting occurred between 5:00 and 7:00 p.m. and included a PowerPoint presentation beginning about 5:15 p.m.

The meeting was attended by the following agency and Consultant Team members:

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Karin Hilding   | City of Whitefish                                 |
| Sheila Ludlow   | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Shane Stack     | MDT Missoula District Office (Missoula)           |
| Susan Kilcrease | MDT Environmental Services (Missoula)             |
| Jeff Key        | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Dan Norderud    | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |

Twenty-six (26) people signed the attendance sheets for the meeting, although more than a dozen other persons joined the meeting as it progressed. A copy of the sign-in sheets from the meeting is attached.

### Meeting Purposes

The purposes of the public meeting were to:

- Introduce the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects currently underway in the community.
- Introduce the project team and convey appropriate contact information.
- Present the project schedule and development parameters.
- Solicit input from the community on transportation-related issues and concerns.
- Provide an opportunity for formal and informal contact with the various responsible parties for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects.

## **Meeting Summary**

The meeting began with the informal review of various display boards positioned around the meeting room depicting the study area for the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study and other known information about the Whitefish area road and street system. Displays provided information about functional classifications, existing traffic volumes and lane configurations, traffic signal locations, crash locations, pedestrian/bicycle facilities, and past transportation projects in the community. Another set of display boards illustrated known transportation issues related to the following: Traffic Operations, Safety, Trucks, Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities, Parking, Land Use/Growth, Aesthetics, and the Natural and Human Environments. Each board provided a broad issue statement for each topic and a list of specific conditions or concerns relating to the issue. The display boards served as contact points for informal conversations between the public and members of the Consultant Team.

Jeff Key of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) began the meeting at 5:15 p.m. and introduced representatives of the City of Whitefish, MDT and Consultant Team members. He then asked those in attendance to introduce themselves before beginning his formal presentation about the Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects.

**Meeting Presentation:** Mr. Key used a PowerPoint presentation to provide an overview of the Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects. He presented background information about each project, summarized major work tasks and milestones for the projects, and outlined planned public outreach activities. Additionally, the slides identified the study area boundary for the Transportation Plan (the same area considered in the community's Growth Policy) and listed elements that will be emphasized in the plan.

Mr. Key noted that while several transportation studies have been completed for specific areas, no comprehensive Transportation Plan has ever been completed for the City of Whitefish and its surrounding area. He stressed that the Urban Corridor Study will be developed within the context of and concurrent with the Whitefish Transportation Plan. This approach allows for a focused look at US 93 through Whitefish based on the consideration of existing and planned land use changes and a detailed evaluation of community-wide transportation needs and desires. The corridor study will allow for a "fresh look" at issues associated with US Highway 93 through Whitefish and offers the opportunity to examine a full range of design options for the facility.

Mr. Key emphasized that these new planning efforts will be sensitive to prior community input and projects like: previous "subarea" transportation studies; the US Highway 93–Somers to Whitefish Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS); the Downtown Business District Master Plan; and the community's current Growth Policy Update project. He emphasized the value of previous efforts by the Citizens Working Group (CWG)—a group previously established to provide design input for the "Whitefish Urban" and "Whitefish-West" projects under development by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Mr. Key indicated the Consultant Team's intention was to acknowledge past work and build upon known transportation issues and concerns in the Whitefish area.

**Breakout Sessions:** The presentation lasted about 35 minutes and was followed by a “breakout” session where those in attendance were encouraged to visit one of three stations to discuss issues with the Consultant Team related to: US 93 urban corridor, general transportation issues, and pedestrian/bicycle and transit issues. The breakout stations were manned by Mr. Key (General Transportation Issues), Dan Norderud (US 93 Urban Corridor) of RPA and Karin Hilding of the City of Whitefish (Pedestrians/Bicycles and Transit). The breakout sessions lasted about 30 minutes and key comments identified through discussions were documented at each station. Comments noted during the breakout sessions are summarized below:

### **General Transportation Issues**

- The 2nd Street Bridge over the Whitefish River has a very poor riding surface and the concrete is falling apart. This is a maintenance issue and should be addressed?
- There is a substantial seasonal variation in traffic volumes within the Whitefish area. The summer tourist season is generally the peak traffic condition, although during school year some of the intersections next to the school become quite congested.
- A potential bypass of the community will be met with resistance. It would make sense to remove big trucks from the downtown, but people living along existing roadways/corridors will resist. You will almost have to find a totally brand new corridor if a Bypass will; be seriously considered.
- Whitefish Stage Road has safety issues related to speed and no roadway expansion should be completed. People ride their bikes and walk along the roadway which compromises safety even further. There are three safety projects that will be completed to address curve and sight distance issues however.

### **Pedestrians/Bicycles and Transit**

- The City’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan needs to be made a part of this community-wide transportation plan.
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are critical elements of future improvements to the US 93 corridor through Whitefish and past Twin Bridges Road.

### **US 93 Urban Corridor**

- The highway corridor should be all commercial.
- Consideration should be given to a bypass that would draw truck traffic away from the corridor. (Truck bypass possibilities along Farm-to Market Road and an existing powerline corridor were mentioned).
- How will the corridor study interface with the recommendations in the Downtown Business District Master Plan?
- What is the timeframe for actually reconstructing US 93 through Whitefish?
- Reconstructing US 93 through Whitefish could result in the loss of on-street parking. On-street parking is critical to local businesses.

The comments and issues heard at each station were then relayed to the entire group.

**Public Comments/Questions:** Following the breakout session, Mr. Key opened up the meeting for comments and general questions from the audience. The following comments or questions were heard during this part of the meeting:

- **What is the definition of urban?** It was explained that incorporated areas in Montana are considered “urban” when they have a population of 5,000 or more. Montana has 15 designated urban areas and three communities with over 50,000 residents that fall under Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) guidelines for transportation planning.
- **When will the next public meeting occur?** Mr. Key explained that according to the schedule, the next series of meetings should occur near the end of May or in early June. Members of the audience suggested that August would be a poor time for a public meeting since many residents are not around during the month.
- **Will the Consultant Team present more information at the next meeting?** Mr. Key indicated that considerable information regarding the operation of the transportation system is known and new information will be generated over the upcoming months due to the aggressive schedule of the projects. This information will be summarized at the next public meeting.
- **How will cost constraints be considered in the transportation plan? Can a realistic plan be developed without consideration of costs and affordability?** Mr. Key explained that MPO’s (large urban areas in Montana) develop transportation plans that are fiscally constrained—i.e. projects identified in the transportation plan have firm costs and designated funding sources. He continued that most transportation plans for smaller urban areas are not fiscally constrained and identify projects that will benefit the community regardless of their cost. However, projects within transportation plans are often prioritized by local officials and a variety of funding sources can be pursued for individual projects.
- **What is the timeframe for actually reconstructing US 93 through Whitefish?** The reconstruction of US 93 will not occur until after the corridor study is completed and the recommendations from the study are duly considered and documented through the appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

Because the Whitefish Urban project was developed as the result of an Environmental Impact Study (EIS), the recommended design option(s) must be reviewed by Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and MDT to determine how they relate to the decisions in the EIS and how to proceed. It is possible that a Supplemental EIS may be needed if design option(s) or potential impacts are substantially different than those in the original EIS. A decision regarding a preferred alternative for US 93 from by FHWA and MDT will be needed before a construction project can be developed and programmed for funding. It may take 3- to 5 years before a reconstruction project on US 93 will be ready for programming by MDT. The actual construction will then depend on the availability of funding.

**Conclusion:** Mr. Key concluded the meeting by quickly summarizing upcoming activities for the projects and thanking those in attendance for their input.

**The meeting concluded at about 6:45 p.m.**

It is also noted that an abbreviated version of the *powerpoint* presentation was made to the Whitefish City Council at their regularly scheduled meeting the evening of April 16<sup>th</sup>. Although the meeting began at 7:10 pm, RPA did not make their presentation until 10:15 pm due to a wide variety of regular business being conducted at the evening's City Council meeting. RPA's presentation lasted about ten (10) minutes and gave the Council a summary of the two projects at hand and a brief assessment of the previous public meeting held earlier in the evening.

# WHITEFISH

## TRANSPORTATION PLAN URBAN CORRIDOR STUDY OF U.S. 93

### SIGN IN SHEET

#### PUBLIC MEETING NO. 1 April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007

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| Susan Kilcreath   | 2100 W. Broadway     | M. S. Sault | skilcrease@mt.gov            |
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SHEET 1 of 1

# WHITEFISH

## TRANSPORTATION PLAN URBAN CORRIDOR STUDY OF U.S. 93

### SIGN IN SHEET

#### PUBLIC MEETING NO. 1 April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007

| NAME             | ADDRESS / P.O. Box    | City      | Email Address            |
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| Dave Kauffman    | Bx 91                 | Whitefish |                          |
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| Mark Swenmungen  |                       |           |                          |
| Ed Prack         | 110 GOAT TRAIL        | WHITEFISH |                          |
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SHEET \_\_\_ of \_\_\_

# SIGN IN SHEET

**PUBLIC MEETING NO. 1**  
**April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

**WHITEFISH**  
TRANSPORTATION PLAN  
URBAN CORRIDOR STUDY OF U.S. 93

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| Shane Stack       |                    |           |                             |
| Karin Hilding     |                    |           |                             |
|                   |                    |           |                             |
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|                   |                    |           |                             |
|                   |                    |           |                             |

SHEET \_\_\_ of \_\_\_

## Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 Public Information Meeting #2 Summary (07/17/07)

### Introduction

The second public open house informational meeting for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects was held on Tuesday, July 17, 2007 in the Whitefish City Council Chambers, 402 East Second Street. The meeting occurred between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m. and included a PowerPoint presentation beginning about 6:15 p.m.

The meeting was attended by the following agency and Consultant Team members:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| John Wilson   | City of Whitefish                                 |
| Sheila Ludlow | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Jean Riley    | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Jeff Key      | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Dan Norderud  | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Scott Randall | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |

Seven (7) members of the public attended the meeting including Nancy Woodruff, a member of the Whitefish City Council. A copy of the sign-in sheet from the meeting is attached; however, not all signed the attendance sheets for the meeting since some joined the meeting as it progressed.

### Meeting Purposes

The purposes of the public informational meeting were to:

- Describe work completed to date and review project scope and schedule;
- Discuss the land use assignments made for the planning horizon (year 2030) and how it influences transportation decisions;
- Present preliminary “future year” traffic volumes on the study area road system;
- Describe cursory findings of western route alternatives;
- Provide for open discussion on transportation issues in the Whitefish City Beach area and school areas; and
- Solicit input on the potential for expanding transit service in Whitefish and for an additional railroad crossing in the community.

## **Meeting Summary**

Jeff Key of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) began the meeting at 6:15 p.m. and introduced representatives of the City of Whitefish, MDT and Consultant Team members. He then began a PowerPoint presentation focused on the Transportation Plan project.

Mr. Key summarized major work tasks and milestones for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects, and outlined planned public outreach activities. He presented a project schedule that showed completion of the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study documents before the end of 2007.

Mr. Key provided an update of work progress to date for the Transportation Plan and indicated data collection activities began last spring and are ongoing. Some intersections were counted in May and numerous other locations will be counted during July and August to reflect peak seasonal traffic in the community. Average Daily Traffic (ADT) volumes have been collected for major roadways in the Transportation Plan study area and accident data has been analyzed to help identify crash locations. Further, he stated future land use and employment projections have been made and incorporated into the “travel demand model” for the Whitefish area and preliminary model results have been obtained from MDT. Public outreach activities have continued.

He stressed that work for the Whitefish Transportation Plan is taking priority over that for the Urban Corridor Study at this time. Defining overall transportation system needs and desires, recognizing future land use changes, and the travel demand modeling done for the Transportation Plan will provide important information needed to take a focused look at US 93 through Whitefish.

**Existing Conditions Summary:** Mr. Key presented a series of slides showing existing traffic volumes on major roadways, existing levels of service at key intersections, and crash locations within the study area. He stated the level of service analysis for intersections has not yet been completed due to ongoing data collection at numerous locations.

**Land Use Forecasting:** Mr. Key then discussed land use forecasting and its importance to the travel demand model. He stated that land use forecasting including the allocation of future dwelling units and the locations of non-retail and retail jobs is crucial to assessing transportation system needs in the future (year 2030 for the Transportation Plan). The projections are based on information from the US Census Bureau and local planning documents like the City’s *Growth Policy Update*, and Downtown Business District Master Plan. He stressed that the Whitefish community is growing and will continue to grow with an increasing impact on traffic volumes.

Mr. Key indicated that projected future dwelling units and jobs are allocated to individual Census Blocks within the study area. The travel demand model used by MDT is sensitive to this information and can reliably predict travel patterns based on the location of dwelling units and jobs. He then presented a series of slides that showed how dwelling units and jobs have been allocated to each Census Block in the study area. He emphasized that projections through the year 2017 are consistent with the City’s Draft Growth Policy and other planning documents. Growth rates after the year

2017 were assumed to remain similar to that recognized in the Growth Policy (3.6% per year). Mr. Key pointed out that this may or may not occur, but the growth rate is a reasonable assumption for the future.

**Preliminary Future Traffic Volumes (2030):** Mr. Key then showed several slides illustrating year 2030 projected traffic volumes on Whitefish area roadways. The traffic volumes were generated by MDT's travel demand model and reflect future volumes without any improvements to the road system. He stated that comparing future year traffic volumes against the capacities of roadway types in the community helps identify potential problems and roadway needs. Mr. Key selected several Whitefish roadways and presented existing versus future traffic volumes to illustrate notable changes.

**Western Route Alternatives:** Mr. Key moved onto a series of slides depicting western route connections between US 93 south and US 93 west of Whitefish. He indicated that work directives for the Transportation Plan require RPA to identify and evaluate potential new western routes that might help alleviate traffic on US 93 through the City. He explained that RPA revisited four potential western alignments considered in the Somers-Whitefish Final EIS. The western route alternatives were modeled to determine potential future traffic volumes on each alignment and their impacts on US 93 and parts of the local road system. Model runs were completed both with and without alternate routes in place to determine their potential to reduce traffic on US 93. The preliminary modeling showed alternate routes would attract a notable amount of traffic (typically 7,000-15,000 vehicles in 2030); however, significant traffic volumes would likely continue on the existing US 93 corridor.

John Wilson pointed out the importance of considering and planning for new connections on Whitefish's east side. He felt such routes could help meet long term needs, link schools with the JP Road area, and provide important connections in the Haskill Basin area.

**Developing Issues/Open Forum:** Jeff Key identified several emerging topics that will need to be considered in the Transportation Plan. These items are discussed below

- **City Beach Area.** Mr. Key showed an aerial photograph of the City Beach area and described existing traffic circulation and parking conditions and highlighted issues associated with pedestrian transportation in the area. He asked the audience for comments regarding improving traffic flows and pedestrian safety.

A member of the audience pointed out that parking for vehicles with boats is limited in the area and that vehicles must negotiate steep roadway sections. John Wilson stated the City's big motivation for looking at this area was to improve safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, skateboarders, and others. He felt there is a need to enhance trail connections from northeastern portions of Whitefish to City Beach.

- **School Area Circulation Improvements.** Mr. Key shared that RPA had reviewed conditions surrounding Whitefish High School and nearby Muldown Elementary School during May

when school was in session. He listed several circulation and safety problems experienced in this area and described a proposal he was aware of to extend a portion of 8th Street to Ashar Avenue. John Wilson indicated the 8th Street extension has been considered in the past by the City Council. He was not certain the extension would provide many benefits in the area.

- **Transit System Considerations.** Mr. Key described a meeting held with staff from Glacier National Park (GNP) regarding partnering with communities surrounding the park and making use of GNP transit vehicles during the park's off-season. He also asked the audience about how transit travel modes can be integrated into future transportation planning in the Whitefish area. Those in attendance generally felt that expanding transit services would be desirable; however, acknowledged conditions that contribute to low ridership levels.
- **Additional Railroad Grade Separation.** Mr. Key asked the group for ideas on where a new grade separation over the BNSF Railroad might be desirable. He pointed out that there is an existing at-grade crossing east of town on 2nd Street but enhancing the crossing is unlikely. He offered several potential locations for a new grade separation such as Columbia Avenue, East Texas Avenue/Pine Avenue, and in the Cow Coulee area. Those attending generally agreed that a new crossing was desirable and should be included in the Transportation Plan.

John Wilson commented that another railroad overcrossing has been viewed as desirable for many years and locations like those discussed had been mentioned before. He also noted a structure may be hard to justify given its high construction costs and limited funding sources.

A member of the audience asked about the possibility of an undercrossing instead of an overcrossing. John Wilson responded by stating high groundwater in the Whitefish area poses concerns for constructing an undercrossing. Jeff also said ensuring uninterrupted rail traffic could also add to the cost of an undercrossing.

**Conclusion:** Mr. Key concluded his presentation by summarizing upcoming work efforts. These efforts will focus on developing appropriate long-range recommendations for roadways, intersections, non-motorized infrastructure and transit. The recommended transportation network improvements will be modeled and future model volumes will be used to evaluate design options for US 93 corridor through the City. Design options for US 93 will be developed to maintain efficient traffic flows, address safety for all users, preserve the character of the downtown area and community in general, and ensure compatibility with the Downtown Master Plan and Growth Policy Update.

**Public Comments/Questions:** The following public comments or questions were heard during the meeting:

- **Has anyone ever looked at the possibility of developing Farm to Market Road from Kalispell to Whitefish as an alternate to US 93?** Mr. Key explained that while Farm to Market Road offers an opportunity for developing a parallel route to US 93, the corridor is

located too far from Whitefish and would not reduce traffic on US 93 through the City.

- **When will the next public meeting occur?** Mr. Key explained that the next series of meetings should occur near the end of September or in early October. Members of the audience suggested ensuring an article about the Transportation Plan and the third public meeting appears in the Whitefish Pilot.

**The meeting concluded at about 7:30 p.m.**

# WHITEFISH

## TRANSPORTATION PLAN URBAN CORRIDOR STUDY OF U.S. 93

### SIGN IN SHEET

### PUBLIC MEETING NO. 2 July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007

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| REBECCA HORTON    | P.O. BOX 762                        | WF        | rannorton@ehoo.com  |
| Sheila Bower      | Whitefish Chamber                   |           |                     |
| Sheila Ludlow     | MDT                                 | HELENA    | sludlow@net.gov     |
| Don & Judy Spivey | PO-Box 878, 59937                   | Whitefish | drsjese@digisps.net |
|                   |                                     |           |                     |
|                   |                                     |           |                     |
|                   |                                     |           |                     |

## **Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 Public Information Meeting #3 Summary (01/10/08)**

### **Introduction**

The third public open house informational meeting for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects was held on Thursday, January 10, 2008 in the O'Shaughnessy Center, 1 Central Avenue. The meeting took place between 7:00 and 9:15 p.m. and included a PowerPoint presentation beginning about 7:15 p.m.

The meeting was attended by the following agency and Consultant Team members:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| John Wilson   | City of Whitefish                                 |
| Karin Hilding | City of Whitefish                                 |
| Sheila Ludlow | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Jeff Key      | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Dan Norderud  | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |

More than 80 people attended the meeting; however, not all signed the attendance sheets for the meeting since some joined as it progressed. Copies of the sign-in sheets from the meeting (attached) show that 50 people signed the attendance sheets.

Prior to the meeting, the entries from the City's Transportation Plan Kids Art Contest were available for viewing in the foyer of the O'Shaughnessy Center. Informal conversations with attendees occurred prior to and after the public meeting.

Copies of the Executive Summary and a figure showing recommended major street network improvements from the draft Transportation Plan were used as handouts for the meeting.

### **Meeting Purpose**

The primary purpose of this meeting was to present the first "Public Draft" of the Whitefish Transportation Plan document and highlight its major components to the public. The purposes of the informational meeting were to:

- Discuss how a community Transportation Plan is intended to be used and what value it brings to the process;
- Highlight key chapters in the Transportation Plan;
- Describe the process for public review of the document and how to submit written comments; and
- Provide an open forum for questions from the public and answers from the Consultant.

## **Meeting Summary**

Karin Hilding of the City of Whitefish began the meeting by welcoming the public and announcing the winners of the Whitefish Transportation Plan Kids Art Contest. The contest was held to solicit visions about what transportation in Whitefish might be like in the year 2030. She then introduced Jeff Key of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA), the engineering firm hired by the City and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to prepare the Whitefish Transportation Plan.

Mr. Key began his presentation around 7:15 p.m. by introducing representatives of the City of Whitefish, MDT and the Consultant Team. He then began a PowerPoint presentation discussing the Transportation Plan document. Jeff began by advising the audience that the draft Transportation Plan is the “first cut” at a community-wide Transportation Plan and represents only the Consultant’s opinions at this time. He stressed that the Transportation Plan has not yet been adopted or endorsed by the City of Whitefish or the MDT. He commented that the Plan is intended to help guide major transportation system decisions in a community and should be used by elected officials, staff, planners, developers and the public. Since conditions can sometimes change quickly, the Plan needs to be regularly updated to reflect changes in the community and revisit planning assumptions.

He pointed out that the Transportation Plan is intended to be in general compliance with other planning documents in the community. Mr. Key reiterated transportation-related goals outlined in the community’s recently adopted Growth Policy and indicated the recommendations contained in the Transportation Plan are generally consistent with these goals.

Mr. Key advised the audience that a companion project—the US 93 Urban Corridor Study—is underway and involves a detailed analysis of conditions on Spokane Avenue, 2nd Street, and Baker Avenue. The Corridor Study should be completed several months after the Transportation Plan since defining overall transportation system needs and desires, recognizing future land use changes, and the travel demand modeling done for the Plan will provide important information for the Corridor Study.

**Summary of the Draft Transportation Plan:** Mr. Key then presented a series of slides highlighting several key chapters from the Draft Transportation Plan including:

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction & Background**
- **Chapter 3 – Travel Demand Forecasting**
- **Chapter 6 – School Transportation Considerations**
- **Chapter 8 – Recommended Projects**
- **Chapter 9 – Miscellaneous Transportation System Considerations**

**Chapter 1 – Introduction & Background:** Mr. Key commented that this chapter summarizes the history, need and value of transportation planning in the community. It presents the “transportation related goals, policies and objectives” currently in place in your community that are elaborated in a variety of planning documents including the Whitefish Growth Policy, Downtown Business District Master Plan, Big Mountain Neighborhood Plan, and others. He stressed that knowing the community’s goals and objectives are crucial in determining whether the Transportation Plan and its recommendations are “on target.”

Chapter 3 – Travel Demand Forecasting: Mr. Key indicated that a crucial step in assessing future (year 2030) transportation system needs was the development of a travel demand model for the Whitefish study area. The travel demand model used by MDT is sensitive and can reliably predict travel patterns based on the location of dwelling units and retail and non-retail jobs. He explained that projected future dwelling units and jobs were allocated to individual Census Blocks within the study area consistent with US Census Bureau projections and assumptions in the Whitefish Growth Policy. He then presented several slides showing how future dwelling units and jobs have been allocated within the study area to each Census Block in the study area. The land use and employment projections suggest that growth will continue in the Whitefish area.

Mr. Key pointed out that the travel demand model developed for the Plan provides a way to estimate future traffic volumes and identify potential roadway needs. He stressed that the traffic volumes generated by the model are not absolutes but allow for a planning level comparison of existing to future conditions.

He then showed several slides illustrating year 2030 projected traffic volumes on Whitefish area roadways. The traffic volumes were generated by MDT's travel demand model and reflect future volumes without any improvements to the road system. He stated that comparing future year traffic volumes against the capacities of roadway types in the community helps identify potential problems and roadway needs.

Mr. Key stressed that without improvements, the traffic generated by this growth will likely continue to place substantial demands on the existing transportation system.

Chapter 6 – School Transportation Considerations: Mr. Key said that along with peak tourism traffic, school traffic issues notably affect traffic flow in Whitefish. He related that this chapter of the Plan discusses a variety of issues experienced at or near schools and presents potential remedies or ideas to address the issues. He noted that the Plan includes considerable discussion about the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program and its potential benefits.

Chapter 8 – Recommended Projects: Mr. Key then showed a series of slides discussing recommendations for transportation improvements. He pointed out that Chapter 8 of the Plan attempts is to provide a range of projects that will enhance the local transportation system. He stated that a fundamental philosophy of the Plan is to focus on creating a strong grid transportation network by increasing east-west and north-south connections. He advised the audience that recommendations show a variety of new corridors that may be desirable if and when development occurs in such areas. He emphasized that all projects recommended in the Plan are an attempt to strengthen the existing transportation system, prepare for the future, increase travel mobility and provide options.

He indicated that the recommended improvements include relatively low cost Transportation System Management (TSM) projects like adding turn bays and making simple improvements at intersections, installing or modifying traffic signals, and doing access control studies. Mr. Key also stated that recommendations include large-scale projects—identified as Major Street Network (MSN) projects—involving roadway reconstruction, new roadway corridors, or other major undertakings. Jeff presented slides showing where MSN projects are proposed within the study area

and highlighted recommended improvements in the Whitefish Beach area.

He pointed out that there are a variety of projects previously identified in the City's Capital Improvements Plan and in the City's Pedestrian and Bicyclist Master Plan that are being carried forward in the Transportation Plan.

Chapter 9 – Miscellaneous Transportation System Considerations: Mr. Key briefly highlighted the content of Chapter 9. He stated that many of the items discussed in the chapter don't really fit into other chapters of the Plan and several topics help "plant the seed" for ideas that may be valid during the planning period. He highlighted the potential for a cooperative transit project between Glacier National Park and gateway communities near the park.

Western Route Alternatives: Mr. Key moved onto a series of slides depicting western route connections between US 93 south and US 93 west of Whitefish. He indicated that work directives for the Transportation Plan required RPA to identify and evaluate potential new western routes that might help alleviate traffic on US 93 through the City. He explained that RPA revisited four potential western alignments considered in the Somers-Whitefish Final EIS. The western route alternatives were modeled to determine potential future traffic volumes on each alignment and their impacts on US 93 and parts of the local road system. Model runs were completed both with and without alternate routes in place to determine their potential to reduce traffic on US 93.

Mr. Key indicated that the Transportation Plan does not recommend a "bypass" route around Whitefish. Although travel demand modeling suggests such a route would draw some traffic, a western route would not solve future traffic issues along the US 93 corridor through Whitefish. He pointed out that the western routes around Whitefish have numerous issues that would likely make such projects difficult to implement including environmental resource constraints, landowner opposition, and high construction and right-of-way costs. For these reasons, the Consultant believes the community is better served by strengthening the transportation grid system and focusing on other improvements.

Commenting on the Draft Transportation Plan: Mr. Key advised the audience about locations in Whitefish and on line where the Transportation Plan can be read and reviewed. He encouraged the public and other interested parties to submit written comments on the Plan by January 31, 2008.

Next Steps: Mr. Key concluded his presentation by stating that it is up to the City-County Planning Board and City Council to adopt the Transportation Plan. He stated that additional opportunities to receive public comments on the Plan will occur at Planning Board meetings on January 17 and February 21 and at a future City Council hearing on the Transportation Plan (possibly during March). He then requested comments or questions from the audience.

## **Public Comments/Questions**

The following public comments or questions were heard during the January 10 public meeting:

- **What is meant by a "parallel connector" and what is its purpose?** Mr. Key explained that a parallel connector is an alternate route that parallels an arterial roadway (like Spokane

Avenue). Jeff took the opportunity to provide information to the audience on functional classifications of roadways and the range of traffic volumes generally associated with each classification. However, it should be recognized that *federal functional classification doesn't correlate volumes to classifications*.

- **A bypass route has been advocated for a long time in Whitefish. Would the need for a bypass be offset if Spokane and Baker Avenues were configured as one-ways?** As indicated during the presentation, modeling done for the Transportation Plan suggests that future traffic volumes would still be significant even with a bypass in place. Mr. Key explained that the Corridor Study is taking a detailed look at a variety of potential configurations for Spokane and Baker Avenues. The work done for the Corridor Study will help establish the most desirable and effective long-term configuration for US 93.
- **The presence of large trucks in the downtown is undesirable and should be addressed now. Continuing the existing situation over the planning horizon is unacceptable.** Comment is noted.
- **Is there sufficient existing right-of-way along Wisconsin and Karrow Avenues to accommodate the recommended upgrades suggested in the Transportation Plan?** Mr. Key explained that he did not know for sure if existing rights-of-way would be sufficient to adequately improve these corridors. He noted that Wisconsin Avenue has a particularly narrow right-of-way. He also noted that the costs of right-of-way acquisition will be sizable for some projects but it may be possible to make some interim improvements without new right-of-way in some areas.
- **All major roads in Whitefish feed into the downtown area. If development continues in the center of the community, the need for a bypass will be greater.** Jeff commented that continuing development will point toward future revisions of the Transportation Plan and growth assumptions.
- **If Karrow Avenue is improved, won't it function as a "defacto" bypass?** Jeff acknowledged that if Karrow were improved, some people would undoubtedly find and use the roadway as an alternate route to US 93. The recommendations for Karrow Avenue contained in the Plan call for "context sensitive" reconstruction as the area becomes more developed. The roadway can be designed in a manner that would help influence the type of vehicles that can use the roadway and travel speeds.
- **I applaud you for putting recommendations forth in the Transportation Plan that can be commented on by the community.** One of the original reasons that a bypass was suggested years ago was the potential for a major impact on the downtown. With the downturn in logging presently underway, maybe logging trucks won't represent such a concern in the future.
- **Karrow is quite busy on the section between 7th and US 93.** Comment is noted.
- **South of 7th to US 93 (south of Whitefish) receives light vehicle traffic. This area**

would be difficult and expensive to improve due to the presence of wetlands and the need for three or more residential relocations (these properties exist nearly adjacent to the existing roadway). Several large property owners along Karrow Avenue have no desire to sell property or develop. There is not a very desirable location to join US 93 south of town due to the rolling terrain. Comment is noted.

Jeff asked if the audience saw the need for some improvements to Karrow Avenue. The general sentiment was that if development occurs, then it should be improved by the developers.

- **Can you provide information about the type of non-motorized improvements being proposed in the Plan?** Jeff stated that the Plan generally incorporates the recommendations and identified projects listed in the City's Pedestrian and Bicyclist Master Plan.
- **Baker and US 93 (2nd Street) poses a huge bottleneck due to the lack of a left turn lane. Adding such a feature could provide substantial traffic relief in the area.** Comment is noted.
- **Are there any short-term plans for addressing major issues like the congestion experienced at Baker and 2nd Street?** Jeff noted that the Plan does recommend various interim measures like adding left turn bays on 2nd Street or changing signal timings. He noted that such improvements may result in the loss of some on-street parking near the intersection and that there are right-of-way limitations on one corner of the intersection. He also indicated that various interim improvements have been recommended on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor.
- **Improving the south to north left turn movement at Baker and 2nd should be a high priority.** There is more room on the south side of the intersection than on the northside.
- **Is there any plan for removing police cars that routinely park along Baker Avenue?** John Wilson indicated that the City has started the process for developing a new emergency services center and a new building is still more than a year away from happening.
- **Is the Wisconsin Avenue bike path ever going to get built?** Jeff indicated that the bike path project had to be rebid due to high costs and few bidders last year. He noted that the project has been awarded and construction will begin this spring.
- **The proposed improvements to Old Morris Trail may not be viable as recommended due to the existence of a conservation easement on some property in the area.** Comment is noted.
- **A member of the audience suggested prioritizing those feasible measures that can help ease congestion in downtown Whitefish.** Comment is noted.
- **What kind of suggestions are in the Plan for public transportation?** Jeff stated that

public transportation is discussed in Chapter 9 and includes an idea for partnering with Glacier National Park to provide transit services in nearby communities like Whitefish. Glacier National Park will have a fleet of busses that won't be used year round so there may be an opportunity to use these vehicles for part of the year. He also mentioned some opportunities to develop transit services around special events in Whitefish like the 4th of July. Eagle Transit is exploring twice per day bus service between Whitefish and Kalispell.

Jeff commented that the Plan recommends planning for future transit (like bus pullouts) when new developments are being considered. The community could also consider establishing a bike rental program to enhance alternate transportation in the community.

- **Does the Plan contain any language about bus transportation from Whitefish to Kalispell?** Eagle Transit is exploring such service between Whitefish and Kalispell.
- **What about another railroad overpass? There is a need for such a facility due to enhance emergency response times within the community.** Proposed MSN-6 (Kalner Lane Extension) includes a new grade-separated crossing of the railroad. This location was chosen over several others because it crosses only a few railroad lines and other potential crossing locations would either have negative effects on residential neighborhoods or be too far out of town to provide much benefit.
- **How do you connect Kalner Lane to Highway 40 without creating another problem intersection?** The intersection of Kalner Lane and Highway 40 would require design modifications and reconfiguration to ensure it functions well for all traffic movements. This intersection would likely meet one of the eight required signal warrants and the installation of a signal or roundabout would accommodate traffic turning left or right from Kalner Lane.
- **When making the proposed east-west connection between 13th Street and Voerman Road (MSN-10), what types of difficulties do you envision?** This connection would require the construction of a new bridge across the Whitefish River. Acquiring right-of-way and constructing a bridge would be expensive. Road and bridge construction also have the potential to impact wetlands and the riparian habitat.
- **Twenty years ago the general feeling in many communities (including Whitefish) was that a bypass could kill a small town. Now the situation has changed in Whitefish so that if we don't get a bypass it will harm the downtown. Before the idea of a bypass is dropped, it is essential that folks recognize that through traffic from Canada and other growth areas north of Whitefish will continue to create traffic impacts in Whitefish.** Comment is noted.
- **I appreciate that the Transportation Plan does not support a bypass. Traffic from logging and chip trucks is slowing.** Comment is noted.
- **Wildlife populations need to be considered when planning for transportation since conflicts between wildlife and traffic can occur.** Comment is noted. Jeff pointed out that current highway designs often contain accommodations for wildlife like over or under

crossings and ensuring fish passage in culverts.

- **Has anyone investigated Farm-to-Market Road as a truck bypass?** Jeff stated that Farm-to-Market Road is generally too far west of Whitefish to have much of an effect on traffic flows in town. Such routes need to be convenient to be attractive alternatives to existing routes.
- **If a bypass route is considered, it must connect to Highway 40 since trucks are often headed for destinations to the east and already use that highway.** Comment is noted.
- **How much would a bypass cost?** Very preliminary cost estimates were prepared for the four western route alternatives evaluated in the Transportation Plan. These options had potential construction costs ranging from \$4 to \$10 million which could be low given the cost of land for right-of-way in the Flathead Valley. There are also considerable costs for preliminary design engineering activities that would be incurred, typically about 10-15% of the construction cost.
- **What is the process from this point forward and how do projects recommended in the Plan get implemented?** Jeff responded that the draft Transportation Plan will be reviewed at a Planning Board work session on January 17 and at a public hearing held by the Planning Board in February. The City Council will also conduct a public hearing on the Transportation Plan and will be asked to formally adopt the Plan.

Implementing individual projects will require decisions from MDT, the City and the County depending upon the road system (state-maintained or local systems) affected by the projects. Projects under the jurisdiction of MDT would be subject to their project development procedures and activities. Major projects under the jurisdiction of the City would be advanced through the City's Capital Improvements Program and budgeting processes. Public review and comment opportunities for individual projects would typically be available as projects are being developed by both MDT and the City.

- **The figure showing recommended improvements (Figure 8-1) shows various lines going across lands where no roads exist. Would these lines affect the sale of property? Are these lines "set in stone"?** Jeff stated that the lines represent potentially desirable transportation links for the community's transportation network. However, if there is no development planned for a property crossed by one of the "lines" then nothing is likely to happen. John Wilson also commented that the City would not be involved in the sale of property where a new road was proposed. They would only be involved when a plan to develop the property came up for consideration by the City. In that case, the City would refer to the Transportation Plan recommendations and request that the developer provide right-of-way or at least plan for a future roadway.
- ***(Written Comment from Scott Sorenson left at the meeting)* As a four-term (I was just appointed to my fifth term) Whitefish City-County Planning Board member, I think the two biggest needed major projects are 1) Wisconsin Avenue from the viaduct to Whitefish Mountain Resort Road and 2) a car/truck 93 bypass on the west**

**side of town. Both have been needed for years. Everything else is less needed.**  
Comments are noted.

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## **Whitefish Transportation Plan 2008 Public Meeting**

**\*When: January 10, 2008 7-9pm**

**\*Where: O'Shaughnessy Center**

**\*Formal Presentation Begins at 7:15pm with Open House to follow**

**\*Winners of the Whitefish Transportation Plan Kids Art Contest Will be Announced at 7pm**

**\*Refreshments will be provided**

The city of Whitefish, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) will be holding a public meeting to present the draft *Whitefish Transportation Plan*. The Plan contains important recommendations to strengthen the city's transportation system and encourage multi-modal transportation.

The draft plan can be viewed on the project website at [www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/whitefish](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/whitefish) beginning Saturday, January 5, 2008. In addition, hard copies will be available at the City's Public Works Department on Monday, January 7. Comments on the draft Plan will be solicited until January 31, 2008. Comments can be submitted via the project website, or by mail to the following address: Robert Peccia & Associates, c/o Jeff Key, P.E., PO Box 5653, Helena, Mt. 59601. For further information you may call Karin Hilding, Senior Project Engineer, City of Whitefish 863-2450.

*Thanks to the Walking Man Frame Shop for their assistance with the Whitefish Transportation Plan Kids Art Contest.*



**WHITEFISH**  
**TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

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**PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3**  
**January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

| NAME             | ADDRESS/P.O. Box     | CITY | Email Address      |
|------------------|----------------------|------|--------------------|
| Courtney Feldt   | 410 Iowa Ave         | WF   | courtmt@bksnan.net |
| Pat & Kim Conrad | 1200 W. Forest       | WF   |                    |
| Terri Nichols    | 109 8th St. W.       | WF   |                    |
| Tom Thomas       | P.O. Box 5588        | WF   |                    |
| Paul Johanson    | P.O. Box 1248        | WF   |                    |
| Steph Bowe       | P.O. Box 1100        | WF   |                    |
| Maria Duenas     | 1465 Lakeside Ln W/F |      |                    |
| Bob Jaki         | 1016 Greenview Dr    | WF   |                    |
| Karen Reeves     | 230 Mossy Ln         | WF   |                    |
| Greg Gunderson   | 840 1st St.          | WF   |                    |

# WHITEFISH

## TRANSPORTATION PLAN

### SIGN IN SHEET

#### PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3 January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008

| NAME                  | ADDRESS / P.O. Box          | City      | Email Address                                   |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|---|
| Great Northern Cycles | 104 O'Brien Ave             | Whitefish | GreatNorthernCycles@gmail.com                   |
| KEN & MARIE MECKEL    | 1129 W. 7 <sup>th</sup> ST  | WF        |   |
| GLENN ALEXANDER       | 510 BLANCHARD BLVD          | WF        |   |
| DAVINA PRINCE         | 510 BLANCHARD BLVD          | WF        |   |
| Steve Dunell          | 523 West 4 <sup>th</sup> St | WF        |   |
| Gaye + Joel Lockwood  | 1380 Karrow Ave             | WF        | gaye.lockwood@yahoo.com<br>joel@ozoneonline.com |
| Bill Klein            | 700 Monesud                 | WF        |   |
| Klaus Heinrich        | 610 Monesud                 | WF        |   |
| John Chaney           | 609 Baker                   | WF        |   |
| MARGARET MURDOCK      | 185 BEECHVOIR RD.           | WF        |   |

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**PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3**  
**January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008**



| NAME                    | ADDRESS/P.O. BOX     | City | Email Address |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------|---------------|
| SHANNOT BATTIN          | 185 ROSEBUD RD.      | WF   |               |
| JEANNE TALLMAN          | 967 COLORADO AV.     | WF.  |               |
| DON DU/BEAU             | ✓ ✓                  | ✓    |               |
| Aleisa and Rick Stevens | 344 Blanchard Hollow | WF   |               |
| Kim Sands               | PO Box 4761          | WF   |               |
| Chaz Wram               |                      | WF   |               |
| Ted Belcer              | 230 Mendota Rd       | WF   |               |
| KEVIN MAUREEN CORDOZA   | 150 Lost Coast Trail | WF   |               |
| JEFF CAUSEN             | 215 ARMOY            | WF   |               |
| George Shryock          | 6 Rwantail           | WF   |               |

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**PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3**  
January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008



| NAME                | ADDRESS / P.O. Box       | City | Email Address             |
|---------------------|--------------------------|------|---------------------------|
| Maria To Look       |                          |      |                           |
| <del>Patricia</del> |                          |      |                           |
| Scott Sorensen      | W.F. with outbook<br>205 | WF   |                           |
| Peter Elland        | 305 Baker Ave            | WF   |                           |
| Cameron Blake       | PO BOX 1480              | WF   |                           |
| Peggy Sweady        | PO Box 4903              | WF   | peggy.sweady@berport.net  |
| Doug Oitman         | #1 pass way              | WF   |                           |
| Scott Blair         | 908 KAREO W AVE.         | WF   | SCOTBLAIR@HOTMAIL.COM     |
| Patte Codrigan      | 112 Old Morris Trail     |      | pcodrigan@ironhorsemt.com |
| Julie Ferchul       |                          | WF   | SNOWPERCH@CENTURIED.COM   |

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**PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3**  
**January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008**



| NAME                   | ADDRESS / P.O. Box | City            | Email Address                 |
|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| George & Roberta Swick | 963 Colorado Ave   | Whitefish 59937 | intsmiths@centurytel.net      |
| Anne Shaw Moran        | P.O. Box 4472      | Whitefish 59937 | <del>asm</del> asm@digisp.net |
| Dick Zwellner          | 1565 Ucemm         | WF              |                               |
|                        |                    |                 |                               |
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**WHITEFISH**  
**TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

**SIGN IN SHEET**  
**PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3**  
**January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

| NAME                    | ADDRESS/P.O. Box | City | Email Address          |
|-------------------------|------------------|------|------------------------|
| Nancy & Mark Spennungen | 1465 Lakewood Ln | W.F. | mnswenn@centurytel.net |
| SHEILA LUDLOW           | MDT              |      |                        |
|                         |                  |      |                        |
|                         |                  |      |                        |
|                         |                  |      |                        |
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## **Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 Public Information Meeting #4 Summary (08/19/08)**

### **Introduction**

The fourth public information meeting for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects was held on Tuesday, August 19, 2008 in the Whitefish City Council Chambers, 402 East Second Street. The meeting occurred between 7:00 and 9:00 p.m. and included a PowerPoint presentation beginning about 7:10 p.m.

The meeting was attended by the following agency and Consultant Team members:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Shane Stack   | MDT Missoula District                             |
| Sheila Ludlow | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Karin Hilding | City of Whitefish                                 |
| Dan Norderud  | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Scott Randall | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |

Ten (10) members of the public attended the meeting including Nancy Woodruff, a member of the Whitefish City Council. Copies of the sign-in sheets from the meeting are attached; however, not all signed the attendance sheets for the meeting since some joined the meeting in progress.

### **Meeting Purposes**

The purposes of the public informational meeting were to:

- Provide an update on the Whitefish Transportation Plan;
- Describe work completed to date and next steps;
- Describe identified corridor problems and needs;
- Present an overall “vision” for the US 93 corridor and outline goals for corridor improvements;
- Briefly discuss preliminary design and improvement options and other strategies under consideration; and
- Get comments on issues and the range of preliminary options under consideration for the corridor.
- Solicit input from the public on any new ideas (improvement options) not identified during the presentation that should be considered for the corridor.

### **Meeting Summary**

Dan Norderud of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) began the meeting at 7:10 p.m. and introduced

representatives of the City of Whitefish, MDT and Consultant Team members. He then began a PowerPoint presentation focused on the Corridor Study project.

Mr. Norderud summarized the current status of the Whitefish Transportation Plan and highlighted major work activities completed since the Plan was presented at a January 2008 public meeting. He noted that as a result of comments received from the City-County Planning Board, the Transportation Plan will not be finalized until recommendations from the Corridor Study have been incorporated and discussed. He stated that the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study will be completed on a more parallel track than originally proposed.

Mr. Norderud provided an update of work progress for the Urban Corridor Study and noted that an Environmental Scan and five Technical Memos supporting the study have been completed. The Environmental Scan identifies environmental resources and issues with the potential to influence the type, location, or design of future improvements to US 93 through Whitefish and documents the concerns of regulatory agencies early in the process. He explained the memos “mirror” chapters from the Corridor Study and present relevant background information about the corridor’s setting, the current and future operations of US 93, corridor issues and needs, and offer a vision for what US 93 improvements should accomplish. Further, he pointed out that one of the memos outlines a range of design and improvement options and other strategies to help meet identified corridor needs.

Dan emphasized that no decision has been made yet about which design option or strategy may be best suited for the corridor. He indicated that travel demand modeling and operational analyses for the design options shown on the meeting handout have been completed with the next phase of the corridor study work focused on screening options against a detailed set of criteria to help identify the most reasonable option(s).

Mr. Norderud outlined work to be completed over the next four months and highlighted major activities including a future public meeting to discuss the recommendations in the Draft Corridor Study. He stated that both the Corridor Study and Transportation Plan projects should be completed around the end of the year.

**Summary of Technical Memos:** Mr. Norderud then presented a series of slides summarizing the content of five Technical Memos prepared for the Corridor Study. The topics of these memos and their general content are highlighted below:

- *Analysis of the Existing Transportation System.* The memo discusses the physical characteristics of the existing road and street network in the corridor, its operation (Level of Service) and its safety performance. It also describes other available transportation modes and facilities including non-motorized facilities, transit, and rail.
- *Current/Planned Land Uses, Community Characteristics, and Environmental Setting.* The memo examines current and planned land uses and land use controls within central Whitefish and discusses key demographic and socio-economic characteristics and trends in the Whitefish community and corridor study area. The memo also describes environmental considerations

that could potentially influence the location or design of US 93 through the City of Whitefish.

- *Analysis of Future Conditions on US 93 Through Whitefish.* The memo summarizes the future traffic conditions and operations of the US 93 corridor in Whitefish expected to occur in the year 2030. The analysis described in the memo establishes a “baseline” of future traffic conditions that can be used to help evaluate potential design and improvement options in the US 93 corridor.
- *Corridor Issues, Corridor Vision & Goals, and Statement of Purpose & Need.* The memo discusses issues and a “vision” for the corridor and reviews past community input on corridor issues and needs from five planning efforts and projects undertaken in the community since 1995. Considered together, these planning efforts and projects generated a significant body of public and agency input on issues, problems, needs and desires for the US 93 corridor through Whitefish.
- *Preliminary Conceptual Design and Improvement Options for the Corridor.* The memo outlines the design and improvement options and other strategies under initial consideration for the US 93 corridor through Whitefish. These designs and strategies will be subject to a multi-step screening process to help determine those meriting further detailed study.

**Summary of Corridor Issues and Needs:** Mr. Norderud then showed a series of slides highlighting the following fundamental corridor needs based on previous input from community planning efforts and MDT’s design projects:

- Need to Enhance Capacity and Improve Operational Efficiency
- Need to Improve Flow of Large Trucks in Corridor
- Need to Address Geometric and Design Deficiencies
- Need to Upgrade US 93 Infrastructure
- Need to Enhance Safety for Facility Users

He also noted that corridor improvements need to consider local land use plans and the City’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan; need to be conscious of environment and community character; and need to be feasible to implement.

**Corridor Vision:** Dan presented a slide outlining a corridor vision and commented that the vision recognizes the identified needs for the corridor and highlights that US 93 serves as both a regional transportation route and as a local main street in Whitefish. Corridor improvements must attempt to balance the regional mobility needs with the local transportation functions of US 93.

Dan then presented slides showing the goals developed to support the corridor vision and noted numerous objectives for achieving the goals have been developed. The goals and objectives for achieving the goals will form the basis for screening criteria used to help evaluate design and improvement options.

**Overview of Potential Design Options and Strategies for the Corridor:** Mr. Norderud then showed a series of slides related to the conceptual design and improvement options and transportation strategies under initial consideration for the corridor. He explained the designs and options under consideration generally consist of:

- All alternatives for the Whitefish urban area described in the US Highway 93 Somers to Whitefish Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS);
- Design options developed after the Record of Decision (ROD) on the FEIS as part of project development activities for the MDT's Whitefish Urban project;
- Recommendations from the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan; and
- Other strategies that may potentially help relieve congestion and reduce future travel demands on the US 93 corridor.

Dan pointed out the US Highway 93 Somers to Whitefish FEIS considered several groups of alternatives including:

- Improving a parallel corridor to US 93;
- Providing a bypass route around the City;
- Reconstruction to add capacity on US 93;
- Making minor "spot" improvements to existing US 93;
- Improving transit opportunities;
- Implementing measures to reduce demand for traffic to drive on US 93; and
- Taking no action (No Build).

Mr. Norderud described the design alternatives evaluated in detail in the FEIS and the principal features of the Preferred Alternative for US 93 identified in the ROD.

He then noted that MDT advanced two reconstruction projects on US 93 through Whitefish to implement the Preferred Alternative identified in the ROD. These design projects involved a local Citizens Working Group (CWG) to provide input on design matters for US 93. Based on the CWG input and work done for MDT's Whitefish Urban project, several changed conditions in the community with design ramifications for US 93 were identified. MDT's design consultant "updated" the design configuration for the Preferred Alternative to reflect new capacity needs on US 93 which resulted in a proposed "Modified ROD Configuration."

Dan commented that three additional design concepts were developed in response to newly identified concerns or community desires expressed in the ongoing Growth Policy and Downtown Business District Master Plan projects. These were identified as the "Contra-Flow Configuration," the "Truck Route Configuration," and the "Downtown Business District Master Plan Configuration."

Dan referenced a handout and displays available at the meeting showing 7 design configurations considered in the Somers-Whitefish FEIS and the 4 configurations developed after the ROD. He pointed out these options generally represent the most obvious ways to accommodate traffic flows within the corridor—two directional or one-way travel, couplet configurations using all or portions of Spokane and Baker Avenues, using 2, 3 or 4 lanes to accommodate traffic, and providing east

west links between Spokane and Baker Avenues. He noted that without going substantially beyond this project area, no new or “previously undiscovered” design configurations are proposed for the corridor.

Dan also briefly discussed the potential indirect benefits to the corridor that may result from locally implemented “off-system improvements and several options or strategies not applicable to the corridor. He pointed out the Transportation Plan examines other potential local street improvement projects that could help divert traffic from US 93 or offer alternate travel routes for some facility users. He stressed that these locally implemented projects should not be viewed as essential “add-ons” to corridor designs.

Mr. Norderud stated that Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies (ridesharing, park and rides, telecommuting, transit-oriented development, etc.), Transportation System Management (TSM) projects (low cost, “tune-up” type improvements), transit improvements, and Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) strategies will receive initial consideration in the Corridor Study.

He also identified several options and strategies that do not appear to merit consideration for the corridor because they are too far removed from the corridor to divert traffic, have the potential to create unacceptable neighborhood impacts, or have a “regional” focus not suited to the US 93 corridor.

**Conclusion:** Mr. Norderud concluded his presentation by summarizing upcoming work efforts for the Corridor Study. These efforts will focus on screening design options and transportation strategies and sharing recommendations for the corridor with interested agencies and the public. He then asked the audience to share their comments on the corridor issues and vision outlined during the presentation and the range of design options under consideration for the corridor.

## **Public Comments/Questions**

The following public comments or questions were heard during the meeting:

**What is your opinion about one-way streets in the downtown?** Mr. Norderud noted that option with one-way traffic configurations will be duly considered and the operational analyses presented in the Corridor Study. One-way streets can typically move lots of traffic in an efficient manner. However, there are other considerations for their use and some evidence that suggests one-ways may not be the “best” option for some downtown areas.

**Is it possible to build a new bridge across the Whitefish River (at 7th Street) and how much influence does permitting requirements potentially have on the design of such a structure?**

Dan explained that it is possible to design a bridge in a manner that minimizes impacts on the river and its associated riparian environment. A variety of federal, state and local water quality regulations will apply at highway crossings of the Whitefish River and these regulations would influence the design of a bridge. Impacts caused by such a project must also be mitigated—providing replacement wetlands is a good example of a typical mitigating measure for such impacts. Shane Stack from MDT noted that Section 404 regulations can be very stringent and the Corps of Engineers can require implementation of a design that does the “least harm” to surface waters.

**Karin Hilding** commented about the potential benefits that might be realized if park-and-ride lots were paired with low cost bicycle rental service. She felt this could be a way to encourage summer peak season visitors to use alternate transportation modes and could help reduce the numbers of vehicles on the US 93 corridor.

**When can corridor improvements be built?** Shane Stack addressed this question and commented that funding for improvements from MDT is extremely tight and providing a date when the project could be implemented is very difficult. It depends to a large extent on the availability of funding for corridor improvements. He explained that there are federal and state environmental compliance processes that must be followed and the complexity and time requirements associated with this task will depend on the design option selected. Implementing improvements will also require developing design plans, acquiring right-of-way (if needed), and programming the project based on available funding.

Since it is unlikely that improvements to US 93 through Whitefish would be completed very soon given the current funding situation, a member of the audience asked why 2030 was being used as a planning horizon for the corridor study instead of a date much farther into the future (like 2050). These concerns were acknowledged and it was pointed out that using such a horizon year would require making uncertain assumptions about future growth and employment in Whitefish. This information is not readily available from local planning agencies and would be subject to many assumptions regarding community growth over the next 40+ years. Additionally, there is no certainty over what type and how much funding will be available in the long range future.

**Can traffic signals be adjusted to account for seasonal variations in traffic?** Yes, software and sophisticated controllers associated with new signal systems allow great flexibility with regard to signal timing. To achieve optimum efficiency, traffic signals must be monitored and adjusted to serve changing traffic patterns or daily variations in traffic passing through the signalized intersection. Different signal timing plans can be developed to reflect the time of day, day of week, and season of the year. Traffic engineers typically collect detailed information about traffic patterns, volumes and speeds. Once this data is analyzed, new timing plans are developed and field adjustments are implemented as required.

**The meeting concluded at about 8:30 p.m.**

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## Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 CAC Meeting #1 Minutes (April 17, 2007)

### Introduction

The first of four anticipated meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was held at the Whitefish Public Library conference room on Tuesday, April 17<sup>th</sup> began at 5:30 p.m. The CAC is an ad hoc committee for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects appointed by the Whitefish City Council during March 2007. The following people attended the meeting:

#### CAC Attendees

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Sabine Brigitte   | Citizen                                     |
| Bridger Kelch     | Whitefish Police Department                 |
| Mary Jo Look      | Citizen                                     |
| Shirley Jacobson  | Whitefish City Council                      |
| Mary Person       | Business Owner                              |
| George S. Gardner | Citizen                                     |
| Don Spivey        | Citizen                                     |
| Fred Jones        | Big Mountain Resort                         |
| Jerry House       | Whitefish School District                   |
| Gary Stephens     | Whitefish Business Owner/Heart of Whitefish |

#### Agency/Consultant Team

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Karin Hilding | City of Whitefish                                 |
| Sheila Ludlow | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Shane Stack   | MDT Missoula District Office (Missoula)           |
| Jeff Key      | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Dan Norderud  | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |

#### Others Present

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Rick Cunningham | Whitefish Snow Bus |
|-----------------|--------------------|

Appointed CAC members Monte Gilman and Dale Duff were not present. Bridger Kelch attended the meeting in place of Mike Ferda and will do so for the remainder of the project. Mary Jo Look, Mary Person, and George Gardner are designated as alternate members of the CAC.

Meeting participants were provided with an agenda and other information to support and foster discussion during the meeting.

## **Meeting Purpose**

The purposes of this initial meeting were to: 1) introduce Consultant Team and agency representatives to CAC members; 2) provide background on the community-wide Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects and project schedules; 3) establish and discuss the role of the CAC in the projects; 4) discuss known issues related to transportation in the community; and 5) solicit input on other issues or concerns relevant to transportation planning in the Whitefish area.

## **Meeting Summary**

Jeff Key of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) began the meeting by asking those in attendance to introduce themselves and indicate what motivated their interest to participate in this transportation planning effort. Discussions at the meeting then focused on the following items:

**Overview of Projects:** Jeff Key, RPA's Project Manager, provided an overview of the Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects. Copies of slides from a PowerPoint presentation made to the Whitefish City Council on April 16 were provided to those in attendance. The slides presented background information about each project, summarized major work tasks and milestones for the projects, and outlined planned public outreach activities. Additionally, the slides identified the study area boundary for the Transportation Plan (the same area considered in the community's Growth Policy) and listed elements that will be emphasized in the plan.

Mr. Key noted that while several transportation studies have been completed for specific areas, no comprehensive Transportation Plan has ever been completed for the City of Whitefish and its surrounding area. He stressed that the Urban Corridor Study will be developed within the context of and concurrent with the Whitefish Transportation Plan. This approach allows for a focused look at US 93 through Whitefish based on the consideration of existing and planned land use changes and a detailed evaluation of community-wide transportation needs and desires. The corridor study will allow for a "fresh look" at issues associated with US Highway 93 through Whitefish and offers the opportunity to examine a full range of design options for the facility.

Mr. Key emphasized that these new planning efforts will be sensitive to prior community input and projects like: previous "subarea" transportation studies; the US Highway 93–Somers to Whitefish Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS); the Downtown Business District Master Plan; and the community's current Growth Policy Update project. He emphasized the value of previous efforts by the Citizens Working Group (CWG)—a group previously established to provide design input for the "Whitefish Urban" and "Whitefish-West" projects under development by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT).

**CAC Guiding Parameters:** Mr. Key provided those attending with a handout discussing the CAC's anticipated role in the Whitefish projects. He explained the CAC will act as an advisory group with a much broader focus than the former CWG. While the CWG generally focused on two specific reconstruction projects on Highway 93, the CAC will be asked to help the Consultant Team identify community-wide transportation needs and issues. The CAC will be asked to serve as a

sounding board as recommendations to address identified needs and issues are developed.

Mr. Key then outlined the anticipated roles and responsibilities of the CAC and the Consultant Team. CAC members acknowledged the anticipated responsibilities. Several members of the CAC who previously served on the CWG group indicated that considerable time and effort was spent in 2005 on issues that will be relevant to these new projects. The Consultant Team acknowledged this past work and indicated copies of the minutes from past CWG meetings are available. Several CAC members expressed an interest in viewing these minutes, so it was agreed that copies of all previous CWG meetings and a public open house meeting held during April 2005 will be provided to all CAC members.

Gary Stephens requested that the Consultant Team provide relevant background materials to help CAC members during their review of project deliverables.

**Review of Transportation Issues Theme Boards:** Mr. Key expressed that the Consultant Team recognizes that significant community input and discussion about transportation issues and the Highway 93 corridor has already occurred in Whitefish. He stated that in preparation for the April 16 Public Open House and first CAC meeting, RPA reviewed public comments received during several important projects in the Whitefish area including:

- US Highway 93 - Somers to Whitefish FEIS (1994)
- Downtown Business District Master Plan (approved by the Whitefish City Council in early 2006)
- Whitefish Urban & West Projects (MDT and WGM Group)
  - Minutes from the Public Open House Meeting (April 2005)
  - Minutes from Whitefish Urban & West Highway 93 CWG meetings (2005)
- Whitefish Growth Policy Update (2006/2007)
  - Draft Elements of Growth Policy Update
  - Summaries of comments obtained through community visioning sessions
  - Summaries of community surveys

Mr. Key indicated the Consultant Team's intention was to acknowledge past work and build upon known transportation issues and concerns in the Whitefish area. As a starting point, RPA developed several transportation issues "theme" boards focusing on the following topics: Traffic Operations, Safety, Trucks, Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities, Parking, Land Use/Growth, Aesthetics, and the Natural and Human Environments. Each board provided a broad issue statement for each topic and a list of specific conditions or concerns relating to the issue. The issues boards were made available to the CAC both as large display boards and as handouts.

The issue statements and associated conditions or concerns listed on each issue board were then reviewed and verified with CAC. Input was solicited from members about new or additional concerns related to each topic before moving on to successive issues boards.

Based on the review of the issues boards, the following new items were identified:

### **Traffic Operations**

- The real issue in Whitefish is the lack of alternate north-south routes (like Wisconsin Avenue) serving Big Mountain and areas north of the railroad.
- Whitefish needs another parallel north-south route east of US Highway 93 with a railroad crossing.

### **Safety**

- Pedestrian and bicyclist safety near schools in Whitefish is important.
- The center two-way left turn lane on Highway 93 at the south edge of Whitefish poses a safety concern. The design contributes to conflicts between opposing vehicles making left turns.
- The community hospital has moved to a new location and traffic patterns are changing. CAC members noted an emergency only access from Highway 93 to the hospital is being used for general access to the facility.

### **Trucks**

- Truck traffic generated by construction activities in the Whitefish area is substantial and contributes to congestion within the community.
- Several truck bypass possibilities were mentioned.

### **Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities**

- No additional comments from CAC.

### **Parking**

- No additional comments from CAC.

### **Land Use/Growth**

- The CAC recommended revising the last bullet item to say: “General support for managing growth in the community.”
- Neighborhoods (like the railroad district) in Whitefish are changing from traditional uses and zoning regulations allow for increases in densities. In some cases, single family dwellings are being replaced by duplexes or multi-family housing. The model developed to help forecast future traffic conditions needs to be sensitive to these types of land use changes.

### **Aesthetics**

- No additional comments from CAC. It was learned that a Walgreen’s drugstore is proposed for the Highway 93 South.

Don Spivey indicated that there has been lots of interest in the design/appearance of Highway 93 South over the years and mentioned that Doug Adams has been involved in an effort to reconsider the idea of installing a raised median on this section of roadway.

Fred Jones also commented that the current design of Highway 93 South does nothing for the appearance of the community. He stressed that changing the roadway's appearance is important and can help visitors recognize they have left the highway and entered the City.

### **Natural Environment**

- No additional comments from CAC.

Dan Norderud provided a brief explanation of the term "PM-10 nonattainment area" and explained how the community received the designation.

### **Human Environment**

- It was noted that efforts to clean up soil contamination at the former Big Mountain Tire site are underway.

**Identification of Traffic Counting Locations:** Mr. Key related that the scope of work for the project included doing traffic movement counts at 27 intersection locations within the study area. He provided a list of critical intersections for evaluation and asked the CAC for help in identifying additional traffic count locations. As a result, the following potential count locations were identified:

### **Signalized Intersections:**

1. 2nd Street/Spokane Avenue
2. 2nd Street/Central Avenue
3. 2nd Street/Baker Avenue
4. Wisconsin Avenue/Edgewood Place
5. Spokane Avenue/13th Street Avenue
6. Spokane Avenue/18th Street
7. U.S. Highway 93/MT Highway 40

### **Unsignalized Intersections:**

- |                                       |                                   |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 8. U.S. Highway 93/Blanchard Lake Rd. | 18. Spokane Avenue/4th Street     |
| 9. U.S. Highway 93/JP Road            | 19. Spokane Avenue/5th Street     |
| 10. U.S. Highway 93/Karrow Avenue     | 20. Fir Avenue/2nd Street         |
| 11. U.S. Highway 93/State Park Road   | 21. Fir Avenue/4th Street         |
| 12. Karrow Avenue/7th Street          | 22. 2nd Street/Kalispell Avenue   |
| 13. Baker Avenue/4th Street           | 23. Pine Avenue/2nd Street        |
| 14. Baker Avenue/5th Street           | 24. Pine Avenue/4th Street        |
| 15. Baker Avenue/7th Street           | 25. Pine Avenue/7th Street        |
| 16. Baker Avenue/13th Street          | 26. Ashar Avenue/7th Street       |
| 17. Spokane Avenue/1st Street         | 27. Skyles Place/Wisconsin Avenue |

A map showing the potential count locations will be produced and forwarded to the City of Whitefish Public Works Director and Assistant City Engineer for review and approval.

## **Other Miscellaneous Discussion Items**

Jerry House noted that there has been lots of time and effort spent on considering transportation in the community and volumes of information exist. Mr. Key acknowledged the comment and reiterated that the intent is to make use of and build upon existing information for the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study projects.

Don Spivey believes that it is very important to ensure the public is involved in the process. The group then generally discussed ways to engage the public in the development of the transportation plan including targeting specific groups (like parent groups at schools) to enhance “word of mouth” knowledge of the project and ensuring the project is publicized in local newspapers. It was agreed that Press Releases summarizing CAC meeting discussions will be written and provided to the Whitefish Pilot and Whitefish Free Press after each meeting.

Gary Stephens commented on his desire to see a transportation plan that was realistic and fundable. He noted many plans have been done within the community and seem to sit on the shelf.

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Key concluded the meeting by summarizing what was accomplished and briefly outlining upcoming activities for the projects. Future meeting dates were generally discussed and it was determined that the next CAC meeting would be scheduled for early June. The group asked that no CAC meeting be scheduled for August.

**The meeting concluded at 7:35 p.m.**

## **Action Items for Consultant Team**

1. Provide CAC members with copies of the following documents:
  - Minutes from the Public Open House Meeting for the Whitefish Urban & West projects
  - Minutes from Whitefish Urban & West Highway 93 CWG meetings
  - Downtown Business District Master Plan
  - Whitefish Pedestrian/Bicycle Plan
  
2. Write Press Release for April 17, 2007 CAC Meeting

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## Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 CAC Meeting #2 Minutes (July 16, 2007)

### Introduction

The second meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was held at the Whitefish Public Library conference room on Monday, July 16th, 2007 and began at 5:30 p.m. The CAC is an ad hoc committee for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects appointed by the Whitefish City Council. The following people attended the meeting:

#### CAC Attendees

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Mary Jo Look      | Citizen                                     |
| Mary Person       | Business Owner                              |
| George S. Gardner | Citizen                                     |
| Don Spivey        | Citizen                                     |
| Nick Columbus     | Whitefish Mountain Resort                   |
| Jerry House       | Whitefish School District                   |
| Gary Stephens     | Whitefish Business Owner/Heart of Whitefish |
| Monte Gilman      | Whitefish Chamber of Commerce               |
| Dale Duff         | Citizen                                     |

#### Agency/Consultant Team

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Karin Hilding | City of Whitefish                                 |
| Sheila Ludlow | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Jean Riley    | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Shane Stack   | MDT Missoula District Office (Missoula)           |
| Jeff Key      | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Dan Norderud  | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Scott Randall | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |

Appointed CAC members Sabine Brigetta, Shirley Jacobsen, and Bridger Kelch were not present. Nick Columbus represented Whitefish Mountain Resort and will replace Fred Jones who recently retired.

Meeting participants were provided with an agenda and other information a week in advance to support and foster discussion during the meeting.

### Meeting Purpose

The purposes of this meeting were to: 1) update CAC members on the work status and project schedules for the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study projects; 2) discuss recent outreach

activities; 3) discuss several Technical Memorandums providing background information relevant to the community-wide Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects; and 4) solicit input on potential system improvements in the western portion of the study area and several other focus areas of the Transportation Plan.

## **Meeting Summary**

Jeff Key of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) began the meeting and asked those in attendance to introduce themselves. Discussions then focused on the following items:

### **Overview of Project Status and Schedules**

Jeff Key provided an update of work completed for the Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects. Mr. Key referred to a graphic listing major work tasks and the expected duration of each task. He pointed out that work is generally on schedule although the need to conduct intersection turning movement counts during the peak summer visitation period has caused some delays. The traffic counts are ongoing and should be completed near the end of July. Mr. Key explained that the timing of the CAC meeting and Public meeting #2 has slipped somewhat from the original schedule. He stated that a CAC workshop to present Transportation Plan recommendations would likely be held around the end of September.

Gary Stephens asked if Task 7 (Travel Demand Modeling of Existing and Projected Conditions) was behind schedule. Mr. Key acknowledged that work for Task 7 is not fully completed. However, the travel demand model of the existing network has been completed by MDT Planning and model runs have been made illustrating future conditions without any improvements. The task that looks at alternatives (Task 9) is in process and would desirably be completed by mid- to late-August. Task 19 should be modified to extend to the end of August.

### **Review of Outreach Activities**

Mr. Key then summarized several outreach activities that have occurred since the first CAC and Public Information Meetings held at the end of May. These activities included meetings with the following individuals or groups:

- Gary Danzyk of Glacier National Park to discuss potential use of NPS transit vehicles in area communities
- Eagle Transit to discuss transit issues and future needs in the north Flathead Valley
- Doug Adams to discuss new local efforts to add raised medians on US 93 south of 13<sup>th</sup> Street
- Resource Agency Meeting held in Helena on May 24, 2007
- Curt McIntyre to discuss the extension of Baker Avenue to JP Road
- Jerry House to discuss school district issues and concerns

### **Presentation of Work To Date**

Mr. Key then referred CAC members to the Meeting Materials Booklet provided prior to the meeting containing working draft copies of numerous Technical Memoranda. These memos

summarize key elements of the Transportation Planning effort and provide the results of analyses essential information that will be used to develop transportation system improvements.

**Study Area Boundary Memo** – Mr. Key indicated that this memo documents the study area selected for the Transportation Plan and the reasons for its selection. Jeff stated that the study area is the same as the planning area being considered in Whitefish’s Growth Policy Update. CAC members had no comments on the memo.

**Goals and Objectives Memo** – Mr. Key noted that the Goals and Objectives memo lists a variety of transportation goals contained in Whitefish planning documents including the existing Whitefish City-County Master Plan, Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan, Flathead County Growth Policy, Big Mountain Neighborhood Plan, and the Transportation Element from the City of Whitefish’s Draft Growth Policy. He stated the City’s directive to incorporate the three goals from the Transportation Element of the Draft Growth Policy and highlighted several specific objectives from the document that have influenced work on the Transportation Plan including:

- a mandate for no new development in the Monegan Road area without an additional east-west connection;
- the need to explore ideas for a new grade-separated crossing of the BNSF; and
- the need to assess an alternate western route to help alleviate traffic on US 93 through Whitefish.

Gary Stephens commented that some additional goals or reframing of language is needed. Specifically, Mr. Stephens believes an overriding community goal is to preserve and enhance the character of Whitefish. He felt the goal listed in the memo under the Downtown Business District Master Plan that says “Accommodate increasing traffic volumes without degrading downtown businesses and the retail environment” is incompatible with the local goal of preserving the character of the community. He suggested changing the objective to read something like “traffic should be moved as efficiently as possible without detracting from the downtown.” Under objectives on page 3 of the memo, it was suggested that the sixth bullet be revised to be more far reaching instead of just referring to local residential streets.

Monte Gilman questioned the need to take a look at bypass options as suggested by the Draft Growth Policy. This stimulated discussion among the group and it was generally agreed that bypasses (alternate west routes) need to be considered in the Transportation Plan to determine if the concept has merit and would provide general community benefits and help reduce traffic on US 93. This topic was discussed in more detail later in the meeting.

**Socioeconomic Data, Growth Trends and Land Use Assignments Memo** – Mr. Key briefly described the content of the memo and the importance of assigning land use and employment data to the Travel Demand Model. His discussion then focused on page 12 of the memo where growth rates for the community and future populations are discussed.

Jerry House commented that the use of a 2.5 persons per household rate may be low for Whitefish given his research for the Whitefish School system. He felt the persons per household number may increase somewhat in the future.

Jeff then referred the group to various graphics showing year 2030 projected dwelling units and retail and non-retail employment by Census Block in the study area. He indicated these were essential inputs for traffic modeling. Don Spivey asked what non-retail employment included and noted that many such jobs are attributed to residential areas. Jeff said these were work at home type jobs which are becoming more common.

Gary Stephens questioned the amount of retail employment attributed to the downtown area and felt it did not correlate to that projected for the area in the Downtown (WB-3 Zone). Gary cited a recognized employment statistic of 9 Full Time Employees (FTE) per 10,000 square feet (SF) of retail space and said that 144,000 SF of new retail space is called for in the Downtown Master Plan. Gary suggested that the number of retail jobs assigned to the downtown area may be on the order of 1,300 new retail jobs.

**Note:** RPA followed up on this comment by revisiting the projected retail employment in the downtown area and the suggested FTE rate for retail space. The calculations showed that about 130 new retail jobs could be expected in the downtown area. The assignments of new retail employment presented for this area in the memo were shown to be consistent with projections for new retail space presented in the Downtown Master Plan. RPA provided this information to Gary Stephens on July 17 and he concurred with the employment projections for the downtown area being used in the model. RPA's employment rate amounted to roughly 13 jobs (full or part-time) per 10,000 SF of retail space.

**Future Capacity Issues Memo** – Jeff then directed the CAC members to the memo discussing future capacity issues. He said the memo was developed for the City of Whitefish to aid in their development of impact fees. He pointed out that the travel demand model generated traffic volumes on the local road system and it allowed calculate volume to capacity (V/C) ratios for road segments (areas between intersections). He highlighted several graphics presenting V/C ratios for road segments in the study area and a summary table highlighting roadways likely to experience capacity problems by 2030.

There were several comments from CAC members about the results shown in the table and that the results did not indicate the worst areas for traffic—particularly in the downtown area. Jeff replied that the results do not consider intersections and that another type of level of service analyses will be done to address capacity problems at intersections. He emphasized that the results are indicative of areas where problems are or will be occurring in the future if no roadway improvements are ever contemplated. Jean Riley commented that all the road segments listed in Table 1-3 on page 18 of the memo show V/C ratios exceeding 1.00. Ratios over 1.00 suggests roadways are over capacity and operating at an extremely poor level of service (LOS F). It was also pointed out that fixing intersections along these routes could substantially improve the LOS on road corridors.

**Traffic Calming Memo** – Jeff indicated that the Transportation Plan will include a chapter on Traffic Calming and described the purpose of such activities. Gary Stephens pointed out that the last paragraph on page 1 of the memo was not appropriate in his opinion since it implies traffic calming should only be used on lower function roads. The suggestion was made that some traffic calming techniques could be appropriate for “higher classification” roads (such as arterials) and used throughout the City to help maintain the character of the community.

**Overview of the Environmental Scan** – Dan Norderud indicated that work on the corridor study is ongoing and that such work includes preparing an environmental scan. The purpose of the environmental scan is to identify environmental issues or conditions that have the potential to influence the location, design or construction of improvements to US 93. He pointed out that meetings with resource agencies occurred in May 2007 and summaries of the meetings can be found in the Meeting Materials Booklet.

**US Highway 93 Bypass Review** – Jeff Key indicated that work directives for the Transportation Plan require RPA to identify and evaluate potential new western routes that might help alleviate traffic on US 93. He explained that RPA revisited four potential western alignments considered in the Somers-Whitefish Final EIS. The western route alternatives were modeled to determine potential future traffic volumes on each alignment and their impacts on US 93 and parts of the local road system. Model runs were completed both with and without alternate routes in place to determine their potential to reduce traffic on US 93. The preliminary modeling showed alternate routes would attract a notable amount of traffic (typically 7,000-15,000 vehicles in 2030); however, significant traffic volumes would likely continue on the existing US 93 corridor.

Mary Person related that considerable discussion about a bypass was heard during the development of the Growth Policy. Concerns were expressed over the amount of construction-related heavy trucks on the US 93 corridor destined for ongoing developments in the Whitefish area. Mary also raised the idea of continuing the Kalispell Bypass and developing an entirely new route offering an alternate north-south route to US 93.

Mary Jo Look commented that any bypass that is considered should connect at Highway 40 to have any chance of attracting through trucks. She also felt people would not want to “backtrack” (travel south on US 93) to access a westerly route like Alternative A.

Mary Person commented that the intersection of US 93 and Blanchard Lake Road (at Coffee Traders) is a concern and that it is particularly difficult to see the intersection during the winter. Jeff acknowledged the comment and indicated that a turning movement count will be performed at the intersection during July.

In general, the group felt Alternative D (Karrow Avenue) would be “politically impossible” in Whitefish and the neighborhood’s successful past resistance to new development proposals confirms a high level of engagement along the corridor. Alternative B, a route requiring a crossing of Blanchard Lake, may not be viable due to community Lakeshore Protection ordinances and likely opposition from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Alternative A does not connect to Highway 40 and its distance from the city may not attract much local traffic. Of the alternatives presented, Alternative C would probably be the most favorable since it follows a BPA powerline corridor. Mary Person pointed out that Alternatives B and C pass through the Blanchard and Lost Coon Lake area and both have the potential for substantial wildlife and wetland impacts.

There was discussion about whether the word “bypass” should be used. The group generally agreed that it may be best to refer to such options as western alternate routes. Karin Hilding felt the Transportation Plan needs to identify important future road connections and emphasize the need for and the long-term benefits of making such connections.

Jerry House commented that while discussing routes around the west side of Whitefish, it is important to recognize that other areas of the communities also have needs for alternate routes. He cited the need for new connections for those living on the north side of Whitefish. The group agreed with Jerry's comment and that the Transportation Plan should address needs in all areas of the community.

### **Other Items Discussed**

Jeff Key identified several emerging topics that will need to be considered in the Transportation Plan. These items are discussed below.

**Baker Avenue Extension.** Jeff indicated he had met with a local business owner regarding a proposal to extend Baker Avenue from its current end point to JP Road. Extending Baker Avenue southward would provide an alternate access route into businesses and land uses along US 93 south. Don Spivey was aware of this proposal and suggested that such a route might be best developed following the zoning boundary.

**Raised Medians for US 93 South.** Jeff stated he had recently talked with Doug Adams about a proposal to install raised and landscaped medians on US 93 from Highway 40 to 13th Street. He showed a set of preliminary concept plans. Don Spivey, a member of the committee for this effort, provided the group with a history of the local efforts to get medians installed on US 93 and stated the group will seek an endorsement of the proposal from the Whitefish City Council. Dale Duff said the median concept was presented during the development of the Somers-Whitefish EIS but the community was unsuccessful in getting the idea included with the Preferred Alternative. There was general discussion about how to address the median proposal in the Transportation Plan.

**Additional Railroad Grade Separation.** Jeff asked the group for ideas on where a new grade separation over the BNSF Railroad might be desirable. He pointed out that there is an existing at-grade crossing east of town on 2nd Street but enhancing the crossing is unlikely. He offered several potential locations for a new grade separation such as Columbia Avenue and the East Texas Avenue/Pine Avenue area. Don Spivey suggested a new crossing in the Cow Coulee area. The group expressed concern that a crossing in the Columbia Avenue area would be undesirable since there is a potential to generate lots of traffic in a residential area. Gary Stephens indicated there is a real need for another way to and from Big Mountain.

**City Beach Area Circulation.** Jeff indicated the City of Whitefish had asked RPA to review traffic circulation and parking issues in the City Beach area. Seasonal traffic volumes, narrow roadways and steep grades on some local streets, and the parking situation contribute to congestion and pose safety concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists in the area. Jeff highlighted these issues and asked for comments from CAC members. Don Spivey stated the Bike Committee had recommended that a one-way loop for traffic be established in the area to help improve safety. Karin Hilding described known circulation and parking issues near City Beach and pointed out a retaining wall along one of the roadways has started to fail. Jeff said RPA will take a detailed look at this area and will develop several improvement ideas that can be considered as part of the Transportation Plan.

### **Next Meeting Date**

Jeff asked the group about a likely date for the next CAC meeting. George Gardner indicated that WGM has set September 19th as the date for the next meeting on the Whitefish-West project. After considering comments, Jeff indicated the next meeting would be scheduled for the end of September or early October. He will contact CAC members with several dates during that time and set the next meeting date. He also pointed out that the next meeting will be a workshop to discuss preliminary recommendations and could require between 2 and 4 hours to complete.

**The meeting concluded at 7:45 p.m.**

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## **Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 CAC Meeting #3 Minutes (January 8, 2008)**

### **Introduction**

The third meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was held at the Whitefish Public Library conference room on Tuesday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and began at 4:00 p.m. The CAC is an ad hoc committee for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects appointed by the Whitefish City Council. The following people attended the meeting:

#### **CAC Attendees**

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Mary Jo Look      | Citizen                                     |
| Mary Person       | Business Owner                              |
| George S. Gardner | Citizen                                     |
| Don Spivey        | Citizen                                     |
| Nick Polumbus     | Whitefish Mountain Resort                   |
| Gary Stephens     | Whitefish Business Owner/Heart of Whitefish |
| Monte Gilman      | Whitefish Chamber of Commerce               |
| Sabine Brigetta   | Citizen                                     |
| Shirley Jacobsen  | Whitefish City Council                      |
| Bridger Kelch     | Whitefish Police Department                 |

#### **Agency/Consultant Team**

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Karin Hilding | City of Whitefish                         |
| Shane Stack   | MDT Missoula District Office (Missoula)   |
| Jeff Key      | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena) |
| Dan Norderud  | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena) |

CAC members Jerry House and Dale Duff were not present.

Meeting participants were provided with a copy of the draft Transportation Plan prior to the meeting.

### **Meeting Purposes**

The primary purpose of this meeting was to present the draft Transportation Plan document and its major components to CAC members. This was accomplished through a chapter-by-chapter discussion highlighting the analysis, findings, and recommendations in the document.

The meeting was also used to update CAC members on the current status of work for the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study and solicit general input from CAC members.

## **Meeting Summary**

Jeff Key of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) began the meeting with a few remarks about the project schedule and thanked the CAC members for their patience. The original intent had been to hold this meeting in late September or early October. However, holidays and the receipt of internal review comments on an administrative draft of the document affected the schedule more than anticipated. He stated that the goal is to have the Transportation Plan completed by the end of February and a draft of the Corridor Study should follow closely after the Transportation Plan. He reiterated that significant work has been and continues to be completed for the Corridor Study.

Jeff stated that the Plan will be presented for adoption by the City Council and meetings with both the Planning Board and City Council are planned within the next 4-6 weeks.

## **Summary of the draft Transportation Plan**

Jeff then began a chapter-by-chapter orientation and synopsis of the Transportation Plan for CAC members. Comments were encouraged at any time during the summary of the Transportation Plan. Key discussion and comments regarding individual chapters of the Transportation Plan are highlighted below.

### **Executive Summary**

No comments received.

### **CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Background**

**Don Spivey** commented that the City's Pedestrian and Bicyclist Trails Master Plan should be added to the list of community transportation planning documents listed on page 1-1. Don also asked about when the redesign work on the urban corridor section of US 93 in Whitefish might begin. Jeff responded that the corridor study and its recommendations must be completed and MDT must address the recommendations in a future NEPA process since this section of US 93 was addressed in the *US Highway 93 Somers-Whitefish Final EIS* (FEIS) and Record of Decision on the FEIS.

### **CHAPTER 2: Existing Conditions**

**Gary Stephens** commented on Table 2-10 (2007 PM Peak LOS for Signalized Intersections) and wondered how an intersection with multiple approaches functioning at LOS C or better could result in an overall LOS of F for the intersection. Jeff indicated that the overall intersection LOS rating is not an average of the LOS on other approaches. One traffic movement, if impeded significantly enough, can adversely affect the overall LOS for an intersection.

### **CHAPTER 3: Travel Demand Forecasting**

Jeff opened the discussion of this chapter by offering a caveat about the results of travel demand forecasting (i.e. traffic modeling). He indicated that the traffic volumes presented as the result of the modeling efforts for various scenarios should be viewed with caution. Although traffic volumes are

readily interpreted and understood, he cautioned that they are only representative of future conditions and the actual volume could vary substantially from the numbers shown. He stressed that the best indication of changes can be gained by looking at the magnitude (percent) of change in traffic volumes between year 2030 traffic volumes with and without the improvements associated with various modeling scenarios.

Considerable discussion occurred about modeling scenarios for western route alternatives (Scenarios 1-4). Jeff commented that traffic modeling allowed for a general assessment of the effects of a “bypass” on the community transportation system. He pointed out that modeling showed traffic would likely use such routes; however, the options fail to significantly reduce future traffic volumes through the core of the city. Additionally, the western route alternatives would be very costly projects with numerous environmental impacts and would likely meet substantial public opposition. For these reasons, the draft Transportation Plan does not include a recommendation for a new western route around Whitefish.

**Don Spivey** commented that in his opinion, a bypass is not a recognized “cure-all” for Whitefish’s traffic issues but is one more piece of the puzzle that would help remove some of the trucks and RVs to reduce distractions and dangers on the US 93 corridor in the downtown.

**Mary Jo Look** stated that truck traffic does not enhance the downtown and she felt that people would bypass Whitefish if there was an option.

There was a general discussion of trucks in the downtown and the portions of the truck traffic comprised of through trucks and local construction vehicles. It was pointed out that an origin-destination (O and D) study would really be needed to accurately quantify through versus local truck traffic. Jeff pointed out that such efforts can be quite costly.

Karin Hilding felt that the idea of an alternate route around Whitefish may be desirable to many residents.

**Gary Stephens** suggested adding language somewhere in Chapter 3 that identifies the community growth scenario considered in the traffic model.

#### **CHAPTER 4: Projected Traffic Conditions (2030)**

Jeff pointed out that Chapter 4 provides information about where problems on the local transportation network may occur in the future and focused his discussion on the information presented in Table 4-3. The V/C ratios higher than 1.0 presented in the Table 4-3 suggest areas on the transportation network that may have insufficient capacity to accommodate future traffic. He pointed out that the information in the Table will likely be used by the City of Whitefish to help establish impact fees for new developments.

#### **CHAPTER 5: Problem Identification**

Jeff highlighted the signal warrant guidelines presented in section 5.2 of the Chapter and indicated that one or more warrants must be met before the installation of a signal can be considered. There

were general discussions about a future signal installation on Spokane Avenue at JP Road and planning for new signal installations.

### **CHAPTER 6: School Transportation Considerations**

Jeff indicated that traffic and parking related to schools notably affect community traffic flows. He pointed out that the Transportation Plan recommends that the City consider implementing a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program and indicated MDT has a funding program that may help. SRTS include actions to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure, activities to educate and encourage more students to walk or bike to school, and enforcement activities to increase safety.

### **CHAPTER 7: Traffic Calming**

Jeff stated that Chapter 7 presents a variety of traffic calming strategies that may be applicable in some situations in Whitefish.

### **CHAPTER 8: Recommended Projects**

Jeff highlighted the recommendations for network improvements described in the draft Transportation Plan. He advised that the recommendations include Transportation System Management (TSM) measures, major street network improvements (MSN), and Future MSN improvements. The TSM measures are relatively low-cost actions designed to address safety and operational improvements. The MSN improvements are actions that are needed to meet the anticipated traffic demands in 2030. MSN projects typically require more extensive efforts to develop and are notably more expensive than TSM projects. Jeff stressed that project cost estimates do not include right-of-way acquisition costs or costs associated with preliminary engineering, incidental construction and construction engineering. In some cases, these costs (particularly right-of-way acquisition costs) may be substantial.

**Karin Hilding** commented that the Whitefish-West project on US 93 may be split into several projects for construction. She felt that consideration should be given to implementing a walkway project within the Whitefish-West corridor (from Grouse Mountain to the downtown) since lots of people walk in this area and there was a recent pedestrian accident recorded along this stretch of US 93.

**Shane Stack** pointed out that the cost identified for the Whitefish-West is considerably higher than that shown in the draft Transportation Plan. He agreed to provide a current cost estimate for the project.

### **CHAPTER 9: Miscellaneous Transportation System Considerations**

Jeff stated that this chapter addresses several topics including a discussion of the pros and cons of several roadway typical sections identified in the Growth Policy and transit considerations in the community. Sections 9.2 and 9.3 are intended to “plant the seed” for developing a transit partnership with Glacier National Park and for ensuring new developments are designed with future

public transit opportunities in mind. Funding has traditionally been a limiting factor for public transit services.

## **CHAPTER 10: Financial Analysis**

Jeff commented that this chapter presents federal, state, and local funding sources for transportation related improvements. The chapter also identifies current and future funding for transportation projects that may be available to the City of Whitefish.

Gary Stephens pointed out that the Whitefish Resort Tax should be included under the Local Funding Options discussion. The resort tax was recently extended through 2023 in Whitefish.

### **General Comments and Discussion**

Jeff concluded his summary of the draft Transportation Plan by requesting CAC members to review the document and set the end of January as a target date for receiving written comments.

**Don Spivey** stated that some of his written comments will likely pertain to the corridor as well as the Transportation Plan.

**Mary Person** commented that knowing what the situation in Whitefish will be in 2030 is difficult given our dependence on gasoline. The price of gas could be so expensive in the future that our transportation modes change significantly. Jeff pointed out that Transportation Plans need to be revisited periodically (every 5 years or so) to keep current with changing conditions within the community.

**Gary Stephens** stated that he would like to see the Plan include a table (like Table 2-13) that illustrated Level of Service conditions at key intersections in the community in 2030 since the data may help establish priority areas for transportation improvements. Jeff said that this information will be presented in the final version of the Plan.

Gary also indicated that Figure 2-15 shows the intersections along Wisconsin Avenue function acceptably (LOS B/C) but in reality traffic backups are common during the AM and PM peak hours due to left turning vehicles along the roadway. He felt the LOS at these intersections should be lower. Jeff responded by noting that RPA did not conduct turning movements at these intersections since recent data was available through other Traffic Impact Studies (TISs). He stated that when the counts for the TISs were conducted could influence the results of the LOS analysis, particularly if there is a notable seasonal variation in traffic.

Gary also commented that he felt it was necessary that the plan clearly depict the future transportation network and recommended adding a figure showing the future system based on functional class. It was agreed that such a figure would be added to the Plan.

Gary concluded his comments by stating that some method of prioritizing recommended projects should be done to help direct future community efforts towards implementing improvement projects. He felt that prioritizing improvements by need, effectiveness, or timeframe is essential.

Other CAC members agreed with the idea of setting priorities. Jeff responded by noting that other communities where RPA has completed plans have also asked for help setting priorities. For example, Kalispell did not want to set priorities for individual projects but rather establish priorities by group (projects with higher need versus long-term needs). Projects could then be advanced based on the availability of funding or other factors. Jeff acknowledged the benefits of setting priorities and agreed to do this for the final version of the Transportation Plan.

**Mary Person** pointed out that the conservation easements exist in the some areas along the route where improvements to Old Morris Trail (Project FMSN-3 in the Plan) are proposed.

**Karin Hilding** reiterated the need for pedestrian improvements as a short-term improvement within the Whitefish-West corridor close to the downtown.

**George Gardner** asked if the 7th Street Bridge would be considered a collector. Jeff indicated it would likely be associated with the city's arterial network.

**The meeting concluded around 6:00 p.m.**

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## Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 CAC Meeting #4 Minutes (August 19, 2008)

### Introduction

The third meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was held at the Whitefish Public Library conference room on Tuesday, January 8th, 2008 and began at 4:00 p.m. The CAC is an ad hoc committee for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects appointed by the Whitefish City Council. The following people attended the meeting:

#### CAC Attendees

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Mary Jo Look      | Citizen                                     |
| Mary Person       | Business Owner                              |
| George S. Gardner | Citizen                                     |
| Don Spivey        | Citizen                                     |
| Nick Polumbus     | Whitefish Mountain Resort                   |
| Gary Stephens     | Whitefish Business Owner/Heart of Whitefish |
| Monte Gilman      | Whitefish Chamber of Commerce               |

#### Agency/Consultant Team

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| John Wilson   | City of Whitefish                                 |
| Karin Hilding | City of Whitefish                                 |
| Shane Stack   | MDT Missoula District Office (Missoula)           |
| Sheila Ludlow | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Dan Norderud  | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Scott Randall | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |

CAC members Jerry House, Sabine Brigetta, Shirley Jacobsen, and Bridger Kelch were not present. Gary Stephens joined the meeting as it was in progress. Dale Duff arrived near the conclusion of the meeting and attended the public meeting. David Taylor, City of Whitefish Planning & Building Director, was also in attendance.

Meeting participants were provided with a series of Technical Memos prepared for the corridor study prior to the meeting and a meeting handout illustrating design concepts for the corridor previously identified in the Somers to Whitefish Final EIS and other configurations developed after the Record of Decision on the Final EIS.

### Meeting Purposes

The primary purpose of this meeting was to present and discuss five Technical Memorandums prepared for work tasks associated with the Corridor Study. This was accomplished through a

memo-by-memo review highlighting the key information, findings, and analyses from the following memos:

- **Analysis of the Existing Corridor Transportation System**
- **Current/Planned Land Uses, Community Characteristics, and Environmental Setting**
- **Analysis of Future Traffic Conditions on US 93 through Whitefish**
- **Corridor Issues, Corridor Vision & Goals, and Statement of Purpose & Need**
- **Preliminary Conceptual Design and Improvement Options for the Corridor**

The meeting was used to share and seek comments on a corridor vision with associated goals and conceptual improvement options and strategies under initial consideration for the corridor. CAC members were also updated on the current status of work for the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study and general comments were heard from CAC members on items of interest to both these projects.

## **Meeting Summary**

Dan Norderud began the meeting with remarks about the status of the Whitefish Transportation Plan. He noted that a public meeting to present the Draft Whitefish Transportation Plan was held in January and numerous oral and written comments were received on the document.

The Draft Plan was also the subject of reviews by Planning Department staff from the City of Whitefish and the Whitefish City-County Planning Board during February and March. Both entities provided written comments on the Draft Transportation Plan. Most notably, these reviews asked that the Transportation Plan not be finalized until recommendations from the Corridor Study have had a chance to be discussed and incorporated into the Plan. The original intent of the project had been to finalize the Transportation Plan and complete the Corridor Study shortly afterwards. Dan stated that both projects will be completed on a more parallel track with a revised version of the Transportation Plan being issued at or near the same time as the Corridor Study.

Dan added that draft responses to all written comments on the Draft Transportation Plan are nearly complete and will soon be submitted to MDT and the City for review. The comments and responses will be included as an Appendix in the Transportation Plan.

Dan said that considerable work has been performed for the Corridor Study including the completion of an Environmental Scan and a series of Technical Memorandums that will support chapters in the study document. He also indicated the evaluation and screening process for design and improvement options is underway and the results of this evaluation will be presented in a future Technical Memo.

Dan noted that considerable work for the Corridor Study will occur this fall with a goal of substantially completing work on the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study by the end of the 2008.

## **Summary of the Technical Memos**

Dan then briefly reviewed key information from each of the five Technical Memos previously provided to CAC members. He explained that the memos “mirror” chapters that will be in the Corridor Study document. Further, he noted that these memos have been subject to previous reviews and comments by staff from the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Comments were encouraged at any time during the review of the Technical Memos. Key discussion and comments about individual memos are highlighted below.

### **Analysis of the Existing Corridor Transportation System**

The Memo discusses the characteristics of the existing road and street network in the corridor, its operation (Level of Service) and its safety performance. The memo also describes other available transportation modes and facilities including non-motorized facilities. Dan highlighted the dual functions of US 93—an arterial roadway serving both state and regional transportation needs and local traffic. He highlighted traffic growth trends (based on historical Average Annual Daily Traffic counts on US 93), briefly discussed traffic characteristics (daily, seasonal, and truck composition), and described locations on the corridor with capacity concerns and undesirable levels of service. Trends based on an analysis of motor vehicle crashes in the corridor during a recent 3-year period were described.

**Comments from CAC Members:** **Karin Hilding** commented that the shuttle service between Whitefish and Kalispell offered this past winter by Eagle Transit operated on a schedule that was not particularly favorable for Whitefish residents. Dan asked if CAC members knew if any decisions had been made yet regarding continued shuttle transit service for Whitefish. Karin mentioned that Eagle Transit was still investigating this and was seeking some financial support from the City.

In comments after the meeting, **Gary Stephens** highlighted several locations in the memos where information presented needed to be corrected. Text in need of corrections is highlighted below:

*Page 2 (1st Sentence of Last paragraph)* – The sentence should be revised as follows:

**From south of the Montana Highway 40 intersection** and extending to 13th Street, US 93 transitions from a **five-lane rural highway with a painted center median/two-way left turn lane** to a five-lane urban roadway **consisting of** two travel lanes in each direction and a center two-way left turn lane. The section...

*Page 9 (Last Sentence in the paragraph describing Baker Avenue)* – The sentence should be revised as follows:

...turn lane. The north approach to the Baker Avenue and 2nd Street intersection has been configured with a 12-foot wide **through-right** lane for southbound traffic, **a 12-foot wide left turn lane for southbound traffic, and a 12-foot wide** through lane for northbound traffic. **A 7.4-foot wide shoulder marked to prohibit parking exists along the west side**

of the street on the north approach and a 9-foot wide parking lane exists along the east side of the street.

### ***Current/Planned Land Uses, Community Characteristics, and Environmental Setting***

The Memo examines current and planned land uses within central Whitefish, presents key demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the Whitefish community, and environmental considerations that could potentially influence the location or design of US 93 through the City of Whitefish. Dan noted that two planning documents—the Whitefish City-County Growth Policy and Downtown Business District Master Plan— address land uses in the corridor study area and that the Business District Master Plan has been adopted as part of the Growth Policy. Dan highlighted community growth trends and current and future populations for the City and Whitefish area. Dan also acknowledged several environmental conditions (the Whitefish River and associated wetlands, historic properties, and some hazardous materials concerns) that must be considered during project development and design activities for US 93. He also mentioned that the improvements to US 93 will be subject to the City’s newly adopted Critical Areas Ordinance.

**Comments from CAC Members:** In comments after the meeting, **Gary Stephens** asked about the significance of the corridor study area boundary shown in Figure 1 of the memo since community wide travel patterns influence the amount and distribution of traffic on US 93. Dan indicated the study area boundary provides a general area of interest for the discussion of land uses and environmental conditions.

**Karin Hilding** pointed out the City may face additional Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (MPDES) discharge permit requirements when the community exceeds 10,000 residents.

### ***Analysis of Future Traffic Conditions on US 93 through Whitefish***

The Memo looks at the future traffic conditions and operations of the US 93 corridor in Whitefish expected to occur in the year 2030. This analysis establishes a “baseline” of future conditions which can then be used to help evaluate potential design and improvement options in the US 93 corridor. The future conditions are based on assumptions of future employment and housing within the community and travel demand modeling developed as part of the Whitefish Transportation Plan.

Dan noted that the most apparent future deficiencies on the US 93 corridor will be:

- the poor operation of unsignalized intersections on Spokane Avenue caused by excessive side street vehicle delays;
- deteriorating LOS at the signalized intersections of Spokane Avenue and 13th Street and 2nd Street and Baker Avenue; and
- the continued inability for the intersection of 2nd Street and Baker Avenue to completely accommodate trucks.

He stated the analyses suggest significant increases in delay and resulting decreases in Level of Service (LOS) are anticipated along Spokane and Baker Avenues in peak hours by the year 2030.

**Comments from CAC Members:** No comments were offered specific to the content of this memo. **Shane Stack** asked if RPA optimized signal timing in our analysis of future conditions. Scott Randall responded that the analyses were done with and without optimizing signal timings.

**Karin Hilding** stated that there are obvious problems at signalized intersections on 2nd Street and she wondered what data was necessary and if any of the data can be collected in advance to help facilitate signal improvements sooner than later. The data typically needed for a signal analysis include intersection geometrics (i.e., lane configurations, lane widths, parking lanes) and turning movement counts during peak hours. Dan explained that much of this information exists and that turning movement counts have been conducted at various times during previous years at key signalized intersections.

**John Wilson** followed Karin's comments with a question about how soon a project could be developed to improve the signals and wondered if MDT could develop a separate project to undertake signal upgrades? **Shane** responded by stating that it may be possible to do a separate signal project and that a project addressing the three signals on 2nd Street could be accomplished in a relatively short timeframe (maybe a year) assuming there is no need for right-of-way acquisition. However, he noted that if NH (National Highway) System funds are very tight and MDT does not readily have the funding at this time for such a project. John suggested the Corridor Study (or Transportation Plan) discuss the process for undertaking an interim signal project on 2nd Street.

### ***Corridor Issues, Corridor Vision & Goals, and Statement of Purpose & Need***

The Memo highlights issues associated with the US Highway 93 corridor, reiterates past community input on corridor issues and needs from previous planning efforts and projects, and presents a corridor vision with goals to help identify and evaluate infrastructure improvement options for the corridor. He noted the goals and objectives for achieving the goals will form the basis for screening criteria used to help evaluate design and improvement options. Dan highlighted the following fundamental corridor needs based on previous input from community planning efforts and MDT's design projects:

- Need to Enhance Capacity and Improve Operational Efficiency
- Need to Improve Flow of Large Trucks in Corridor
- Need to Address Geometric and Design Deficiencies
- Need to Upgrade US 93 Infrastructure
- Need to Enhance Safety for Facility Users

He also noted that corridor improvements need to consider local land use plans and the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan; need to be conscious of environment and community character; and need to be feasible to implement.

**Comments from CAC Members:** In comments after the meeting, **Gary Stephens** highlighted a statement in the second bullet item under the "Safety" heading on page 2 of the memo that indicated crash rates were substantially higher than statewide averages for other urban areas. He indicated this contradicted a statement we made in the *Analysis of the Existing Corridor Transportation System* memo that says crash rates for a recent 3-year period are not considered high. A review of the

referenced bullet item showed the statement made on page 2 of the memo is correct based on the data presented in Figure 1-9 of the FEIS.

### ***Preliminary Conceptual Design and Improvement Options for the Corridor***

The Memo outlines the design and improvement options under initial consideration for the US 93 corridor through Whitefish. Dan explained the designs and options identified in the memo will be subject to a screening process to ultimately help determine which ones merit further detailed study. The conceptual design and improvement options for the corridor generally consist of:

- All alternatives for the Whitefish urban area described in the US Highway 93 Somers to Whitefish Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS);
- Design options developed after the Record of Decision (ROD) on the FEIS as part of project development activities for the MDT's Whitefish Urban project;
- Recommendations from the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan; and
- Other strategies that may potentially help relieve congestion and reduce future travel demands on the US 93 corridor.

Dan referenced a handout showing design configurations (build alternatives) considered in the Somers-Whitefish FEIS and four configurations developed after the ROD. He pointed out these options generally represent the most obvious ways to accommodate traffic flows within the corridor—two directional or one-way travel, couplet configurations using all or portions of Spokane and Baker Avenues, using 2, 3 or 4 lanes to accommodate traffic, and providing east west links between Spokane and Baker Avenues. He noted that without going substantially beyond this project area, no new or “previously undiscovered” design configurations are proposed for the corridor.

Dan also briefly discussed the potential indirect benefits to the corridor that may result from locally implemented “off-system improvements and several options or strategies not applicable to the corridor.

**Comments from CAC Members:** **George Gardner** commented that some of the options do not include portion of Baker Avenue south of 7th Street. He noted that the character of Baker Avenue will change notably (some of these changes are evident already) with corridor improvements making use of the street. In general discussion, it was noted that right-of-way is limited along portions of Baker Avenue and right-of-way acquisition may be difficult. **Karin** pointed out that during previous City improvement projects on Baker considerable time and effort was spent acquiring needed right-of-way.

This discussion expanded to include potential right-of-way issues on Spokane Avenue. Some of the design configurations could require new right-of-way along the street and could potentially impact boulevards along the roadway.

**Don Spivey** commented about the need for a safe pedestrian/bicyclist crossing of Spokane Avenue where the street crosses the Whitefish River north of 13th Street. He noted that the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee has requested that the culverts be replaced with a new bridge and provisions included that allow for a grade separated crossing of US 93 and for crossing from the east

to the west side of the river as the city's river corridor path is on the west side from that location down to the playing fields near Highway 40. He also pointed out that this had been discussed at a Citizens Working Group meeting in September 2005 and there appeared to be general agreement from MDT about including this design feature. Dan noted that he was aware that replacing the culverts with a bridge was part of the FEIS Preferred Alternative but dropped out of the Record of Decision due to cost reasons.

**Don Spivey** suggested that it be made clear at the public meeting that a design configuration has not been selected and the options presented in the handout are all under consideration.

### **Other General Comments and Discussion**

**Karin Hilding** commented about the potential benefits that might be realized if park-and-ride lots were paired with low cost bicycle rental service. She felt this could be a way to encourage summer peak season visitors to use alternate transportation modes and could help reduce the numbers of vehicles on the US 93 corridor.

**Mary Jo Look** asked why a bypass cannot be considered for Whitefish? She believes a bypass from Highway 40 and to US 93 west of Whitefish will greatly benefit the community and would receive much use by traffic wishing to pass through town. Shane pointed out that a bypass can be considered and has been examined in the Transportation Plan. Travel demand modeling suggests a bypass would likely see use; however, significant traffic volumes would still be present on the US 93 corridor and improvements would still be needed. The time required to identify and develop a potential bypass route, the associated high costs of right-of-way and construction, environmental concerns, and the potential for local opposition to a bypass were mentioned as other considerations for implementing a bypass in the community. Shane noted that if a bypass were developed to "replace" US 93 through Whitefish, there would be a potential to lose federal funding for Spokane Avenue and 2nd Street.

There was a general discussion about an enhancement to Karrow Avenue and whether the Whitefish-West project includes left turn provisions at the Karrow intersection.

**Monte Gilman** noted that he believes the projects recommended in the Transportation Plan will provide a solution to many of Whitefish's congestion problems. He supported the increased connectivity which is a basic philosophy of the Plan.

**Mary Person** commented that in her opinion, many of the community's transportation problems can be addressed through upgrades and more efficient use of existing facilities.

**Dave Taylor** asked when a revised version of the Transportation Plan might be available. Dan explained that the document should be available at the same time or shortly after the release of the Draft Corridor Study.

There was a general discussion of the newly completed bicycle and pedestrian path along Wisconsin Avenue. Issues discussed included the need for some minor signing revisions, the community's use

of the new path, and the conflicts caused by path users crossing in the vicinity of the Whitefish Lake Lodge.

In comments after the meeting, **Gary Stephens** expressed his opinion that the planning horizon for the Corridor Plan should really be 2050 since it is unlikely that improvements to US 93 through Whitefish would be completed given the current funding situation. Gary's concerns were acknowledged and it was pointed out that using such a horizon year would require making uncertain assumptions about future growth and employment in Whitefish.

**The meeting concluded around 6:10 p.m.**

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## Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 Resource Agency Workshop Meeting Summary

### Introduction

A Resource Agency Workshop was held on Thursday, May 24th in Conference Room A at MDT's Rail, Transit, and Planning Office at 2550 Prospect Avenue in Helena. The meeting took place between 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. and was attended by the following persons:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Sheila Ludlow | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Jean Riley    | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Carl James    | Federal Highway Administration                    |
| Bob Burkhardt | Federal Highway Administration                    |
| Steve Potts   | U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)        |
| Jeff Key      | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Dan Norderud  | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |
| Scott Randall | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |

### Other Agency Representatives Invited

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Scott Jackson   | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)             |
| Allan Stienle   | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE)                 |
| Jeff Ryan       | Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)  |
| Robert Ray      | Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)  |
| Julie Dalsaglio | U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)         |
| Jim Satterfield | Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) |
| Glenn Phillips  | Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) |
| Steve Knapp     | Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) |
| Mark Baumler    | Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)  |

In an effort to provide project information to invited agency representatives who did not attend the workshop, the PowerPoint presentation used for the workshop, and these meeting minutes, have been posted on the project website (<http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/whitefish/>) under the "Documents/Newsletters" link.

All invited agency representatives were provided with an agenda and other project information prior to the workshop to support and foster discussion during the meeting.

## **Workshop Purpose**

The purposes of this workshop were to: 1) introduce the Consultant Team to agency representatives; 2) provide an overview of the community-wide Transportation Plan and US 93 Urban Corridor Study projects; 3) compare and contrast the corridor planning and NEPA processes; 4) discuss existing conditions within the US 93 corridor and identify known corridor resource issues and concerns; and 5) solicit input from agency representatives on environmental resources along and affected by the highway corridor through Whitefish and possible regulatory concerns.

## **Workshop Summary**

### **Overview of the Whitefish Projects**

Jeff Key began the workshop by providing an overview of the Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects. He noted there are two (2) distinct projects underway in Whitefish—the Whitefish Transportation Plan and an Urban Corridor Study focused on US 93 within the City. The projects are cooperative efforts funded by MDT and the City of Whitefish that should be completed near the end of 2007.

Mr. Key explained that no comprehensive Transportation Study has been undertaken to date within the City and surrounding area and the time is right for such a study due to the land use changes and growth occurring in the community. The Transportation Plan will inventory and analyze the existing transportation system; forecast future development patterns and travel demands; and evaluate the forecasts to determine needed transportation improvements in the study area.

He stated that design work for MDT's "Whitefish Urban" and "Whitefish West" projects on US 93 began in 2005. These projects were developed based on the Preferred Alternative for US 93 outlined in the US Highway 93—Somers to Whitefish Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD). As part of the work for these projects, a Re-Evaluation of the findings and conclusions in the FEIS/ROD as they relate to the Whitefish Urban and Whitefish West project areas is underway. The preliminary results of this effort suggest unanticipated growth has changed traffic volumes and travel patterns within the community. Traffic analysis work also showed the Preferred Alternative for the Whitefish Urban project would not function as indicated in the FEIS/ROD. As a result, MDT and FHWA determined that additional studies and analyses of feasible alternatives are needed for US 93 through Whitefish and resulted in a decision to do a corridor study to take a fresh look at options for the US 93 corridor through Whitefish.

Mr. Key stressed that the Corridor Study will be developed within the context of and concurrent with the Whitefish Transportation Plan. This approach allows for a focused look at US 93 through Whitefish based on the consideration of existing and planned land use changes and a detailed evaluation of community-wide transportation needs and desires. He emphasized that these new planning efforts will be sensitive to prior community input and projects like: previous "subarea" transportation studies; the Somers to Whitefish FEIS/ROD; the recently adopted Downtown Business District Master Plan; and the community's current Growth Policy Update project.

The Corridor Study is not being completed in conjunction with a NEPA document but it will be developed and documented in a manner consistent with NEPA. Recommendations and appropriate supporting information from the Corridor Study will be forwarded into a future NEPA process.

### **Corridor Planning and NEPA**

Dan Norderud presented a series of PowerPoint slides that discussed Corridor Planning and how it relates to the NEPA process. The discussion identified elements of corridor studies and the potential benefits offered by undertaking corridor planning: reducing the cost of the environmental review process; speeding up project delivery time; and providing for early and ongoing involvement of agencies and the public. Mr. Norderud compared and contrasted Corridor Planning and the NEPA process and discussed how corridor planning can be used to “inform” the NEPA process through the identification of issues and system deficiencies, the development and screening of alternatives, and impact analyses. He explained that both processes have similar goals:

- Make decisions in the best overall interest of the community through a collaborative process; and
- Bring environmental considerations into agency planning and action.

### **Roles and Responsibilities and Public Involvement Activities**

Jeff Key identified all parties involved in the projects and remarked that the City of Whitefish appears to be very engaged in the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study. The Consultant Team is working with a Project Oversight Committee composed of members from MDT, FHWA, and the City of Whitefish. Conference calls among members of the committee are held every other week. A Citizens Advisory Committee composed of various stakeholders in Whitefish has also been formed as a sounding board for the projects.

Public involvement activities planned for the projects include four meetings with the Citizens Advisory Committee, four public information meetings, a presentation and a formal hearing for the Transportation Plan before the Whitefish City Council, and informal community meetings. The first public informational meeting and meetings with the Citizens Advisory Committee and the City Council were held in mid-April.

Mr. Key explained that various public outreach efforts are underway and planned including project newsletters (with distribution to over 5,000 community residents), an online travel preference survey, and a project website.

### **Existing Conditions Summary**

Mr. Key then presented an overview of the US 93 corridor and conditions within the community that have changed since the time of the Somers to Whitefish FEIS/ROD. He provided information about the functional classification of US 93, lane configurations and traffic controls, estimated traffic volumes, and land uses within the US 93 corridor. It was pointed out that large commercial motor vehicles accounted for 8-13% of traffic within the corridor at time of the Final EIS and that traffic

analyses have generally verified that the percentage of large trucks in the traffic stream remains an issue.

Mr. Key then identified notable changed conditions within the community and US 93 corridor including information documenting the notable growth, development, and land use changes within the Whitefish area. The information illustrated rapid growth rates and pointed out that migration of out-of-state residents into the area is a significant factor in this growth. Mr. Key advised the group that the City's new Growth Policy assumes controlled growth would occur within the community and forecasted the addition of about 2,400 new dwelling units over the next 12 years (the planning horizon for the Growth Policy). He also highlighted key objectives of the Downtown Business Master Plan and described recommendations of the plan that could influence the design of the US 93 corridor.

Mr. Key concluded by indicating that issues like livability issues and managing growth, alternate transportation modes (particularly pedestrian and bicycle facilities), aesthetics, environmental protection, and preserving the community's character and "small town" feel are highly important to Whitefish residents based on comments heard to date and previous planning efforts.

Dan Norderud then presented information about environmental resources present within the US 93 corridor including: air quality; surface waters/water quality/floodplains; threatened and endangered species; wetlands; general wildlife and fisheries; cultural resources; and hazardous materials. An aerial photo overlain with information about floodplains, wetlands, cultural resource sites, and hazardous materials sites was presented. The information presented was compiled from: previous resource documents prepared for the Somers to Whitefish FEIS; studies conducted in 2005 and 2006 that updated resource information for the Whitefish Urban and Whitefish West project areas; and new information generated for an environmental scan associated with the corridor study. Mr. Norderud explained that the environmental scan will be used to help identify fatal flaws, differences in potential impacts, and procedural requirements associated with alternatives considered for US 93.

### **Next Steps**

Mr. Key concluded the workshop presentation by summarizing work in progress and briefly outlining upcoming activities for the projects. He indicated that only one agency workshop has been planned but agencies will be kept apprised of progress on the projects.

### **Comments/Discussion**

Jeff Key indicated during his presentation that there are some differences regarding the City's managed growth scenario for the community and growth assumptions made for traffic analyses done for the Whitefish Urban project. Bob Burkhardt of FHWA asked if it would be misleading to present two differing growth scenarios in the traffic modeling for the transportation plan. Jeff responded that a decision regarding the most appropriate growth scenario has not yet been made; however, he felt that the scenario representing the worst case for traffic should be used to help identify necessary system improvements.

Steve Potts indicated that based on the materials presented at the workshop, he believed the issues of interest to EPA are known and will be addressed in the corridor planning effort.

There was general discussion among the group about PM-2.5 non-attainment areas since monitoring has shown particulate levels in Whitefish over the 2002-2005 period approached the recently revised 24-hr average standard for PM-2.5. Steve Potts indicated Libby was the only PM-2.5 non-attainment area in Montana and identified Betsy Wahl as an EPA staff member that can provide further information about PM-2.5 non-attainment status.

The group also discussed how recommendations from the corridor study may be incorporated into NEPA documents and that corridor planning may help identify less costly and phased approaches to resolving transportation issues. This may enable some projects to be more easily advanced through the environmental review process.

Jean Riley also suggested that agencies be provided with advance copies of the corridor study. This would keep agencies up to date on the direction of the project and could help identify notable issues or concerns early in the process.

Jean Riley also asked about if the City's proposed Growth Policy could push growth outside Whitefish's jurisdictional area. Jeff Key indicated that the Growth Policy has not yet been adopted and some resistance to a limited growth idea has been heard. He pointed out that if growth shifts beyond the jurisdictional area, the effect may not be too significant on US 93 since residents still have to use the roadway for travel within and through the community.

### **Follow-Up Actions**

Scott Jackson of the USFWS was unable to attend the workshop due to prior commitments. Scott requested a meeting to be set on a different date to discuss the Whitefish projects and obtain input on potential Threatened/Endangered species issues. MDT will contact Scott and set up a meeting.

**The workshop concluded at 3:00 p.m.**

## **Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 May 30, 2007 Coordination Meeting with the USFWS**

A meeting with Scott Jackson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was held on Wednesday, May 30th in Conference Room B at MDT's Rail, Transit, and Planning Office at 2550 Prospect Avenue in Helena. The meeting was arranged because Scott Jackson was unable to attend the Resource Agency Workshop held on May 24, 2007. Scott was provided with a copy of the slides from the PowerPoint presentation made at the Agency Workshop.

The meeting took place from 8:30 to 10:00 a.m. and was attended by the following persons:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Sheila Ludlow | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Jean Riley    | MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena) |
| Dan Norderud  | Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)         |

The purposes of this meeting were to provide an overview of the community-wide Transportation Plan and US 93 Urban Corridor Study projects and solicit input from the USFWS on environmental resources along and affected by the highway corridor through Whitefish and possible regulatory concerns.

### **Meeting Summary**

Dan Norderud began with a brief overview of the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Corridor Study. He summarized MDT's efforts to develop the "Whitefish Urban" and "Whitefish West" projects—developed based on the Preferred Alternative identified in the US Highway 93—Somers to Whitefish Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) completed in 1994. Dan pointed out that work done for these projects, suggests unanticipated growth has changed traffic volumes and travel patterns within the community. Traffic analysis work also showed the Preferred Alternative (a one-way couplet design) for the Whitefish Urban project would not function as indicated in the FEIS/ROD.

Mr. Norderud indicated MDT and FHWA determined that additional studies and analyses of feasible alternatives for US 93 through Whitefish were needed. MDT and the City of Whitefish agreed to prepare a community-wide Transportation Plan and review design options for US 93 in Whitefish. This approach will allow for a focused look at the US 93 corridor considering existing land uses and planned land use changes; community-wide transportation needs and desires; and local planning efforts like the recently adopted Downtown Business District Master Plan and the ongoing Growth Policy Update project. Dan stated that recommendations and appropriate supporting information from the Corridor Study will be forwarded into a future NEPA process.

The discussion then focused on threatened and endangered species. Scott related that the following endangered, threatened, proposed, and candidate species are listed for Flathead County:

- Canada lynx – Listed Threatened with Designated Critical Habitat
- Gray wolf – Listed Endangered
- Grizzly bear – Listed Threatened
- Bald eagle – Listed Threatened
- Bull trout – Listed Threatened with Designated Critical Habitat
- Spalding's Campion – Listed Threatened

Habitat availability, species distribution, the potential impacts associated with improving US Highway 93, and measures to minimize impacts to potentially affected species were discussed among those attending the meeting. These discussions are summarized below.

**Bull Trout.** Scott stated that Whitefish Lake and tributaries above the lake have been designated as critical habitat for bull trout. The Whitefish River, which flows southeasterly from Whitefish Lake to join the Stillwater River, is within bull trout range but does not provide high quality habitat for the species. He pointed out that water quality and temperature are the principal reasons for the habitat limitations in the river.

Scott indicated that he had previously discussed the reconstruction of US 93 through with biological resources consultants assisting with the Whitefish Urban and Whitefish West projects. He was aware of the need to cross the Whitefish River at several locations. Jean Riley pointed out that the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS/ROD called for a new bridge across the river at 7th Street linking Spokane and Baker Avenues. Scott noted that USFWS has not had to consider many “new” bridges across bull trout waters in recent years. He said building a new bridge presents a concern but would not be a “deal stopper” given the quality of habitat being crossed in Whitefish.

Scott recommended that design efforts should attempt to minimize impacts and encroachment on the Whitefish River through measures like minimizing the number of piers and adequately accommodating flood flows. He also wondered if consideration could be given to replacing the existing culverts with a bridge where Spokane Avenue crosses the river in the southern portion of the corridor. Dan mentioned that a bridge on Spokane Avenue at the identified crossing was being discussed for the Whitefish Urban project. He also said the community had an interest in developing a pedestrian/bicycle trail along the river and some type of crossing under the highway would be desirable at this location.

**Bald Eagles.** Scott indicated that bald eagles could potentially be found foraging along the Whitefish River. He was not aware of any bald eagle nests in the immediate Whitefish area and that information on nesting can be obtained through a request to the Natural Heritage Program. Scott said that bald eagles are becoming more frequent in urban areas and there are some instances of bald eagle nests being established in urban areas. Limitations on construction activities could be possible if a nest were. In general, Scott felt that the same type of minimization measures discussed for bull trout would generally benefit foraging eagles and other aquatic species.

**Grizzly Bears.** Scott provided a map showing the boundaries of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the distribution of grizzly bears in 2002. The species distribution map showed that grizzly bears could occur in Whitefish. He felt there are no notable issues related to grizzly bears if US 93 improvements occur along the existing urban corridor. There could be some concern if work for the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study suggest the development of a new bypass route through a more rural area of the community. The principal issue related for grizzly bears for the area was ensuring “good housekeeping” practices and sanitation during construction.

**Canada Lynx and Gray Wolf.** Scott does not there are any issues associated with these species within the US 93 Corridor or the remainder of the study area for the Transportation Plan. The nearest critical habitat for Canada lynx is in Glacier National Park.

**Spalding’s Campion.** Scott indicated the project does not pose a concern for this threatened plant species since suitable habitat for the species does not occur in the immediate Whitefish area.

### **Follow-Up Actions**

Jean Riley suggested that RPA contact Montana FWP staff in the Whitefish area for their input on wildlife/fisheries resources and relevant issues. RPA will contact Tim Their, Mark Delaray, and Tim Manley and document their comments.

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