

# 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

NAME	ADDRESS / P.O. Box	City	Email Address
JEFF Key	825 Custer Ave.	Helena	jeffkey@sp9-hl.mt.gov
DAN Nordlund	825 Custer Ave.	Helena	dand@sp9-hl.mt.gov
OLE NETTEBERG	5491 Hwy 93 So	Whitefish	netter2@centurytel.net
Sheila Ludlow	2150 Prospect Ave	Helena	sludlow@mt.gov
Susan Kilcream	2100 W. Broadway	M. S. Sault	skilcream@mt.gov
GEORGE S. GARDNER	2339 NORDIC LOOP	WHITEFISH	
STEVE PLEASANTS	533 SPOKANE AVE W	WHITEFISH	DR.PCHIED@CENTURYTEL.NET
John Chaney	609 Baker	Whitefish	johnchaney@csosb.edu
Gary S Topkens	1470 Barkley Lane	"	gary.stopkens@centurytel.net
HAP PETERS	4660 WHITEFISH STAGE	"	hap1@bigtym.net

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
Don Stanley	P.O. Box 628	Whitefish	dsjess@diggs.net
Martin Fisher	10 Firway Drive	Whitefish	
Dave Kauffman	Bx 91	Whitefish	
Nancy Swenmungen	310 Glenwood Rd	Whitefish	swenmbresnan.net
Mark Swenmungen			
Ed Prad	110 GOAT TRAIL	WHITEFISH	
Mary Jo Leach	890 Fairway Dr	Whitefish	
Bob Beckwith	550 Grand Ridge Drive	Whitefish	
Stammow Nancy	1805 Awt 93 S. 240	Whitefish	
Julie Perchy	390 Missy Lane	Whitefish	snwperch@centurytel.net

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

NAME	ADDRESS / P.O. Box	City	Email Address
Ches SCHWITZKO	504 SPokane AVENUE	WHITEFISH	gardens.digi@igs.net
RHONDA FITZGERALD	412 LUPFAC	WFSH	
Dorothy/Caris Nunnen	P.O. 856	Whitefish	dngans@yaho.com
Sheyla Bowen	520 E 2nd St	Whitefish	shawne@whitefishchamber.org
Shane Stack			
Karin Hilding			

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