

Newsline

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Newsletter of the Montana Department of Transportation Rail, Transit & Planning Division

September 2013

MDT Centennial Celebration – Good Roads Day Kick-off a Success



Good Roads Day, June 18, marked the official kick-off of the Centennial celebration of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Hundreds of people joined MDT at the Capitol for an afternoon of vintage cars and transportation history. Thanks to sponsors AAA MountainWest, Montana Contractors Association, and the Montana Motor Carriers Association many enjoyed a great meal. The Capitol Rotunda was filled with 100 years of highlights, telling MDT's story through pictures, maps, and quotes.



MDT's beginning was simple: three commissioners (one being the chief engineer), a stenographer, and an annual budget of \$5,000. The idea that one day the Montana State Highway Commission would evolve into the Montana Department of Transportation or that one hundred years later, there would be an interconnection of state, county, and local roads totaling 75,000 centerline miles (12,920 on the state highway system), is likely beyond the vision of the 1913 Legislature. Those legislators would likely not believe that one day 11.7 billion annual vehicle miles would be traveled in the state in a year.

Today MDT is more than building roads and bridges. The department:

- Clears winter roads, last year covering over three million miles
- Provides travel information for road conditions
- Inspects commercial vehicles for safety and compliance
- Helps communities plan their transportation systems
- Funds transit, emergency response vehicles and equipment, and traffic safety programs
- Owns 15 public use airports
- Provides civilian air search and rescue
- Builds and maintains bicycle and pedestrian facilities

These are just the beginning of the long list of responsibilities the department takes care of each year. MDT strives to deliver a statewide, inter-connected transportation network that includes

roadways, airways, airports, railways, traffic safety, and public transit, along with bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.

Though the 1913 Legislature couldn't have imagined what the future would bring for the department and Montana, MDT is looking into the future. The department knows that as vehicles become more fuel efficient and alternate forms of transportation gain popularity, fuel tax collections will decrease. MDT also understands Montana's precarious position regarding federal funding. The department will continue partnering, planning, investing in existing assets, working smarter, and seeking funding solutions that will provide for a reliable transportation system into the next 100 years.

After all, safely moving Montanans to work, medical appointments, shopping, and recreational activities and moving raw and finished products in and out of the state is critical to daily life and a thriving Montana economy.



Trooper Brian Inman, Montana Highway Patrol, shows a restored 1935 Ford Coupe, a 1973 restored Ford Police Interceptor, and a new cruiser.



MDT Maintenance Crew Leader Matt Komac (left) and Motor Carrier Services Patrol Officer Jim Kinsey (right) with vehicles from their divisions.



Antique and muscle cars from around Montana added to the celebration.

New Supervisors at Rail, Transit & Planning Division



*Transit Section Supervisor
David Jacobs*

David Jacobs is the new Transit Section Supervisor. He has been with MDT for 15 years in Transportation Planning and worked in the Transit Section for 13 of those years.

In 2009, David and his Transit Team received the Governor's Award for Excellence for their work in expanding public transportation across Montana. In his free time, David enjoys spending time with family and friends. Contact him at 444-9192 or dajacobs@mt.gov.



*Traffic Safety Section
Supervisor Janet Kenny*

Janet Kenny was selected as the State Highway Traffic Safety Section Supervisor. She has worked for the state of Montana for 15 years with eight of those at MDT. She served the last five years as the CMAQ Program Manager and Rail Planner in the Rail, Air Quality, and Studies Section.

Janet enjoys singing in community music groups and spending time with her family, friends, and pets. Contact her at 444-7417 or jakenny@mt.gov.



*Resources Section
Supervisor Bill Semmens*

Bill Semmens was recently selected to serve as the Resources Section Supervisor in the Environmental Services Bureau. He has been with MDT for eight years in the Resources Section as the Billings District Biologist.

In his free time, Bill likes to hunt, fish, hike, and golf. He can be contacted at 444-7227 or bsemmens@mt.gov.



*Statewide & Urban Section
Supervisor Carol Strizich*

Carol Strizich is the new Statewide & Urban Section Supervisor. She has worked for MDT for 14 years, holding various positions, including Systems Impact Planner, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator, and most recently as the Butte and Billings District Planner and Comprehensive Highway Safety Program Manager.

In her free time, Carol enjoys hiking, biking, and skiing with family and friends. She can be contacted at 444-9240 or cstrizich@mt.gov.

MAP-21 Provides MDT Bridge Program Opportunities

Just over a year ago, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) was signed into law. With the enactment of MAP-21, MDT experienced a change in program structure to the Federal-Aid Highway Program with regard to the funding of bridge work on Montana's highways. The most notable change was the removal of dedicated bridge program funding beginning in 2013.

MAP-21 significantly loosened the eligibilities for bridge-related activities. MDT now has many more options for addressing geometric and safety issues, as well as greater freedom in preserving and rehabilitating existing bridges.

While dedicated Bridge Program funding was discontinued in MAP-21, allowances were made to utilize National Highway Performance Program (NHPP) funds for bridge work on Interstate and National Highway System (NHS) routes. Additionally, Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds can now be used for bridge work on primary, secondary, urban, and off-system routes. Initially, there were some concerns that this funding shift would result in a reduction of available funds for MDT's bridge program. However, the total dollars available for Montana's core programs remained relatively unchanged.

As for the amount of money that actually goes to MDT's

bridge program, funding levels are determined via MDT's asset management approach, termed the Performance Programming Process. As part of this process, bridge needs are identified and prioritized against other system needs to determine the most optimal funding mix possible. Therefore, MDT's bridge program funding is not directly driven by changes at the federal level. While MAP-21 may have eliminated dedicated federal funding for bridges, MDT's bridge program remains fully funded.

MAP-21 advanced a new performance metric relating to structurally deficient bridges on NHS routes. This requirement stated that less than 10 percent of total NHS bridge deck area can be on structurally deficient bridges. Presently, Montana exceeds this standard with a value that stands at around six percent. Lastly, MAP-21 required that each state maintain a minimum contribution to the Off-System Bridge Program. Montana vastly exceeds this requirement.

At first glance, it appeared as if MAP-21 would provide many challenges for Montana's bridge program. In reality, it now appears that MAP-21 has provided MDT with more opportunities. MDT is ready to take advantage of these opportunities to maintain the high standard of excellence that Montanans have come to expect for their bridge program.

MDT Receives National Value Engineering Awards



Left to right, Terry Berends, Washington DOT, and outgoing AASHTO Value Engineering Technical Committee Chair; Gerry Brown, MDT Value Engineering Team Leader; Ray Sacks, MDT Value Engineering Team Leader and AASHTO Value Engineering Technical Committee member, and Nancy Yoo, Design Support Director with Minnesota DOT.

MDT received recognition at the 2013 AASHTO Value Engineering Peer Exchange Workshop in Minneapolis. National Value Engineering (VE) Awards were given in six categories selected by the AASHTO Value Engineering Technical Committee. MDT brought home top honors in the Improved Performance category and an Honorable Mention Award with a most-value-added proposal in the Pre-construction Engineering Costs Less Than \$25 Million category. (MDT scored highest in this category as well, but only one first-place award can be given to an individual state.) The purpose of the awards is to acknowledge state departments of transportation VE program efforts in demonstrating the outstanding value engineering achievements in:

- Teamwork.
- Cost and schedule savings.
- Innovation.
- Enhanced performance and constructability, or expedited project delivery that resulted in an overall improved project.

MDT representatives at the 2013 AASHTO Value Engineering Peer Exchange Workshop also gave a presentation on a paper titled *MDT's VALUE ANALYSIS PROGRAM "Inception to Success,"* to an audience of VE enthusiasts from across the country, Puerto Rico, and Canada. The purpose of the paper and presentation was to provide information about MDT's Value Analysis (VA) Program, describing the journey from its beginning to present-day activities. The presentation benefited attendees from state DOTs, local governments, and transportation authorities that have a small transportation improvement program utilizing federal aid highway funding. The paper addressed several objectives:

- A process and schedule for developing and implementing MDT's VA program.
- A procedure for training VA Team (VAT) members.
- The evolution of the VA study process since initial implementation.
- A summary of MDT's progress, success, and performance measures.

This paper and presentation demonstrates how an agency with a relatively small staff can develop and implement an effective VA program in a short time period that meets Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) requirements and the expectations of the agency's senior managers and decision makers.

The audience gained skills and knowledge on how to develop

and implement an effective VA program, especially for those agencies that do not have the resources to hire, train, and maintain a staff dedicated exclusively to VA activities. MDT's VA program was established February 15, 2005 to address escalating project costs combined with funding constraints and meet FHWA requirements, as well as more restrictive MDT requirements for potential VA study projects. Prior to October 1, 2012, VA studies were conducted to meet FHWA requirements for projects greater than \$25 million. As of October 1, 2012 VA studies have been conducted to meet the new FHWA requirements for projects greater than \$50 million. MDT's more restrictive requirements are projects \$8 million or more, and of average or greater complexity, unique design features or special constraints, urban construction, or special programs or processes.

MDT's program is called "Value Analysis" to distinguish it from the contractor-initiated VE cost reduction process outlined in the Standard Specifications. Value Analysis/Engineering is defined as the systematic application of recognized techniques by multi-disciplined teams which identifies the function of a product or service; establishes a worth for that function; generates alternatives through the use of creative thinking; and provides the needed functions reliably, at the lowest overall cost. MDT's process is a formal one that involves numerous MDT and FHWA staff that complete a study and senior managers to review, discuss, and implement feasible study recommendations. The process is outlined in the MDT VA Program Manual available at http://mdtinfo.mdt.mt.gov/other/const/internal/manuals_guides/va_manual.pdf.

The VA/Design Build/Constructability Review Section of the Construction Engineering Services (CES) Bureau housed in the Engineering Division is responsible for the VA program, including study follow-up, program monitoring, and effectiveness reporting.

Since program implementation, 50 VA studies have been conducted on MDT projects having a total estimated cost of \$982,387,920 resulting in 235 recommendations having potential cost savings of \$165,535,868. Although not all recommendations are adopted, actual cost savings from accepted recommendations are estimated to be \$84,875,434. The program realizes a 101:1 return on investment.

A special thanks to the members of the two VA Studies that won the two national awards this year and to the numerous MDT and FHWA staff who are trained and participate on MDT's Value Analysis Teams. This program would not be successful without these efforts.

Montana Transportation Commission Schedule

The Montana Transportation Commission is scheduled to meet at 9:00 am September 26 at the Red Lion Colonial Inn at 2301 Colonial Drive in Helena and 8:30 am October 31 in the Montana Department of Transportation Commission Room at 2701 Prospect Avenue in Helena. Agenda items for the October meeting are due by 5:00 pm on October 1.

For more information, contact Commission Secretary Lori Ryan at 444-6821 or lryan@mt.gov.

Tribal and Annual Transportation Safety Meetings – October 15-17

The 2013 Tribal Transportation Safety Summit and the Annual Transportation Safety Meeting are scheduled for October 15-17 at The Gateway Center, 1710 National Avenue in Helena.

These events bring together safety partners and stakeholders to assess Montana's progress on improving transportation safety and discuss strategies to reduce crashes. Areas of emphasis include seat-belt use, alcohol & impaired driving, Native Americans, young drivers, single vehicle run-off-the-road, large vehicle & bus, motorcycle, older driver, traffic records management, high-crash corridor/high crash locations, and emergency medical services.

These emphasis areas are listed in *Montana's Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan*, a data-driven, collaborative effort of state agencies, local and tribal governments, and others to work towards reducing crashes on Montana's roadways. It is located on the Web at www.mdt.mt.gov/safety/plans-programs/chsp.shtml.

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

Highway Safety Improvement Program

The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) is a federal program and an element of MDT's Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP). The HSIP funds infrastructure-related highway safety improvements that contribute toward the goal of halving the number of fatal and serious injuries by 2030. Most of these improvements involve signing, striping, delineation, guardrail installation, slope flattening, intersection improvements, and roadway realignment.

The locations are generally identified by crash trends based on the number of crashes, crash rates, severity of crashes, or a combination of these factors. Improvements can also be identified based on the statewide crash issues identified in the Montana CHSP. An example would be installation of rumble strips or curve warning signs to address identified single-vehicle-run-off-the-road crash issue.

Citizens or local agencies can submit a location for consideration. Local road agencies will need to include a safety priority list, provide an accident analysis and traffic information (if available), and identify proposed improvements, including any site constraints (right-of-way acquisition, utility relocations, etc.). A local road agency may submit up to five locations annually. The deadline for submitting a location is the end of the calendar year for projects to be reviewed during the spring of the following year. An application is available on the MDT Internet site at http://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/forms/hsip_application.pdf.

After MDT receives the applications from local road agencies, the Safety Engineering Section prepares an annual list of priorities. MDT then develops a program for improvements subject to funding availability. The Transportation Commission approves the list of safety improvement projects.

For more information on the Highway Safety Improvement Program, contact Kraig McLeod at 444-6256 or kmcleod@mt.gov.

Aeronautics Celebrates 100 Years of Service

The Aeronautics Division continued MDT's Centennial Celebration with an open house August 19 in conjunction with the Helena Regional Airport. The event kicked off with remarks from Lt. Governor John Walsh, MDT Director Mike Tooley, and Helena Regional Airport Manager Ron Mercer. Over 30 aircraft from the area provided an interesting static display for the crowd. Rick Griffith, retired manager of the Bert Mooney Airport in Butte and MDT Transportation Commissioner, provided a catered lunch. The Helena Chapter 344 of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) provided young eagle airplane rides for close to 100 kids ages 7-17, and musician Dan Hunthausen provided entertainment. Many thanks to all who made this event a success, including the several hundred people who attended.



Left to right are Helena Regional Airport Manager Ron Mercer, MDT Director Mike Tooley, Chris Bokovoy, and Lt. Governor John Walsh.

MDT's Aeronautics Division is responsible for providing for the protection and promotion of safety in aeronautics, cooperating in effecting a uniformity of the laws relating to the development and regulation of aeronautics, revising state statutes relative to the development and regulation of aeronautics, establishing uniform regulations relating to aeronautics, and providing for cooperation with the federal authorities in the development of a national system of civil aviation.

Seatbelt Survey Conducted



MDT conducted Montana's 2013 Seatbelt Survey in June. For two weeks, a dedicated team of MDT employees observed the front seats of more than 13,000 vehicles on Montana roadways. Another team of Buckle Up Montana Coalition coordinators assisted in the survey by recording quality assurance collection site spot checks throughout the data collection period.

Federal requirements for conducting an annual seatbelt survey called for a new set of sampling sites for 2013. The sites chosen provided a broad sampling of Montana roadways.

Preliminary examination of the data shows that approximately 79 percent of front seat occupants of motor vehicles in Montana were wearing seatbelts during the survey, which is relatively the same as recent years.

For more information, contact Mark Keeffe at 444-3430 or mkeeffe@mt.gov.

Watch For Wildlife This Fall While Driving

Fall is an active time for wildlife in the Big Sky state. Cooler weather, mating season, and hunting activity alters wildlife movements across the state. Additionally, drivers experience less daylight during commute times and variable weather conditions. With that in mind, MDT reminds motorists to use extra caution when driving this fall to avoid animal-vehicle collisions by following these tips from Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

- Continuously scan for wildlife on the road, in the ditch, and on the shoulders of the road. If you see an animal, slow down and prepare for it to dart onto the road. Use your brakes and not your steering wheel.
- Be especially watchful from dusk to dawn when animals are most active. Avoid driving on cruise control during these hours, and drive at a lower speed.
- Use extra caution near posted wildlife crossings. These areas are places where wildlife are likely to cross roads to reach food, water, and shelter. Be alert and slow your speed in these areas.
- Be aware that deer and elk rarely travel alone. When one crosses the road, prepare to avoid others that may follow.
- For help or to report a collision, call the city police, county sheriff, or the Montana Highway Patrol, depending on where the crash occurs.

MDT also reminds drivers to always wear a seatbelt when driving or riding, and wear a helmet while riding a motorcycle.

International Walk and Bike to School Days



International Walk to School Day is October 9, 2013 and the International Bike to School Day is scheduled for May 7, 2014. Go to: <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/> to find out more about these programs.

Transit Tales

Transit Section Aces State Management Review

MDT's Transit Section recently completed a State Management Review (SMR) by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Every three years the Transit Section undergoes a SMR by FTA to ensure compliance with federal regulations in more than 14 areas. The review also checks with Transit systems that receive funding from MDT to ensure MDT is providing those systems with the guidance and support needed to be successful.

This year, MDT received a perfect score with no deficiencies in any area of the review. This is an achievement that many states fail to master. As one FTA representative stated, "In my 17 years of working for the FTA, I have never seen a review with zero deficiencies!" The Transit Section works very hard for the public transportation riders of Montana to ensure that all state and federal regulations are followed for its grant recipients.

For more information, contact David Jacobs at 444-9192 or dajacobs@mt.gov.

Funding Awarded for Safe Routes to School Projects

Montana's Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program for SFY2014 is now in full swing. Whether it is K-5 classroom activities, developing and building safe roadway skills, or sidewalks that provide safe and secure access to school campuses, many communities have benefitted from this program. Communities were provided seed money to start SRTS programs and are encouraged to continue them with local support. Montana projects were awarded \$1,131,333 for 11 infrastructure and 22 non-infrastructure projects for SFY2014.

However, this is the final year for the SRTS program in Montana. MAP-21, the new federal highways funding legislation, will continue to provide Montana communities with the opportunity to apply for funding to continue local SRTS programs. Communities will need to apply for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects through Montana's Transportation Alternatives (TA) program. Information on Montana's TA program can be found at http://www.mdt.mt.gov/mdt/ta_application.shtml.

Information on Montana's SRTS is available online at <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/saferoutes>.

For more information on the SRTS program, contact David Jacobs at 444-9192 or dajacobs@mt.gov.

Equipment Program Helps Improve Community Air Quality

Seventeen Montana communities will be breathing a little easier with help from the Montana Department of Transportation. MDT is again providing assistance to local governments through the department's Montana Air & Congestion Initiative (MACI). The program is aimed at improving air quality through the use of state-of-the-art street maintenance equipment.

Communities eligible for the equipment are those in nonattainment of federal air quality standards for fine dust or are identified as "at-risk" of experiencing readings that violate the standards monitored by the Department of Environmental Quality. Maintenance equipment includes street sweepers, flush trucks, and deicing equipment. The local government match for the program is 13.42 percent with MDT providing the balance through federal funds.

Communities will use the new equipment to disperse non-polluting deicer material in the winter, collect leftover traction sand, and keep streets clean of particulate matter and debris.

This year a total of \$4.6 million is being invested in equipment to improve air quality. MDT developed the MACI program in 1998 to distribute funds from the Federal Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement Program.

Find MDT on Social Media



MDT is expanding the department's use of social media to reach more people and provide timely information to the public. The department has been utilizing Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for several years and recently expanded to Pinterest.



Social media allows users to quickly access an abundance of information. With that in mind, MDT is making a concerted effort to increase the information available about the department and transportation in Montana via these mediums. Using social media, MDT has expanded the department's ability to communicate and respond quickly to the public.



Sharing photos of weather events that affect travel, such as the past spring flooding, is just one example of what MDT is now posting on Facebook. MDT's YouTube channel includes video of maintenance crews clearing the Beartooth Highway along with compelling videos advocating sober driving and seat belt use.

Check out MDT's social media sites to find out what is happening at MDT and transportation in the state.

Facebook - www.facebook.com/montanadot

Flickr - www.flickr.com/photos/montanadot

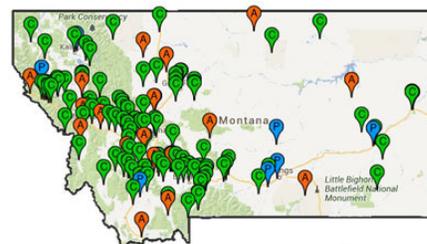
Twitter - www.twitter.com/mdtroadreport

Pinterest - pinterest.com/montanadot

YouTube - www.youtube.com/montanadot

Research Corner

The Research Program has developed a [map](#) to visualize research projects. This map has three sets of filters. The first filter allows users to view research projects, experimental projects, or both. The second filter allows users to view projects by status (active, pending, and/or completed). The third filter allows users to view projects by MDT district. For more information, contact Sue Sillick at 444-7693 or ssillick@mt.gov.



New Research Projects

During the May Research Review Committee meeting, five new projects were approved to move forward to technical panels for further development. They include the following:

[MAP 21: The Primary National Freight Network and Its Relationship to State Systems and Needs](#)

The US DOT, under current transportation legislation (MAP-21) is working to designate a Primary Freight Network (PFN). State departments of transportation are to provide input and designate the Rural Freight Corridors to the PFN and the rest of the Interstate System. This proposed research plan would assist MDT in providing input for this national freight strategy and gather information to develop tools and metrics to identify relevant state freight routes.

[Safety Impact of Differential Speed Limits on Rural Two-lane Highways in Montana](#)

On May 28, 1999, Montana law establishes a differential speed limit between commercial and passenger vehicles. Nationwide, research has been completed analyzing the safety impacts of differential speed limits between commercial and passenger vehicles; however, the research has focused on interstate or controlled access facilities. No research has been located discussing the safety impacts of differential speed limits on two-lane roads, especially those with limited passing opportunities.

The proposed research will include a review of studies evaluating statutory speed differential completed by other states or at the national level. Researchers will also review historical, Montana-specific crash and speed data on select corridors to determine the safety effects of the statutory, differential speed limit.

[Special Event Traffic](#)

Planned special events, such as sports competitions, concerts, etc., produce nonrecurring congestion as attendees attempt to exit the event, overloading the local transportation network. To a lesser extent, the arrival for special events can also overload parts of the local transportation network. These types of events can have a significant impact on traffic operations, particularly in small urban and rural environments where limited infrastructure is available to access and egress the venue. The proposed research will investigate three venues (MetraPark-Billings, Montana State University-Bozeman, and the University of Montana-Missoula) to evaluate past practices and determine additional possible future practices. Based on the development of best management practices, a traffic manage-

Continued on next page

Change in Direction: The Federal Highway Act of 1921

By Jon Axline, MDT Historian

Beginning in 1919, the Montana State Highway Commission and the Montana Highway Department established themselves as key players in the state's road-building efforts. The commission developed policies, while the department's engineers designed projects, did survey work, and oversaw the contract bidding process. Despite their greater role in the road building process, the commission and the department still functioned primarily as advisory bodies to the counties to ensure that roads and bridges met current national standards. The counties provided the matching funds for federal money, not the state of Montana. That detail was an enormous obstacle in the development of a standardized interstate highway system. The relationship between the state and the counties was often a rocky one. Unless the state controlled all aspects of the road building process in Montana, it ran the risk of returning funds to the federal government and the state would lag in infrastructure improvements. The solution would require innovative federal legislation and a willingness on the part of the state to take the reins of the road building process from the counties.

In March 1921, the Seventeenth State Legislature abolished the cumbersome twelve-man highway commission and replaced it with a three-man panel. Governor Joseph Dixon appointed George Lanstrum as the Highway Commissioner, whose "duties [were] regulatory and broadly executive and all employees of the . . . department [were] subject to his orders and instructions." Essentially, Lanstrum functioned in the same capacity as the MDT Director does today. He was the only salaried member of the highway commission. Lanstrum was assisted by two individuals who attended the monthly commission meeting, but received only per diem for their time.

Eight months later, Congress enacted the Federal Aid Road Act of 1921, which appropriated \$75 million to the states for road improvements. Montana's share of the money was \$1.5 million. In an effort to increase the power of the state highway departments, the act specified that all construction and maintenance done on federal aid highways had to be performed under the highway department's direct supervision. Most importantly, the legislation established the Seven Percent System, an effort to empower the highway departments by limiting the amount of mileage on which federal funds could be expended and encourage the establishment of an interstate highway system. Designated by the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) and the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), the system consisted of seven percent of the total mileage in each state. Federal funds expended under the 1921 Road Act concentrated on primary roads, but also made provisions for secondary roads that connected county seats, and federal roads within municipalities. There were a total of 67,747 miles of county and state roads in Montana of which 4,742 miles was on the state's Seven Percent System. The federal government supplemented Montana's 1921 appropriation with an additional \$4 million in 1922.

Despite the increased amount of federal funding available for road projects, the highway commission believed that it would matter little in Montana. The highway department prioritized projects based on importance to the state's overall highway system and tried to improve the worst sections of highway first. All too frequently, however, a county asked the highway commission to initiate a federal aid project "which, after considerable expense had been incurred by the department, the local officials later decide to postpone or abandon." Because Montana was suffering through an economic depression during much of the 1920s, some counties

were unable to finance their share of federal aid projects or did not cooperate with the highway department because projects were too costly. These problems made it difficult for the highway department to establish a construction program. It was obvious to the highway commission that if federal legislation was going to work in Montana, it needed to be free of county interference.

The best way to do that, the commission felt, was to provide the highway commission with its own source of revenue to match federal funds. To that end, the 1921 Legislature enacted a one cent per gallon gasoline tax with a portion of the revenue going to the State Highway Fund. The legislature increased the tax in 1923 to two cents per gallon, but, instead, dumped the highway department's twenty percent of the funds into the counties' kitty. The result was a serious shortfall in the highway department's budget which impeded its program and resulted in employee layoffs.

The Federal Aid Road Act of 1921 revolutionized the relationship between federal and state governments in how highways were financed and built. Indeed, all subsequent highway bills until the end of the Interstate Highway era were based on the 1921 Act. Even with the roadblocks, the highway department managed to improve nearly 700 miles of roads and build several substantial bridges, including the Skalkaho Road and the Bonner Bridge near Missoula, in the early 1920s. In 1926, the counties were removed entirely from the process with the passage of the Good Roads Law. But that's a story for another issue . . .

New Research Projects *continued from previous page*

ment strategy will be developed for each venue, as well as for special event traffic management strategies throughout the state.

[Speed Limits Set Lower Than Engineering Recommendations](#)

Montana has various speed limits set lower than the engineering recommendation. Before and after studies have indicated voluntary compliance with these speed limits is lacking. MDT would like to document compliance with limited enforcement present, determine what level of enforcement is needed to obtain compliance with the set speed limit, and document the effect lower speed limits have had on the crash history, both in the number and severity of crashes.

[Testing Woolen Roadside Reclamation Products](#)

Successful highway right-of-way management following construction, reconstruction, and other disturbances of MDT lands requires the creation of the proper environmental conditions. The conditions should be conducive to the successful establishment of reclamation plantings, the control of soil erosion and surface runoff, and its sediment load into adjacent receiving waters (as regulated by the Clean Water Act). The development and testing of various wool matting, batting, and soil-seed-wool packets will allow MDT to address each of these issues with locally made products that provide an alternative use for a Montana agriculture "waste product" (wool rejected by clothing mills). The proposed research will consist of a series of side-by-side tests of these new woolen reclamation products with a comparable coconut or coir fiber product that is commercially available for the same purpose.

Information on these projects as they progress and other MDT research projects, both active and completed, can be found at <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/whatsnew.shtml>.

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MDT’s mission is to serve the public by providing a transportation system and services that emphasize quality, safety, cost effectiveness, economic vitality, and sensitivity to the environment.

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Montana Department of Transportation**

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MDT Wants Your Comments

To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, visit http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/docs/trans_comm/proposed_proj.pdf, or give us a call at 1-800-714-7296. You can mail your comments on proposed projects to MDT at the following address or e-mail them to mdtnewprojects@mt.gov.

MDT Project Analysis Manager
PO Box 201001
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Only the most frequently requested numbers are listed here. For an area or person not listed, call 800-714-7296 (in Montana only) or 406-444-3423. The TTY number is 406-444-7696 or 800-335-7592.

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