



Montana Department of Transportation
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

Memorandum

To: RRC Members
Steve Albert/WTI
Debbie Alke, Administrator/ Aeronautics Division
Mike Bousliman, Administrator/Information Services Division
Jeffery M. Ebert, P.E./District Administrator-Butte
Larry Flynn, Administrator/ Administration Division
Dwane Kailey, Administrator/Highways and Engineering Division
Bob Seliskar/FHWA
Jon Swartz, Administrator/Maintenance Division
Mike Tooley/Director
Duane Williams, Administrator/Motor Carrier Services Division
Pat Wise/Deputy Director
Lynn Zanto, Administrator/Rail, Transit, and Planning Division

From: Susan C. Sillick, Manager
Research Programs

Date: October 31, 2016

Subject: March 29, 2016 RRC Meeting Notes

RRC Members Present: Steve Albert, Debbie Alke, Mike Bousliman, Jeff Ebert, Dwane Kailey, Sue Sillick, Jon Swartz, Pat Wise, and Lynn Zanto

Others Present: Kris Christensen and Darin Reynolds

1. **Budget Report:** Attached

In prior years, research funding had been substantially higher than the annual federal appropriation and the required state match, as there was a substantial carry forward each year. However, due to the recent funding of more projects at 100% federal and a number of large projects, all of the carry forward amount and the current year's apportionment are committed to current projects. Given this, it was reiterated that there is no funding available for research projects during federal fiscal year 2016. There is some, but limited funding in FFY 2017. For FFY 2018 and later years, funding is limited to the annual appropriation. Also, there are currently five projects in the pipeline that have not yet been funded. There will be no solicitation for research ideas this year to allow the current unfunded research projects to move forward and be considered for the funding available in FFY 2017. The next solicitation will be held in 2017, with a due date of 4/30/17 for FFY 2018 projects.

Sue has added a note to the solicitation web page that new research topics will be considered again in 2017. Sue will also send a message to the solicitation listserv, and MDT administrative staff and bureau chiefs to this same effect.

In addition, beginning federal fiscal year (FFY) 2017, there will be a change in how funds for research projects are obligated. Currently and in the past, only the funds that were expected to be expended in each year of multiyear projects were obligated. Beginning in FFY 2017, all funds for each project will be obligated upfront. This will decrease the number of research projects that can be initiated in any given year.

It was clarified that State Planning & Research (SPR) federal funding funds both Planning and Research activities. CFR states a minimum of 25% goes to Research, with the remaining amount going to Planning, in our case 75%. Both Research and Planning have different required activities; however, Planning funds can be used for Research activities as well. Other funds, such as STP, can also be used on Research activities. Pat asked if Lynn could identify some amount of funding, above the 25% minimum that could be spent on Research activities. Lynn stated she is going to spend more SPR upfront in the project development stage in the hopes of decreasing scope creep in later stages of project development and, at this time, could not identify any amount that could be used for research activities for FFY 2017 and beyond.

Previously, Sue had asked Lynn to pay the majority of the NCHRP for FFY 2016, which Lynn gladly offered to do. Since NCHRP is funded at 5.5% of total SPR funds, Sue suggested every year NCHRP should be split the same as SPR funds are split. Due to the above upcoming additional demands on Planning funds, Lynn indicated she could not commit to funding 75% of NCHRP in future years. Sue and Lynn will discuss this possibility on an annual basis.

Finally, Sue had asked Lynn to fund the wildlife accommodations project as an RFP had already been issued, the winning proposal was selected, and we were approaching the time at which the project cost was no longer guaranteed and we would have to re-advertise the project. In order to prevent this, Lynn agreed to fund this project.

2. [Research Projects - current listing](#)

- a. **Large Scale Laboratory Testing of Geosynthetics in Roadway Applications (14-034)** - Panel recommends this project be cancelled.

Darin Reynolds was present to represent the technical panel in requesting this project be cancelled. While there is still value in conducting this research, there are a couple of reasons to cancel the project for now. There is an ongoing NCHRP project on this topic. The panel wants to see the results from this project before moving forward with this MDT research project. Also, the scope of the research has changed substantially since it was originally proposed and approved to move forward to the technical panel stage.

Dwane mad a motion to cancel the project; Jon seconded the motion. All RRC members present voted to cancel this project, except for Jeff, who voted against cancelling this project.

3. **Discussion on the Role of Research** (cont. from 2/2016 RRC meeting)

It was decided that the Research Review Committee is the governance board for all contracted research projects, regardless of funding source. This topic will be brought to the next Administrative Staff meeting.

4. **Discussion on Research Project Prioritization and Approval/Strategic Planning**

In the past, with the substantial carry forward of research funding, MDT had been able to move forward all identified research needs as contracted research projects or participation in pooled funds. However, given the lack of carry forward funds and the change in programming research funds, this may not be the case in the future. In light of this, the RRC generally discussed how they might prioritize funding for future projects. Some methods identified include the following:

- ★ Identifying research focus areas
- ★ Developing a prioritization process
- ★ Suspending pooled fund commitments

Steve suggested MDT should not suspend pooled fund contributions as there is great value in leveraging funds.

Sue will work with Dwane and Mike Dyrdaahl to identify and propose some options for prioritizing research needs.

Also, participation in the TLN pooled fund was discussed. Dwane indicated that he asked Brad Nelson to compile statistics on MDT use of TLN. Right now, is a busy time for TLN; Brad will compile the statistics in a few months. Sue indicated that would work as we have committed to funding TLN at \$117,000 for state fiscal year 2017; which runs through June 2017. Lynn suggested Brad compile the MDT staff evaluations of TLN training sessions; she indicated her staff was not necessarily pleased with the training received. In addition, there are alternatives for training within the State of Montana. The topic of training, specifically, the most cost effective way for the Department as a whole to provide training, will be added to the next Administrative Staff meeting agenda.

5. **Reports:** Available on Research [website](#)

No discussion.

- a. **Assessment of Montana Road Weather Information System (RWIS) System** (14-019)- Task 5 report
- b. **Development of Strategic Enterprise Architecture Design for MDT** (14-016)- Task 2 report
- c. **LTAP-** progress report

- d. **Montana Weigh-in-Motion (WIM) and Automatic Traffic Recorder (ATR) Strategy** (11-005) - Task 4, 6, & 7 reports
 - e. **Safety Impact of Differential Speed Limits on Rural 2-Lane Highways in Montana** (13-002)- Task 1 and 2 reports
 - f. **Speed Limits Set Lower than Engineering Recommendations** (13-006)- Task 5 report
 - g. **Special Event Traffic** (13-010)- Tasks 3 and 4 reports
6. **Proposals:** None
7. **Implementation/Performance Measures/Technology Transfer:** None
8. **Department/Division Hot Topics - RRC Members Roundtable Discussion**
- No discussion.

Copies:

- Craig Abernathy/Research Section
- Audrey Allums/Grants Bureau
- Kent M. Barnes, P.E./Bridge Bureau
- Katy Callon/Research Section
- Kevin Christensen/Highways and Engineering Division
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