



Bell Crossing Roundabout: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) **September 2024**

Roundabout at Bell Crossing

Q: Why didn't I get a chance to vote on the selected design?

A: MDT seeks and considers public input on transportation projects, but voting is not part of the public involvement process. A crash trend was identified at the Bell Crossing intersection. MDT analyzed why crashes are occurring, crash severity, and solutions to best address these findings. Once MDT had this information about the Bell Crossing intersection, staff identified the roundabout design as the best safety solution.

In planning projects where multiple safe solutions are possible, MDT can consider community preferences. For this location there is only one design solution that best addresses safety to avoid T-bone (right angle) crashes and serious injury crashes.

When MDT reviews an intersection to determine if an upgrade is necessary, a signal warrant analysis is conducted using nationally accepted criteria that considers traffic volumes and crash history. When the analysis was conducted for this intersection, it was determined that the traffic volume during certain peak traffic times justified the need for intersection improvements. Therefore, both the traffic signal and the roundabout alternatives were initially advanced for further consideration. However, from a safety standpoint, the history of addressable high-speed, T-bone crashes makes the roundabout alternative superior.

A Restricted Crossing U-turn Intersection (RCUT) alternative was also considered (this type of intersection does not allow left turns). However the RCUT was determined not to be cost effective due to the amount of right-of-way required, and more importantly, would not address the crash history that a roundabout would. Also, the individual approaches onto US Highway 93 (US 93), both north and south of the Bell Crossing intersection, diminish safety for high-speed merge lanes.

Best engineering practices show that the roundabout will handle the traffic volume and address the high-speed, high-severity T-bone crashes that often result in injuries or, unfortunately, death. MDT's responsibility is to choose the safest option when conducting a safety improvement project, even if it's not popular.



Q: Emergency services use this route. Will a roundabout make it difficult for fire trucks and other large vehicles to travel through the corridor?

A: No. Roundabouts have been highly effective in other Montana communities similar to Victor in supporting Emergency Medical Services (EMS), large loads, and other oversized vehicles.

Numerous studies have shown that well-designed roundabouts support trucking operations and uniquely benefit truck operators. This roundabout will be designed specifically for the types of trucks and large loads that will navigate it, including emergency response vehicles.

Operators often recognize the ease of entering a roundabout due to the one-way circulating traffic and no longer having to wait for a gap in two-way traffic (particularly in multilane facilities). Slowing, not stopping, can also reduce wear and tear on large vehicles.

Q: How is this project being funded?

A: The project is funded primarily through federal National Highway System (NH) and Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds allocated to Montana. Additional project funds are primarily from state gas and diesel fuel tax collections.

Q: Will my property taxes be impacted by this project?

A: No. This project is funded by federal funds and state special revenue funds (see question above). This funding has no impact on property taxes.

Q: Why are you spending money on something the community does not want?

A: We recognize that a roundabout at this intersection is not popular with everyone. Our number one priority at MDT is safety. Bell Crossing crash data indicates that this intersection needs a safety solution that eliminates T-bone crashes, which can involve serious Injuries and death. A roundabout is the safest solution for this intersection.

Q: Why don't you reduce speed limits throughout the area?

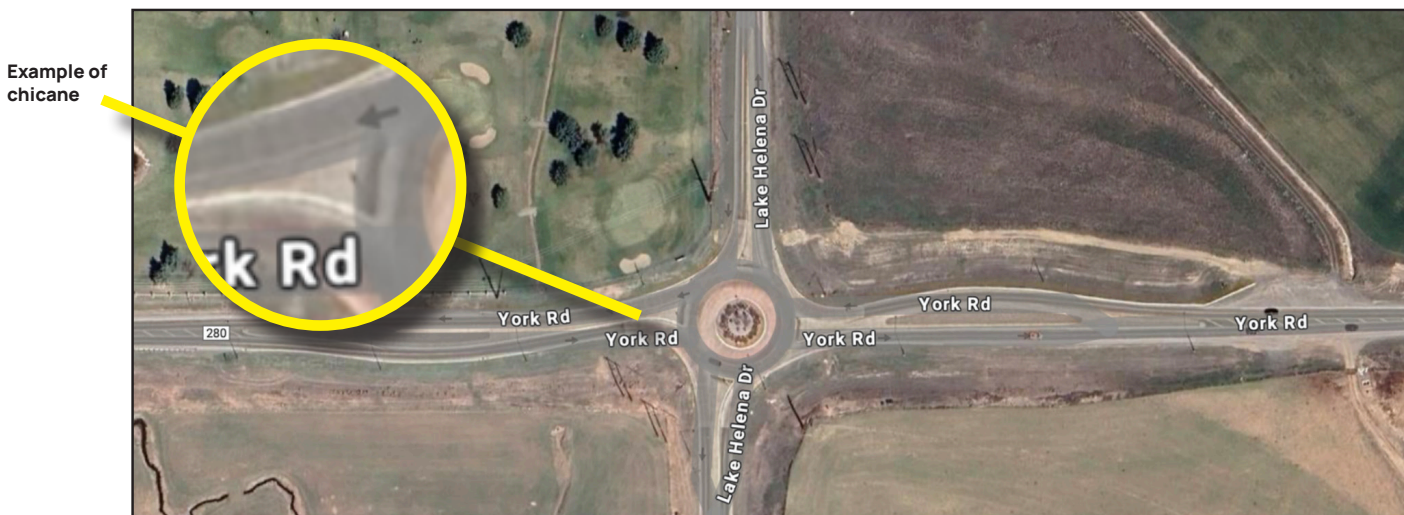
A: MDT reviewed traffic speeds while assessing the Bell Crossing project, and has heard many comments that drivers 'fly through' this corridor. But simply posting signage and lowering the speed doesn't change driving behavior. A physical change in the roadway is needed to force slower speeds. Safety is MDT's top priority, and a roundabout is the best engineering solution to reduce speeds. As such, no proposed regulatory speed reduction is planned at this time.

A roundabout introduces a forced speed reduction as drivers must navigate it between 15 and 20 mph.

The Bell Crossing roundabout project will include other features to help slow US 93 speeds when approaching the intersection. In addition to warning signage on approach from every direction, there will be chicanes. Chicanes are serpentine curves with curbed medians. Drivers must slow down to navigate through into the roundabout. This curved alignment with medians forces drivers to significantly slow down before entering. An example photo of this is included below.

With a traffic signal, drivers have the ability to run a red light and drive through an intersection at full speed. This is not possible with a roundabout.

Example of Existing Roundabout Geometry in Montana



If you are interested in additional Information about setting speed limits, please click this link:

www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/roads/speed-limits.aspx.



Q: Are roundabouts more expensive than a signal?

A: Yes, roundabouts are more costly than a signalized intersection. However, at this location specifically, safety benefits of a roundabout warrant the additional cost.

Q: People will be confused because drivers don't know how to use a roundabout. How do you navigate a two-lane roundabout?

A: MDT recognizes this is new to some and is working to increase education on driving roundabouts, including having them included on drivers' tests. This type of intersection is becoming more common throughout Montana and the United States.

More information on how to drive a two-lane roundabout is below.

A two-lane roundabout is very similar to a single-lane roundabout.

- As you approach a two-lane roundabout, slow down.
- Choose the lane you need to travel in based on the exit you need to take.
- If you plan to turn right, use the right lane.
- If you plan to travel straight, use either lane.
- If you plan to turn left, use the left lane.
- Then, look left and yield to drivers inside the roundabout. Never change lanes once inside the roundabout.
- Turn your blinker on as you exit the roundabout.



Q: What is “Vision Zero” and how does it relate to this project?

[Here is a link to learn more about Montana's Vision Zero initiative.](#) This is a statewide initiative with the goal of zero deaths and zero serious injuries on Montana Roadways. There has been some confusion with Montana's traffic safety initiative and “Vision Zero” used in other forums. MDT has no association with the “Vision Zero Network.”

MDT's Vision Zero focuses on:

1. Education through training programs and activities, public information, and traffic safety outreach campaigns.
2. Enforcement of Montana's traffic laws and deterrence including changing driver's understanding of law enforcement, prosecution and adjudication penalties, and the impact on victims and survivor families and friends.
3. Emergency medical response to support the essential role of emergency services in reducing severity of injury outcome and to ensure technologies and systems are adequately funded and equipped to respond to crashes.
4. Engineering of Montana's roadways to ensure best practices are implemented and maintained with safety as the priority.

At Bell Crossing, a crash trend was identified that included fatal and serious injury crashes. Our goal through education, enforcement, emergency medical response, and engineering of the roadway is to prevent future occurrences.

Please reach out with additional questions or concerns. MDT's goal is to be transparent and help provide background as to why a roundabout was determined to be the best option at this specific location.

Additional updates will be provided as the project progresses.

Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided on request. Persons who need an alternative format should contact the Office of Civil Rights, Montana Department of Transportation, 2701 Prospect Avenue, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620. Telephone 406-444-5416 or Montana Relay Service at 711.