

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for

Project Number: IM 90-6(111)298

Project Name: I-90 East Belgrade Interchange

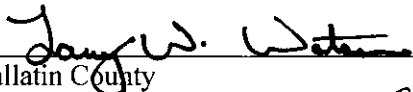
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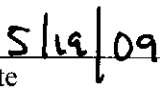
Gallatin County, Montana

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have determined that the Preferred Alternative, as described in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) dated October 2008, will have no significant impact on the human environment. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based on the October 2008 EA, and information obtained during the public and agency coordination process. After independent evaluation of the EA, MDT and FHWA conclude that the EA adequately and accurately discusses the needs, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. The EA provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. MDT and FHWA take full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the attached October 2008 EA.

For purposes of compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) (ARM 17.4.609(3)(j) and ARM 18.2.239(3)(j)), this FONSI and conclusion that an EIS is not required should be considered part of the EA.



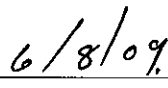
Gallatin County



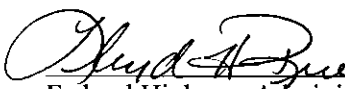
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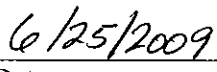
Montana Department of Transportation



Date



Federal Highway Administration



Date

Project Abstract and Location:

The proposed action is the construction of a new interchange on I-90 to be located in the vicinity of Alaska Road and the entrance to Gallatin Field, on the eastern end of the City of Belgrade. This is approximately 1.2 miles east of the existing Jackrabbit Lane interchange, and approximately 5.75 miles west of the existing North 19th Avenue interchange in Bozeman. The purpose of the project is to provide greater intermodal connectivity, and to improve regional mobility. The Preferred Alternative includes new interchange access to I-90 on the eastern end of Belgrade, a new connection to MT 205 via a grade-separated crossing of the Montana Rail Link (MRL) rail line, and a new connection to Alaska Road on the south side of I-90.

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I - INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes the final coordination activities undertaken by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to complete the I-90 East Belgrade Interchange Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA, which is attached as Appendix D, describes the potential social, economic, and environmental effects of constructing a new interchange on I-90, in Belgrade.

This document affords MDT and FHWA the opportunity to:

- Present the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for this project;
- Identify the alternative that has been selected for this project;
- Summarize the impacts of the selected alternative and the proposed mitigation;
- Summarize the efforts undertaken to coordinate with the public and agencies;
- Clarify/correct the text of the EA distributed in January 2009; and
- Respond to written and verbal comments received at the February 24, 2009 Public Hearing and those submitted during the comment period from February 9 through March 11, 2009.

II - SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Based on the I-90 East Belgrade Interchange EA (Appendix D) and the public and agency comments and responses (Section VI), MDT and FHWA have selected the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative is described in detail beginning on page 2-15 of the attached EA.

In summary, the Preferred Alternative includes:

- New Compressed Diamond Interchange (with potential for roundabout intersection control).
- South connector roadway from Alaska Road to the interchange.
- North connector roadway from the interchange, under the railroad, connecting with MT 205, and to Gallatin Field.
- Realignment of Alaska Frontage Road.
- Structures to grade-separate connector roadway from the interstate and the railroad.
- Closure of two current at-grade crossings.

III – SUMMARY OF IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

Impact

Mitigation

Land Use

Consistency with Local Plans:

The Selected Alternative is consistent with current zoning.

No mitigation necessary.

Parks & Recreation/Section 6(f):

No parks, recreational facilities or Section 6(f) lands would be impacted by the Selected Alternative.

No mitigation necessary.

Farmlands

The Selected Alternative may require the conversion of minor amounts of Farmland of Statewide Importance.

A Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form has been completed, and no additional consideration for protection is necessary.

Social Conditions

The Selected Alternative is expected to have no effect on population growth, demographic composition, or income levels. It is anticipated to improve intermodal access.

No mitigation is required.

Right-of-Way/Easements/Relocations

Acquisition of one mobile home and two residences currently under construction would be required under the Preferred Alternative due to direct conflicts between the proposed construction limits and the existing structures. A number of utilities have been identified within this corridor that may be impacted by the new right-of-way limits.

All lands needed for right-of-way under the proposed action which are private ownership would be acquired in accordance with both the *Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act* of 1970 and the *Uniform Relocation Act Amendments* of 1987. Any utility relocation would be coordinated with the lines' owners, and done prior to this proposed project's construction.

Economic Conditions

Improvements would be expected to have a positive impact on economic conditions in Belgrade and surrounding areas.

No mitigation is required.

Environmental Justice

According to Census data, income in the study area has grown in the last decade, and there are fewer people in the lowest income range.

The proposed right-of-way acquisitions do not appear to be either low-income or minority owned/occupied properties. Due to the limited number of acquisitions and the nature of these homes, both the No-Build Alternative and the Build Alternatives would not create disproportionately high and/or adverse impacts on the health or environment of minority and/or low-income populations.

Impact

Mitigation

Air Quality

The Selected Alternative is located in an unclassifiable/attainment area of Montana for air quality under 40 CFR 81.327, as amended. As such, this project is not covered under the EPA's Final Rule of September 15, 1997 on Air Quality Conformity.

No mitigation is required.

Pedestrians and Bicyclists

The Selected Alternative would provide an opportunity for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross under the railroad and interstate at the proposed interchange location through the use of a wide shoulder or dedicated bike/pedestrian lane.

The Selected Alternative would improve access for pedestrians and bicyclists through the study area through the provision of bike lanes, ADA accessible sidewalks, and/or shared pedestrian/bicycle paths. No mitigation is required.

Noise

Traffic noise impacts are anticipated at ten receptors under existing conditions, 12 under a No-Build scenario, and 13 with the Selected Alternative. The dominant source of noise is the traffic on I-90, whether or not the project is constructed.

The only practicable alternative to mitigate noise would be the construction of noise walls/barriers; however, this abatement measure is not reasonable given the high cost of construction. No noise mitigation is proposed.

Water Quality

There would be an increase in the total surface area of paved road related to the new interchange and connector roadways. This increase in total surface area decreases the overall permeability of substrate and increases the rate and quantity of surface water runoff from the roadway.

The project will employ Best Management Practices and will require a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and field monitoring/oversight to ensure that impacts to water quality due to construction is minimal.

Wetlands

There are no wetlands within the project site.

No mitigation is required.

Floodplains

There are no floodplains within the project site.

No mitigation is required.

Impact

Mitigation

Waterbodies, Wildlife Resources, and Habitat

Wildlife Resources

The Biological Resources Report identified several avian, mammal, and fish species in the corridor. Minimal impact to wildlife in the area of study is expected due to the proximity and availability of similar habitat type.

Best Management Practices will be used to minimize impacts to general fish, wildlife, and avian species.

Habitat

The project corridor is not critical for survival of the species present given the adjacency and availability of other similar habitat type.

No mitigation is required.

Species of Concern

The Selected Alternative would not impact any wildlife or plant species of concern.

No mitigation is required.

Noxious Weeds

Seven noxious weeds were observed within the project area.

All construction activities will comply with Montana County Weed Control Act and Administrative Rules.

Threatened/Endangered (T/E) Species

No Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed plant or animal species exist within the study area.

No mitigation is necessary.

Hazardous Wastes

No hazardous waste sites were identified within the study area.

No mitigation is necessary.

Cultural/Archaeological/Historic Resources

The Spain Ferris Fork Ditch and the Northern Pacific Main Line are oriented perpendicular to the proposed interchange and connector roadways. Impacts would be limited to piping short lengths fo the ditch and temporary impacts to the rail line during construction.

SHPO has concurred with findings of “No Adverse Effect” to the railroad, and “No Effect” to the ditch. No mitigation is required.

Visual

Because the majority of the project elements in the Selected Alternative would be located below the existing grade, there will be very limited visual impacts resulting from the Selected Alternative.

No mitigation is necessary.

Impact

Mitigation

Construction Impacts

Construction activities from the Selected Alternatives would cause temporary inconveniences to area residents and businesses. These would occasionally result in longer travel times, detours, temporary closures, and noise and dust due to the use of heavy machinery.

The project's contractor would be subject to all state and local laws to minimize construction noise by having mufflers on all equipment. Dust control would also be implemented by using either water, or another approved dust-suppressant. In general, BMP's would be used to minimize the effect of sedimentation and/or run-off during the roadway construction periods.

Cumulative Impacts

In addition to ongoing private development and re-development within the study area, there are approximately 16 other roadway projects within the general area at various stages of completion. Additional projects would be necessary following construction of the interchange. These include: Extension of Northern Pacific Street; construction of an East Side bypass connection adjacent to the airport; extension of Frank Road; and widening of Alaska Road from the interchange south to Valley Center.

The Selected Alternative is not anticipated to induce new growth or development, the Selected Alternative is not anticipated to individually or cumulatively, when considered with the other projects, have any substantial cumulative impacts.

Indirect Impacts

Indirect impacts from the Selected Alternative may be those related to a change in land use from improved access in this area. Since the project lies entirely within the city limits, the direction of future growth will be determined more by zoning and permitting by the City of Belgrade than by the construction of the interchange. Based on this information, the Selected Alternative will not induce significant land use changes or promote unplanned growth.

No mitigation is necessary.

IV - NEPA/MEPA COORDINATION PROCESS

The proposed project fully defined in the attached EA has been coordinated with the appropriate federal, state, and local agencies in compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), as well as guidelines provided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A).

Availability of EA for Review and Comment

Gallatin County, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved the EA for distribution between October 2008 and January 2009, and a Notice of Availability was distributed to area newspapers and radio stations as follows:

An individual mailer was also sent out to approximately 40 people/businesses that either attended previous public meetings or expressed an interest in the project.

Copies of the EA were available for public review at the following locations:

- Gallatin County Commissioners Office (311 West Main Street),
- Belgrade City Hall (91 East Central),
- Gallatin Field (850 Gallatin Field Road),
- Belgrade Public Library (106 North Broadway),
- Bozeman Public Library (626 East Main Street),
- MDT Bozeman Area Office (907 North Rouse Avenue)
- MDT Helena Headquarters Office (2701 Prospect Ave).

Copies of the EA were also available upon request from MDT and the EA could be viewed on the MDT website at http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/eis_ea.shtml.

The EA was mailed to all agencies contained on the Distribution List on pages 5-1 and 5-2 of the EA. The public review and comment period began on February 9, 2009 and ended on March 11, 2009.

Additional copies of the EA were mailed to private individuals upon their request.

Public Hearing

A formal Public Hearing was held to present the Preferred Alternative and take comments on the EA. The Hearing was held on February 24, 2009 at the Belgrade Middle School. Approximately 25 people attended the Public Hearing. A transcript of the Public Hearing and copy of the sign-in sheets are provided in Appendix B.

Comments Received

Three verbal comments were received at the Hearing, and seven were submitted in writing during the comment period. Those comments and responses from MDT and FHWA are contained in Appendix A of this FONSI.

V – EDITS/CORRECTIONS TO THE EA

The City of Belgrade requested clarification/update regarding references made in the EA to planning documents prepared by the City. The EA references the 1999 *Belgrade Area Plan* as a way to convey the project’s conformance with local planning efforts. As a matter of update, it should be noted that the 2006 *Belgrade Growth Policy* further supports the proposed project. Specifically, the *Growth Policy* states that the interchange “is accomplishing a major task of the Belgrade Area Plan as well as this Growth Policy.”

The City of Belgrade requested inclusion of an updated Zoning Map to replace the previous map displayed at Figure 3-1 on page 3-2 of the EA. Below is the updated map.

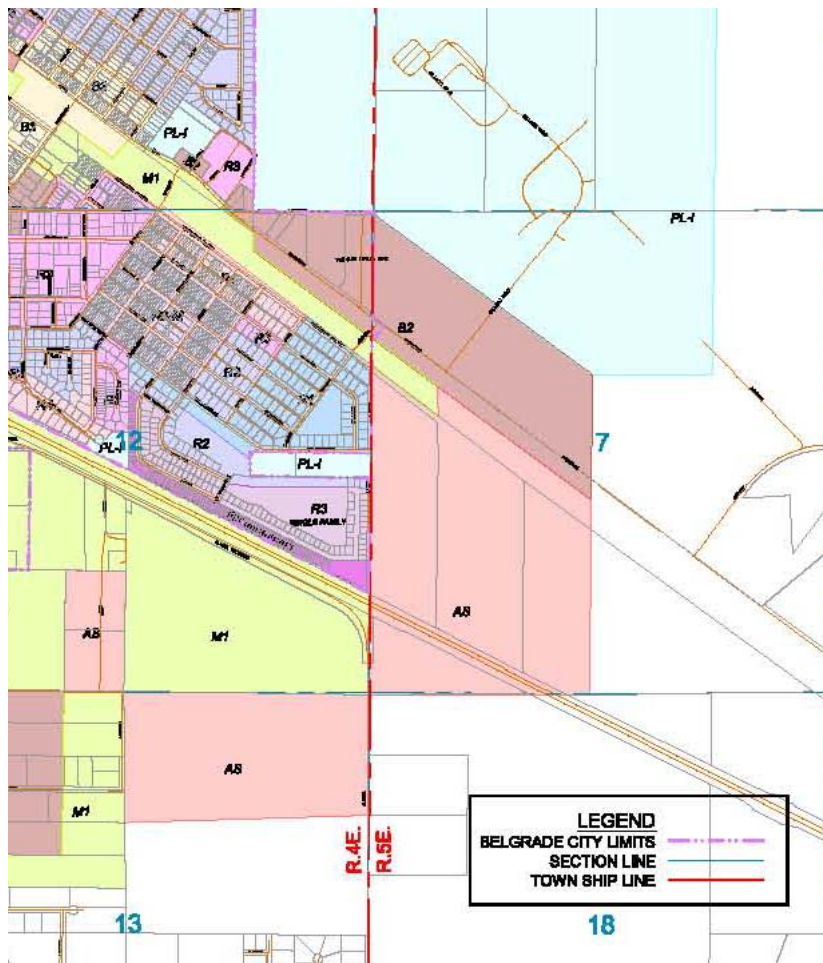


Figure 3-2 on page 3-4 of the EA identifies acquisitions from the “Las Campanas subdivision.” The City of Belgrade has requested clarification that these acquisitions are from the “Skyview Townhouses” located within the Las Campanas subdivision. Additionally, the text on page 3-25 indicates that the “[Las Campanas] subdivision will include 29 residential units.” This is changed to read, “The Las Campanas subdivision includes the Skyview Townhouses, which will include 29 residential units.”

Text in Section 6.2, on page 6-1 of the EA should read as follows: “Notices have been published in the Belgrade Daily News and Bozeman Daily Chronicle.”

VI – RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

The public review and comment period on the I-90 East Belgrade Interchange EA began on February 9, 2009 and ended on March 11, 2009. Seven written comments were received during this period. Each of those comments and a response from the project team is included in Appendix A. The Public Hearing for the EA was held on February 24, 2009, during which three verbal comments were recorded. The transcript as well as responses to those comments are contained in Appendix B, along with copies of the sign-in sheets from the Hearing.

APPENDIX A – RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

The following pages contain copies of the comment letters received (on the left side of the page), and the Gallatin County/FHWA/MDT response (on the right side of the page). Comment letters are presented in date-order, and each is numbered sequentially. The response to each letter is identified with the number corresponding to the comment. Below is a log of the comments received during the comment period, and the page number where the comment and response can be found in this Appendix.

Comment Number	Name	Page Number
1	Cindy Tirrell	A-3
2	Scott Jackson, USFWS	A-4
3	Jason Karp and Christopher Scott	A-5
4	David Schmit, Knife River-Belgrade	A-7
5	Ted Lange, Gallatin Valley Land Trust	A-8
6	Elizabeth Ann Bird, Bozeman Area Bicycle Advisory Board	A-10
7	Ralph Zimmer, Bozeman Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Committee	A-12

Verbal testimony was also provided at the Public Hearing and is included in Appendix B. The following individuals provided testimony:

Comment Letter	Name	Transcript Page Number
A	Jason Karp	B-2
B	Russ Nelson	B-3
C	Debe Youngberg	B-3

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The following comments were submitted in writing to MDT during the public comment period on the EA.

Comment 1

Sent: Monday, February 16, 2009 9:15 AM

1-A

I have lived in Belgrade for over 4 years and agree whole heartedly that a second interchange is needed for the area but my concern is with the side of Belgrade that has been chosen to put it on. I drive in Belgrade daily and I see first hand where the congestion issues are coming from, it's the subdivisions (River Rock, Landmark, etc) that are located west of Belgrade. When congested traffic is feeding from the southwest how will putting this interchange east of Belgrade solve the existing problems? I feel the location picked needs to be re-thought and if it's not changed a lot of money will be spent with nothing gained.

1-B

I don't know if the people who have planned for this location live in Belgrade but I would suggest they take a morning and see how long it takes commuters from the River Rock area to get to the Belgrade interchange during peak traffic hours. This is clearly where traffic problems lie, please plan this interchange for what will be best for the tax payers in Belgrade rather than what will be best for the airport.

Thank you,

Cindy Tirrell

Response 1

1-A

As noted in the EA, the purpose of the project is twofold: to provide greater intermodal connectivity, and to improve regional mobility. The location chosen is the best location along I-90 in the Belgrade area that would provide not only improved intermodal connectivity to Gallatin Field, but to downtown Belgrade and developing areas to the south. Traffic studies conducted as part of the Interchange Approval Process indicate that aggressive growth and development in the surrounding area, as well as increasing levels of airline travelers, have put a strain on the existing roadway network in the study area. The existing network is physically constrained by the parallel system of railroad, frontage road, and Interstate in the general study area; thus limiting the ability to expand the existing network to accommodate future demand. It is unlikely that a new interchange at any location would fully address local network congestion, and is not the primary purpose of this proposed project.

1-B

The Bozeman Area Transportation Coordinating Committee established the Belgrade Interchange Sub-Committee in December 2002 to determine the feasibility of an interchange in Belgrade to improve the connectivity between the Interstate and the airport. The Committee is made up of local and area residents and business owners representing local interests. As noted above, the traffic analyses indicate that a new interchange at this location is neither intended to address local network congestion, nor would it worsen the existing congestion levels.

Comment 2

Sent: Monday, February 23, 2009 5:00 PM

Thank you for sending me a copy of the EA for the proposed I-90 East Belgrade Interchange (IM 90-6(111)298; CN 5897) for our review and comment.

2-A I just wanted to let you know that USFWS has no project-related concerns for federally-listed T/E species relative to this project. Therefore, we don't expect the need for S.7 consultation for this project.

2-B Because it is likely that this project would entail construction of structures (i.e., bridges), I'd also like to take this opportunity to encourage MDT to strongly consider providing features in those structures that would benefit our Montana bat species. As has been well documented, most of the species of bats in this country are already endangered or are declining in numbers sufficient to warrant concern. Also well known (per MDT-sponsored research) is that many species of bats in Montana commonly roost on highway bridges. Features that could be designed into a new structure or a roosting box that could be retrofitted onto a structure after construction are examples of possible techniques that could be incorporated into this project for relatively little cost and that would provide a host of ecological benefits. We encourage MDT to follow the management recommendations from their bat research project when designing this project.

Thanks again for the chance to review and comment on this EA. Have a good week.

Scott

Scott Jackson, Fish and Wildlife Biologist U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Montana Field Office
585 Shepard Way
Helena, Montana 59601

Response 2

2-A Comment regarding no need for formal Section 7 consultation is noted.

2-B As the project progresses, design consideration will be given to the inclusion of features to benefit Montana bat species.

Comment 3



GALLATIN COUNTY

February 24, 2009

Tom S. Martin, P.E.
Environmental Services Bureau Chief
Montana Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 201001
Helena, MT 59

RE: Comments on Environmental Assessment for I-90 East Belgrade Interchange

Dear Mr. Martin,

On behalf of the Gallatin County Planning Department and Belgrade Planning Department the following comments are presented on the I-90 East Belgrade Interchange Environmental Assessment (EA).

3-A

• Staff would suggest more discussion on the importance and benefit of the undercrossing of Interstate 90 and the railroad. The undercrossing would substantially improve public health and safety by increasing response times of emergency services.

3-B

• The EA refers to the 1999 *Belgrade Area Plan*. This document has been updated and shall now be referenced as the 2006 *Belgrade Growth Policy*.

3-C

• Figure 3-1 Belgrade Zoning Map is out of date and the current Belgrade Zoning Map of this area should be used.

3-D

• On Page 3-25 under **Other Area Actions**, first bullet point identifies the subdivision *Las Campanas* that includes 29 residential units. *Las Campanas* is the larger subdivision and the 29 residential units shall be identified as the *Skyview Townhouses*. Figure 3-2 on page 3-4 should also be changed to refer to the *Skyview Townhouses*. Additionally, under **Relocations** on page 3-4 states *one existing mobile home would require relocation by the proposed interchange action*. However, further development has taken place on lots in the *Skyview Townhouses* and further relocations maybe needed due to the location of the westbound on-ramp.

3-E

• Under **Section 6.2 Public Involvement** refers incorrectly to the *Belgrade Daily News*, it should be the *Belgrade News*.

3-F

• Under **Section 3.5 Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities, Impacts** it states *The Preferred Alternative would provide an opportunity for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross the railroad and Interstate at the proposed interchange location through the use of a wide shoulder or dedicated bike/pedestrian lane*. Staff would not prefer an at-grade widen shoulder to accommodate pedestrian users. Staffs'

3-G

Response 3

3-A

While not part of the Purpose and Need for this project, the improve emergency vehicle response times are a clear benefit from the project. Your comments will serve to highlight this additional benefit of the improvements.

3-B

Noted in the Errata

3-C

See new map included in the Edits/Corrections section of the FONSI.

3-D

Noted in the Errata

3-E

The project team coordinated with the developers of this site very early in the NEPA/MEPA process. The townhomes constructed are consistent with the early plans shared with the design team, and there are no other impacts anticipated beyond those outlined in the EA.

3-F

Noted in the Errata

3-G


As the project moves forward in design, MDT will consider opportunities to accommodate both a shoulder appropriate for bicycle use as well as a raised sidewalk for pedestrian travel. Cost and design constraints may limit the ability to provide a boulevard in addition to the shoulder and sidewalk, but this option will be explored.

preference would be a grade separated pedestrian facility and an at-grade dedicated bike lane.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the I90 East Belgrade Interchange EA. Both the Belgrade and Gallatin County Planning Staffs acknowledge the importance and need for the I90 East Belgrade Interchange to serve future and existing development in the region and to provide for more adequate connection to the airport. If there are any questions or need for our help please let us know.

Sincerely,



Jason Karp, Planner
City of Belgrade

Christopher Scott, Planner
Gallatin County

Comment 4

Sent: Tuesday, March 10, 2009 10:01 AM

On page 3-22, figure 3-11 of the EA, the natural gas main line appears to be drawn incorrectly or has moved since the existing utilities were first located. The gas line does not run through the gravel pit as it once did and there is a significant gas operation/valve station in the NW corner of our Alaska Gravel pit along Alaska Road. The line was relocated and runs parallel to the interstate and relocates at our easterly border.

Thank you

David Schmit
Knife River - Belgrade

Response 4

Thank you for the clarification. As the project proceeds, design engineers will work with Knife River and the utilities to coordinate utility disruptions and/or relocations.

Comment 5

Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2009 12:55 PM

Dear I-90 East Belgrade Interchange Planners,

The GVLT Community Trails Program is encouraged that bicycle-pedestrian facilities are being considered and planned for to some extent in the preferred alternative. However, from the limited information provided in the EA it is very difficult to assess whether safe bicycle-pedestrian access will be adequately designed.

5-A

Currently, there are minimal safe options for bicyclists and pedestrians to cross I-90 and the railroad going to or from Belgrade. The underpasses proposed in the preferred alternative provide an important opportunity for creating a safe, bicycle-pedestrian connection.

5-B

This connection could be incorporated into a future Bozeman to Belgrade trail route. It is important to note that if safe bicycle-pedestrian access is not provided in this project, then Belgrade will be left with only one option for providing such a connection - through future improvements to the Jackrabbit Lane bridge over I-90. GVLT believes the citizens of Belgrade and the surrounding areas should have more than one safe option for crossing I-90 and the railroad.

Response 5

5-A

To preserve the objectivity and contain the costs of analyses conducted through the NEPA/MEPA process, designs are carried only to a planning level. Commitments made in the EA will be forwarded in the final design, and that design will meet current safety and design standards for vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian use.

5-B

This connection is noted in the EA, and as indicated above, MDT is committed to inclusion of these improvements during final design.

Comment 5

5-C We expect that traffic through these underpasses will be intense, and we are concerned that a wide shoulder or dedicated bike/pedestrian lane would not provide safe access for bicyclists and pedestrians. Certainly, most bicyclists and pedestrians would not feel safe and would not use a wide shoulder through the underpasses. We believe adequate space should be provided to install a substantial physical barrier separating bicyclists and pedestrians from motor vehicle traffic. Completely separate box culverts for bicyclists and pedestrians would be ideal, but may not be financially feasible.

5-D The intersections with Montana 205 and the I-90 Interchange ramps should also be designed to appropriate AASHTO standards to ensure safe bicycle-pedestrian crossings.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ted Lange, Community Trails Program
Gallatin Valley Land Trust
406-587-8404 ~ ted@gvlt.org ~ www.gvlt.org

Response 5

5-C As noted above, as the project moves forward in design, MDT will consider opportunities to accommodate both a shoulder appropriate for bicycle use as well as a raised sidewalk for pedestrian travel. Based on the conceptual design prepared to date, it appears that both facilities could be accommodated. Cost and other design constraints will ultimately dictate what facilities will be included, but the need for bicycle and pedestrian facilities is noted and will be accommodated to the extent feasible and practicable.

Separate box culverts would not be necessary or desirable. The optimal design would be to extend the length of the I-90 bridge structures, but this may be cost prohibitive.

5-D Project elements will be designed in accordance with current AASHTO, MDT, FHWA, and Gallatin County design standards as appropriate.

Comment 6

Response 6

Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2009 4:55 PM

Dear I-90 East Belgrade Interchange Planners,

The Bozeman Area Bicycle Advisory Board is excited about the prospects for a safe bicycle/pedestrian corridor to cross I-90 as part of the I-90 East Belgrade Interchange project. Right now the only effective route between Bozeman and Belgrade is along MT 205 which has no shoulder and is exceedingly dangerous for bicyclists. Consistent with U.S. DOT policy, it is important that bicyclists and pedestrians are accommodated as part of all new roadway construction projects. A safe bicycling route between Bozeman and Belgrade is a high priority for many in the bicycling community of Gallatin County. In response to last year's bike/pedestrian survey, conducted in conjunction with our Transportation Plan update, 110 respondents *volunteered* comments to this effect (i.e. no survey question asked specifically about bicycle travel between Bozeman and Belgrade), even though this was a survey primarily filled out by Bozeman residents (not Belgrade residents, many of whom would welcome a bicycle commuting route).

Currently, there are inadequate options for bicyclists and pedestrians to cross I-90 and the railroad going to or from Belgrade. The underpasses proposed in the preferred alternative provide an important opportunity

Comment 6

for creating a safe, bicycle-pedestrian connection. This connection could be incorporated into a future Bozeman to Belgrade designated bicycling route. We expect that automobile traffic through these underpasses will be intense, and we are concerned that a wide shoulder, or even a dedicated bike lane, would not provide safe access for bicyclists. Most bicyclists would not feel safe using a wide shoulder through the underpasses, and hence this opportunity for regular bicycling (both commuting and recreational) between our two communities would be lost.

We believe adequate space should be provided to install a substantial physical barrier separating bicyclists and pedestrians from motor vehicle traffic. Completely separate box culverts for bicyclists and pedestrians would be ideal.

The intersections with Montana 205 and the I-90 Interchange ramps should also be designed to appropriate AASHTO standards to ensure safe bicycling.

Thank you for your consideration,

The Bozeman Area Bicycle Advisory Board

=====

Elizabeth Ann R. Bird, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, Bozeman Area Bicycle Advisory Board
1505 Hillside Lane

Response 6

See response to Comment 5 above regarding final design details for pedestrian/bicycle facilities.

Comment 7

Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2009 5:51 PM

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing about the I-90 East Belgrade Interchange EA on behalf of the Bozeman Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Committee. The committee is a joint City of Bozeman/Gallatin County/School District 7 committee whose interests extend out to the project location.

Response 7

7-A Unfortunately, we are unable to "bring up" or download the EA from your website, so we can only make generic comments.

We are greatly concerned about the nature of the accommodations for pedestrians in the plan, and we know our "sister" organization, the Bozeman Bicycle Advisory Board, is similarly concerned about the accommodations for bicyclists.

7-A The electronic version of the EA contained on the MDT web page is a large file, and can take several minutes to download. The EA was also made available in hard copy format at seven separate locations in Belgrade and Bozeman (see page 6-2 of the EA) as indicated on the web page, press releases, print advertisements, and postcard notifications. The EA was also available at the Public Hearing held on February 24, 2009.

7-B There will be pedestrians. Some will be recreationalists who are either walking or jogging, but others are walking because that is the only way for them to get from Point A to Point B. The number of pedestrians will only increase over time as businesses, motels, restaurants, residences, etc. build up at that location and near that location. Adequate provision for pedestrians needs to be there from Day #1. Pedestrian facilities need to provide substantial safety for the pedestrians. Some of those pedestrians, like myself, will be visually impaired and will tend to wander from left to right and back as they walk. The walkway needs to be adequately wide to accommodate

7-B The proposed bicycle and pedestrian elements of the project would be implemented concurrently with the overall improvements. These improvements would be designed consistent with current AASHTO, MDT, FHWA, and Gallatin County design standards to ensure safe travel for vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

such "wandering" without putting those pedestrians dangerously close to passing vehicles, particularly if those vehicles are traveling relatively fast and with a number of roadway and traffic features demanding the driver's attention.

In short, well-designed, not minimally designed, pedestrian facilities must be there for Day #1. Anything less is unwise, unsafe, and unacceptable.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ralph W. Zimmer, Chairperson
Bozeman Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Committee
2103 South Tracy Avenue
Bozeman MT 59715
(406) 586-9152
RalphZimmer@mcn.net

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APPENDIX B – HEARING TRANSCRIPT AND RESPONSES

Verbal testimony was also provided at the Public Hearing and is included in this Appendix. The following individuals provided testimony:

Comment Letter	Name	Transcript Page Number
A	Jason Karp	B-2
B	Russ Nelson	B-3
C	Debe Youngberg	B-3

A copy of the sign-in sheets from the Hearing follows the transcript.

UPN5897
Belgrade Interchange East
Environmental Assessment Public Hearing
February 24, 2009
Belgrade Middle School
Partial Transcript ~ Hearing Portion Only
Comments

PAUL GRANT: Okay. We will go ahead and go into the formal hearing at this time. We want to make sure you hear your comments and we want to make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak, so we just ask that you are considerate of time and please realize there are other people that may want to have an opportunity to speak as well.

As we did mention there are other opportunities available to you to comment if you are not prepared to speak tonight or something comes up that you think of when you go home or when you look at the EA document – another opportunity is that you can mail in your comments or e-mail your comments or leave them at the comment box in the back of the room.

We encourage you to get your comments into to us, again, by March 11. And over on the table at the back of the room are the postcards with the addresses of the EA document availability. We just want to make sure for those of you who came in late that there are other opportunities available to you to comment.

Again, I will come around with the microphone. Just go ahead and identify yourself. And realize that we will not respond to your comments, we are just hear during this portion of the hearing to listen.

So raise your hand and I will come around with the microphone.

JASON KARP: I am Jason Karp. I am a planner with the city of Belgrade, Belgrade City Planning office. The Gallatin Planning city staff and the Belgrade City Planning staff sat down and reviewed the Environmental Assessment jointly and we had some comments on that and we put it in a letter signed by myself and Chris Scott from county planning. So I will turn that in and I won't belabor the point by reading the entire letter.

But we thought that the EA could even more strongly emphasize the importance of this interchange to public health and safety in Belgrade, especially in relations to the traffic – and that would already pretty much articulated at – but we have the train already going through Belgrade right now, all of our crossings at grade, and as everybody in Belgrade knows, every now and then the train decides to stop and block all of our crossings.

We also have one crossing already over I-90 and we have city limits on both sides of I-90 now.

And there have been accidents on that I-90 Interchange that have closed it off. And everybody knows getting around that is a – quite a journey – either you are going to Manhattan or you are going half way to Bozeman to get around. That is a real problem when your fire department is on one side and the house on fire or the accident is on the other side.

So we think that is a real critical component to this interchange and one of the reasons why the city was one of the entities that pursued it.

Our other comments were related to just some updating, the Belgrade zoning map has been updated since the EA created. And our growth policy has been updated. So some of the references may need to change a little bit.

And we did also want to emphasize the staff recommendation for pedestrian ways, preferably elevated pedestrian way – and designated bike lanes to be built with the interchange.

That is all I had.

RUSS NELSON: Russ Nelson. I live at 414 Al Drive in Belgrade. And I am the mayor of Belgrade. And I always wait until the last because people do that to me at the city meetings, so I thought that would be fun to do to somebody else.

I want to say that this is a great project for Gallatin County. It helps the airport. It helps the city of Belgrade. It helps people travelling from Manhattan through Bozeman. So this is good thing. It is going to create good jobs. And it is going to help the safety of our community.

I used to be at First Security Bank in Belgrade, but now I am in Bozeman. And I would watch from the Bank in Belgrade the corner of Jackrabbit Lane and Main and watch fire trucks and police cars stopped waiting for a train to go by. And stopped and try to turn around because the train had stopped. So I echo what Jason had said, that that is probably the biggest factor here – that should be emphasized and should be given more credit and emphasis as to what it is going to do for public safety. And we are anxious – I am anxious as an individual and the city is anxious to see this project move forward.

Thank you.

DEBE YOUNGBERG: I am Debe Youngberg with the Belgrade Chamber. The other thing that I – representing the Belgrade business community, a lot of people were worried that this interchange situation would take traffic away from downtown Belgrade and the shoppers from the airport. I think this interchange is going to move commuter traffic and people going to and from work are not in the shopping mode.

What I do think it is going to do is JTL will have direct access into the interchange. It will take the truck traffic off of Main Street.

And if any of you come down this summer, I will give you a rocking chair. You can sit on the front porch of the chamber and you can count how many trucks go down Main Street on just a two-hour interval and you will be shocked. They don't like coming down Main Street. They don't like making the corner at Broadway. And it causes a lot of congestion downtown. I think this interchange is going to make our downtown more appealing for shopping and it will have less congestion. There won't be as much dirt and gravel. I just think all around it is really going to be much better for the business community.

On top of that, we have the opportunity when they do the landscaping for the interchange, to get involved in that, to do some signage, so that we have nice signage out there for the people, folks coming from the airport going to Big Sky. They still have to get their groceries, they still have to eat lunch, they still have to get that maybe last-minute haircut or that prescription filled or their booze at the liquor store. And we still want them to come to Belgrade and we have that opportunity to promote ourselves at that time when that exit – they are not going to – it is not going to bar them from coming into Belgrade. They still have that opportunity to make a right-hand turn into Belgrade. And I think they will do that because they don't have any other opportunity down the road.

So I just don't think that it is going to hurt the business community all. I think it is going to enhance it and I think this is a great project that the city and county and airport have gotten involved in.

GRANT: Any other comments?

Okay. We will close the formal hearing at this time. Again we want to thank you all for coming on behalf of Gallatin County and Montana Department of Transportation. We appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule to be here.

Remember. Comments need to be in by March 11. Comment sheets are back there. You can mail, email or drop them in the box. So March 11, please remember that date.

Thank you.

Hearing Ended.

APPENDIX C – MEDIA OUTREACH FOR EA AND PUBLIC HEARING

Press Releases:

Press Releases for Notice of Availability were sent to the Bozeman Chronicle and Belgrade News and other media outlets via e-mail on Tuesday, February 10 and distributed at the media outlet's discretion.

Press Releases for Notice of Hearing were sent to the Bozeman Chronicle and Belgrade News and other media outlets via e-mail on Friday, February 13 and distributed at the media outlet's discretion.

Post Card Notification:

Postcards were sent to approximately 40 individuals who had participated in previous meetings or otherwise requested to receive project mailings.



Gallatin County and the Montana Department of Transportation is conducting a formal Public Hearing to take comment on the Environmental Assessment for the proposed I-90 East Belgrade Interchange project. To view the Environmental Assessment visit: www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/eis_ea.shtml Comments and concerns may be presented at the Public Hearing; by mail to Larry Watson, Gallatin County, 311 West Main, Room 304, Bozeman, MT 59715; or online at the above web address.



Public comments are due no later than March 11, 2009.

PLEASE JOIN US!

Public Hearing
Tuesday February 24, 2009
Belgrade Middle School
(in the Cafeteria)
410 Triple Crown
Belgrade, MT

6:00 p.m. Open House
6:15 p.m. Informal Presentation
followed by the Public Hearing



Notice of Availability

I-90 East Belgrade Interchange Environmental Assessment

The Environmental Assessment (EA) is now available for public review and comment. The Preferred Alternative identified in the EA includes elements that best satisfy the need for the project while minimizing impacts. The proposed action is the construction of a new interchange on I-90 to be located in the vicinity of Alaska Road and the entrance to Gallatin Field. This is approximately 1.2 miles east of the existing Jackrabbit Lane Interchange, and approximately 5.75 miles west of the existing North 19th Avenue Interchange in Bozeman. A new interchange at this location would also require short connector roadways to be constructed from the interchange to the Frontage Road (Montana 205) to the north, and to Alaska Road to the south. The connection to the north would also include a grade-separated crossing of the Montana Rail Link rail line.

Review the EA at:

- Belgrade Public Library (106 North Broadway)
- Bozeman Public Library (626 East Main Street)
- Gallatin County Commissioners Office (311 West Main, Room 306) - Bozeman
- Belgrade City Hall (91 East Central) - Belgrade
- Gallatin Field (850 Gallatin Field Road) - Belgrade
- MDT Bozeman Area Office (907 North Rouse Avenue) - Bozeman
- MDT Headquarters Office (2701 Prospect Ave) - Helena
- Online at www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/eis_ea.shtml
- Call MDT Environmental Services at (406) 444-7228 for a copy

Comment Period: February 9, 2009 to March 11, 2009

- Present verbal or written comments at the public hearing
- Written comments to Larry Watson, Gallatin County, 311 West Main, Room 304, Bozeman MT 59715
- Online at www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/eis_ea.shtml



For More Information:

- Larry Watson, Gallatin County, (406) 582-3192
- Jeff Patten, FHWA, (406) 449-5302
- Tom Martin, MDT Bureau Chief – Environmental Services, (406) 444-7228

Gallatin County and MDT attempt to provide accommodations for any known disability that may interfere with a person's participation in any department service, program, or activity. For reasonable accommodations to participate in this meeting, please contact Paul Grant at (406) 444-9415 at least two days before the meeting. For the hearing impaired, the TTY number is (406) 444-7696, (800) 335-7592, or Montana Relay at 711. Alternative accessible formats of pertinent information will be provided upon request.

Tuesday, February 24, 2009 6:00 p.m.: Open House
6:15 p.m.: Informal Presentation followed by the Public Hearing
Belgrade Middle School Cafeteria, 410 Triple Crown, Belgrade

Notice of Availability published in Bozeman Chronicle – Monday, February 9, and in the Belgrade News – Tuesday, February 10, 2009.



Public Hearing

I-90 East Belgrade Interchange Environmental Assessment

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Tuesday, February 24, 2009 6:00 p.m.: Open House
6:15 p.m.: Informal Presentation followed by the Public Hearing
Belgrade Middle School Cafeteria, 410 Triple Crown, Belgrade

Public Hearing Notice published in Bozeman Chronicle – Sundays, February 15 and 22, and in the Belgrade News – Friday, February 13 and Tuesday, February 17, 2009.

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APPENDIX D – ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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