

Montana Transportation Commission

December 11, 2025 Meeting Commission Room 2701 Prospect Avenue Helena, Montana

IN ATTENDANCE

Loran Frazier, Transportation Commission Chair (District 3)
Kody Swartz, Transportation Commissioner (District 1)
Shane Sanders, Transportation Commissioner (District 2)
Noel Sansaver, Transportation Commissioner (District 4) (on line)
Scott Aspenlieder, Transportation Commissioner (District 5)
Chris Dorrington, MDT Director
Larry Flynn, MDT Deputy Director
Jess Bousliman, MDT Commission Secretary
Dustin Rouse, MDT Chief Engineer
Dave Gates, MDT Construction Engineer
Valerie Balukas, MDT Chief Legal
Doug McBroom, MDT Statewide Planning & Modal Ops Administrator
Jon Swartz, MDT Asset Strategy, Operations & Maintenance
Ryan Dahlke, MDT Preconstruction Engineer
Brenden Borges, MDT
Bill Baron, Lake County Commissioner
Mark Scott
Samantha Boucher
Lawrence Kovac
Brittain Kovac

On Line:

Geno Liva, MDT District 2
Mike Taylor, MDT District 5
Paul Johnson, MDT
Justun Juelfs, MDT
Ed Ereth, MDT
Rebecca Anderson, MDT
Brian Hasselbach, FHWA
Aaron Wilson
Luke LaLiberty
Alan McCollim
Devin Filicicchia
Brandt Dahlen
Marie Garrison

Please note: Minutes are available for review on the commission's website at https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolv/trans_comm/meetings.aspx. Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided upon request. For additional information, please contact transportation secretary Jess Bousliman at (406) 444-6201, jbousliman@mt.gov visit the commission's website at http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolv/trans_comm/meetings.aspx. For the hearing impaired, the TTY number is (406) 444-7696 or 1-800-335-7592 or call the Montana Relay at 711. Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided upon request.

OPENING – Commissioner Loran Frazier

Commissioner Frazier called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioner Sansaver offered the Invocation. Commissioner Frazier asked for introductions.

Director Chris Dorrington said we are having a significant rain and snow event in the Libby area. We've lost one secondary bridge, Search and Rescue is looking for a potential vehicle there. We are working on updates and I might have to leave the meeting to get an update. I think of 2022 and the Stillwater event at Rock Creek. Commissioner Frazier said I hope things go well. Mother Nature is letting us know it is the changing of the seasons.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the Commission Meetings of September 30, 2025 and October 21, 2025 were presented for approval.

Commissioner Aspenlieder moved to approve the minutes for the Commission Meetings of September 30, 2025 and October 21, 2025. Commissioner Sanders seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 1: Construction Project on State Highway System Kenyon Noble Lumber and Hardware, Belgrade

Doug McBroom presented the Construction Project on State Highway System – Kenyon Noble Lumber and Hardware, Belgrade, to the Commission. Under MCA 60-2-110 “Setting priorities and selecting projects,” the commission shall establish priorities and select and designate segments for construction and reconstruction on the national highway system, the primary highway system, the secondary highway system, the urban highway system, and state highways. This statute exists to ensure the safety of our system, protect transportation investments, and encourage coordination on public and private infrastructure improvement projects that impact MDT routes.

Kenyon Noble Lumber and Hardware – Belgrade

Kenyon Noble Lumber and Hardware is proposing modifications to Jackrabbit Lane (N-85) near Belgrade to address traffic generated by their new facility. Proposed improvements include the installation of a new right-turn lane on Jackrabbit Lane 2near Valley Center Road.

MDT headquarters and Butte District staff have reviewed and concur with the recommended improvements. Kenyon Noble will provide 100 percent of project funding and will be required to complete MDT’s design review and approval process to ensure that all work complies with MDT design standards.

When complete, MDT will assume all maintenance and operational responsibilities associated with the proposed improvements.

Staff recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission approve this modification to Jackrabbit Lane pending completion of applicable state and local design review and approval processes.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the Construction Project on State Highway System – Kenyon Noble Lumber and Hardware, Belgrade. Commissioner Aspenlieder seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 2: Construction Project on State Highway System Norton Properties Subdivision, Bozeman

Doug McBroom presented the Construction Project on State Highway System – Norton Properties Subdivision, Bozeman, to the Commission. Under MCA 60-2-110 “Setting priorities and selecting projects,” the commission shall establish priorities and select and designate segments for construction and reconstruction on the national highway system, the primary highway system, the secondary highway system, the urban highway system, and state highways. This statute exists to ensure

the safety of our system, protect transportation investments, and encourage coordination on public and private infrastructure improvement projects that impact MDT routes.

Norton Properties Subdivision – Bozeman

Laurel Parkway, LLC is proposing modifications to Huffine Lane (N-50) in Bozeman to address traffic generated by the Norton Properties subdivision. Proposed improvements include a right in/right out approach at Betty Lane, a 3/4 movement approach at Water Lily Drive, and a new T-intersection with a traffic signal at Laurel Parkway.

MDT headquarters and Butte District staff have reviewed and concur with the recommended improvements. Laurel Parkway, LLC will provide 100 percent of project funding and will be required to complete MDT's design review and approval process to ensure that all work complies with MDT design standards.

When complete, MDT will assume all maintenance and operational responsibilities associated with the proposed improvements.

Staff recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission approve these modifications to Huffine Lane pending completion of applicable state and local design review and approval processes.

Commissioner Sanders said I went on line and tried to find Betty Lane and I couldn't find it. Can you tell me where Betty Lane is actually located? Doug McBroom said I'm not exactly sure where it is. Commissioner Sanders said I would make a request that you include a map that has a little bit more detail on it like we've done for our speed studies and we now have pretty good maps.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the Construction Project on State Highway System – Norton Properties Subdivision, Bozeman. Commissioner Swartz seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

**Agenda Item 3: State Highway System Revision
West End Road, Park County**

Doug McBroom presented the Construction Project on State Highway System Revision – West End Road, Park County, to the Commission. The Transportation Commission is responsible for approving revisions to the state highway system (per MCA 60-2-126) and may add (or remove) public roadways from the list of routes considered to be state highways. State highways are roadways that are under the jurisdiction of the Transportation Commission – but not part of a designated highway system (such as the National, Primary, Secondary or Urban Highway System).

At this time, Park County is proposing the following modifications to a state highway:

- Remove West End Road (X-34139), near the West Livingston Interchange, from the State Highway System.

If approved, this action would serve to reduce state highway mileage by 0.23 miles. Park County, through resolution, will be accepting jurisdictional and maintenance responsibility for this roadway.

On behalf of Park County, as required by MCA 60-2-126, staff requests that the Transportation Commission approve this proposed modification to the state highway system as listed above and illustrated on the attached map.

Staff recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission approve the following modification to the state highway system

- **Remove West End Road (X-34139), near the West Livingston Interchange, from the State Highway System.**

The net mileage reduction to the state highway system equals 0.23 miles.

Commissioner Sanders asked why we are transferring this over, what is the rationale for this. Doug McBroom said there are some utilities that they would like to supply and they feel it would be easier for them to maintain the road and the utilities if they have the road taken over.

Commissioner Frazier said don't we have a maintenance facility in there somewhere? Doug McBroom said that is correct at the end of West End Road. Commissioner Frazier asked if that would change our access since it's our MDT facility. Will we still be plowing snow in it? Jon Swartz said that road will be transferred to the city of Livingston and we will work with them on an agreement to plow that after it is transferred. Valerie Balukas said there is a Maintenance Agreement with Park County to maintain the road and MDT will do the snow removal. That agreement already exists. Commissioner Frazier asked if this was in our best interest. Jon Swartz said yes it is.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the State Highway System Revision – West End Road, Park County. Commissioner Aspenlieder seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

**Agenda Item 4: Construction Project on State Highway System
Kings Common Subdivision, Helena**

Doug McBroom presented the Construction Project on State Highway System – King Common Subdivision, Helena, to the Commission. Under MCA 60-2-110 “Setting priorities and selecting projects,” the commission shall establish priorities and select and designate segments for construction and reconstruction on the national highway system, the primary highway system, the secondary highway system, the urban highway system, and state highways. This statute exists to ensure the safety of our system, protect transportation investments, and encourage coordination on public and private infrastructure improvement projects that impact MDT routes.

Kings Common Subdivision – Helena

Helena Kings Common, LLC is proposing modifications to the I-15 Frontage Road (X-25295) in Helena to improve safety and reduce potential conflicts between vehicles and non-motorized traffic. Proposed improvements include bike/ped feature upgrades, ADA work, and the installation of a rectangular rapid flashing beacon (RRFB) at a crosswalk near Queen Anns Street.

MDT headquarters and District staff have reviewed and concur with the recommended improvements. Helena Kings Common, LLC will provide 100 percent of project funding and will be required to complete MDT's design review and approval process (to ensure that all work complies with MDT design standards).

When complete, the City of Helena will assume all maintenance and operational responsibilities associated with the proposed improvements.

Staff recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission approve these modifications to the I-15 Frontage Road - pending completion of applicable state and local design review and approval processes.

Commissioner Swartz moved to approve the Construction Project on State Highway System – Kings Common Subdivision, Helena. Commissioner Sanders seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 5: Delegation of Authority to Award Federal-Aid Projects California Street, Missoula

Doug McBroom presented the Delegation of Authority to Award Federal-Aid Projects – California Street, Missoula, to the Commission. Under MCA 7-14-4108 “authority to contract for road work when federal funds involved,” all federally funded construction projects with joint contracting between the Department of Transportation (MDT) and cities or towns must be let by the Transportation Commission.

The City of Missoula is requesting Commission approval to let, award, and administer the contract for a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) project that will reconstruct California Street from Dakota Street to South 3rd Street in Missoula. The project will utilize the Local Agency Guidelines (LAG) process for project delivery.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission delegate its authority to let, award, and administer the contract for this project (California Street - Missoula) to the City of Missoula – in accordance with MDT's Local Agency Guidelines (LAG) process for project delivery.

Commissioner Sansaver asked if this was being paid for by Missoula or is it state money. Doug McBroom said this is using Missoula's CMAC source. Commissioner Frazier said there was a previous project to the north of this and this will complete that corridor. Hopefully that will take some traffic off Russell Street. I think it's a good project.

Commissioner Swartz moved to approve the Delegation of Authority to Award Federal-Aid Projects – California Street, Missoula. Commissioner Sansaver seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 6: Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program Projects Additions to TA Program (14 New Projects)

Doug McBroom presented the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program Projects – Additions to TA Program (14 New Projects) to the Commission. The Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program provides assistance to local governments, tribal entities, transit providers, resource agencies and/or school districts for community improvements deemed eligible to receive TA funding. Program priorities are determined via a competitive process with the highest scoring proposals moving forward as project nominations.

MDT is requesting Commission approval to add fourteen (14) new Transportation Alternatives (TA) projects to the program. The estimated total cost for all projects is \$14,609,415 (\$11,503,705 federal + \$3,105,710 local) – with the entirety of the federal funding originating from the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program.

The projects are consistent with the goals and objectives identified in the Performance Programming (Px3) Process as well as the policy direction established in TranPlanMT. Specifically, traveler safety and bicycle/pedestrian features will be enhanced with the addition of these projects to the program.

Staff recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission approve the addition of these Transportation Alternatives (TA) projects to the highway program.

Commissioner Aspenlieder asked how many of these 14 projects will be delegated to the cities or counties. Doug McBroom said the very next agenda item has that but I believe it will be nine.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program Projects – Additions to TA Program (14 New Projects). Commissioner Swartz seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 7: Delegation of Authority to Award Federal-Aid Projects – Transportation Alternatives Program Projects

Doug McBroom presented the Delegation of Authority to Award Federal-Aid Projects – Transportation Alternatives Program Projects, to the Commission. Under MCA 7-14-4108 “authority to contract for road work when federal funds involved,” all federally funded construction projects with joint contracting between the Department of Transportation (MDT) and local governments must be let by the Transportation Commission.

Numerous local governmental entities are requesting Commission approval to let, award, and administer contracts for Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program projects. Attachment A lists the TA projects and identifies the local governments that will be utilizing the Local Agency Guidelines (LAG) process for project delivery.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission delegate its authority to let, award, and administer the contracts for these projects to the cities and

counties in accordance with MDT's Local Agency Guidelines (LAG) process for project delivery.

Commissioner Swartz asked how you decide whether it will be a LAG project. In District 2 why are five of the projects LAG and one is not? Commissioner Frazier said the two projects in District 3 are in the town of Cascade and Fairfield, they do not have city staff available to take care of that. Doug McBroom said I believe it is a capacity issue and a volume issue. Ryan Dahlke said I'll have to look into it and get back to you. My suspicion is it is the county and not that city of Bozeman or Belgrade but I'll have to verify that. Commissioner Swartz said it sounds like it has something to do with what the project falls under. The one in Lodge Grass is not a LAG project so it comes down to the local government. Commissioner Frazier said yes if the local government does not have staff to perform inspection or design. Ryan Dahlke said Johnson Lights project is being done by Yellowstone County. There are counties that can and I'd encourage more counties to be willing to do that as well. Gallatin County is more than capable of doing this.

Commissioner Aspenlieder moved to approve the Delegation of Authority to Award Federal-Aid Projects – Transportation Alternatives Program Projects. Commissioner Swartz seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment:

Commissioner Bill Barron, Lake County Commissioner, said we are here for the speed study on Agenda 9.

**Agenda Item 8: Speed Limit Recommendation
US 93 (N-5) – Elmo to Dayton**

Dustin Rouse presented the Speed Limit Recommendation, US 93 (N-5) – Elmo to Dayton, to the Commission. In August of 2023, Lake County requested a speed study be performed on US 93 in the general area of Dayton/Proctor. After reviewing the study area, the study was expanded from the community of Elmo to the beginning of the previously completed Rollins speed study which ended at milepost 85. The public's main concern is the area immediately around Dayton and the desire to institute either a 45-mph or 55-mph speed limit. The request highlights that Big Arm and Elmo have a 55 and 45-mph speed zone and they would like to see the same type of speed zone through the community of Dayton.

Within this speed study, US 93 is part of the non-interstate national highway system (N-5) and classified as a principal arterial. Typical sections are comprised of two 12-foot travel lanes (one in each direction) with 8-foot shoulders. Shoulder width is reduced to four feet approximately between milepost 78 and milepost 79.5. There is adequate sight distance for the most part along the roadway. Segments have horizontal and vertical curves that may restrict sight distance. This is especially true for approaches in these curves. There are also some approaches that intersect at angles other than 90-degrees. Centerline and shoulder rumble strips are present throughout the study area. Passing zones are present for approximately 62-percent of the study area. Average annual daily traffic (AADT) volume from 2023 ranges from almost 5,200 vehicles north of the community of Elmo to about 6,500 vehicles north of the community of Dayton. Peak AADT was observed in 2023. There has been little changes to traffic volumes near Elmo in the last three years, however, after 2020 traffic volumes increased substantially and have held constant since. Traffic volumes increased by approximately 15 percent from 2020 to 2021 and have held at approximately the 2021 volumes since. The roadside environment is primarily rural with minimal development along US 93. Even though there is minimal development

along the roadway there is substantial residential development that accesses US 93 from local roadways. Nearly all the development occurs along the lake shore with Old US 93 providing most of the development with access points connecting to US 93.

Summary: A review of the spot speed samples shows that the prevailing speeds along US 93 match with the set speed limits. The 85th percentile speeds and upper limits of the pace are for the most part within ± 7 -mph of the statutory 70-mph speed limit. In total, 80-percent of the stations showed prevailing speeds within ± 3 -mph of the speed limit, with two stations at the end showing elevated speeds. There were two dips in the percentage of drivers traveling within 10-mph of each other, which occurred in the area of Dayton. This could be due to either the curvature of the roadway for this section or the nature of the intersection at Lake Mary Ronan Road. Although the prevailing speeds indicate appropriately set speed limits roadway context indicates these speeds are slightly elevated above what should be considered reasonable and prudent. Based on the elevated crash rates throughout the study it would be advisable to reduce the speed limit. The proposed speed limit will be based on the closest 50th percentile. Based on where the 65-mph speed limit began in the previous Rollins speed study, it is advisable to extend this recommendation to where the 65-mph begins near milepost 86. When considering the crash analysis of that section, in conjunction with the crash analysis of the current study, the use of the closest 50th percentile is still recommended. Extending the recommendation of this study would also eliminate a 1.3-mile segment of 70 mph that would be created if this study were not extended and its recommendations approved. Additionally, this will create a consistent 65-mph corridor for US 93 between Elmo and Lakeside. Currently the transitions to the north of Elmo do not meet current MDT guidance. The 55-mph transition zone is currently 1,400-feet and we recommend a length of 2,700-feet or half a mile. There are elevated speeds at the existing 45/55-mph speed transition and lengthening the 55-mph transition by 1,300-feet could help drivers navigate this transitional zone and reduce speeds going into the 45-mph speed zone.

Lake County agrees with MDT's recommendations and their concurrence is attached.

Staff recommendation:

It is the desire of MDT with the approval of the Montana Transportation Commission to institute the following speed limits:

A 55-mph speed limit beginning approximately 400-feet north of the intersection with Spinnaker Lane (straight-line station 10+00) and continuing north for an approximate distance of 2,700-feet, approximately 1,000-feet south of the intersection with Old US 93 (straight line station 37+00)

A 65-mph speed limit beginning approximately 1,000 feet south of the intersection with Old US 93 (straight-line station 37+00) and continuing north to a point outside the study area for an approximate distance of 7.96 miles, approximately 490-feet north of the intersection with Northaire Lane

Lake County Commissioner Bill Baron said we agree completely with what is recommended.

Commissioner Swartz moved to approve the Speed Limit Recommendation, US 93 (N-5) – Elmo to Dayton. Commissioner Sanders seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 9: Speed Limit Recommendation MT 35 (N-52) – Blue Bay to Woods Bay

Dustin Rouse presented the Speed Limit Recommendation, MT 35 (N-52) – Blue Bay to Woods Bay, to the Commission. In December 2023, the Lake County Commissioners formally requested a speed study and safety improvements for Montana Highway 35 (MT-35) between Blue Bay and Woods Bay, with a particular focus on the business area of Woods Bay. The request highlighted concerns about high-speed traffic, frequent pedestrian crossings, insufficient signage, and heavy truck traffic. It proposed conducting a comprehensive speed study, enhancing law enforcement, and implementing infrastructure upgrades, including flashing speed signs, crosswalks, and potentially a pedestrian walkway in the Woods Bay business corridor. Therefore, in July of 2024 MDT entered into a contract to have RPA conduct a speed study from milepost 13 (northern boundary of the Flathead Indian Reservation) to milepost 28.3 (Lake County and Flathead County line).

Within the study area, MT-35 is classified as a minor arterial and is part of the primary highway system. The typical roadway configuration consists of two 12-foot travel lanes, one in each direction, with shoulder widths that vary between one to eight feet. No MDT average annual daily traffic (AADT) count sites are located directly within the study area; however, nearby sites provide relevant data. In 2023, the count site at RP 28.5, north of the study corridor, reported an AADT of 4,786 vehicles per day, while the site at RP 17.14, south the study area, recorded an AADT of 3,060 vehicles per day. The majority of the roadside environment resembles that of a rural/suburban mix with the environment changing to a rural town in and around Woods Bay. Residential development is concentrated along Flathead Lake, which is west of the roadway, with some development occurring on the east side of the roadway. It should be noted that a large minority of the residential development is only occupied for parts of the year as vacation homes as indicated by surveys from Lake County. Sight distance along the corridor is generally poor with multiple obscured approaches, dense foliage and adverse geometric conditions.

Summary: Observed 85th percentile speeds are for the most part at least 5-mph above the posted 50 mph and 45-mph speed limits and reached 10-mph above the posted for both speed zones. Current speed limits are set below the 50th percentile speeds for all speed zones along the study area. Overall, speeds are elevated beyond the posted speed limits by a significant amount. The rounded down 85th percentile was determined to be the most appropriate for determining a speed limit for the majority of the study section with the exception of the Woods Bay business area which recommended the closest 50th percentile due to pedestrian activity, angle parking and on-street parking. It should be noted that all speed zones when utilizing the above criteria for determining a speed limit generally recommends an increase in the statutory speed limit by 5-mph. For several of the speed zones, the rounded down 85th percentile and the closest 50th percentile results in the same recommendation of an increase in 5-mph. For the rest of the speed zones, it resulted in a recommendation that was the same as the current posted limit. This is all to illustrate that the current speeds limits are not in line with the speed data and the engineering recommendation would be for an increase across several of the zones, including the Woods Bay area which would see the 35-mph speed zone be increased to 40-mph. However, understanding the local concerns and input, we are recommending a no-change instead of any increases along this corridor. Current transitional areas are up to MDT guidance. MDT agrees with the recommendation set by RPA.

Lake County does not concur with MDT's recommendation, and their request is attached. Lake County would like to see two changes instituted along this route. The first is an adjustment to the length of 45-mph speed zone south of Woods Bay. Lake County recommends that the zone be shortened by approximately one mile.

Considering the aforementioned elevated 85th percentile speeds, MDT has no objections to moving the 45/50 mph transition to the north and supports this change. The second desire is to change the existing 35-mph speed zone to a new 25-mph speed zone with the same limits as the existing 35-mph speed zone. This would be a net reduction of 10-mph from existing conditions. It should be noted that speeds are generally elevated through this section already, with an average 85th percentile of 42.4-mph and 50th percentile of 36.6-mph. The closest 50th percentile or rounded down 50th percentile would still end in the same recommendation of 35-mph, which would be no-change to the existing speed limit. MDT would like to stress that the speed data does not support a 10-mph reduction for this segment and research has shown that reducing the speed limit by 10-mph or more below the engineering recommendation can lead to an increase in fatal/injury crashes.

Staff recommendation:

It is the desire of MDT with the approval of the Montana Transportation Commission to institute the following speed limits:

A 50-mph speed zone beginning at milepost 18 (straight-line station 10+00) and continuing north for an approximate distance of 6.3-miles, approximately 1,500-ft north of milepost 24 (straight-line station 344+50)

A 45-mph speed zone beginning approximately 1,500-ft north of milepost 24 (straight-line station 344+50) and continuing north for an approximate distance of 1.39-miles, approximately 750-ft north of Birch Tree Drive (straight-line station 418+00)

Commissioner Sanders said I understand there is also requests for flashing signs and other traffic issues. Dustin Rouse said I've been in contact with Bob Vosen and Justun Juelfs who is on line. We have our District Administrators coordinate with the locals to work through those potential safety features that would include a potential feed-back sign. I defer to Justun Juelfs the Acting DA. Justun Juelfs said I understand prior conversations have taken place between MDT and Lake County as well as other local citizens. MDT supports working with the local government to come up with a plan to determine if those are appropriate and how best to include those in this segment.

Commissioner Frazier asked for a show of hands for how many guests intend on speaking on this issue – five people raised their hand. We will start with the County Commissioner.

Bill Baron, Lake County Commissioner said I live in Polson but Woods Bay is in my commission district. I was in law enforcement for 30 years, I'm Sheriff for two terms for Lake County, and I've been a Lake County Commissioner for 17 years. Woods Bay has always been in my area of jurisdiction and I'm very familiar with the issues up there. When I look at your sign out here it says 179 deaths as of December 3rd of this year. That is startling but I guess it's down a little. I'm always amazed it isn't higher with some from Woods Bay because if you're up there during high traffic times of the year, it's dangerous to drive through that town; 25 mph is too fast. It is just crazy at night and why there aren't more pedestrians killed or car accidents is beyond me.

My thought process behind extending the 50-mph speed limit farther north, which I see you're approving and I appreciate that, is if you come around at 45 mph and slow down for such a long stretch with no reason for it to be that slow, people start speeding up again. Then they are going too fast.

We strongly feel that the limit in Woods Bay should be dropped to 25 mph. In the summertime it's hard for cars to drive that fast but they find a way to do it. It's crazy. We talked about having a different speed for winter and summer, as a law enforcement officer I know that is done in places but I think it's confusing and I think it would be confusing in Woods Bay. One thing I think would help with the speed limit is if we could have a sign on each end of town that says, "Entering Woods Bay". I think that would go a long way to help slow people down because a lot of people are out of the area and don't realize they are coming into a town and it makes it dangerous. We strongly feel it should be lowered to 25 mph and stay there. I've read a lot on speed studies that shows the danger of lowering the limit too far below what is suggested but I don't know if that really applies to this situation from my experience. For right now we would like to see the 25 mph speed limit and the entering signs and we will work with Justun on doing some speed signs and some flashing lights.

Commissioner Frazier asked if Woods Bay was an incorporated town. County Commissioner Baron said it is not. Commissioner Frazier said I think there are some statutory rules that might apply. I'll let staff research that. Commissioner said there are signs for entering Rollins and you basically have a little service station and a post office. If there was something that could be done, I think it would be very beneficial.

Commissioner Aspenlieder asked if we could get some guidelines on what we can and can't do with respect to entering an unincorporated/incorporated community. That is unclear for me too. I know there are some unincorporated communities in northeast Montana that do have signs as if they are an incorporated city. We may have been inconsistent along the decades of MDT operation but if we can get some clarification that would be helpful. Valerie Balukas said I can certainly look into it.

Commissioner Frazier said I believe there used to be some statutory rules for an incorporated town when it comes to speed zones. County Commissioner Baron said Charo is an incorporated town and it has a sign "entering Charo". Ferndale has a sign also. So there are signs. Commissioner Frazier said it isn't the signs, it has to do with statutory rules regarding how speed limits are set.

Commissioner Sanders asked if he heard correctly that he was in law enforcement. County Commissioner Baron said yes I was in law enforcement in Lake County for ten years and 15 years in Glacier County. Commissioner Sanders said these guys had to do a lot of training for me about how speed limits work and when you set a speed limit lower than the prevailing traffic the chances of a severe accident including fatalities increase. Without law enforcement efforts to get the speed limit enforced, we'd be doing a disservice to this particular area by dropping it even further. In your time in law enforcement was Woods Bay was a concentrated area and did you put extra effort into enforcing speed limits in that area? County Commissioner Baron said they had a deputy stationed in Woods Bay. He was a resident deputy there and he worked that area. Deputies were back and forth there numerous times a day. I don't know how much actual traffic work they were doing, they were serving civil papers, etc., but I know if someone was speeding they would have stopped them for sure.

Mark Scott, I'm a resident of Woods Bay on the southern end of that zone right near the transition to 35 mph sign. The request to the Commission I remember because people don't respect how tight the turns are there in the area and it is reflective of the actual speed people are doing but it is not safe. My neighbor's dog was killed and I know of several fatalities in the area. Numerous big rigs come off the road every winter in Woods Bay on the tight corners on the north end. The request from the residents is the fact that those may be the speeds people are driving but they are too high. The parking for the bar and restaurants right in the middle of Woods Bay has very limited site lines, parking is right up against the traffic lanes, and people are coming into town at 50 mph around a corner. I am personally amazed there aren't more people killed and it is just a matter of time. The only person I'm aware of was a

motorcyclist coming around the corner way too fast. The request from the community is to slow the traffic down because it is too fast. People pulling out of the parking spots, people leaving the restaurant to cross the road to get to their cars, kids going down to the lake. It is very difficult for us. All the residents know this and are extremely careful with pets and small children but sometimes they get loose. Our request is to slow the traffic down and reduce the risk of that happening.

We had a poll of the local residents and 140+ people responded and 85% were in favor of reducing the speed limit not just seasonally. I think it would be better to establish a lower speed limit, enhance the signage and enforce it and change the behavior.

Samantha Boucher, I own two restaurants in Woods Bay in that heart of the strip. They are right across the street from each other and I'm constantly crossing the street along with multitudes of pets and tourists all throughout the summer. There is a ton of pedestrian traffic going across that road just through that little window. I'm not a political person and I don't usually get involved in these things but I'm scared about this. I'm here today because of that. It is only a matter of time and we are very concerned about it and thankful our Commissioners agree with us and we hope that you will consider this. If not if you could help us find some other solutions. Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

Brittain Kovac, I am the business owner of Flathead Lake Resort and a resident as well. I am also not very political. I'm speaking as a business owner, a resident, and also on behalf of the Bigfork Chamber of Commerce, and as a voice for other Woods Bay businesses. Our Chamber represents more than 400 members many of whom are business and community leaders who are directly impacted by the speeds going through Woods Bay. The request to lower this one-mile stretch is reflective of not only the shared experiences we have but also the community's overwhelming support as shown in the study that was done. We feel we're not asking for something unprecedented, there are already 25-mph highway zones that are similarly structured in areas including Whitefish on Hwy 93, Columbia Falls on Hwy 2 which I drove a few days ago, then down around Ronan and Arlee on Hwy 93. So slower segments in developed communities are a proven and accepted approach across the State of Montana.

Speaking from the perspective of a business owner and resident, my husband and I own Flathead Lake Resort, a hotel in Woods Bay. One of our greatest concerns is for our guests many of whom would love to walk to the local restaurants and establishments but instead we have to encourage our guests to drive 30 seconds up the road or 90 seconds down the road because walking along the highway in this stretch is not safe. It is a shame that our area, this beautiful cherished area of Woods Bay with very limited parking, cannot be enjoyed.

Further we are located at the bottom of a steep and dangerous curve near mile marker 26.5. Drivers who are heading south past Papa's Market, there is no warning sign before they encounter the significant down-hill grade as well as a slight double curve. It is very dangerous in inclement weather and one of my greatest concerns is that a vehicle going down this curve too fast will leave the roadway and kill themselves, my family, or my guests at the bottom of the hill and curve. It is dangerous and everyone in Woods Bay knows it's dangerous.

On behalf of the many Woods Bay businesses as well who employ J1 workers, we know they come here to be in our place without vehicles and they have to walk this one-mile stretch to get to work or home or to simply go up to Papa's Market to get groceries. They don't have vehicles and it's not safe for them to walk. As mentioned this is a preventable danger as well. So lowering the speed limits to 25 mph is not simply a preference, it is a matter of safety, live-ability and preserving the character of the place we all deeply love. Our community has spoken clearly and we are asking for

the state's partnership in taking a corrective step for something that could prevent an accident in the future. Thank you for your time.

Lawrence Kovac. I've been visiting my daughter for two weeks. We've been visiting for years since they moved up here but I've been driving from Columbia Falls to Woods Bay quite a bit observing driving habits. I'm one that obeys driving speed limits because I drive a customized veterinary clinic making house call in Kansas City. I'm very careful. I'm amazed in this little strip how many folks get mad at me because I'm following the speed limit. I had one pass me in Woods Bay on that curve. All of us that visit have been amazed there have not been some deaths. Where I live we have a hidden visibility curve, it took one too many deaths for them to finally drop the speed limit from 55 mph to 30 mph in a one-mile stretch of that area. That is a little input from an outsider who is experiencing this. I like the 25-mph speed limit in Columbia Falls and Whitefish. The summer traffic in the tourist areas will probably get busier and busier.

Marie Garrison (on line). Thank you for taking our comments into consideration today. I apologize I could not be there, I have to go out of the country for business today. I'm the one who started the on-line petition collecting feedback from the community. That was shared very broadly on Facebook, Next Door, and the entire community had the opportunity to participate without any cherry picking or selection whatsoever. We did find that around 85% of people supported this. I would ask you to consider when is the last time we had 85% of people on the same side of any issue. So that speaks how clearly our community feels about this. We are very grateful for Bill Baron for being here with us today.

I also want to acknowledge the resource constraints that are faced by MDT in terms of conducting the speed study. We know that this has been a really challenging time in terms of resources for everyone involved but the reality is that the speed study was the first one that had been done in our area in 10 years. It was conducted over one day and at the very end of August at the very end of our tourist season. School was back in session and it was an unseasonably cold day about 60 degrees. So you have a week day at the end of the tourist season with very cold temperatures which is going to be very different from what we have at the peak of our tourist season. At the peak of our tourist season, especially on the weekends, we have tons of traffic and people coming to enjoy the area, the houses and restaurants along the area are completely packed with pedestrians. As some of the business owners have mentioned, these people have come from different areas and they think they are in a little charming mountain village and they are completely relaxed looking at the beautiful scenery. I've watched them walking along with headphones, walking in the middle of the road, they think they're in a Swiss village. I'm very concerned that it's only a matter of time before some of these people are going to be hit by a car and we're going to have a completely preventable fatality. For the sake of everyone in the community and for the sake of local business, and for the sake of the enjoyment of this incredible area we don't think it would disproportionately harmful to any other groups, whether truckers or traffic, to reduce the speed limit to 25 mph especially in the summer. If we can at least come to agreement on the summer due to the increased pedestrian traffic in the summer, that would be a huge step forward but I do agree it should be year-round but if this is an area where we need to compromise, I think potentially we could do that.

This has been a known issue for our community for many years and I encourage you to read the comments that were submitted. There have been people in our community trying to get this issue addressed for more than 10 years and it seems that we're continually caught up in some different legislation or different types of resource constraints, red tape, whatever it is. I just think as Montanan's coming together to really protect our local community and do the common-sense thing is hopefully a value we all share. As mentioned there are numerous bars and restaurants in this area, it is a one-mile area, numerous houses on one side of the street with docks and lake

access on the other side of the street, there are children and pets going across this road all summer long and it is very hard to keep them contained. So we would appreciate any sort of compromise and working together so that we can come to the common-sense thing that will really reflect the will of the community and all the comments that we have submitted. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Commissioner Aspenlieder said in the study and the compilation, one of the things I look at is the crash data and the citation data. One of the things we talk about whether it's Woods Bay, Glendive, or pick the community, and we've done some arbitrary speed limits, I look at the citations to see what we're getting for enforcement. Whether it be Commissioner Sanders wearing me down or being a City Councilman in Billings and being a local government official, I can empathize with the fact that it's hard to hire law enforcement, it's hard to keep law enforcement because they have a lot of obligations, but in this instance, there are 34 citations for speeding over five years. That's six per year, that's not even one a month in enforcing the current speed limit. With a problem that is so rampant, that's something that local government has to put an emphasis on. I don't know what else to ask but that's something that has to be a priority of local government in enforcing speed limits. We can set speed limits at whatever, even 10 mph, the only thing that is going to change driver behavior is the threat of citations. That's not my perspective, that's a proven fact. So regardless of what we set the speed limit at and I can empathize with wanting to set the speed limit at 25 mph, the problem is that until people are writing tickets nothing is going to change.

It's also interesting to me the timing of the speed study completion done at the end of the tourist season kind of indicates to me that this is very much a local problem – locals are not following the speed limit and locals are not respecting the dangers of the situation. This isn't even a tourist problem. If you listen to the comments and look at the data and the timing, this is a local problem that locals don't follow the speed limit either.

So I would have a hard time reducing the speed limit to 25 mph because I think it arbitrarily sets it lower. I don't know if we've gone back and looked at the speed limit around where we had modified lower than the recommended speed like at the Quinn's Hot Springs. That is a question for Mr. Rouse – have we restudied what's going on at Quinn's to determine the impact. Dustin Rouse said you are correct, we did have a lot of comments in favor of dropping the posted speed even lower. At that time the Commission set it at 10 mph below the engineer's recommendation. We went back and studied it the next year and found that the amount of speed differential had significantly increased. There were actually requests at that time to reduce the length of the zone back to the engineer's recommendation. We brought that back to the Commission and the Commission took action to revert it back to the engineer's recommendation.

Commissioner Aspenlieder said I'll wrap up my comment noting that we've done this recently where we've set it lower than the statistics and known scientific data show and then turn around and increase it back because without enforcement it does not change. Driver habits do not change without enforcement. If MDT is willing to work with the locals in providing some speed feed-back signs and increase signage that would be a great things for the community to put some "Entering Woods Bay" signs on either side of Woods Bay, if we can do that statutorily, that would be helpful. I'm very hesitant to arbitrarily lower the speed limit against the data because every time we do that, it is shown not to have an impact without having enforcement behind it. I'm struggling. I empathize with the public but I'm struggling to get there.

Dustin Rouse said I read through all of the comments and clearly there is concern and there are issue there. Through our study we found they are not following the posted speed. We have it posted at 35 mph and on average the 85th percentile are driving at 45 mph. They are 10 mph over the posted speed. What I heard is "we want

people to drive slower" but unfortunately that doesn't happen by what you put on a posted sign. People drive based on the context of the road they're driving and without some type of contextual change as folks come into a community, you're going to see that. The risk to me is posting it even lower at 25 mph then the folks who are trying to abide and drive the speed limit, get frustrated people driving behind them doing stupid things. I'm sure you've seen it. That's the risk for us in arbitrarily posting a lower speed. I am all for trying to find solutions, working with the district and the locals to put a speed feed-back sign up. If everyone was going 35 mph there would be a different feel in that community but we have to get them there and that takes a change in the context.

Commissioner Sanders said one comment said we actually agreed to put in speed feed-back signs in the past but that never happened. Does anybody have awareness of that? Dustin Rouse said I do not. Justun Juelfs said I'm not aware of any signs in the Woods Bay community but we have them a little bit further north as it migrates into the Big Fork community.

Larry Kovac, Kansas City, said I've been driving here for 40 years and logged almost one million miles observing drivers. You made a point. The speed limit is 35 mph and most of the folks are going 45 mph. I find that driving around wherever I am in Kansas City. If they are going to pass me they are usually driving 10 mph over the speed limit. A thought – bring it down to 25 mph so instead of 45 mph they will be driving 35 mph. It's a safer speed limit and what the community is asking for. That's just a thought.

Mark Scott, Woods Bay. My wife's family has lived in Woods Bay since the early 1940's. I remember a request back in the 2000 time frame to make Hwy 35 a Scenic Byway. As part of that process and the discussion at the time, there was a request to put in signage to try and enhance driver compliance with the existing speed limits. I have a lot of that paperwork with me. I would agree if you put an arbitrary limit that doesn't reflect what people are doing is ill advised but the context when you come into Woods Bay changes very rapidly. What's really going on is the approach in either direction is a long straight-away, you're going faster and then suddenly you go around a bunch of bends and there are a bunch of bars and businesses and pedestrians.

Trying to do something to make the drivers aware that it will rapidly change and they can't be doing 50 mph around that corner because there are people in the road and they don't know that and then they slam on the breaks. It's the logging trucks and Fed Ex trucks not from the area and they don't know the area and they're going full speed. If they were going 35 mph they'd been fine but the problem is they aren't and they don't know they shouldn't be. It's a tight section and there are no shoulders, the parking is right on the road, the bars and restaurants are set back 20 feet, and you can't see that until you get there. That's what is different about Woods Bay. Most towns have the businesses set much further back. Big Fork is 35 mph and they are set back 100 feet. People will do 35 mph through Big Fork because they see all the stuff. In Woods Bay you don't see it.

Regarding enforcement, this is the only road in this section of Lake County and Lake County ends just north of Woods Bay, so for Lake County to provide enforcement for it someone has to drive all the way from Polson except for the single deputy who lives in Woods Bay. I've spoken to him many times, he's parked in front of my house to try and give people tickets and he does all he can but he is only one person. He's sitting at one end of town or the other and he'll pull people over for speeding; one was going almost 90 mph up the highway. He's one person so there's going to be limited enforcement in that regard unless we get some assistance from Flathead County and I don't know if that's possible.

Brittain Kovak, Flathead Lake Resort. When we met with our Commissioner and the State a couple of months ago to start this conversation and citations were brought up at the presentation. It was my understanding that there is a long list of things that

take precedence for law enforcement before traffic citations come into play and essentially it was mentioned there is not enough time or personnel officers to get to the point of citations. So I guess I'm looking for recommendations on how to work with the county to make this happen. We are the northern most point of our county so it is harder. Also if traffic citations are at the bottom of the list and overlooked if other things are taking precedence, so I'm looking for feedback and guidance on how to go about that would be helpful.

Bill Baron, Lake County Commissioner. When I was Sheriff the deputies had a lot of stuff to do, serving papers, investigating crimes, and I had a standing order that unless somebody was doing 15 mph over the speed limit, you don't stop them. If you're not caught up on your civil process or investigations which was more of the Sheriff's Office responsibility, traffic went last. Then they prioritized county roads instead of state highways, so there's a lot of things that play into the equation. The Highway Patrol has been short-handed up there for the last few years and we have two deputies on at a time. Law Enforcement is an issue, enforcement is tough, and we get complaints we respond to but to just be out working traffic deputies don't have time for that.

Commissioner Sansaver said I'd like to thank the community of Woods Bay for all the hard work they've put into this request for lowering the speed limit. I know it takes a lot of time and energy and in particular the lady who posted this and put it out on Facebook and all the hard work she's done. It's very difficult for the Department of Transportation for the State of Montana to arbitrarily change speed zones based not on the studies done by the state but by the studies done by the communities. I'm certainly, and have been for eight years, very sensitive to the requests by the communities and have tried to support all of those communities. With that being said I also need to support the staff. Overall it is of the utmost importance that the Commission stand back and take a good look at the work our people do out there and committing to these studies the safety of the local community and of the people of the State of Montana whether you are part of Woods Bay or outside of it.

As Commissioner Aspenlieder said if you're not doing the speed limit, that's not on us, that is on the local communities and I certainly want to support the local Sheriff's office and the Montana Highway Patrol and the local districts, they don't have the staff and we understand that but we don't know what the answer is. If we can't go with the intended proposal by our staff on what the safety issues are, it is very difficult for us to make a decision to change that. As pointed out from Woods Bay, if you lower it to 25 mph they are still going to go 35 mph. Again, that's not on the State of Montana that is on the local community to find a way whether it's posting those speed feed-back signs so you can actually see your speed limit, an illuminator coming into the town might be an answer for the people moving through that area to be more careful. We don't have a lot of deaths that have taken place there and I'm sorry that has to be a signal indicator because that certainly would be a sad indicator for the State of Montana to have to change a speed limit. I don't know what the answer is and I wish I could firmly say that I believe it should be changed to 25 mph if they are still going to be going 35 mph, that's still a danger in that community. Again I want to thank the community of Woods Bay for all the hard work they did and I certainly support all the people in that area but we have to take a look at the safety concerns by the State and the studies we do. Thank you.

Commissioner Aspenlieder said I'm trying to find some middle ground here. Can we commit to coming back and doing another speed study post working with the local government to get some speed feed-back signs up on either side of the community in the appropriate locations as identified by the local government, county and state, and getting up "Entering Woods Bay" signs? Can we come back and do another speed study after that to understand the impact of making those moves before we do a speed limit adjustment? Director Dorrington said Mr. Swartz would be responsible under his program for putting up messaging signs with coordination with Mr. Rouse

and MUTCD requirements. We are able to put those up as it is allowed by the sign code. I think it's a good idea to try that and it's not unprecedented. We've done that same thing, taking an interim step and then come back and study it. We're happy to do that.

Commissioner Aspenlieder said let me try to make a motion to approve Agenda Item 10 as recommended by staff with staff working to get speed feed-back signs up at the appropriate locations in coordination with local government, Lake County, and installation of community signs if allowed by statute. Then requiring MDT to come back do another speed study within 12 months of when the signs are implemented. Commissioner Frazier said then your motion is to approve the speed study changes as recommended with the addition adding speed feed-back signs at the appropriate locations and entering community signs if allowed and as appropriate with a follow-up speed study within 12 months of installation during the tourist season. Director Dorrington said I would say 12 months after installation of the signs. Commissioner Aspenlieder said that was my intent. Obviously if we install these in February, we want to have them there long enough to impact the community and traveling public to get acclimated to it, so that means we don't do a follow-up study next tourist season we would do it the next tourist season. We want to collect it during tourist season but not two months after its installed when everybody is still getting used to it. I'll leave that up to the engineers and staff's discretion as appropriate but not three years later. Larry Flynn said I have one point of clarification, this is regarding Agenda Item 9.

Commissioner Swartz said District One is my district. I just had my first conversation with Justun Juelfs, Acting DA and it was great. I can definitely empathize with the community. I live in Missoula but we go up the Flathead often in the summertime and I've spent a lot of time at The Raven with my family and all the places up there. I do understand it's not safe for pedestrian traffic for the most part. As Mr. Kovak said when he does go the speed limit, he has people passing him. That's where I get worried about lowering it too much because that's when you get more and more frustrated people and that's when big accidents happen. It's not that we don't hear you and we don't want to lower it but something has to change with the way people drive before we can lower that speed limit. Otherwise you're just asking for more conflict. When I was talking to Justun the big thing I mentioned was to put the speed feed-back signs up because when I'm driving and I'm going too fast and the sign starts blinking red at me saying slow down and I usually slow down. I don't know if everyone does but we have to get people closer to going 35 mph before we can set it to 25 mph. Let's try the interim step of putting in the speed feed-back signs and the Welcome to Woods Bay signs to get people to drive the posted speed limit before we arbitrarily lower it. I think 25 mph is probably realistic with the pedestrian traffic but I think if you lower it there now you're going to have more problems. That's our goal as a Commission, we want it to be as safe as possible and if we get that big variation in speeds then we're going to see the big crashes that result in fatalities. Thanks for all of you showing up. It was good to hear from the community on this.

Commissioner Frazier said I often say signs don't mean much but there is a sign that comes to mind on the Alaska Highway in northern Alberta as you come into the community it says, "All those in favor of a lower speed limit, raise your right foot."

Commissioner Sanders said my concern is if this is open ended enough because there are specific things that need to be done and Justun Juelfs will need to be working with the community to find the best method and do we really want to have a 12-month restriction on it? Can we add "at an appropriate time, or in a timely fashion" or something like that because I don't want to tie Justun's hands to 12 months. Is it open ended enough for you to do what you have to do? Justun said if it's acceptable to allow us to make solid engineering decisions on the timing that would work.

Commissioner Aspenlieder moved to approve the Speed Limit Recommendation, MT 35 (N-52) – Blue Bay to Woods Bay with the addition of the installation of speed feedback signs and entering community signs as appropriate with the MUTCD, and an additional speed study to be completed within 12 months of these installations.

Commissioner Aspenlieder then moved to amend the motion to remove the time constraint of 12 months and change the second study timeframe to be deemed as appropriate by staff, but not exceeding 30 months. Commissioner Swartz seconded the motion to amend. All Commissioners voted aye.

Commissioner Swartz then seconded the motion with the above amendment. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 10: Speed Limit Recommendation Interstate 15 (I-15) – Helena

Dustin Rouse presented the Speed Limit Recommendation, Interstate 15 (I-15) – Helena, to the Commission. In June of 2025, in discussions about the Bozeman interstate speed limits, it was discussed that Helena had also met the population threshold for the creation of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

Investigations looked into the Helena Interstate Speed limits and discovered that the Helena 65-mph speed limit was set based on a speed study and not by MCA 61-8-303 (a), which denotes that the interstate speed limit should be 65-mph in an urbanized area of 50,000 population or more. Now that Helena has reached the population threshold, MCA 61-8-303(a) dictates that the urbanized boundaries of Helena now be 65-mph. However, when looking at the urbanized area, it was determined that the scope of the urbanized area does not match the intent of the 65-mph statute.

The existing 65-mph speed limit through Helena exists mainly through three interchanges in the Helena interchange network. The existing 65-mph speed zone begins just south of the Capital Interchange and continues north until just north of the Custer Interchange, for a total approximate distance of 2.85-miles. The northern boundary of the Helena urbanized limits would be at Sierra Road, which is located 2.70-miles north of the Custer Interchange. The southern boundary for the urbanized limits is half a mile south of the South Hills Interchange. The South Hills interchange is located about 1.5-miles south of the Custer Interchange. The total length of the urbanized limits is approximately 6.85-miles, which is approximately 4-miles longer than the existing 65-mph speed zone or approximately more than double the existing length. Considering the northern urbanized boundary, there are no interchanges in this three-mile section or any access points at all. This section is an urbanized planning area but from an interchange perspective, it has no relevance to the actual traffic flow for this 3-mile area. The next interchange after Custer going north is the Lincoln Road Interchange which is located 6-miles north of the Custer Interchange, there are no access points or interchanges in-between these two interchanges.

There is no roadway context to support a 65-mph through this section, and we recommend that the 65-mph speed zone end where it currently ends just north of the Custer Interchange. The southern boundary of the urbanized limits is different as there is roadway context to support extending the 65-mph speed zone. The South Hills Interchange is part of the Helena Interchange network, and it services a growing part of Helena, the South Hills area. This area is rapidly developing and is expected to continue developing into the future and has changed substantially over the last 13-years since the last speed study was conducted on this section.

Summary: The last speed study conducted on this stretch of I-15 was conducted in 2013. The data from that study showed an average 85th percentile speed of

approximately 75-mph, and an average 50th percentile of approximately 66-mph. It should be noted this study was completed only a year after the construction of the Custer Interchange and before a sizeable majority of development occurred near this interchange as a result of its completion. As a result, speeds are inferred to be lower than the 2012 counts, this will be confirmed when speed data is collected next year. Speed data will be taken in roughly the same locations as the 2013 study in order to get a cleaner comparison of travel speeds over the last 13-years. Average annual daily traffic (AADT) volume is available at several locations along the study area. Two important locations for AADT is between the Capital and Cedar interchanges and between the Capital and South Hills interchange. AADT between the Capital and Cedar interchanges for 2024 was 30,894 vehicles. AADT for the same location but in 2013 was 23,720 vehicles, which is approximately a 31% increase in traffic over a 12-year span or approximately 2.5% in traffic growth per year. AADT between the Capital and South Hills interchange for 2024 was 15,551 vehicles and for 2013 was 12,641 vehicles. This equates to approximately a 23% increase or approximately a 1.9% increase in traffic growth per year. AADT in the future is expected to continue at a faster pace after the proposed eastside arterial connector is completed which will provide additional access for development and increase connectivity for existing development east of Helena. It should be noted this connector is only in the planning phase as the City of Helena was just recently awarded a 1.3-million dollar RAISE grant to plan and design the connector. This proposed arterial connector would connect at the currently vacant east side of the South Hills interchange. Considering the steady growth of traffic volumes since 2012 inside the Helena Interchange network, we believe that expanding the 65-mph speed zone to the South Hills Interchange better reflects the growing changes to the road network and Helena at large.

Lewis & Clark County and the City of Helena concur with MDT's recommendation, and their concurrence is attached.

Staff recommendation:

It is the desire of MDT with the approval of the Montana Transportation Commission to institute the following interim speed limit:

A 65-mph speed limit beginning approximately ½-mile south of the South Hills interchange and continuing north for an approximate distance of 4.3-miles, approximately ½-mile north of the Custer interchange.

Commissioner Sanders asked if we were contravening the MCA by doing this and are we authorized to do this. Dustin Rouse said the statute that dictates we set the speed limit by the MPO boundaries is MCA 61-8-303(a). That directs the department to take action and set those speeds. The Transportation Commission does have the authority to establish special speed zones and an interim speed zone through MCA 61-8-309. The Commission can adjust up or down based on our recommendation that there is justification for the action. Valerie Balukas said legal was involved in developing this recommendation looking at the statutes.

Commissioner Aspenlieder said I get the statue and I hate the statute, I think it's dumb. I thought it was dumb when we did this in Bozeman so I don't like it. However, you probably have a friend in Senator Usher who also equally hates it and he might be willing to sponsor a bill if there was a department bill to change this kind of statute and eliminate this kind of thing if the department was interested. If the department is not interested I will certainly request that of Senator Usher on his own volition to do that. I hate this statue. I understand why we've got to do it but I hate it.

Commissioner Frazier said my only comment is if you like to drive a parade, drive 65 mph between Custer and South Hills. Commissioner Aspenlieder said we just sent

those people from Woods Bay out of the room saying we don't set arbitrary speed limits and then we have a statute that's forcing us to set an arbitrary speed limit that is absolutely asinine. That's why it's so frustrating to me. We don't do it except for this stupid statute around MPO's that require us to arbitrarily do things that make no sense.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the Speed Limit Recommendation, Interstate 15 (I-14) – Helena. Commissioner Aspenlieder seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 11: Certificates of Completion September & October 2025

Dave Gates presented the Certificates of Completion for September & October, 2025, to the Commission. Certificates of Completion serve as documentation of final acceptance by the department, confirming the contract was completed in full compliance with the plans, specifications, and special provisions, as authorized by the Transportation Commission.

After a Certificate of Completion is accepted by the Transportation Commission, the department will notify the Contractor and its Escrow Agent that the bid documents may be released.

In September we have seven projects submitted. The sum of the total bid amount of the seven projects was \$17,423,019.51. The final amount was \$17,431,961.98 which is +0.05% above the original bid amount. There is one tied project in the seven total projects.

In October there were three projects submitted. The sum of the total bid amount of the three projects was \$28,417,794.13. The final amount was \$28,265,533.02 which was -0.54% below the original bid amounts. There are zero tied projects in the three total projects.

Staff recommendation:

Staff recommends approving the Certificates of Completion for September & October 2025.

Commissioner Sansaver moved to approve the Certificates of Completion, September & October, 2025. Commissioner Swartz seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye.

The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 12: Directors Discussion

Director Chris Dorrington

AASHTO Meeting

We attended the AASHTO meeting in Salt Lake City just a few weeks ago. It was very well attended and a well put together meeting. A couple of things I'll highlight, it is incredible how fast technology is moving, including autonomous vehicles and the use of AI in the transportation space. Interestingly and the first time I've ever seen it the Federal Administrator for Highways, Rail, and Transit and a top DOT official attended the whole meeting. I'm happy to report that I was able to meet directly with

the Federal Highways Administrator. One of the other subjects covered in detail was the Federal Reauthorization and the anticipated passage of the next funding bill. Almost everybody has an idea of when that could be and no one's right at this point. We are hopeful that in Q1 it will get picked up. It has to be in place by September 2026 in order for us to not enter a Continuing Resolution just for Transportation. That would be really difficult but we've done it before many times. Odds are good that it will make it through next year.

The other portion of funding that many states reported on was the state funding component. So an increase in the federal program and the IIJA by about 20% plus the focused money. So those two components and legacy funding have really strapped states. So a whole bunch of the states across the United States and many Western States have looked at state funding solutions. Almost every other state has three-to-five opportunities where we have one. The biggest one is the User Fee and that's our Fuel Tax. Wyoming redirected sales tax and excise tax to transportation, North Dakota issued one-time significant money \$200 million, Idaho is looking at a state funding solution and they are really concerned. They actually have a general fund transfer to transportation every year in at 60/40 split the amount of \$180 million for total infrastructure but that's in jeopardy. Washington increased their fuel tax and redirected some of the sales tax to infrastructure. Michigan reported using Marijuana money, which we do not want, in the amount of a revenue target of \$420 million and the sales tax/excise tax user fees include fuel tax. It's an issue for all states and it's an issue for Montana. We're in good company with a very challenging solution set ahead of us.

Transportation Interim Committee

We also attended two weeks ago the Transportation Interim Committee. We were there all day. We presented a lot of really good information at that the request of the Legislative Committee on Public Transportation which included a significant discussion on the Big Sky Pass Rail Authority in the Southern Route. Mr. Dahlke presented on the project selection process. We participated, via Mr. Gates, on alternative projects methods discussion on a panel along with contractors and the Interim Committee. We had a Funding Overview discussion presented by our CFO.

US 212

Last but not least we had a US 212 discussion for next steps. The reason I bring this up is the Commission will very likely be involved. It was nominated by one of the Senators as a closure of US 212 to commercial vehicles. We have appropriately cautioned against that recommendation because it is a US Highway that is open to all sorts of traffic. I think it will be a difficult or no go bill. However, the issue there is safety and there is a real safety concern along that route. Driver behavior almost exclusively is a real serious problem – speed, distraction, occupant protection, and impairment and commercial vehicles are definitely a big part of that.

Process Improvement

Our agency is working really hard process improvement. As an agency we're looking to do better in a handful of really key areas. Likely our programs will be out in communities, we have scheduled that already. We were in Billings last week and Missoula in August and we'll continue to do that. MPO's are first and then we'll move to the urban areas. That's just one area. What I'm trying to accomplish is to bring a multitude of our internal programs, move them out of a silo'd perspective into a community perspective and then with one voice the community can tell us what is important to them. Then we will come back and work those things as a department and come out with one thematic voice instead of one program at a time – with seven visits from MDT in one month and none of them coordinated.

Follow-Up – Agenda Item 7.

Ryan Dahlke said Commissioner Sanders had a question on Agenda No. 7 regarding the local agency administration of TA projects. Commissioner Sanders asked why Huffine Lane Shared Use Path was not local agency administered and, as I suspect, that one is county administered whereas the others in the Butte District are city – Bozeman or Belgrade. Their application, specifically as it refers to administration, specifically stated they do not have the capacity to administer this project due to limited staff resources and expertise in managing large-scale transportation projects. They acknowledge they have successfully managed smaller projects in the past but the complexity and scope of this project in conjunction with their work load resulted in a request for MDT to administer the project. The only thing I'll add is that this project is a little over \$1.5 million. That is why that project is MDT administered per their request.

Commissioners included in MPO Meetings

Commissioner Frazier said I'd like to discuss MPO meetings with coordination of district staff and the Commissioners being invited to those meetings. I'm invited to all the quarterly meetings for the Great Falls District and I suppose I'll be added to that in Helena since that is also in my district. How do you as Commissioners feel about that?

Commissioner Aspenlieder said it is no secret that I was incredibly frustrated to not be coordinated with and not even be notified that MDT was going to meet with the MPO in my district. I found out through my City Council role in our planning staff. The thing most frustrating about that is this process started five years ago when this Commission pushed and leaned into MDT to try and find ways to get itself out of the MPO boundary and pull itself back. So to get excluded from the MDT side of the conversation was incredibly frustrating. I don't know why or how that happened but when we're supposed to be your partner in these local communities and you go meet with those folks, the first people the local government folks come to is the District Commissioner. They come to us with what MDT said but I don't know what MDT said because I wasn't there – so I can't swing the bat for you or against you because I have no idea. If we're supposed to be a partner with you in helping work with the local governments, then you've got to be a partner with us also when you're going into the local governments. Sometimes that might work and sometimes that might not work, and we may not be able to be there but at least be notified that this is going on and asked to be there if we can. That was a frustrating situation for me last week.

Commissioner Swartz said I'd like to be invited. When you guys met with them in August, I heard from Jeremy Keene and that's when I reached out to Chris about it. I think we should probably be invited to those meetings and have a seat at the table just so we're aware of what's being conveyed back and forth.

Commissioner Frazier said then again I'd like to mention that as Commissioners and the Director and MDT staff we're all on the same team. I'll use the example of the Butte politicians, they may go beat the snot out of each other in the back room but when they come out they're all united. It just helps dealing with the local governments if there is one voice.

Commissioner Sanders said it has been a point of frustration for me. Mr. Dahlke had the unfortunate task of riding with me in a Van for three hours during the District One tour, so he heard me grouse about that. I get it, we all have other jobs and you guys are here every day with your nose to the grindstone, I do feel it's gotten a little better but I still feel like there could be a little more and even copying us on relevant emails and at least give us some awareness so it doesn't come as a complete surprise. I would encourage the staff to try to include us even if it is just a cc on an email to give us some background information.

Commissioner Sansaver said I think it's important that we be involved in as much as we can in our districts. I know we are busy people and we have a lot of stuff going on but I've known a few cases where either the Director has been in the area or the District Administrator has been in the area meeting with people that are ultimately going to come to me for answers and I hadn't received notification. So I think it's important for whatever we do as a team that we try to keep everybody involved.

Director Dorrington said we really are on the same team. Last week was not that example and by no stretch were we on the same page. By no means did we intend to exclude you and I apologize that you were excluded. Context matters, right? You said you'd like to be invited but you need to be more specific. We can invite you to probably 100 meetings per month if you wanted to attend. I do think that blurs the lines on what our roles are but I don't have any problem keeping you informed. I think as we evolve and we're completely open to doing a better job; we're in charge of how we show up every day. Today is a new day! We can do better especially with your feedback. There's no problem with that whatsoever but what if there was some other way? Last week didn't work and we can modify, no problem. In the context of the meeting this meeting was set so that we could improve our footprint and admit that we needed to improve. That was the whole context. What we did is to reach out to the Billings MPO and asked them what they would like to talk about because this is you're meeting. So in light of this being their meeting, I think the staff took the position that we're not inviting others, we're just bring our contingent to try and get coordinated. So we could now and in the future, cc you on a meeting. It wasn't to slight you and I'm sorry you feel that way. That's was not the intent. In the meeting what we're trying to say and what I opened with was, "we need to do a better job". You made it clear systems impact hasn't worked for a long time and you then told us it's actually gotten worse and I understand that.

I'm the third Director just in the time you guys have been on the Commission – Mike Tooley just before 2021, then Director Long and then me. Looking back on the last two Directors, there's two really clear themes – Director Tooley was about safety, he didn't travel too much and he certainly was not about friction. He was a great person but he was very cautious. Director Long was about construction; that was his thing. My thing is about improving the way in which this Agency operates. I'm an internal focused person. We worked on organizational structure for over a year. Systems are in line and in the works right now. Process improvement so that when we go to the locals, we're first coordinated and then we do a better job with their feedback. That was the whole point of the meeting. I think we came ready. The Missoula meeting was awesome, Billings not so much. I hope the rest of them go well and we will certainly extend to you notice and invitation. There's a lot more work to do, Systems Impact in particular has not been a focus for improvement for this agency until I got here and it was a real trigger for the Governor because he kept hearing about it. He said, "Figure this out, it's got to be more clear and more responsive. It has to be a process that developers and local entities and your agency can better understand what's going on." I think we're up to a meeting with me on my seventh Systems Impact review with the group and we're about to be structured differently. The process is being reviewed and I think we should be time bound. I think there should a time in which we provided responses. I don't want to over simplify because Systems Impact can be a real bugger if you have to wait for Army Corp, and Fish Wildlife feedback go get your environmental document completed and then back to the solution set. That is the goal, to try and be better, more responsive and more clear about the process. That was one component of last week's meeting.

I really think we can do this and I'm happy to include you. I think you need to say what you don't want to be included in. From the district perspective, we do invite all of you to your quarterlies. My expectation for the District Administrators is to be that facilitator first because they're in the communities in the district you are responsible for.

Commissioner Frazier said going back 20 years, I did one of my very first public meetings as District Administrator in Libby for a fairly controversial meeting. The Commissioner up there was Dan Larson who was a character. He actually picked up a guy who was harassing me and carried him outside and told him not to come back in. I appreciated him having my back. He came from the logging community and he had his own way of dealing with people. He showed up when I asked him to and it was nice to have him there.

Commissioner Sanders said I appreciate all the comments and I think we're on the same team. I would encourage anybody to have part of their legacy be communication. The District Administrators could be a good screen. If they think it's important that we be involved in something then as part of their task they could make sure to make us aware of anything that might be of interest to him. I think that would be a good screen. I don't need 100 emails. That would be my encouragement.

Director Dorrington said that's a good point. I have a very high expectation of the District Administrators. Their role has changed a bit. I expect a lot from them. They are human. Some are quieter and don't say as much as others. I talked to him about it and he's working on it. We've had a couple of legislators reach out and ask about it. He is doing better

Larry Flynn said we all know each other and we work with you all the time and have developed great relationships with you. Keep in consideration that the bulk of our team hears that the Transportation Commission intimidates the heck out of them. Commissioner Frazier asked him for clarification. He said when they have to bring up something that may involve a Commissioner, it's intimidating. So what Director Dorrington and what we're talking about with our process improvements in the agency is to ensure that folks who are in the trenches doing the work have the ability to communicate up where they need help. We work together with the Commission and the district on a variety of different things where issues come up. Often times, especially in the district we don't anticipate something to blow up and then we're in the thick of it. So just give that grace back and forth.

Marijuana Money

Commissioner Sanders asked about the marijuana money, is that a fed thing. Director Dorrington said almost everything related to that money is both appropriated and taken back two years later. One of the bills two sessions ago was about moving some of the marijuana money to the infrastructure and people lost their marbles. It's gone to FWP, Revenue and you just can't count on it. It pops up and looks like an awesome target because there's a lot of revenue there and then you lose it two years later because somebody else wants it and their lobbying group is more powerful.

Agenda Item 13: Change Orders September & October 2025

Dave Gates presented the Change Orders for September & October 2025 to the Commission. This summary is informational only; Commission action is not required.

Month	Total Contracts	Total Change Orders	Total
September 2025	24	26	\$ 998,540.94
October 2025	25	27	\$3,137,844.28
Sum Total:			\$4,136,385.22

Commissioner Sansaver said when we look at Change Orders, in this case \$4,136,385, part is funded federally and part by the state, does that impact the federal side of things? Do they come up with the extra money or is it all on the state side? Dave Gates said the Change Orders operate the same way as our federal aid and associated state match requirements. They do have somewhat of an impact to the program. Mr. Dahlke can speak to that with respect to how we plan program projects, identify them in the TCP, move forward, and execute the work. It's part of the federal aid portfolio that we have to manage.

Commissioner Sansaver said if we have a project that is \$1.5 million and \$1.3 million of that is funded federally with the other \$200,000 funded by the state and you have a change order that changes it to \$1.7 million, what side does that impact? Does it impact the federal side? Where is the additional money coming from for that particular change order? Dustin Rouse said a change order on any of our projects, the funding will be at the same level that the original project was under. Let's say it's 87/13 if we had a change order, we go through a process with Federal Highways and they still match at that level. If it's on a Reservation and is 100% federal and we end up with a change order, that change order would also be 100% federal unless for some reason that change order was not allowed and the feds found it to be non-participating then we'd have to state fund that change order but typically everything you see remains at the original level.

Larry Flynn said there is no additional federal dollars that we receive for change orders. We get no additional federal money for change orders. If we're funding \$1.7 million of additional federal dollars, we have to take that \$1.7 million from somewhere else in the program, we don't create additional federal resources, we have to manage it within the program we already have.

Dave Gates said regarding a positive on the change orders, not all change orders are from a problem. Things happen and we anticipate that, in fact our TCP accounts for that with respect to past performance and what we see for project overruns so it is baked into the program. If you look on page 5 for October, the Lambert projects there is a \$1.9 million change order, that has added significant value and efficiency to the Department in that we encountered a box culvert that was contained within the project's limits of our adjacent rehab project. The contractor that was executing the work on our adjacent project agreed to complete the work and we were able to swiftly develop a design, get that out in the field, and administer the construction of a new box culvert. So in the details of change orders there are pros and cons. If you're looking at the overall October 2025 summary, that is a huge chunk.

Commissioner Swartz said thinking of our last two or three meetings, we've made a point of saying Agenda Item 11, Certificate of Completion, our growth is .05% and negative 4/5% but every month we're also seeing these change orders at \$3-4 million. Are those change orders included in the awarded amount at that point? I would think they'd be going up. Are we doing more projects under budget that are bringing those change orders back down to the total awarded amount? Dave Gates said on Agenda Item 11 the table that informs the awarded amount is the objective contract award amount and the final amount is the objective total amount that would include change orders. Take into consideration these are specific contracts so as projects evolve through construction to certificate of completion and beyond, we are constantly going through and finalizing projects so it's not necessarily linear that you are going to see the certificate of completion report in relation to the change orders because of the duration of projects. There will be ebbs and flows and spikes. The certificates of completion take into consideration all contracts across the state.

Commissioner Sansaver said I didn't get a clear answer on my question. Deputy Director Flynn said we do not receive any additional money for change orders but I'm hearing that it is pro-rated between the feds and the state, so which one is it? Larry Flynn said the project itself would be at a split between federal and state funds,

any changes to that project would be at the same pro-rata. My point in saying there is no additional federal money is because we still have a pot so big of federal dollars and if we have to use additional federal dollars out of that pot to fund this change order and the associated state match, there is less dollars to go to other projects. So at some point we have to make adjustments to the program downstream to see what other projects need to be adjusted to accommodate that. So yes there are federal dollars available but they come at a cost to something else in the program. We have to shuffle the deck a little bit. Commissioner Sansaver said then we do assume the cost of the change orders through state money? Larry Flynn said yes state and federal money. The same proportional share of state and federal money as the original project. Commissioner Sansaver said it still doesn't make sense to me but I can visit with you at the state meeting.

Director Dorrington said if you reduce the cost of a project, you save money. You did on the project but overall that money is going to go to another project because we have a total amount appropriated to us. We want to spend that because that means projects on the ground. If you go up in a change order, you're going to go down somewhere else. You will balance somewhere but we're going to spend the money we have because that is the obligation of the taxpayer. There's saving and there's loss but it all balances to the same total size of the pie. Commissioner Sansaver said I understand that but it is just balancing the state budget that I'm concerned about. If we have these change orders and if the state is picking up the difference in those change order, then obviously that changes the budget of the state. I just want to know if I'm asked by one of my constituents who pays for that change order. Where is that money coming from, the state pocket or the feds pocket? Larry Flynn said on a \$100 project, \$13 comes from the state, \$87 comes from the feds. If you make a \$10 change order, the project now costs \$110. So you add another \$1.30 to the state and the remainder comes from the feds. But that \$1.30 of state money is no more in total than was ever given to us out of the state special revenue account in total. What we do is subtract that \$1.30 from another project. So there's no requirement on one community to spend more or the state to generate additional revenue.

Commissioner Frazier said in the end if you write a whole bunch of change orders, you will take projects that were in that year and move them to the next year. Larry Flynn said the whole federal pot doesn't change and the associated state match doesn't change in total. It just has to shift from project to project. Commissioner Frazier said if you get enough of a shift and enough of an overrun, you bump a project out another year. Larry Flynn said correct.

Agenda Item 14: Letting Lists

Ryan Dahlke presented the Letting Lists through December of 2026 to the Commission. The Commission secretary will mail it to the entire Commission. This is informational only.

Ryan Dahlke said I want to add something so you are aware if your constituents ask questions. We have implemented this to the MDT website. Historically we've only shown the letting list three months ahead. Now if you are doing business, contracting and bidding, we call this our proposed letting list and it includes all the projects planned in fiscal year 2026. So we have everything up through the end of December 2026. The note here says we have our internal status review meeting that informs when projects are ready, so some of these projects might shift in lettings and we'll evolve this through the year. This is a big win for us and is feedback from MCA and the Bridge Summit we had that the contracting community would like to have a better understanding about what projects are coming. So this is a big win for us. This is on our website right now.

Commissioner Sanders said the first couple of lettings in October have no projects in them and then you have a giant one in November. Is that tied to the fiscal year or what is the reason for that? Dave Gates said it is tied to the federal fiscal year. October is reserved for redistribution projects so we don't overwhelm our contractors or staff when we add those redistribution projects in. November is the first month of the federal fiscal year so we load that. Then when we get to the TCP we may shift those to an actual targeted letting but right now our plan is November.

Next Commission Meetings

The next Commission Conference Calls were scheduled for December 16, 2025, January 27, 2026, and February 17, 2026.

The next Commission Meeting was scheduled for February 26, 2026.

Director Dorrington wished everyone a Merry Christmas. Commissioner Sansaver said remember the reason for the season is not about all the gifts, it's not about ourselves, it's about our Lord Jesus Christ. Everybody needs to take time out for that; take a breath, and hug your family members. I've lost three family members in the last two months. We take it for granted that we get another day and sometimes we don't. Today is a present from our Lord Jesus Christ. So just remember the reason for the season.

Meeting Adjourned

Commissioner Loran Frazier, Chairman
Montana Transportation Commission

Chris Dorrington, Director
Montana Department of Transportation

Jess Bousliman, Secretary
Montana Transportation Commission