



Great Falls South Arterial Alignment Study

Public Information Meeting February 15, 2007

Meeting Agenda:

- 6:30 – 7:00 p.m. **Open House**
- 7:00 – 7:30 p.m. **Presentation**
- 7:30 – 8:00 p.m. **Questions and Answers**
- 8:00 – 8:30 p.m. **Open House**

Project Team:

City of Great Falls:

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Federal Highway Administration:

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Montana Department of Transportation:

Mick Johnson
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Project History:

The South Arterial has been the subject of numerous plans, studies and news articles since the late 1960s. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the City was on the verge of buying right of way for the project after completion of a route study in 1981, but the refinery on Smelter Hill closed, the air base experienced personnel reductions, and other local economic conditions didn't allow budgeting for right-of-way acquisition. Considering the economic slump at the time, Great Falls community leaders chose not to move forward and available federal transportation funds were declined.

In the early to mid-1980s, the U.S. Department of Defense also studied the possibility of a south arterial serving as an alternate route to 10th Avenue South for transporting a proposed missile deployment vehicle dubbed the “Midgetman.” The interest in the prototype vehicle and Arterial were dropped in about 1988.

With passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993, there was renewed interest to pursue an arterial connector route between US Highway 87/89 and Interstate 15 as a means to promote regional and international trade along the Camino Real and CANAMEX corridors.

In 1994, both the City and County Commissions adopted resolutions supporting a process to solicit commitments to secure funds for the South Arterial, and to dovetail it into a broader need for upgrading the highway between Great Falls and Billings. A “Working Group” representing the City, County, Chamber of Commerce, City-County Planning Board, and Great Falls Economic Development Authority was created to secure broad based commitments for the proposed arterial project.

Working Group representatives held numerous meetings and discussions with various community and statewide groups and organizations, including the Montana Department of Transportation, the Montana Transportation Commission, and the Governor’s office. The culmination of its efforts resulted in the development of a “Strategy Plan.” The Plan contained the following specific steps for development of the arterial:

- 1 - Formally incorporate the Arterial into the Great Falls Area Transportation Plan.
- 2 - Conduct a corridor feasibility study.
- 3 - Conduct a route location study and [environmental review process].
- 4 - Work with the Montana Department of Transportation to place the route on a Federal-aid system and on its construction priority program.
- 5 - Work with the Montana Department of Transportation, the Montana Congressional Delegation and others to secure funds for final design and right of way acquisition.
- 6 - Continue long term plans for phased project construction.

The first two steps from the Plan have been completed since the proposed arterial was included in the Transportation Plan in 2000, and a Feasibility Study was completed in 2004. The conclusions and recommendations from the Feasibility Study indicated that the northern corridor would not satisfy the Federal Highway Administration’s recommended guidelines for project feasibility because it failed to achieve an economic threshold benefit/cost ratio of 1.0 or better, recommended that no further study of the northern corridor be conducted. On the other hand, the study concluded that a southern arterial would provide a favorable benefit/cost ratio of 3.54, meaning there would be a net return of \$3.54 for each \$1.00 expended to build and maintain the arterial. Therefore, the report recommended the continued development of the southern corridor to include preparation of a route location study and environmental impact statement.

The Feasibility Study determined and documented that the southern corridor route would:

- **Improve safety and mobility by attracting sufficient traffic volumes to reduce accidents and solve intersection capacity problems on 10th Avenue South, Fox Farm Road and elsewhere on the Great Falls street network. And relieve 10th Avenue South of high volumes of through truck traffic.**
- **Improve air quality by reducing congestion, as well as stopping and idling times.**

- Enhance and solidify Great Falls' position at the juncture of two high priority trade routes (CANAMEX and Camino Real) to better serve commercial trade between Canada, the United States and Mexico. This would also include regional interests to further develop the Great Falls to Billings Highway.
- Serve as a catalyst for long term local and regional economic development aimed at business recruitment and retention, as well as to specifically accommodate and facilitate air cargo operations and expansions at the Great Falls International Airport.
- Provide additional and improved internal access and circulation for local motorists and for emergency services.
- Serve to positively direct and control future orderly growth and development in the area of the route, through the provision of public investment in community infrastructure.
- Address Malmstrom Air Force Base operational concerns, including missile transports, and facilitate Base access to the Great Falls International Airport.

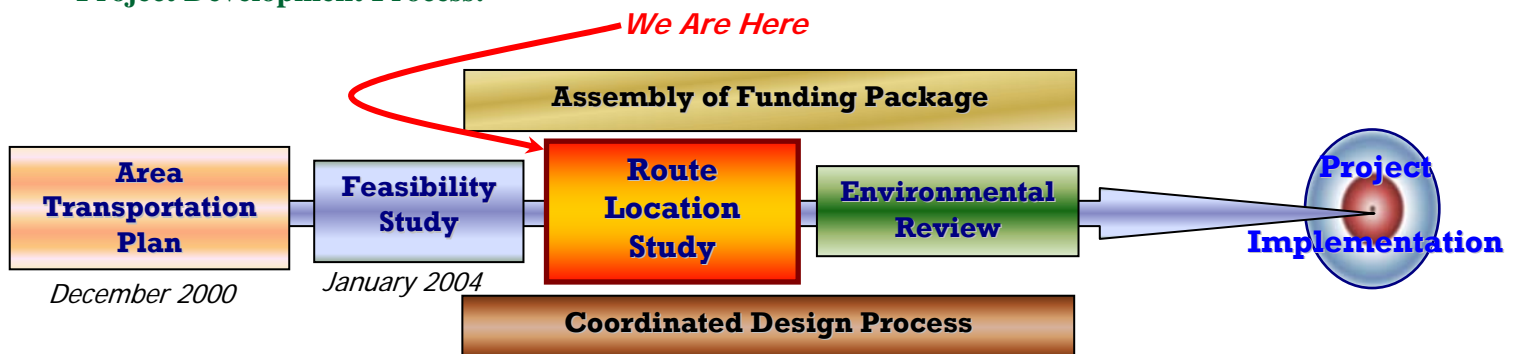
Purpose of the Alignment Study:

As noted above, the proposed South Arterial has been the subject of years of discussion and planning studies. The current concept has been supported through the Great Falls Area Transportation Plan and a Feasibility Study completed in 2004. The current Route Location Study is intended to build on the analysis conducted under the Feasibility Study and provide a more detailed analysis of the opportunities and constraints in the general study area, identify any engineering challenges, and prepare preliminary cost estimates to aid in the identification of an optimal alignment for the South Arterial.

This process will result in the selection of a single, or limited number of alignment options that would be further reviewed under a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to ensure that the proposed roadway design would minimize impacts to the surrounding built and natural environments. Once a specific alignment is chosen and the impacts are analyzed and disclosed through the NEPA process, the project could move into final design and construction.

While these planning, environmental, and design phases are being completed, Great Falls area officials and the Montana Department of Transportation will be exploring funding options and identifying responsibilities for the ultimate costs of construction and maintenance of the facility.

Project Development Process:



How do I stay involved in this project?

Public participation has been a substantial component of the previous planning efforts and the Feasibility Study. Public participation included formal public meetings, as well as several newspaper articles and presentations to citizen groups and local agencies. The Feasibility Study includes letters of support from the Great Falls Development Authority, Montana Department of Transportation, Great Falls International Airport Authority, Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, City of Great Falls, Cascade County, and the former Great Falls City-County Planning Board.

This previous input and support is important, and we continue to request your involvement in the further development of the South Arterial. There will be at least two more opportunities during the Alignment Study to provide input and help refine the alignment options.

You can also obtain information about the Alignment Study by visiting the project website which can be found at www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/greatfalls/

For other information, please feel free to contact either:

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Please refer to the *Great Falls South Arterial Alignment Study* on your correspondence.



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