

Video transcript for the Ronan-North virtual Open House held Tue, Nov. 16, 2021

[Laura Langdon] Good afternoon. We'll give it just a few more seconds here to let people join in before we get going. All right, well, welcome to the Ronan-North Virtual Open House. This is our second session. We had one last night. This meeting is being recorded as well. The agenda today: we're going to go through the meeting instructions, the team introductions, the project purpose, Vision Zero, show you the project area, the anticipated schedule, what to expect during construction, and then questions and answers, and how to stay connected.

Meeting instructions: you'll notice all your mics are muted and they will stay that way. But please type your question in the chat or you can message me at any time. At the end, we will read the questions and get them answered. Bob, would you like to go through the team introductions?

[Bob Vosen] You bet. Thanks, Laura. I want to thank everybody for joining us today to participate in this virtual meeting, to update you about where we are with the Ronan North Project, a project that MDT is very excited to begin to move forward further. So, with me today, we have several people from MDT and our engineering firm, KLJ. As Laura said, My name's Bob Vosen, I'm the District Administrator for District one of the Montana Department of Transportation. With me, we have Miki Lloyd. Miki would like to introduce yourself, please.

[Miki Lloyd] Sure, there's my face. My name is Miki Lloyd, I work for Montana Department of Transportation and I'm the Consultant Project Engineer for this project. Thanks.

[Bob Vosen] Thanks, Miki. John Schmidt's name is up next. He is our Construction Engineer for District One. He was unable to join us today, so I'll be covering his topics in today's presentation. And next on the list is Jacquelyn Smith, the Pre-Construction Engineer. Jacquelyn-

[Jacquelyn Smith] Good afternoon, everybody. My name, as Bob said, is Jacquelyn Smith, the District One Pre-Construction Engineer and I oversee the pre-construction program for the western one third of the state. Thanks, Jacquelyn. And then we have with us a couple of folks from our engineering partners, KLJ, so Dan.

[Dan Richardson] Thank you, Bob. Dan Richardson, I am the Project Manager, the consultant project manager for KLJ for this project.

[Bob Vosen] Thanks, Dan, and you've all heard from Laura, but I will let her introduce yourself officially, also.

[Laura Langdon] I'm Laura Langdon, Public Information Officer of KLJ. So, I've also been sending you the registration links. You can also reach out to me via email if you have any follow up questions. Thank you.

[Bob Vosen] Thanks, Laura. Next thing that we'll move on to is the project purpose and how this project came about. It could move on. Thanks, Laura. This project was originally part of the US 93 corridor from Evaro to Polson, and this project was part of a greater project. It was originally called the Nine Pipes Ronan Project, and we have since separated out the Nine Pipes Ronan Project into several other smaller projects that are sized a little bit more appropriately. smaller projects will allow us to construct them in in manageable pieces that are more easily to get funds for and also from a construction impact. So, Ronan was one project

originally that became now the Ronan Urban and the Ronan North Project. And this Ronan North Project was separated out from the more complex portion that is now Ronan Urban. And by separating this portion out where we're able to begin construction on this project, which is generally to extend the four-lane configuration that's north of Ronan in the Pablo area, so were the four lane necks down to two lanes will be picking up a road that four-lane portion and extending it south to Round Butte Road. This project will also include the development or the beginnings of the couplet system that will be part of the Ronan Urban Project in the future.

Next, I'd like to talk about Vision Zero briefly. As many of you are familiar, Vision Zero is a multi-pronged initiative that has the ultimate goal of eliminating deaths and injuries on Montana highways without good roads, bridges and intersections, traveling safely and efficiently through Montana would be very difficult. So, we recommend having good roads, bridges and other transportation systems, and educating the drivers is critical to building strong communities and a strong state. So, MDT ask all the drivers to do their part. Please wear your seatbelt, slow down, don't drive impaired, and pay attention. We need to end distracted driving. The numbers we're seeing from distracted driving are, are very... our trends are not going in the right direction. So please put down the cell phone, pay attention when you're driving and help us with our goal of making sure that all travelers can get to their destination safely. And as part of the highly traveled roadway and in the Mission Valley, the Ronan Project must align with our Vision Zero goal, and we strongly believe that this project is designed to be another piece in helping us to achieve this goal. I'm going to turn the presentation over to Dan. He's going to discuss the project area in a little more depth. So, Dan.

[Dan Richardson] Thank you, Bob. As Bob was saying, the reconstruction area is from where which is to two lanes up north, kind of near the wildlife passage tunnel there and extends to the south down to Round Butte Road. It'll be a four-lane reconstruction there, with the exception at Round Butte Road and north. It'll briefly be (2) two-lane segments for approximately 600 feet. As Bob was talking about for the couplet system. So, there will be a southbound and the northbound couplet southbound being the one on the west in this picture on the left side here and the northbound on the on the right. Some additional features that I'll go with this. There will be a new traffic signal light at Old US 93 and 3rd Avenue. We will be permanently closing the Spring Creek Road at US 93. and then there will be a new shared use path that will connect from the Round Butte Road all the way up to the end of the project to the north. It'll be the crossing out the new traffic light there as we talk about an Old 93 and 3rd Avenue. Another feature I guess that will be on this is that there will be wildlife fencing that will be located from Old 93 up to the end of the project, and it will include jump outs as well in case any wildlife does happen to get within the boundaries of the new fencing there. So, at that couplet because the Ronan Urban project has not been constructed yet, there will not be. When this is done, traffic patterns will look a little bit different at a couplet is. The current condition versus the final build and then the ultimate build after Ronan Urban is done. So, this image we have here is kind of showing the patterns. The traffic patterns will actually be fairly similar to what they are today. There'll be a single lane heading to the north northbound traffic, which is in the orange there, and it will transition to a four-lane road as you see a couple of arrows on the screen there, where transitions to four lanes. The southbound will be four lanes and have a dedicated turn lane to Round Butte Road, which will ultimately be the southbound couplet. But it will be used as a turn lane for the time being, and then traffic going through will still travel straight through, as it does currently right now. I guess with that, I'm going to pass it over to Miki to talk about the schedule here.

[Miki Lloyd] Hi, everyone, like Bob, said before, we're pretty excited to be at this point in our design for our schedule. This is an anticipated schedule, so I just kind of want to say that it's pretty rough. We will be checking if you need updates as we move along. We'll be posting updates on our website, and Laura has that at the end of the slide, and I think she posted it in the chat also. So, where we're at in the design process? We're currently working on right-of-way acquisition, utility agreements, maintenance agreements with local entities, and environmental permits. So, this all has to be completed before we can advertise the project and award it to a contractor. So, we're hoping to get that completed this winter and spring, hoping to award it to construction, spring and summer of 2022, which would possibly mean that construction could start either in the summer or fall of 2022. We do take a break for winter shutdown, some of it in the cold weather and snowy weather slick weather. We're not having construction going on at the same time, but we will resume in the spring and we're anticipating construction will go into the 2023 spring fall season. So hopefully that's how that works and we're pretty optimistic. So, I will go ahead and turn it back over to Bob to talk about what to expect during construction.

[Bob Vosen] Thanks, Miki. So, during construction of the plan, as Miki said, we're early in the process, we don't have a contract or a contractor yet, but generally we will be trying to maintain traffic on a paved surface as much as possible. Obviously, there will be times when that isn't possible, but we'll keep those to as much of a minimum as we can. We'll also be working very closely to keep up with contractors to keep the delays to a minimum as much as possible. We do recognize the great challenges in the area. Traffic counts are going up every year as people have discovered western Montana, including the Ronan area, so it will be a challenging project. But one thing that I can share is that we definitely will have a strong public involvement component to the project. So, you'll continue to hear from us as we get closer to construction, as well as having regularly scheduled updates to keep everyone informed of what's going on in construction and as things change, what that looks like and what those impacts could be. So definitely stay tuned for more information to come. And we will be, I say, have a very strong public outreach component as we move forward. So, I'm going to turn it back over to Laura for the Q&A portion of our presentation now. Thank you.

[Laura Langdon] Yeah, we've already had a question come in. So, this is about the shared use path. Why does the pathway cross the highway and not stay on the west side to Round Butte Road?

[Dan Richardson] And I can address part of that here with it, crosses the highway there for, I guess there's a number of reasons, I suppose. And Miki, maybe you can fill in some as well. That's part of it was to fit within the design of the of way as well. So, to make sure it's. Fits with the environmental impacts and all that, and as well.

[Miki Lloyd] Yes, and Dan I think you're correct on that, I think the other thing that we looked at is that the east side of the roadway to Round Butte Road is very developed and put in the path, even though it doesn't seem as though it's a wide path to actually engineer that in and then get drainage and hydraulic features put in would actually have impacted quite a few of the landowners there, where on the other side, it didn't have quite that impact because it's undeveloped for the most part, except for the senior citizen center down there. It was felt that that's the way it would be. Also, to connect into the Ronan Urban Project, I believe it's running on the east side all the way through the town of Ronan, south of Round Butte Road. So, I think

it was kind of thought that then, you know, it's being consistent, stayed on that side, is what I remember.

[Bob Vosen] And Miki, we at MDT also coordinated with the city as far as which side they desired us to have the path on, is that correct?

[Miki Lloyd] Yes. And actually, one step further, we've actually talked quite a bit with our technical design committee, which consists of CSKT to the city Ronan and at times, Lake County. There, there are sometimes in on some of those conversations, and sometimes not. But we have coordinated with that group, which includes MDT and FHWA also when we're looking at those alternatives to try to determine the best location for that, especially as we move into design and where actually have more information when it's just a line on a paper, it's pretty easy to look at. But when we actually find out two impacts, then sometimes we may change our mind because of now known known issues or impacts.

[Bob Vosen] Going one step further on that, Miki, I'm going to share with the group that we did look at keeping this shared use path. As you leave, own and traveled north up the screen instead of crossing at the intersection where it is now, we've looked at crossing it, excuse me, further north, actually north of where the Red X is on the screen. Spring Creek Road. But we found some really tremendous challenges with doing it under crossing at that location. And that's the water table in the area is really high, so it's challenging to be able to build up an underpass or a tunnel for the pedestrian path to travel through in this core section of the corridor.

[Laura Langdon] Thank you, Bob, and Miki. And Dan, we've got another Q&A. How will the shared use path cross back across Highway 93 to give access to Main Street and the schools on the west side of the trail?

[Dan Richardson] On that path there's a signalized intersection at Round Butte Road where they can cross there and that will give you access onto the pathway heading to the West to Main Street there. So, there will be signalized cross sections there or crosswalks.

[Bob Vosen] Both intersections that you're looking at right now. On the screen will be signalized. Intersection with Round Butte, with both legs of the couplet will have signals with protected pedestrian crosswalks.

[Laura Langdon] Thank you. I'm not seeing a follow up comment or question quite yet, but we can hang on. Any other comments, questions, if you like to go back to another slide, perhaps. Not seeing any right now. Well, we can move on. You know, if anything does come up, if you if you think of something or just want to know a little bit more, you can reach us on the website. And then Miki Lloyd, who is here as well. Her contract is up on the screen and I can type in the chat as well. Thank you. Any other questions or comments, I think we've got one here. Hi. How will bike and ped traffic be managed during construction?

[Bob Vosen] So, I can speak to that a little bit, Laura Bob again, and bike and pedestrian traffic will be managed. Similar to how we have other construction projects in areas where there are already trails and paths, those will be maintained in some fashion to allow people to continue to have the access that they currently do. And what I mean by that is there's a sidewalk that we're impacting. We will provide an alternative route, an assigned detour route, if you will, for the pedestrian or bicycle traffic. If there is not a path or a sidewalk in the area, we won't be

making those accommodations until it's completed at the end. and then generally for bicycle traffic that's trying to traverse through the project. That will be similar to other construction projects where, we will provide room for bicycles to traverse the project. At times, they will have to follow the same traffic control. If they're traveling in the lane of traffic like a motor vehicle, they have to abide by the same traffic control with the motor vehicle that's for their own safety as they go through the construction zone. So, recognize there are needs and impacts, and we will also be working coordinating with the contractor as the project progresses to make sure that access does remain available.

[Laura Langdon] Thank you, and Hayley, let us know if you have any follow up questions. We've had a few more chats come in. What businesses will be affected?

[Jacquelyn Smith] This is Jacquelyn, and I could answer that. I'm not sure if the question is so much relating to the impacts for the design and the right of way needed, or if it's how construction impacts will be for the businesses. So, I'll answer both. And if there's a follow up question, just let me know in regard to acquiring the necessary right away. We have, I believe, acquired all the right of way needed from the businesses. There's just a little bit of private ownership that is still needed that we're working on, but we have worked with the adjacent businesses to get the necessary right of way for the couplet and the existing 93 roadway work that's needed. Regarding construction, all access to businesses will be maintained. You will not be shutting off any access to the businesses. And we do plan to have public outreach regularly during construction to help inform the general public and the businesses, so they know what activities are going on and if they need to. Just so everybody can be aware and try to operate business as usual as much as possible.

[Laura Langdon] Thank you, Jacquelyn. Few more. Did I miss the potential timeframe for when the rest of the project, I'm assuming, Ronan South, but I think Ronan Urban as well? When will that be done?

[Miki Lloyd] I can try to help, at least from a design standpoint, so we've been focusing on Ronan North for the last few years just to try to get a portion of the project to be able to be let to construction. Ronan Urban is at about 30% design, so it's not ready to go yet. It also includes a considerable amount of right of way acquisition in the town of Ronan, plus significant utility relocations on 1st Avenue. And so that project is going to take quite a bit of time to develop. So, we don't have a timeframe on it yet. As we finish up Ronan North and start focusing on Ronan Urban. We hope to get a better schedule for that and be able to communicate some additional schedule information on that piece later. Thank you, Chris. If you have any other questions, feel free to chat them again or reach out. And thank you, Miki. All right, one from summer. Sorry, if you answered this, but is the walking path crossing the highway via an overpass? The answer to that is no, it's an at-grade crossing, but it's at the signal as the new signalized crossing at old US 93 and 3rd Street. So, it allows the opportunity for the peds or bikes to cross at a signal.

[Laura Langdon] Thank you. Elizabeth Reed has a question. Will there be a modification or widening to Round Butte Road between the shared use path in the school, so that students can travel that section safely?

[Jacquelyn Smith] This is Jacquelyn. I do want to share with the group, and this will help answer the question. We are tying another construction project with this Ronan North project and it is being funded through a transportation alternatives grant. And that is going to include

building new sidewalk on the north side of Round Butte Road to help have a continuous pedestrian connection for the students over there. So, the roadway will not be widened. Let me also just answer the direct question. The roadway will not be widened, but there is going to be some new pedestrian features out there.

[Laura Langdon] Thank you. I think we had another chat. Oh, yeah. She was saying thank you. Those were really good questions. Anyone have anything else you like to follow up on or any other comments? We have a comment here. I'll just go ahead and read it from Kaylee, I hope you will provide training to the flaggers through the construction zone on cyclist safety so that they know to watch for cyclists and provide a slower crossing time. In my experience, too often oncoming traffic is allowed to come through the construction before the cyclist can make it through the zone, because I can't go as fast as the car. The section of Highway 93 between Ronan and where the trail starts is currently used by many cyclists, even though there is no dedicated shared use path there. Another option would be to provide a cyclist detour on Old Highway 93 during construction. The team have any follow up comments or questions?

[Bob Vosen] I couldn't get my button to unmute. Sorry about that. Hey, Kaylee, thanks for the great comment. We'll definitely pass it on. I like the idea of trying to develop a bicycle detour. I think that with a little bit of advance notice, we could put some signage for southbound traffic to turn up there by Mud Creek and get over on the Old Highway 93 and keep the cyclist out of the construction zone. That's the best option for everyone. So, thanks for the great comment. We'll definitely make sure to kind of advance that as we continue to develop traffic control plans.

[Laura Langdon] Thank you, Bob. Can we access this presentation later? Yes, we are. We will be posting this as well. We'll have a transcription too. Thank you, Summer. How will northbound traffic turn into Pizza Cafe?

[Bob Vosen] So, I guess Elizabeth, I got a kind of a follow up question for you, if you can see on the screen right here where the Pizza Cafe is northbound traffic, there's a break in what's shown as a white section between the blue or the double blue southbound arrows are. That's where one project is complete. That'll be where northbound traffic would turn in and then traffic coming out will also share that. There's another approach further to the left on your screen that is will be for southbound traffic only northbound won't be able to access that. And during construction, it's always challenging with all of the to maintain business successes. But we will be working with the contractor in the traffic control contractor to make sure there is access to businesses at all times. So, I hope that answered your question if it didn't. Please post to follow ups like make sure I fully understood the question.

[Dan Richardson] Bob, there is and there is a turn line as well, you can kind of see it there on the image in the orange there it's left turn for the northbound traffic to get into the parking lot there.

[Bob Vosen] It develops back to where the first left in the first north. But I know it's the middle northbound arrow is, yep, right through where the red dot is at that turn lane developed. So, thanks for pointing that out Dan. Well, I just again want to thank everyone for joining us. I think that we've got all of the Q&A is answered at this point, so. We are excited to move forward with the project. There are still some challenges in front of us. I wish I had a firmer schedule that we could provide right now and give you a day. This is one that's going to start, but we're not quite

there yet. But as I said, we will be working to continue to keep the community well informed and involved in the process.

[Laura Langdon] Thank you, Bob. Yeah. I don't see any other comments or chats as well, but you have our email as well as the website. Thank you everyone for coming. These are really great questions. Really appreciate it. Thank you.