

Winifred to Big Sandy Corridor Study

Public Involvement Plan

Prepared for
Fergus County
Chouteau County



Prepared by

DKS Associates
TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS

June 2010

Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	2
1.1	Corridor Study Purpose	2
1.2	Study Background	3
1.3	Study Area	4
1.4	Goals of Public Involvement and Outreach Effort	4
2.0	Public Involvement Procedures	4
2.1	Study Contacts.....	6
2.2	Publications	7
2.3	Stakeholder Contact List	8
2.4	Document Availability	9
2.5	Meetings.....	9
2.5.1	Work Group Meetings	9
2.5.2	Resource Agency Meeting/Involvement	10
2.5.3	Public Meetings.....	10
2.6	Consideration of Traditionally Underserved Populations.....	11
2.7	Study Schedule	11
3.0	Overall Study Communication	13
3.1	Summary	13

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Study Area*
Figure 2: Study Schedule

1.0 Introduction

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Fergus County, and Chouteau County have initiated a process to develop the Winifred to Big Sandy Corridor Study. The study will determine cost-effective ways to address transportation needs within the Secondary 236 corridor between Winifred and Big Sandy, Montana.

MDT has established the corridor planning process in order to investigate improvement options for the corridor in a Pre-National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) study, as provided for in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). If improvement options are forwarded into project development, the corridor planning process will provide information into the NEPA/MEPA process, help advance viable improvement options into NEPA/MEPA, and provide the opportunity for partner involvement at all stages.

One of the first steps in the planning process is to develop a public involvement plan that identifies the public involvement activities needed to communicate information about existing and future corridor needs. The purpose of this public involvement plan is to establish a process that provides opportunities for the public to participate in all phases of the corridor study process. This is accomplished by providing complete information, timely public notices, opportunities for making comments, and full access to key decisions.

1.1 Corridor Study Purpose

A Corridor Planning Study is a high-level evaluation of safety, environmental and geometric concerns along a transportation corridor where needs, possible improvement options and costs are identified. Community input and consensus is an important consideration in this process. *It is important to note that the Corridor Planning Study is part of a planning process and is not a design or construction project.* Another consideration is how costs and the availability of funding affect the nature of any possible improvements and phasing of the possible improvements.

The Big Sandy to Winifred Corridor Planning Study allows for earlier planning-level coordination with the public, resource agencies and other entities. The study may develop specific factors that can be used in the future if a subsequent environmental review process is required.

The NEPA/MEPA process is intended to assist public officials in making decisions taking into account the human and natural environment and the public's need for safe and efficient transportation. The Big Sandy to Winifred Corridor Study is a pre-NEPA/MEPA study that will include a high level environmental scan of potential issues.

For the public involvement component of the study, several strategies are proposed to reach the most people and elicit meaningful participation. These strategies are designed to:

- Educate the public about the key steps in the study process
- Increase the public's ability to ask questions and provide input
- Effectively communicate study findings

1.2 Study Background

Secondary 236 is a major collector on the Montana Secondary Highway System and serves as the north-south corridor between Hilger and Big Sandy. The corridor consists of both gravel and paved surfacing. The width of the roadway varies from 21 to 38 feet. The corridor passes through the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

For a number of years, residents along corridor have sought to have the roadway improved. The existing two-lane roadway is unpaved for 50 miles between R.P. 24 in Winifred and R.P. 74 south of Big Sandy. The remaining 16 miles of the roadway from R.P. 74 to R.P. 90 in Big Sandy is paved. The roadway geometry is poor in many locations, with horizontal and vertical alignment not meeting MDT design standards. Maintenance of the gravel portion of the roadway, which is the responsibility of Fergus and Chouteau Counties, is difficult and costly.

Local officials believe that the lack of accessibility due to the poor roadway conditions has dampened economic development in the area. These conditions also result in numerous potential safety problems. The safety problems are compounded by the growing number of

recreational visitors to the scenic southern rim of the Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River, who share the road with local farmers and ranchers. There has also been an increase in the number and size of trucks and farm equipment that use the road, resulting in traffic operations problems in the roadway sections with narrower width or geometric alignments that do not meet MD design standards.

1.3 Study Area

The limits of the study area have been established as the town of Winifred (R.P. 24) on the south end of the corridor and the town of Big Sandy (R.P. 90) on the north end of the corridor (see Figure 1). The study area boundaries extend one-half mile to either side of the roadway. Physical features within the study area include the Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River and the Claggett Hill area, just to the south of the river.

1.4 Goals of Public Involvement and Outreach Effort

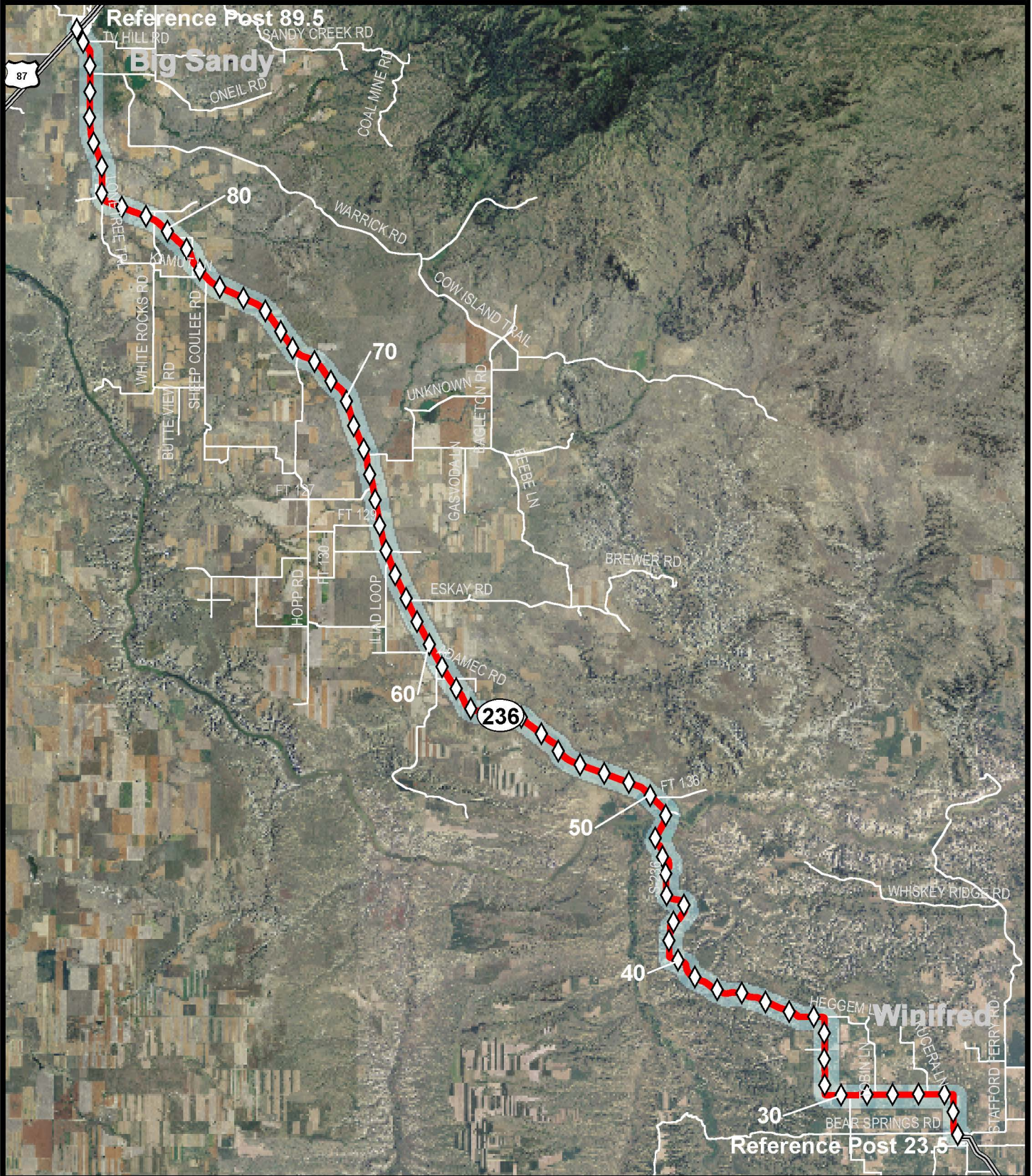
The goal of MDT and the consultant is to generate significant and on-going public involvement throughout the corridor study process. Education and public outreach are essential parts of MDT's responsibility to inform the public about the process. MDT seeks to enable the public to voice their ideas and values regarding issues within the study area. MDT strives to achieve early and continuous public involvement in all major actions and decisions.

2.0 Public Involvement Procedures

The public involvement plan describes the public information and input opportunities that will be provided as part of the development of the Winifred to Big Sandy Corridor Study. This plan encourages active participation in identifying and commenting on corridor issues at every stage of the planning process. Participants in this public involvement process include:

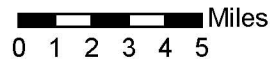
- Towns of Winifred and Big Sandy
- Local school districts
- County fire departments

Winifred - Big Sandy Corridor Study



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- Study Corridor
- Study Area Boundaries
- ◇ Reference Markers
- Other Roads



- County sheriff departments
- Landowners affected by the study area boundary.
- Residents and business owners within Fergus and Chouteau Counties.
- Targeted outreach groups such as the Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument, and any other groups or individuals that may be identified through the corridor planning process.
- Resource agencies

Public meeting materials (meeting notices, newsletters, comment sheets, etc.) will be mailed to the groups identified above.

Methods of notifying the public of study status, upcoming meetings, and other information are detailed below. Individuals who attend public meetings will be added to the study list. The general public will be kept informed of all aspects of the study, and their input will be sought throughout the process. The public and interested parties will provide input to DKS through the methods outlined below.

2.1 Study Contacts

Contact information for MDT and DKS will be provided to the public. Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of study contacts will be published in all information that is released and are also included here:

Fergus County Commissioners, 712 West Main Street, Lewistown MT 59457-2562; (406) 535-5119; Contact – Carl Seilstad, commissioners@co.fergus.mt.us

Chouteau County Commissioners, 1308 Franklin, P O Box 459, Fort Benton MT 59442-0459; (406) 622-3631; Contact – Daren Schuster, dtschus@itstriangle.com

DKS Associates, Inc., 1400 S.W. 5th Avenue, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97201-5502; (503) 243-3500; Contact – Bob Schulte, rjs@dkspdx.com

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Statewide and Urban Planning, 2960 Prospect Avenue (P.O. Box 201001), Helena, MT 59620-1001; (406) 444-9211; Contact – Tom Kahle, tkahle@mt.gov

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Billings District Office, 424 Morey Street (P.O. Box 20437), Billings, MT 59104-0437; (406) 657-0232; Contact – Gary Neville, gneville@mt.gov

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Great Falls District Office, 200 Smelter Avenue NE (P.O. Box 1359), Great Falls, MT 59403-1359; (406) 454-5929; Contact – Bob Vosen, rvosen@mt.gov

2.2 Publications

Meeting announcements will be developed by DKS and advertised as display ads at least two weeks prior to meetings. The ads will announce the meeting location, time, and date, the format and purpose of the meeting, and the locations where documents may be reviewed (if applicable). The following newspapers will carry the display ads:

Lewistown News Argus – print and on-line <http://www.lewistownnews.com/>

The Mountaineer (Big Sandy) – print and on-line

<http://www.smalltownpapers.com/newspapers/newspaper.php?id=266>

The Great Falls Tribune – print and on-line <http://www.greatfalls Tribune.com/>

The Havre Daily News – print and on-line <http://www.havredailynews.com/>

Also, two newsletters will be produced that describe work in progress, results achieved, preliminary recommendations, and other related topics. Each newsletter will be saved as a PDF and posted on the study website.

2.3 Stakeholder Contact List

A stakeholder contact list will be produced that will include individuals, businesses, or groups identified by Fergus County, Chouteau County, MDT, and/or DKS. The following groups or businesses (at a minimum) will be included in the initial list, providing that addresses and/or e-mails are obtainable from each group:

- Town of Winifred
- Town of Big Sandy
- City of Lewistown
- City of Havre
- Hill County Commissioners
- Winifred School District (District 115)
- Big Sandy High School School District (District 2)
- Big Sandy Elementary School School District (District 11)
- Lewistown School District (School District 1)
- County fire departments and emergency medical personnel
- County sheriff departments
- Businesses:
 - Missouri River Canoe Company
 - Triangle Telephone Cooperative
 - Mountain View Co-op
- Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument

Phone interviews will be conducted with representatives of each stakeholder group and the responses received will be recorded.

2.4 Document Availability

In general, all study deliverables will be available in hard copy format at the MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section Office (2960 Prospect Avenue). It is anticipated that hard copies may also be made available at the following locations

- Big Sandy City Hall
- Chouteau County Commissioners Building
- Winifred Library
- Winifred Community Center

Approved electronic copies of study deliverables will be posted on the study website at the address show below within 7 days of receiving approval to do so:

<http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/winifred/>

The following statement required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) will be included on all published materials:

The MDT and DKS attempt to provide accommodations for any known disability that may interfere with a person participating in any service, program, or activity associated with this study. Alternative accessible formats of this information will be provided upon request. For further information, call (503) 243-3500, ext. 291 or TTY (800) 335-7592, or by calling Montana Relay at 711. Accommodation requests must be made at least 48 hours prior to the scheduled activity and/or meeting.

2.5 Meetings

2.5.1 Work Group Meetings

Work Group meetings will be scheduled every 2 weeks for the duration of the 12-month study period. Individuals included in the meetings will be:

- Tom Kahle (MDT Helena Planning), 406-444-9211 tkahle@mt.gov
- Zia Kazimi (MDT Helena Planning), 406-444-7252 zkazimi@mt.gov
- Bob Schulte (DKS Associates), (503) 243-3500 rjs@dkspdx.com
- Wayne Noem (MDT Helena Secondary Roads Engineer), 406-444-6109 wnoem@mt.gov
- Gary Neville (MDT Billings Engineering), 406-657-0232 gneville@mt.gov
- Robert Vosen (MDT Great Falls Engineering), 406-454-5929 (office) 406-788-8785 (cell) rvosen@mt.gov
- Eric Thunstrom (MDT Helena Environmental), 406-444-7648 ethunstrom@mt.gov
- Jean Riley (MDT Helena Planning), 406-444-9456 jriley@mt.gov
- Miles Wacker (MDT Helena Planning), 406-444-0414 mwacker@mt.gov
- Bob Burkhardt (FHWA Helena), 406-441-3907 bob.burkhardt@fhwa.dot.gov
- Carl Seilstad (Fergus County Commissioner), 406-535-5119 (office) (406) 672-5244 (cell) commissioners@co.fergus.mt.us, 712 West Main Street, Lewistown MT 59457-2562
- Daren Schuster (Chouteau County Commissioner), 406-622-3631 (cell 390-0275) dtschus@itstriangle.com, Chouteau County, 1308 Franklin, P O Box 459, Fort Benton MT 59442-0459
- Gary Slagel (BLM Montana), 406-538-1950 Gary_E_Slagel@blm.gov, Bureau of Land Management, P O Box 1160, Lewistown MT 59457

The meetings are intended to track progress and address study issues and questions. The meetings are considered an important aspect for the exchange of information and ideas during the development of the study. Throughout these meetings, the issues, problems, and possible solutions will be identified and discussed.

2.5.2 Resource Agency Meeting/Involvement

After the first formal public meeting has been held on the study, a meeting will be scheduled and held with the resource agencies that are stakeholders in the study. The meeting will be organized by MDT and facilitated by DKS.

2.5.3 Public Meetings

Two formal public meetings will be held throughout the study. The first public meeting will be held early on in the study process and will serve to introduce the study and relevant features and process. The meeting will also serve to receive information from local residents about the study area. The second public meeting will occur after the Draft Corridor Study Report and

Draft Statement of Purpose and Need have been completed. The meetings will be held in Winifred and Big Sandy on consecutive evenings. The public will be asked to comment about the recommendations in the Draft Corridor Study Report and the Draft Statement of Purpose and Need. After the presentation, participants will move to individual display stations in their area of interest to review and comment on the recommendations. Public comments and concerns will be recorded.

2.6 Consideration of Traditionally Underserved Populations

It is recognized that additional efforts must be made to involve traditionally underserved segments of the population in the corridor study process, including the disabled, racial and ethnic minorities, and low-income residents. Including these groups leads to planning that reflects the needs of everyone. The following steps will help with these efforts:

Plan Meeting Locations Carefully

- Public meetings will be held in locations that are accessible and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Be Sensitive to Diverse Audiences

- At public meetings, agency staff and DKS will attempt to communicate as effectively as possible. Technical jargon will be avoided and appropriate dress and conduct will be adhered to. A variety of visualization techniques may be used to present information on the study, including aerial photographs, maps, graphics, full-size posters, color handouts, and PowerPoint presentations.

2.7 Study Schedule

Adherence to the study schedule is important to stay on track and keep all study participants engaged. The study schedule is shown in Figure 2. It is DKS's intent to adhere to this schedule.

Figure 2:
Winifred to Big Sandy Corridor Study
Study Schedule

Fergus County
Chouteau County

Task	Mar-10	Apr-10	May-10	Jun-10	Jul-10	Aug-10	Sep-10	Oct-10	Nov-10	Dec-10	Jan-10	Feb-10	Mar-10
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5
1. Project Management	[Solid blue bar across all months]												
2. Develop Existing and Projected Conditions Report	[Blank]												
a. Develop Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report	[Solid blue bar from Apr-10 to Sep-10]												
b. Conduct Public Involvement Meeting #1	[Blue bar in Jul-10]												
c. Consult with resource and other agencies	[Blue bar in Jul-10]												
d. Compare maps, inventories, and data with those from state, tribal, and local agencies	[Blue bar in Aug-10]												
e. Submit Draft Existing and Projected Conditions Report to Work Group for review, revise based on comments	[Blue bar in Sep-10]												
3. Identify Needs, Issues, Goals, and Screening Criteria	[Blank]												
a. Identify needs, issues, and goals	[Blue bar in Sep-10]												
b. Develop screening criteria and objectives	[Blue bar in Sep-10]												
c. Submit draft list of needs, issues, and goals and draft list of screening criteria and objectives to Corridor Planning Team for review; revise based on comments	[Blue bar in Sep-10]												
4. Determine Improvement Options Advanced and Not Advanced	[Blank]												
a. Develop preliminary options	[Blue bar in Sep-10]												
b. Analyze preliminary options and potential impacts	[Blue bar in Oct-10]												
c. Select preliminary options advanced and not advanced	[Blue bar in Nov-10]												
5. Recommend Improvement Options	[Blank]												
a. Identify potential impacts and mitigation opportunities of recommended options	[Blue bar in Nov-10]												
b. Prioritize recommended options	[Blue bar in Nov-10]												
c. Prepare list and map of recommended options	[Blue bar in Nov-10]												
6. Prepare Draft Corridor Study Report	[Blank]												
a. Prepare Draft Corridor Study Report	[Blue bar in Nov-10]												
b. Prepare Draft Statement of Purpose and Need	[Blue bar in Nov-10]												
c. Submit Draft Corridor Study Report, Draft Statement of Purpose and Need to Working Group for review; revise based on comments	[Blue bar in Jan-10]												
d. Obtain comments from resource and other agencies	[Blue bar in Feb-10]												
e. Conduct Public Involvement Meeting #2	[Blue bar in Feb-10]												
f. Revise Draft Corridor Study Report and Draft Statement of Purpose and Need	[Blue bar in Feb-10]												
7. Make Recommendations	[Blank]												
a. Prepare list of recommendations and next steps	[Blue bar in Mar-10]												
b. Compare Corridor Study Report to MDT Planning Study Checklist and make necessary revisions	[Blue bar in Mar-10]												

3.0 Overall Study Communication

3.1 Summary

The public involvement plan for the Winifred to Big Sandy Corridor Study establishes guidelines and procedures for encouraging public participation. The following communication strategies and techniques may be used to distribute information to the community and seek a higher level of engagement. The Consultant will use techniques that best suit the corridor study development.

- All approved, relevant deliverables and associated materials will be posted on the study website at:

<http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/winifred/>
- Public meeting announcements and press releases for the newspaper will be developed.
- Informational meetings will be held with the public to receive input from the affected community.
- Study documents will be provided to MDT for posting to the study's website and distributed to the Work Group to provide a better understanding of study issues and recommendations and provide study participants with feedback and an opportunity for continual comment. Hard copies of all materials will be made available at the MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (2960 Prospect Avenue).
- Fact sheets may be used to explain corridor-related issues.
- Corridor property owners will receive mailings prior to the public meetings

Responses to questions and comments from the public concerning the public participation process and study deliverables will be made via written response in an appendix to the corridor plan report. In some instances, DKS may respond directly to an individual or group by letter, telephone call, or periodic newsletter.