



NEWSLINE

Montana Department of Transportation
mdt.mt.gov



Fall 2024

Welcome (Back) to MDT, Director Dorrington!

Chris Dorrington now serves as the Director of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), appointed by Governor Gianforte in June 2024. To fulfill MDT's mission, Director Dorrington is focused on organizational excellence, clear and consistent communication, and accountability. He is actively advancing efficiencies and effectiveness of MDT programs while honoring our most valuable assets – our people.



Chris Dorrington, MDT Director

In July 2022 Governor Gianforte also appointed Director Dorrington as the Chair of the Housing Task Force, with an objective of quickly researching and then proposing improvements that both the Montana Legislature, Executive branch and locals could implement to address Montana's housing crisis. Prior to his current role as MDT Director, he led the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as Director for 3.5 years, and the Air, Energy, and Mining Division at DEQ for 4.5 years prior. He started his state career at MDT, working for 10.5 years in the Planning Division. In total, Director Dorrington has nearly 19 years in leadership with the state and six in private industry. He earned his Bachelor's of Science in mechanical engineering from Gonzaga University, and a master's degree in transportation policy, operations and logistics from George Mason University.

Please join us in welcoming Chris Dorrington back to MDT!

Rail Crossing Safety in Montana

On July 1, BNSF Railway Company (BNSF) announced awards to honor four state departments of transportation (DOTs) for their dedication to improving grade crossing safety in their respective statewide communities. Montana, along with Idaho, New Mexico and Wyoming, was recognized with an inaugural "Tracking to Zero" award for averaging less than one grade crossing incident per one million BNSF train miles traveled in the state (based on 2023 data reported to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)).



Pictured from left to right: Calvin Cook (MDT Crossing Inventory Specialist), Mary Ann Monaldi (BNSF), John Althof (MDT Rail-Highway Safety Manager), Matt Jones (BNSF), and Chris Dorrington (MDT Director)

MDT's efforts, which merited the award, include collaborating with BNSF Railway and local governments to identify and address grade crossing improvements, including the identification, analysis, and implementation of grade crossing safety projects across the state. Safety improvements range from crossing signing projects, grade crossing signal installations, upgrades to existing signals, and the elimination of railroad crossings through grade separations. All of these efforts have collectively enhanced the overall safety and efficiency of Montana's extensive rail system.

MDT also works with Operation Lifesaver to educate people on how to be safe around highway-rail crossings and railroad tracks. One such annual effort is See Tracks, Think Train® Week (formerly known as Rail Safety Week), which takes place September 23-29, 2024. This national safety week is a collaborative effort between Operation Lifesaver, Inc. and various rail safety partners across the US, Canada and Mexico. Whether during See Tracks, Think Train® Week or the rest of the year, MDT would like to encourage all Montanans to join in the conversation and do their part to always practice safe, legal behavior around railroad tracks and crossings.

MDT is committed to the goal of Vision Zero – zero deaths and zero serious injuries on Montana roadways. Working with partners like BNSF and Operation Lifesaver to address rail crossing safety is an important part of reaching that goal. Learn more about railroad crossings in Montana and MDT's work with Operation Lifesaver here: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/roads/railroad-crossing.aspx>.



Federal Surface Transportation Program Status

Every year, the total amount of federal funding that can be legally obligated for expenditure by the federal-aid highway program is limited by a provision in the annual appropriations bill for the US Department of Transportation (USDOT). This appropriations bill sets a limit on the total dollar amount of aggregate federal-aid highways contract authority that can be obligated. Of the total obligation limitation, an initial amount is reserved each year for allocated (non-formula) Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) programs. At the end of every July, FHWA determines how much obligation limitation they won't be able to use by September 30, and asks states how much additional funding they could obligate by September 30, of the same calendar year. This additional funding that is made available to states is known as August Redistribution, and has been a part of the federal obligation limitation process since the 1980s. For the first 30+ years, the amounts were relatively small, but over the last few years, the amount of August Redistribution has grown considerably based on the growth in slow-spending non-formula programs, such as discretionary grants. The challenges for state DOTs with August Redistribution are not knowing the amount of funds available, having projects available for these funds, and getting these funds obligated in 30 days. This 30-day window to obligate these funds can force state DOTs away from meeting their strategic capital investment goals.



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SAVE THE DATES OCTOBER 16 & 17

2024 Annual Transportation Safety Meeting

Delta Colonial Hotel
2301 Colonial Drive, Helena, Montana

This event brings together federal, state, tribal, and local safety partners to share implementation of Montana's Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP) emphasis areas, assess progress in reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries, and explore new opportunities to enhance traffic safety awareness.

Emphasis Areas:

- Roadway Departures & Intersection-Related Crashes
- Impaired Driving Crashes
- Unrestrained Vehicle Occupants
- Emergency Response Post-Crash Care

The agenda is under development and will be posted at www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/chsp-meetings.shtml.

For additional information, please contact Pam Langve-Davis at 406-444-7646 or plangvedavis@mt.gov.

Montana Essential Freight & Rail Loan Program (MEFRL)

MDT will be soliciting for freight rail loan applications through the MEFRL Program beginning this September. For more information, go to <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/grants-rail.aspx>.

MEFRL is a small revolving loan program to help preserve and enhance freight railroad service on branch lines in Montana.

Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program

Nearly all the 33 applications that were awarded TA funding in 2023 are now in preliminary project development. Many of these projects are being developed by local agencies while MDT is also developing some of the projects. In January 2025, MDT will release the Call for Applications and \$16 million will be available. There will continue to be two categories: Capital Improvement and Pavement Preservation. The five Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) areas will administer their own Call for Application and selection process. Visit the TA website to learn more: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/mdt/ta-application.aspx>.

Contact Dave Holien, TA Program Manager, at 406-444-6118 or dholien@mt.gov with any questions.

New Buses and Vans to Support Public Transit

Since May, MDT Transit Section staff have been hard at work, taking delivery of 67 new buses and vans for open- and closed-door transportation services throughout Montana. MDT provided pass-through federal transit funds with procurement services to make this happen. These vehicles are intended to replace existing fleet vehicles that have reached expiration and expand transportation services statewide. Removing expired vehicles from service supports MDT's value of providing safe and reliable service, while also supporting the department's strategic goal to maintain a good state of repair. The MDT Transit Section thanks Montana's transit providers and is pleased to expect additional new vehicles before the end of 2024. For more information, contact Adam Kraft, Transit Section Supervisor, at 406-444-6120 or akraft@mt.gov.



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Montana Department of Transportation

MDT Advances Stormwater Infrastructure Mapping to Comply with MS4 Permit

In a concerted effort to meet the requirements of the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit, the MDT has made significant strides in updating stormwater infrastructure mapping across all MS4 areas over the past few years. This initiative, crucial for effective stormwater management, was supported extensively by data provided by local GIS teams, whose contributions have been invaluable to MDT's progress.

To ensure uniformity in the mapping process, MDT developed a standardized procedure for inventorying outfalls under its jurisdiction. To provide transparency and clarity, MDT has released its Outfall Inventory Guidance document, detailing the mapping process.

MDT also met with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and reviewed MDT's guidance. DEQ had no concerns with the approach, encouraging coordination among the MS4 entities.

MDT acknowledges that there may be discrepancies in outfall responsibilities within each MS4 area. To address these potential issues, the department is organizing virtual and in-person meetings at various locations to present an overview of the mapping process and to gather feedback on any concerns regarding MDT's approach. This documentation will facilitate future discussions and coordination, ensuring that all parties can reach an agreement on maintenance responsibilities and reconcile any data discrepancies. These meetings began in July and will continue through October 2024.

MDT remains committed to effective stormwater management and appreciates the ongoing cooperation and support from all MS4 stakeholders in this critical endeavor. As part of the requirements of the program, a 30-day public comment period was advertised and held August 4 through September 4 to solicit comments on MDT's annual Stormwater Management Program (SWMP) update. Public and stakeholder involvement in annual plan updates is intended to improve the function of this program and further protect water quality in Montana. MDT is addressing comments received and plans to issue a Final SWMP in the near future. In the meantime, the June 2024 Revised Draft SWMP is available online as the most current version: www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stormwater/.

Although the official public comment period for this update has ended, MDT encourages and accepts comments on a continuous basis. If you have areas of concern regarding storm water discharges from MDT's transportation infrastructure and/or suggestions to improve other areas of the program listed above, please complete the MDT Storm Water Management Feedback Form online <https://mt.accessgov.com/mdt/Forms/Page/mdt-tp/storm-water-management-feedback/0>, or email comments to the following address, mdtms4datamanager@mt.gov.

Alternatively, comments can be mailed to the following physical address:

Montana Department of Transportation
Environmental Services Bureau
Attention: Tom Gocksch, P.E., Environmental Engineering
Section Supervisor
2701 Prospect
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

MDT's intent is to improve program implementation and public comments that are received will be considered in this SWMP version or during the next annual update in 2025.

MDT's Cpl. Adam Romkema Honored with Medal of Valor

Corporal (Cpl.) Adam Romkema of MDT's Motor Carrier Services (MCS) Division was honored this summer with the Medal of Valor for extraordinary courage to protect or preserve human life. Presented by the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE), the Medal of Valor recognizes Cpl. Romkema's actions when he was first on the scene of a multi-vehicle crash during a blizzard near Twin Bridges in February 2023. Thanks to his quick action and mass casualty incident training received through the Montana Army Guard, Cpl. Romkema was able to secure the scene (despite sub-zero temperatures), organize a safe shelter through a nearby church, and direct local emergency responders until the Madison County Sheriff and Montana Highway Patrol could arrive. MCS officers are rarely first to respond to a crash, as this is not part of their regular duties, but Cpl. Romkema's fast response and training played a critical role in preserving life and reducing the severity of the outcome of the crash.



Cpl. Adam Romkema (left) being presented with Medal of Valor by MFPE President, Amanda Curtis (right).

Congratulations to Cpl. Romkema for this well-deserved honor! Thank you for your continued service and commitment to the safety of Montana's traveling public.

Summer Intern Program

MDT recently celebrated the success of another summer internship program. Interns that participated in 2024 were able to learn firsthand about their chosen career area of the department, ranging from research to engineering. This program starts in May and runs through mid-August, and typically expects a 40-hour work week, Monday-Friday. Internships are paid and available in a number of areas/divisions at MDT. Specific locations and roles vary annually, depending on department needs and upcoming projects. To be eligible to participate, students must:

- be enrolled in a college, university, or technical school; or be within 6 months of graduation date;
- have completed at least 60 academic credits* (or 30 credits if enrolled in technical school); and
- be in good academic standing.

*Interns with less than 60 credit hours may be considered.

Interested in being an intern at MDT? Check out MDT's Current Openings (www.mdt.mt.gov/jobs/current-openings.aspx) for future postings and more information, or contact MDT's Recruiter, Angela Murolo at amurolo@mt.gov. At MDT, you'll find more than just a job. You'll find a career!

Visit MDT's YouTube channel to meet the talented interns from this year's summer program, and hear about their experiences at MDT: <https://www.youtube.com/user/MontanaDOT>.





Montana Child Passenger Safety Program

The Montana Child Passenger Safety (CPS) team is going to be busy promoting awareness around safety for child passengers this fall; especially during CPS Week. This year, CPS Week will take place September 15-21, 2024, with check-up events held across the state throughout the week and on Saturday, September 21st (National Seat Check Saturday).

Montana will also be holding one final CPS Technician Training in Missoula during CPS Week. This training will take place September 17-20, 2024, with the check-up event being conducted on Friday, September 20, at the Missoula Rural Fire District. Montana currently has 15 active CPS instructors, 251 CPS technicians and 33 permanent CPS inspection stations to provide education and assistance on appropriate restraints and proper use and installation for children in vehicles.

For more information, contact Kevin Dusko, State Highway Traffic Safety Section Supervisor, at 406-444-7411 or kedusko@mt.gov. You can also visit MDT's CPS Events webpage: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/people/cps-events.aspx>.

MDT's Safety Related Research Nationally Recognized for "High Value"

Every year, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), through the Research Advisory Committee (RAC), select "High Value Research" projects submitted by each state DOT. Montana put forward its "Effectiveness of Highway Safety Public Education at Montana Motor Vehicle Registration Stations by Streaming a Variety of Safety Content" as its 2024 High Value Research nominee. MDT was nationally recognized with an award for this nomination in a supplemental topic area, "Safety, Security and Emergencies," and has been invited to present a poster on the project at the annual Transportation Research Board (TRB) 2025 Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

The research project tested a method for conducting public education by showing traffic safety video loops/sequences to the public at select Motor Vehicle Divisions (MVDs) and County Treasurer Offices (CTOs) in Montana. Strategically placed monitors showed educational content to the public that often has waiting times of five minutes or longer. This is enough time for people to give their attention to a video screen playing safety messages. The video loop showed a combination of short video clips, facts, and trivia. The video clips included safe driving habits, like buckling seat belts and not driving impaired, and proven innovative road safety countermeasures such as roundabouts and rumble strips.

Surveys were conducted after people had viewed the content. Respondents did not report a change in behavior, but reported that the videos had an impact. Some respondents stated they would be safer drivers while others stated they would share the information seen with others. These are important steps in the process of changing beliefs which can lead to changing behaviors and growing a positive safety culture. Changing beliefs can take years, and growing a positive traffic safety culture is a process, not a single intervention. The researchers believe that the benefits from this approach (showing safety content), along with other strategies over time, will benefit a positive traffic safety culture and change beliefs about safe driving habits.

The research demonstrated that safety content is relatively simple and low-cost, with minimal disruptions to local office staff. The content also reaches broad demographics.

Learn more about this research project at <https://mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/safety/safetyvideos.aspx>.

Tribal Youth in Montana Gain Hands-On Driver Education through GHSA Grant

Thanks to a competitive grant from the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) and Ford Motor Company Fund, 24 teens representing all seven land-based tribes in Montana have completed the Montana Drive program in Lewistown. This was the first time many of these teens received hands-on driving instruction.

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) pursued the grant because only two tribes in Montana offer driver's education. State law requires training be provided by a certified teacher and many tribal communities do not have the resources. Additionally, not all communities within reservation boundaries have traffic code related to education for novice drivers or driver's licensing requirements. This means many young Native American drivers lack access to any formal training, yet driving remains a transportation necessity in rural areas.

"This grant supports historic opportunities for Montana's Tribal communities related to traffic safety," said MDT Director Christopher Dorrington. "Driver's education teaches these youth safe operation behind the wheel and plays a critical role in keeping our at-risk, vulnerable population from harm."

In addition to the Montana Drive program offered through the Office of Public Instruction this grant funded scholarships for Tribal teachers to become certified driver's education instructors through MSU-Northern. Five scholarships were provided with all expenses paid for new instructors in Tribal communities. Confederated Salish & Kootenai, Fort Belknap, and

Northern Cheyenne are taking part in the training.

Since 2006, MDT has implemented Montana's Safe on All Roads (SOAR) program for tribal traffic safety. Through this program, each tribal community employs their own coordinator with funding through MDT's highway traffic safety program to educate community members on traffic safety issues. These coordinators were instrumental in ensuring this grant was a success.

For more information on the SOAR program, please contact Sheila Cozzie at 406-444-7301 or scozzie@mt.gov.



Teen graduates pose with their completion certificates from the Montana Drive program in Lewistown.

Montana Traffic Safety Dates

⇒ **August 14, 2024-September 2, 2024***

Labor Day Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over Law Enforcement Impaired Driving Mobilization (2024 STEP)

Note: There were 20 agencies that participated in the Labor Day mobilization for FFY2023. For more information, contact Spencer Harris, Law Enforcement Liaison at 406-444-0856 or sharris@mt.gov.

⇒ **September 15-21, 2024**

Child Passenger Safety Week (National Seat Check Saturday is September 21, 2024)

⇒ **September 23-29, 2024**

See Tracks, Think Train® Week (Operation Lifesaver)

⇒ **October 1-31, 2024**

National Pedestrian Safety Month (National Walk & Roll to School Day is October 9, 2024: <https://walkbiketoschool.org>)

⇒ **October 16-17, 2024 (See page 2 for more info)**

Annual Transportation Safety Meeting (CHSP)

⇒ **October 20-26, 2024**

National Teen Driver Safety Week

⇒ **October 21-25, 2024**

National School Bus Safety Week

⇒ **October 31, 2024**

Halloween Holiday—Drive Sober, Watch for Pedestrians!

⇒ **November 18-22, 2024**

Crash Responder Safety Week (CRSW)

⇒ **November 23-27, 2024**

Thanksgiving & Holiday Travel—Buckle Up & Drive Sober

⇒ **December 11, 2024—January 1, 2025***

Winter-Holiday Drive Sober Enforcement

***Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP) Mobilization Periods**

Back to School: Tips to Ensure Safe Travel for Montana's Students

It's that time of year again—school's back in session for 2024-2025, and Montana's kids are striding and pedaling their way to class! As we dive into the new school year, let's keep safety front and center.

Drivers, here's your back-to-school checklist:


- **Put the phone away:** Focus on the road, not your screen.
- **Look before you back up:** Check driveways and alleyways for young walkers and bikers particularly in the morning and afternoon especially as daylight hours decrease.
- **Be vigilant in school zones:** Watch for crossing guards and school routes.
- **Slow down:** Be extra cautious around corners and bus stops.
- **Be aware of school bus laws:** Yellow flashing lights indicate children are preparing to load or unload and drivers should be prepared to stop. Red flashing lights indicate children are loading or unloading and motorists **MUST** stop at least 30 feet from the school bus and wait until red lights are no longer flashing.

Kids, here's your safety mantra:


- **Stay alert:** Keep your ears and eyes open—no distractions.
- **Make eye contact with drivers:** Ensure they see you before crossing.
- **Use crosswalks and intersections:** Always choose safe crossing points.

Remember, children's vision and perception aren't the same as adults', so they may not always see or judge vehicles as we do. Let's all do our part—drivers and pedestrians alike—to keep our roads safe.

Parents and guardians, now's the perfect time to brush up on pedestrian and bike safety with your kids. Find handy resources and tips online at www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/, or connect with MDT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator at 406-444-9273 or MDTBikePed@mt.gov. Let's kick off the school year with safety in full swing!




Safe Driving Around School Buses




➔ You should allow a *minimum* of 30 feet between your vehicle and a school bus making a passenger stop. But what might 30 feet look like?


2 Car Lengths




2.5 Snow Plows







3 Bison Lengths



22.5 Road Cones



October is National Pedestrian Safety Month

In 2020, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) launched National Pedestrian Safety Month in October (<https://www.nhtsa.gov/events/national-pedestrian-safety-month-kickoff>), aiming to draw attention to pedestrian safety. This October marks the fifth annual observance of this essential campaign, reminding us that every day, "we are all pedestrians."

This month, we encourage Montanans to engage with the latest updates and resources on pedestrian safety. Keep an eye on MDT's website and social media for informative content and practical safety tips designed to keep pedestrians safe. For ongoing guidance and resources on nonmotorized travel, visit www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/. Let's make our community a safer place for everyone, one step at a time.



MDT Continues to Support Montana Infrastructure Improvements with Federal, State Funding Opportunities

Due to the number of discretionary grant opportunities currently provided under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), MDT created the Discretionary Funding and Analysis Section (DFAS) within the Rail, Transit and Planning Division in April 2023. Also known as the Grants team, DFAS staff research potential grant projects, develop and submit grant applications, and oversee grant management activities for grants awarded and/or transferred to MDT.

Since fiscal year (FY) 2022, MDT has been awarded over \$66 million in discretionary funding for several projects thanks to the hard work of the DFAS staff. These projects include the I 90 Missoula to Garrison Wildlife Crossing Feasibility Study (FY 2023 Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program (WCPP) grant award) and Mineral County I 90 Improvements Project (FY 2024 Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) Program awards). Read more about the FY 2023 WCPP grant award in the December 2023 Newsline: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/newsletters/newsline/2023/newdec23.pdf>.

MDT has also supported a number of applications for discretionary funding submitted by local and tribal governments through letters of support, funding match sources, etc. Out of these local or tribal applications that were selected for discretionary funding awards, several have been subsequently transferred to MDT due to the department's expertise in working with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and its Financial Management Information System (FMIS). Together, these applications represent strong partnerships between MDT and Montana's local and tribal government entities, and the awarded funding will support statewide transportation projects to keep Montana moving forward. Learn more about discretionary grant programs, available support, and MDT applications and support to-date here: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/discretionarygrants/>.

MDT has also been involved in the application and distribution processes for several new state funding sources that were signed into law during the 2023 legislative session. Specifically, the passage of Senate Bill 536, House Bill (HB) 267, and HB 76 made new state funding resources available to support this historic investment in Montana's roads and bridges. Learn more about state funding for local infrastructure here: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/localsupport/state-funding.aspx>.

DFAS continues to research and apply for discretionary planning and construction grants throughout the year, as well as assist local and tribal governments as they apply for grants to help improve Montana's roadways and bridges. For more information, contact DFAS supervisor Nick Hill at nihill@mt.gov.



Overhead view of traffic on I 90 bridge near Alberton, Mont.

MDT Awards Traffic Safety Grants to Support Vision Zero

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Grants

MDT awarded almost \$3.8 million in federal grant monies from NHTSA for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025. The grants will address impaired driving, occupant protection and child passenger safety. The emphasis of this grant program is to improve traffic safety through education, enforcement and emergency medical services training. Law enforcement agencies are funded for increased patrols to concentrate on seat belt, speeding and impaired driving laws. Grants for DUI Courts, a Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor, a Traffic Safety Resource Training Officer, and the 24/7 Program address impaired driving. Traffic safety education programs continue with the Native American Safe On All Roads (SOAR), Buckle Up Montana coalitions, and the Teen Peer to Peer Traffic Safety programs. The NHTSA grant opportunity will open January 1, 2025, and close March 1, 2025, for FFY26 funds. Contact Kevin Dusko at 406-444-7411 or kedusko@mt.gov for more information.

<https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/grants/>

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Grant Program

Nearly \$1 million in grant funds is awarded annually through the state funded EMS Grant program. The grants are provided to agencies staffed by mostly volunteers, Medicare-level billing providers for ambulances, emergency vehicles, training, equipment, communication, or patient care. The program is awarded through a competitive grant process that opens on May 1, and closes June 30, annually. For State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025, approximately \$1 million in funding will be awarded to EMS providers. Contact Spencer Harris at 406-444-0856 or sharris@mt.gov for more information.

<https://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/grants-ems.aspx>

Utility Permits: Overview and Process

MDT uses utility permits to track and manage the installation or modification of utility infrastructure within the highway right-of-way. A utility permit is required prior to occupancy of the highway right-of-way, and may be needed when there are new installations of utilities, major modifications of existing utilities, or any change in type, function, or physical location of a facility. Common utility permits applied for include installation of fiber optics, extension of water mains, light, power in any form, and regulated telecommunications service. MDT utilizes the Utilities Permitting Administration System (UPAS) to track and manage all utility permits for work within the right-of-way. More information on the UPAS system and how to submit a utility permit can be found on the UPAS webpage: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/upas/>.

Most utilities are permitted with a standard utility permit. Utilities proposed for installation longitudinally in the interstate right of way require an Interstate Utility permit. State law (MCA 60-4-601) authorizes MDT to grant a right-of-way use agreement for the use of longitudinal right-of-way along Montana's Interstate highways for eligible projects. Eligible Interstate projects include pipeline, fiber optic or other communications-type cables, wireless facility, associated infrastructure, and dedicated power sources.

MDT District Utility Agents (DUA) manage all utility permits submitted through UPAS and nominate projects to the Systems Impact Action Process (SIAP) when one or more review services are needed from MDT Headquarters staff. Once sent to Systems Impact, a review will be coordinated for the permit with the appropriate sections of MDT and other agencies. SIAP staff will also coordinate any additional documentation needed, such as a bond or a three-party agreement. For more information on the SIAP process, please visit our webpage: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/siap.aspx>.

A Monument to a Failed Dream: The Snowden Bridge

By Jon Axline, MDT Historian

Get more questions about the Snowden Bridge than any other bridge in the state. It certainly is photogenic, with its lift towers rising over a hundred feet above the Missouri River in northeastern Montana. You can see the towers from quite a distance. Its also unique among bridges in Montana, as the only vertical lift structure in the state. Designed by famed bridge engineer J. A. L. Waddell, the Snowden Bridge was an engineering marvel in its day, a superstar built during the height of the golden age of steel truss bridge construction in Montana between 1887 and 1921. Until the interstate highway era, the 1,159-foot Snowden Bridge was the among the state's most massive steel bridges and, for a short time, the longest vertical lift span in the world. Today, it has the distinction of being, perhaps, the most photographed bridge in Montana.

The Snowden Bridge is a monument to a failed dream – the Great Northern Railway's plan to construct the Montana Eastern Railway from Lewistown, Montana, to New Rockford, North Dakota. During the 1910 to 1918 Homestead Boom, the Great Northern and its subsidiaries expanded into the rural areas of eastern Montana and western North Dakota with the intent to serve the homesteaders and to protect the railroad's interests in the area by providing a second, shorter main line west. The Great Northern's plans for the railroad didn't go as planned. Instead of the 579 miles the company's executives planned, the railroad only ran 108 miles between Watford, North Dakota and Richey, Montana with a 24-mile branch north from Fairview to the Snowden junction on the main line. The railroad required two major bridges: one over the Yellowstone River and another spanning the Missouri River. The railroad built both bridges at the same time. Because the federal government classified both rivers as navigable, the railroad needed to make provisions that allowed river traffic to pass under the structures.

In September 1912, the railroad awarded a contract to the Kansas City, Missouri-based Union Bridge and Construction to build both bridges. Within a few weeks of the awarding of the contract, a shanty town sprang up on the north side of the Missouri River for the Snowden bridge. Many of the work crew members were African Americans from Missouri or nearby Fort Buford. Tragically, in April 1913, a dispute over a shack at the construction camp led to the fatal shooting of the Sheridan County sheriff and a deputy by one of the workers. A mob later stormed the Mondak city jail and hanged the perpetrator.

Completed in December 1913, the four-span bridge's design is unpretentious. It consists simply of four through truss spans. Two steel towers support the 296-foot vertical lift span. Engineer Waddell designed the bridge so that concrete counterweights in each tower raised and lowered the span, acting much as sash weights do in old double-hung windows. A three-cylinder, kerosene-fueled engine in the structure on top of the lift span controlled the counterweights to raise and lower the span. Shipping on the Missouri River in Montana did not warrant the raising of the lift span very often. But when it did happen, it took about 30 minutes to raise the span high enough to allow boat passage under the structure during normal water levels. If the lift engine failed, workers could raise the span by hand using a capstan similar to that found on sea-going vessels. In those instances, the span could be raised in several hours. The bridge's lift span is comprised of 571 tons of structural steel.

In 1916, the Great Northern scrapped its plans to complete the Montana Eastern Railway, and the Snowden Bridge functioned as part of a branch line between Sidney and the Great Northern's main line Snowden station. When completed, the bridge was the only river crossing between Fort Benton, Montana, and Bismarck, North Dakota. In 1925, the Great Northern Railway, planked the bridge's deck for vehicular traffic and charged motorists tolls to use the bridge. For most of the bridge's history, train and vehicular traffic shared the use of the structure. It was the only toll bridge in Montana for 30 years, from 1925 to 1955. Toll keepers stationed at each end of the bridge collected 75 cents for an automobile and driver to cross the bridge; it was 15 cents

for each additional passenger. A motorist had to pay attention, though, as trains still used the bridge. After 1955, the Great Northern installed crossing gates and stop lights at each end of the bridge to prevent incidents between vehicles and trains. In 1981, the Montana Highway Department reported that accidents on the bridge were rare because "the structure is so dangerous that it is safe. That is, drivers are more careful than they would normally be when crossing the bridge."

The Snowden Bridge's lift span was rarely used. During the construction of Fort Peck Dam in the 1930s, loaded barges traveled under the bridge, but the railroad seldom undertook the cumbersome task of raising the span to give them clearance. Instead, barges took on water, lowering their height, in order to pass under the bridge. In all, the span was not raised more than 16 times, the last being in 1935. The Great Northern retired the lift machinery and secured the lift span in 1943. Until the 1990s, the lift house with its equipment remained intact atop the lift span.

The Great Northern and local residents suffered a contentious relationship over the bridge for decades. While locals appreciated the bridge's availability for motor traffic, tolls were the issue. The toll rates didn't change for 30 years, but they were seen as a burden to drivers who could ill afford them, especially during the Great Depression. Area chambers of commerce, commercial clubs, and civic groups constantly lobbied the railroad to abolish the tolls with no effect. In 1949, the state legislature passed a bill that designated all toll bridges in Montana as free, and allowed the Montana Highway Commission to expend money on improvements and maintenance on them. Since the bridge was the only toll structure in the state and the bill was introduced in the legislature by a Richland County representative, the bill was clearly aimed at the Snowden Bridge. The Montana Supreme Court later ruled the law unconstitutional because public money could not be spent on a privately-owned bridge. The railroad finally gave into public pressure in 1955, and stopped charging tolls to use the bridge.

The railroad and motor vehicles shared use of the bridge until 1985, when the Montana and North Dakota highway departments opened a new bridge across the Missouri River a few miles downstream of the Snowden Bridge. The Snowden Bridge stands today as a monument to a time of tremendous railroad expansion in Montana and as a technological innovation that was, for a while at least, the longest vertical lift span in the world. Most importantly, Snowden Bridge is firmly entrenched in local lore.



The Snowden Bridge, Montana's only vertical lift structure in the state.

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MDT Wants Your Comments on New Projects

To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, please visit www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/planning/proposed_proj.pdf, www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.shtml, or call 800-714-7296. You can mail comments on proposed projects to MDT Project Analysis Manager, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620-1001 or email them to mdtstip@mt.gov.

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