



Public Participation

How Public Comments Make a Difference

- Helps to ensure a broader range of perspectives and impacts are considered
- Provides insight into issues from locals and neighbors
- Is an initial gauge of public receptiveness to a project
- Helps to identify alternative approaches

How the Public is Involved in the E. Missoula-Highway 200 Corridor Project

Advisory Committee: Established for this project, the bi-monthly committee advises on process and approach, and reviews documents prior to public release. The Advisory Committee consists of approximately 14 individuals representing:

- East Missoula Community Council
- City and County Public Works
- Mountain Line Transit
- Missoula Redevelopment Authority
- Montana Rail Link
- City and County Parks/ Recreation/Trails
- Montana Department of Transportation
- Associated Students- University of Montana - Transportation
- County Planning

Updates with East Missoula and Bonner Community Councils: Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMPO) staff and WGM consultants provide updates to community councils via email news or attendance at council meetings.

Open Houses: Three open houses over the course of this project.

Online Information: Information on the project, interactive maps, and comment platforms are on the MMPO website.

General Outreach:

- Postcard notices to more than 1,000 area landowners (prior to Open House #2)
- News releases
- Flyers prior to Open Houses - intended to reach renters and others
- Outreach to businesses and recreationists - phone calls and surveys to sample groups
- Notices via MMPO newsletter

COVID-19 effect on public engagement: The first Open House was held in February, when there was little statewide awareness of COVID and prior to any COVID restrictions. All subsequent public meetings will comply with local and state requirements for social distancing and other measures to prevent spread of COVID. Some meetings may be held online.

Public Involvement Process

Phase 1: Project Initiation and Issue Identification (Winter 2020)

- Open House #1
- How Comments Make a Difference: Use in refining issues and developing design alternatives

Phase 2: Design Alternatives (Spring 2020)

- Open House #2:
- How Comments Make a Difference: Use in selecting preferred alternative, including suggested modifications

Phase 3: Preferred Alternative (Fall/Winter 2020-2021)

- Open House #3
- How Comments Make a Difference: Use in refining the preferred alternative and development as final alternative

Phase 4: Final Plan (early 2021)

- Review Draft available for comment
- How Comments Make a Difference: Will be considered before finalizing plan

Phase 1: Issue Identification

Step 1: Learn from Previous Public Involvement

The Highway 200 Corridor Plan builds on public engagement from previous plans. Most of those plans address a much broader area than the East Missoula-Highway 200 Corridor. The most locally-specific public engagement was the 2015 East Missoula Vision document.

Step 2: Open House #1, Interactive Online Map, Facebook, Email

To get a sense of whether issues identified in earlier plans had changed over time, Open House #1 and an interactive online map were designed with open-ended questions to allow folks to bring up new issues, not just react to previous concepts.

Starting in February, comments on the project were received from the general public. More than 100 written comments were received during this phase of the project.

- Online Interactive Map (Feb. 6 through April 24): 1,184 visits, 94 written comments
- Facebook (March): 17 persons submitted comments
- Other Comments (Feb.-April): 8
- Open House #1 (Feb. 6): 25-30 persons attended to discuss the project

Phase 1: Comment Summary

Safety



Public comment on this Highway 200 Corridor project makes it clear the main concerns are safety related. East Missoula is a high priority area, as is the Railroad Tunnel-I-90 underpass area, ShaRon, and Van Buren-East Broadway intersection. Bicyclists and pedestrians also need safer ways to travel along the highway.

East Missoula



In East Missoula, there is still general support for many basic components of the 2015 East Missoula Vision. East Missoulians are more than ready to see improvements on the ground and a bit disappointed to realize the current plan is needed before major changes can occur. Comments also made it clear that some components, such as the “triangle” parcel near Ole’s, may need a different approach from the 2015 East Missoula Vision. Public involvement also indicated need for a flashing signal on the highway for East Missoula Fire/Emergency vehicles.

ShaRon Fishing Access



Sha-Ron river access is a traffic congestion and safety issue during the river floating season. Comments addressed needs and suggestions for parking, speed limits, and intersection control.



Railroad Tunnel/I-90

The Railroad Tunnel and I-90 underpass area generated many comments about safety concerns and suggestions for making it better. These included widening the tunnel, a separate tunnel for bikers/walkers, roundabout approaches to/from I-90. There was also opposition to roundabouts.



Van Buren Intersection

Public comments about the Van Buren-East Broadway intersection suggested needed fixes for bike/pedestrian safety. The median to the east makes it difficult to make left turns from east-bound lanes to businesses on north side of the highway. The merging lanes are confusing. Traffic congestion in this area is a problem.

Bike-Pedestrian



Bicyclists and walkers are very much interested in bike lanes, sidewalks, or shared use paths from the Van Buren-Broadway intersection to the Bonner trail system. They also recognize that bike/walk facilities may differ in the three corridor segments – East Broadway, East Missoula, and Sha-Ron. City-style sidewalks, for example, do not fit with the rural feel of the Sha-Ron area. Public comment indicated specific locations for pedestrian crossings and suggestions for striping and signage.

Phase 2: Design Alternatives

Step 1: Prepare Design Alternatives

The project team developed alternative designs based on project goals and objectives, conformance with existing plans, and issues identified by the public in phase 1. A separate team of local state and federal agencies reviewed initial designs for potential environmental impacts. The alternatives covered a broad range of options intended to address the spectrum of issues and differing public opinions on such items as roundabouts.

The design alternatives included three corridor wide alternatives and more detailed options for four focus areas – Van Buren intersection, Railroad Crossing and I-90 interchange, East Missoula, and Sha-Ron fishing access.

Step 2: Open House #2, Interactive Maps, and Design Preference Survey

In the last week of June, the project team sent more than 1,000 postcards to nearby landowners, providing notice of the design alternatives and Open House #2. The project team posted the design alternatives and an interactive preference survey on the website on July 1. Approximately 30 people attended Open House #2 on July 14. By the comment deadline on July 31, 1,276 visits had been made to the interactive survey, and a total of 196 responses and comments. The project received a few additional comments via email and phone calls.

Phase 2: Survey Summary

Corridor Wide Alternatives

Three alternative designs provided options for the length of the corridor.

Alternative A, “Complete Streets,” provided in-street bike lanes and sidewalks separated from the street by landscaped boulevards for the western portion of the corridor. The more rural portion to the east included a shared use path, separated from the highway, and extending the length of the corridor.

Alternative B, “Shared Use Path,” provided a shared use path along Mt Jumbo in the East Broadway segment, separated sidewalk and shared use path on different sides of the highway in the East Missoula segment, and a shared use path in the Sha-Ron segment. The mix of sidewalks and path extended the length of the corridor.

Alternative C, “Sidewalks and Parking,” had on-street parking and sidewalks in the East Broadway and East Missoula segments, but only East Broadway had the sidewalk separated from the street. The Sha-Ron segment had a shared-use path that extended only to Marshall Grade.

The public preferred Alternative B, “Shared Use Path.” Pedestrian and bicyclist safety was the apparent reason it scored so much higher than the other alternatives. Other favored aspects included the continuous path for the length of the corridor, and the greenery in the buffer separating vehicles from the path. Although the proposed Mt. Jumbo path would provide a safer route across the highway and railroad, people were concerned that some bikers and walkers would still use the highway. Other concerns included the preference to keep the path all on one side of the highway to reduce crossings.

	Responses	Percent
Alternative A: Complete Streets	17	28%
Alternative B: Shared-Use Path	40	66%
Alternative C: Sidewalks & Parking	4	7%

Van Buren Focus Area

The Van Buren focus area is the area just east of the Van Buren intersection, extending to the far edge of the Eastgate shopping center. The three options in this area centered on bike/pedestrian movement and included boulevard/sidewalk, shared use path, and curbside sidewalk. Respondents overwhelmingly favored a shared use path to an on-street bike lane. Although it was also the preference for pedestrian use, some comments indicated a separate sidewalk should be included.

	Responses	Percent
Bicycle Amenity		
Option 1: On-Street Bike Lane	2	9%
Option 2: Shared-Use Path	20	91%
Pedestrian Amenity		
Option 1: Boulevard Sidewalk	7	32%
Option 2: Curbside Sidewalk	1	5%
Option 3: Shared-Use Path	14	64%
Total # of Responses	22	

Railroad and I-90 Interchange Focus Area

The three options for this focus area included: 1) two roundabouts and improved railroad underpass, 2) a shared-use path on Mt. Jumbo connecting from Van Buren to East Helena (and no other improvements to Hwy 200), and 3) a single roundabout between I-90 and the railroad.

The majority of respondents favored option 1 with two roundabouts and improved railroad underpass. Some respondents who selected the other two options also wanted to see the underpass widened in those options. Safety at the underpass has been a consistent public concern from the start of this project. Many people who selected option 1 favored roundabouts generally, but there was a split on which one was most necessary. Respondents who selected option 2 indicated the shared path was safest for bike/ped and did not like roundabouts. Some persons selected option 2 because it was the only option without roundabouts. Persons who selected option 3 indicated this was the biggest problem interchange and the highway will need bike lanes.

	Responses	Percent
Option 1: Two Roundabouts & Improved Railroad Underpass	24	57%
Option 2: Mount Jumbo Shared-Use Path	15	36%
Option 3: One Roundabout	3	7%
Total # of Responses	42	

East Missoula Focus Area

The East Missoula focus area includes the main business portion of East Missoula. The survey for this area centered on bicycles, pedestrians and on-street parking, with multiple options for each.

The preferred bicycle amenity was the shared use path. Comments indicated differing opinions of the value and safety of raised cycle track.

On the pedestrian question, there was a near-tie for the top two preferences – shared-use path and boulevard sidewalk (separated by one vote). Comments included putting the sidewalk on one side only, a shared use path on the south side, and concern about potential congestion and conflicts of use on the shared use path.

Regarding on-street parking, the preference was for parallel parking, but many questioned the need for any on-street parking at all.

	Responses	Percent
Bicycle Amenity		
Option 1: Raised Cycle Track	9	29%
Option 2: Curbside Sidewalk	6	19%
Option 3: Shared-Use Path	16	52%
Pedestrian Amenity		
Option 1: Boulevard Sidewalk	14	45%
Option 2: Curbside Sidewalk	2	6%
Option 3: Shared-Use Path	15	52%
On-Street Parking Type		
Option 1: Parallel Parking	17	59%
Option 2: Angle Parking	8	28%
Option 3: Back-in Angle Parking	4	14%
Total # of Responses	31	

Sha-Ron Focus Area

The Sha-Ron focus area includes highway corridor on either side of Speedway Avenue. The survey included two options. Option 1, “On-Street Protected Parking,” provided parking spaces on the south side of the highway, west of Speedway. The parking would be in the existing right-of-way, but separated from traffic lanes by a buffer strip. This option also provided a bus pull-out in the right-of-way east of Speedway and adjacent to the fishing access site. Option 2, “East Parking Lot,” was an approximate 80-space parking lot in the right-of-way, within walking distance east of the fishing access.

The majority of respondents favored option 2, “East Parking Lot. Several persons did not like either option but had to select one or the other in order to make that statement. These respondents often indicated a preference to limit use at Sha-Ron or move the access for floaters to an entirely different location on the river. Others indicated they would like to see some combination of options 1 and 2 and many of these really liked the bus-shuttle pull through in option 1. There were also some concerns about the need for a marked pedestrian crossing to access the north side of the highway to accommodate high volume of bike traffic in Marshall Canyon.

	Responses	Percent
Option 1: On-Street Protected Parking	15	41%
Option 2: East Parking Lot	22	60%
Total # of Responses	37	

Phase 3: Preferred Alternative

Step 1: Prepare Preferred Design Alternative

To develop the preferred design alternative, the project team evaluated individual components of the multiple design alternatives in Phase 2. They worked to develop a corridor-wide design that could best meet project goals and objectives and reflect public preferences.

Step 2: Open House #3 and Other Public Comment

The preferred design alternative was released on October 22 on the project website. In advance of the release, the project team sent more than 1,000 postcards to nearby landowners about the preferred design and Open House #3. Additional notices were sent to a project email list. Approximately 20 participants, not including project staff, attended Open House #3, conducted as an online Zoom meeting, on the evening of October 22. On November 10, MMPO staff discussed the preferred design at a meeting of the East Missoula Community Council. A dozen other comments were received via email by the comment deadline on November 12.

Phase 3: Comment Summary

The following summarizes questions and responses from Open House #3 and other comments received separately. In general, comments were supportive of the preferred design overall.

Q: Will there still be a bus stop on Staple Street?

A: Yes. Mountain Line plans to route busses on the highway through East Missoula. Several bus stops are planned in this area.

Q: Is there the possibility of also including an air compressor at the bus stop before Tamarack? We continue to see a lot of folks accessing the river at that point.

A: Yes, that can certainly be considered. The cost of adding an air compressor is relatively minor.

Q: Will there be a cross walk at Marshall Canyon Rd? Lots more bike activity there with the mountain bike trails at the ski area.

A: The shared-use path is planned on the north side of the highway in this area so a crossing will not be needed to access Marshall Canyon Road. Connecting to this area is one of the reasons for locating the shared-use path on the north side of the highway.

Q: Will all bus stops have lighting? Will school bus stops also be considered?

A: Yes, all bus stops will have lighting. Regarding school bus stops, we have been coordinating with the Missoula and Bonner schools on this preferred design.

Q: I would like you to go back to the East Broadway section and explain the parking areas particularly from Silver Tip to Easy St. Also the amount of lighting proposed. What is the lighting going to be like from Easy St. to the new roundabout?

A: The proposed parking lane shown on the south side of Highway 200 is conceptual. Prior to changes, a more detailed final design will be developed and respond to existing and anticipated parking demand. We do not envision providing a parking lane for areas with little or no demand.

Regarding lighting, we have focused on the areas where lighting is most needed for safety. For the eastern portion of East Broadway to the railroad tunnel, proposed lighting is only at bus stops, street crossings, and the railroad bridge. The lighting will be night-sky sensitive and downward focused.

Q: Why will the path be on the north side of the highway on the east end of this corridor? It will have to cross far more driveways on that side, the river access is on the south side, the path already built past Tamarack is on the south side.

A: We examined both sides of the highway before selecting the north side as the preferred design. This was due mainly to a lack of room to accommodate a trail on the south side due to bank stabilization improvements made this summer by MDT. The MDT bank stabilization project will introduce a retaining wall that would have prevented trail users on the south side of the road from accessing Marshall Mountain. Additionally, by placing the trail on the north side of the road, the residents in these areas can easily access it without crossing Hwy 200, thus we can limit pedestrian crossings to known locations.

Q: What is the plan for parking on the highway near Sha-Ron?

A: Within the Preferred Alternative, there is a recommendation for a new parking lot east of Sha-Ron with a trail connecting the Sha-Ron fishing access. This provides safe parking away from traffic on Highway 200. Additionally, action is already being taken on developing the new parking lot. The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is working with Missoula County, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, which manages Sha-Ron, to address the current parking issues. They are keenly aware of the safety issues associated with the fishing access site.

Q: What will be done to shore up the bank from the end of Cobblestone to Easy St.?

A: The erosion issue will be documented in the final plan and should be addressed in detail as engineering plans are developed for implementing the preferred alternative.

Q: Parking on the north side of the highway in the East Broadway segment – that doesn't make sense in the area where the people who need it are on the south side. The north side area is also used for living in vehicles and many vehicles are left/abandoned in that area.

A: Montana Rail Link owns the north side of the highway there. They plan to fence the area off in the future to eliminate the parking and nuisance uses. They have indicated some willingness to transfer some of their right-of-way to expand road right-of-way where needed. If that occurs, the road would be realigned and parking would be expanded on the south side.

Q: Will there be street lighting at Staple in East Missoula? I personally think it should be lit; it is a dark intersection.

A: Yes, there will be lighting at Staple and at other intersections and at bus stops in East Missoula. Lighting will be downward focused and night sky sensitive.

Q: For the East Broadway segment, has there been any talk of changing the speed limit or changing where the speed increases/decreases? In particular by the University/College area. Do we anticipate a speed reduction at Sha-Ron as part of this plan?

A: MDT will continue to assess the need for reducing speed limits on the highway corridor.

Q: Previously it was mentioned that a Porta Potty would be at ShaRon.

A: Yes, that has been a concern for many but is outside of the scope of this project, which is limited to the highway right-of-way. It is our understanding that there are some issues with proximity to the river and access for water/sewer lines. FWP is aware of the problems and you might contact them.

Q: Move the pedestrian crossing from Tamarck to McDowell Drive.

A: The proposed crossing location just west of Tamarack Road coincides with a Mountain Line bus stop which combines two higher pedestrian use areas into one. This will allow a future project to introduce traffic calming; such as enhanced crosswalks, narrow shoulders, curb and cutter, and shorter crossings at one location. Given this is a state route, traffic calming items such as these require crossing usage thresholds be met. By combining our crossing locations, into one crossing, these thresholds are easier to meet, and we can provide a safer crossing.

Q: (This comment sent as an email prior to the meeting) Could someone PLEASE reach out to the University to inquire about accessing the river via the new Missoula College. Create a walk-in at the proposed new pedestrian bridge. Utilize the existing parking lot at the Missoula College since it is vacant in the summer. I drove by the Missoula College this summer at the peak of the floating season and it was ALWAYS empty! Overflow parking can utilize the proposed parking on the North side of Broadway. The University can show their commitment to the community. It also would alleviate the danger floaters encounter in the existing rapids behind the college. By accessing the river at the University, recreational floaters can avoid this unsafe rapid. Just have it for foot traffic and no boat ramp. Please start embracing the river! This is a win-win-win. University-city-citizens

A: Yes, the parking lot is often empty during the summer and considering how it might be utilized to better coordinate river rafting is a good idea.

Q: The project needs to consider shared use paths on Speedway, Deer Creek Road, and across Bandmann Bridge to connect to existing Canyon River path and Kim Williams Trail.

A: The project is limited to what can be done within the highway 200 right-of-way. That said, the project design team is aware of the need for connections to other existing and future bike-ped pathways and need for a design that can work for those connections.

Q: Will MRL agree to the changes to the RR underpass?

A: We have met with MRL and discussed options for improving bicycle and pedestrian connectivity through improvements to the railroad bridge. The preferred alternative includes a new, wider structure for the railroad crossing which is also MRL's preferred solution. MRL understands the need for safety improvements at that location and has indicated they are willing to work with the County to allow those improvements to happen. The cost for the improvements and maintenance will not be MRL's responsibility and MRL will require uninterrupted service for their tracks during construction. This will be accomplished through a shoofly which is a temporary track that goes around the structure that will be replaced. The cost estimate includes a provision for ensuring continued rail transport during construction.

Q: Concerns about the intersection of Staple St. and Hwy 200 – with poor sight distance.

A: The project design team is reviewing this intersection.

Q: Preference is for the shared use path to be on the south/river side of the highway east of Brickyard Hill.

A: We examined both sides of the highway before selecting the north side as the preferred design. This was due mainly to a lack of room to accommodate a trail on the south side due to bank stabilization improvements made this summer by MDT. The MDT bank stabilization project will introduce a retaining wall that would have prevented trail users on the south side of the road from accessing Marshall Mountain. Additionally, by placing the trail on the north side of the road, the residents in these areas can easily access it without crossing Hwy 200, thus we can limit pedestrian crossings to known locations.

Q: How will these projects be funded?

A: Due to the scale and scope of this project, it is likely to be funded through federal or state sources, including grants. It may also be a partnership between the City and County, similar to what is occurring with the BUILD grant on the west end of town between Mullan and Broadway. Funding options will be spelled out in greater detail in the final report. Needless to say, there is still a lot of work to be done to acquire funding, but this corridor plan puts the projects in a really good place to pursue funding sources.

Other Comments:

- This will be a beautiful improvement to East Missoula. So much safer, especially the RR overpass area.
- I love all of the thought put into this, it is going to be amazing! These changes have been needed for years.
- Thank you for all the work that went into this. It looks great, and especially appreciate the addition of urban trees to the East Missoula corridor, and the considerable improvements to cyclist safety.
- I will add a request for bike parking at sha-ron in my written comments! Thanks!
- Thank you for all your efforts and considering the input throughout this process. It's exciting to see the possibility of this corridor transforming.