

# New Mobility West – Technical Assistance Program

## East Missoula – Community Corridor Vision and Action Strategy



Missoula County – City of Missoula



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## East Missoula – Corridor Vision & Redevelopment

### Project Narrative

#### *Goals & Objectives*

East Missoula is situated between the city of Missoula and the Bonner townsite in Missoula County. East Missoula has over 2,100 residents with a volunteer fire facility, public parks, a private social work graduate school, and Mountain Water service. The East Missoula Sewer District installed sewer lines and requested annexation into the city of Missoula which is likely to occur in 8-10 years. Montana Highway 200 that runs through town has two 12-foot travel lanes and 8-foot shoulders with no designated driveways or pedestrian walkways. The highway defines and divides the town.



**Figure 1**

The community's first objective is to create a vision to articulate what the highway corridor could look like before and after annexation into the City of Missoula and future highway reconstruction activities. This vision would guide the community's second goal to develop scenarios that could transform the highway corridor into a walkable and drivable facility. The third objective is to create strategies to achieve the commercial and residential redevelopment goal.

Despite the slowdown of the timber economy in Western Montana, the townsite and surrounding communities have had recent redevelopment. To the west in the city, the University of Montana proposes to build a 155,000 square foot facility to educate over 2,500 students in 35 occupational and technical two-year programs. To the east, Bonner is undergoing substantial economic and recreational development after the closure of the Champion lumber mill in 2008 and removal of the Milltown Dam in 2012.

Like many post-timber industry communities in the west, East Missoula is in flux. Commercial activity consists of light industrial (auto mechanics, trucking support services, and light manufacturing) and community support services (convenience store, restaurants and coffee shops, and mini-storage). A building material re-use store, a pawnbroker shop, and a six unit apartment complex were recently built within the East Missoula Highway 200 corridor. The highway corridor is ready for redevelopment to match the surrounding development and recreational expansion and prepare for the planned annexation.

East Missoula hopes to achieve a long-desired community goal to reshape and manage future commercial and residential redevelopment within the Highway 200 corridor.



### *Issues & Opportunities*

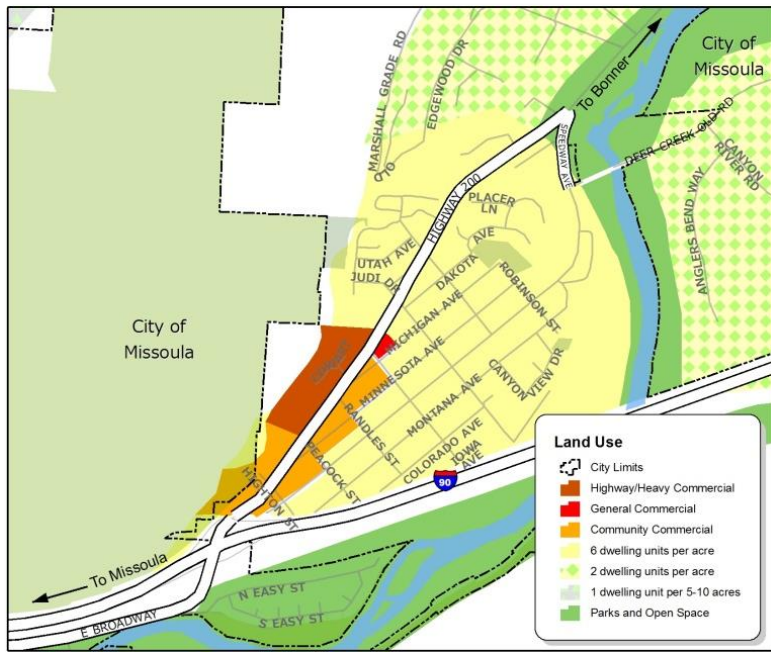
East Missoula does not have a coherent vision for the future redevelopment of the highway. Technical assistance will provide the opportunity to create a vision for corridor development to complement future activity. Impediments to consider during the creation of the vision, scenarios, and strategies include an out-of-date roadway, anticipated development, and limited bus service.

Walking, driving, and bus service are difficult within the townsite. Since the road has unlimited roadway access and no pedestrian facilities, vehicles can make wide turns into and out of the businesses and residences. This increases the likelihood for vehicle and pedestrian collisions and limits commercial and residential development opportunities.



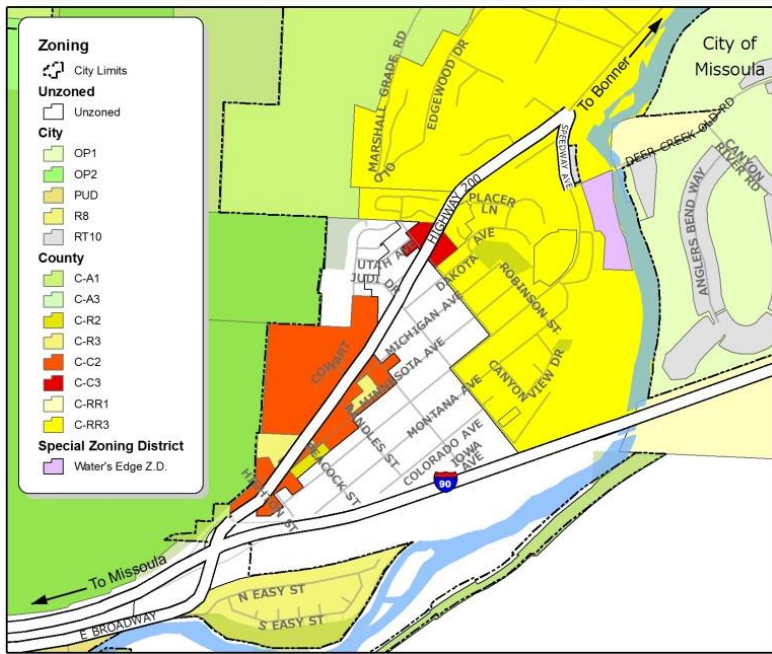
Bus service within East Missoula is limited because bus stops and shelters are not easily identified to encourage ridership. Low service frequency outside the primary travel corridor creates barriers for riders scheduling work commutes or other trips. Low bus ridership within East Missoula likely adds vehicle trips, increases opportunities for crashes, and decreases walkability. The Missoula Long Range Transportation Plan forecasts that traffic will double from 7,424 to 13,572 vehicles per day and congest the roadway by 2040.

The Missoula County Growth Policy estimated 678 new residential units are expected over the next 20 years in East Missoula, prior to plans to construct Missoula College on East Broadway. Surrounding commercial development in Bonner and at the proposed Missoula College site will compound demands upon land use availability and other public services. The historic light industrial businesses typically found in communities near timber industry hubs are transitioning to commercial uses serving the residents and recreation users traveling through the corridor. Unmanaged commercial and residential growth along the Highway will exacerbate traffic.



### Ongoing Planning & Development

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has agreed to conduct a Highway 200 safety audit through East Missoula to identify deficiencies and solutions to improve roadway safety. The highway's out-of-date design bisects the town and creates conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. The safety audit, expected to be completed in the spring of 2015, will address some of these design and operational deficiencies but will not include a substantial land use component or visioning process for the corridor.



The City of Missoula and Missoula County are writing updated Growth Policies to replace the joint 2005 County and City Growth Policies. East Missoula, currently within unincorporated Missoula County, is Growth Policies.

Mountain Line, the local bus operator, completed a Comprehensive Operational Analysis. The plan does not modify the East Missoula route. Saturday service will improve to hourly frequency for portions of the day, instead of the current two hour service.

Technical assistance will complement the roadway safety audit, the Growth Policy updates, and bus service improvements to

address the land use and transportation challenges before annexation into the city of Missoula.

### Community Need

Without Sonoran Institute assistance, it will take significantly longer for the East Missoula Community Council, County, and City to address the land use and transportation difficulties in the area. Several previous land use, zoning, and transportation planning attempts have not yielded substantial results.

In 2010, Missoula County submitted an unsuccessful proposal for federal transportation planning funds to create a Transportation Plan to assist with community and economic development. In 2012, the Community Council hosted a public meeting to for the community to consider future strategies to address land use and zoning challenges. The community supported updating land use designations and addressing the highway deficiencies, however the Community Council has an extremely limited budget of



approximately \$1,000 per year for implementing programs. A 2012 MDT speed study lowered the speed limit through the townsite from 45 miles per hour to 35. The study did not provide recommendations to address access control or design deficiencies.

Technical assistance will catalyze community planning to allow the Community Council, County, City, MDT, and local residents the opportunity to create a vision, scenarios, and strategies to manage corridor development that the residents and governments have been unable to complete.

## Partnerships

### *Agency & Community Partners*

The Missoula Board of County Commissioners, the decision-making authority for East Missoula, is a strong supporter of working with East Missoula Community Council and various partners to develop a vision for this area. The Community Council, County Commissioners, the City of Missoula, and the Montana Department of Transportation expect to collaborate with the public and

local residents to implement any desired recommendations or future changes that might result from this planning effort.



The City of Missoula will likely annex East Missoula and is interested in working with Missoula County and the Community Council to help ensure local zoning and land preferences for the corridor and City of Missoula zoning and land use codes are aligned and can be folded into future annexation plans.



The Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has identified the East Missoula/Highway 200 corridor projects in the 2012 Long Range Transportation and the 2011 Active Transportation Plans. Through these planning documents, the MPO continues to advocate for a transportation network that addresses all modes of transportation, and land use policies to support a vibrant active transportation system. The MPO will continue to support efforts to plan for and secure funding to implement transportation projects in East Missoula.



The MDT supports locally guided land use planning efforts but cannot dedicate financial resources to this planning effort in East Missoula. The MDT will examine Highway 200 safety and operational deficiencies that affect roadway users and the townsite. The strategies from the safety audit may be eligible for available state or federal construction funds to address the safety and operational problems.

The Community Council has requested technical assistance to address commercial, residential, and transportation redevelopment in the area. The Council and local residents are interested in creating a vision, scenarios, and strategies for the corridor prior to annexation into the City so the community can retain its local character once absorbed into the greater Missoula community.



Missoula County Community and Planning Services and Public Works Department currently provide staff assistance to the Community Council when requested. Both agencies will continue to assist with any future land use, zoning, and transportation efforts with dedicated staff time and resources.

### *Community Support*

There are no known opponents to this project. Local residents have led numerous efforts to discuss land use, zoning, and transportation issues that affect the community and have not generated any significant opposition to these ideas to date.

As any project is discussed and created, local residents may question land use, zoning, and/or transportation proposals since they may affect property uses and values. Any planning requires substantial participation from affected businesses and residents within the corridor and in the townsite. Suggested public involvement includes open houses, workshops, and media and mailing notifications to invite public participation and reduce the likelihood of opposition.

### **Capacity**

Since development is expected to expand in East Missoula, especially along the Highway 200 corridor, a thoughtful vision, viable scenarios, and realistic strategies will help guide future planning efforts, inform development review, and potentially leverage private funds to achieve community goal to address identified land use and transportation problems.

The current County Growth Policy revision will evaluate existing and future county-wide land uses, which can support corridor redevelopment prior to or upon annexation into the City. Technical Assistance provided by the Sonoran Institute would be coordinated with these upcoming planning processes to incorporate the community vision, goals, objectives, and implementation strategies to achieve cohesion among existing and future planning efforts.

Missoula County, the East Missoula Community Council, the City of Missoula, and MDT would incorporate land use recommendations from this planning effort into the results from the road safety audit to assist with any future road reconstruction activities, with the goal of fostering a corridor that successfully integrates land use and transportation elements.



Once the community corridor plan and safety audit are complete, Missoula County and the Community Council can begin to apply for state and federal grants to fund economic development and transportation improvements. Potential grant sources include:

1. USDA Rural Development Community Facility Grants.
2. Montana Transportation Alternative Grants for non-motorized improvements.
3. Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery funding.

If selected for a New Mobility West technical assistance grant, Missoula County can use the technical assistance results to increase the chance of securing federal and state funds to implement land use and transportation development strategies. The increasingly competitive nature of infrastructure improvements demonstrates the need for initial planning to show funding agencies that the local governments can address the community's land use and transportation needs.

### **Local Match**

Missoula County Community and Planning Services, Public Works, and other interested county agencies will provide in-kind resources such as dedicated staff time throughout any anticipated New Mobility West technical assistance. The City of Missoula will provide technical support as needed throughout this planning process.

Missoula County would provide any advertising, mapping, imagery, or other printed information for any public meetings or open houses hosted as a result of New Mobility West technical assistance.



## Appendix A - Aerial Imagery

