HOW CAN YOU STAY INFORMED OR GET ACTIVELY INVOLVED?

- Apply to become a member of the Citizen Working Group
- Get on the mailing list to receive project newsletters and updates
- Visit the projects website for updates at www.wgmgroup.com
- Let the Project Team hear from you:

  → Mail comments for both Whitefish projects to: **WGM Group, Inc., PO Box 16027 Missoula, MT 59808-6027**

  → E-mail to: **wgmwhitefish@wgmgroup.com**

  → FAX: **406-728-2476**, with the subject indicating "Whitefish Comments"

  → Online from the project web page at **www.wgmgroup.com**

  **To be included on future correspondence, include name and address with all comments.

For additional information, please contact Brent Campbell at WGM Group, Inc. at (407) 728-4611

The Montana Department of Transportation, in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration, is the sponsor of this project. For more information, contact Dwane Kailey, MDT Acting District Administrator, at (406) 523-5800 or Blair Nordhagen, Consultant Project Engineer, at (406) 444-9128.

The TTY number for the hearing impaired is (406) 444-7643 or (800) 335-7592.

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P.O. Box 16027 • Missoula, MT 59808

WHITEFISH
U.S. HIGHWAY 93

U.S. HWY 93 WHITEFISH URBAN AND WEST PROJECTS

STATUS ★ SCOPE ★ SCHEDULE

SPRING 2005

US HWY 93 RECONSTRUCTION

In February 2005, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) hired WGM Group, Inc. (WGM) to provide the design for the reconstruction of the U.S. Highway 93 corridor in Whitefish. The Highway 93 corridor is split into two projects in the Whitefish area. The work entails reconstructing US Hwy 93 for Whitefish Urban and Whitefish West, adding City entry treatments; incorporating medians, turn lanes, bike lanes, and sidewalk; replacing two existing bridges; and building two new bridges. The project defined by the EIS provides improved traffic safety and capacity, while striving to be compatible with the character of Whitefish.

Whitefish Urban

The Whitefish Urban project begins on US 93 at 13th Street, continues north on Spokane Avenue to 2nd Street, continues west on 2nd, and ends just west of Baker Ave. The project includes a one-way couplet on Spokane and Baker Avenues between 7th and 2nd Streets, and a new bridge crossing the Whitefish River at 7th Street.

Whitefish West

The Whitefish West project begins on 2nd Street just west of Baker Avenue and follows US 93 to approximately ½ mile west of Twin Bridges Road (Hwy 424) at milepost 133.

WGM GROUP, INC.

MDT MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

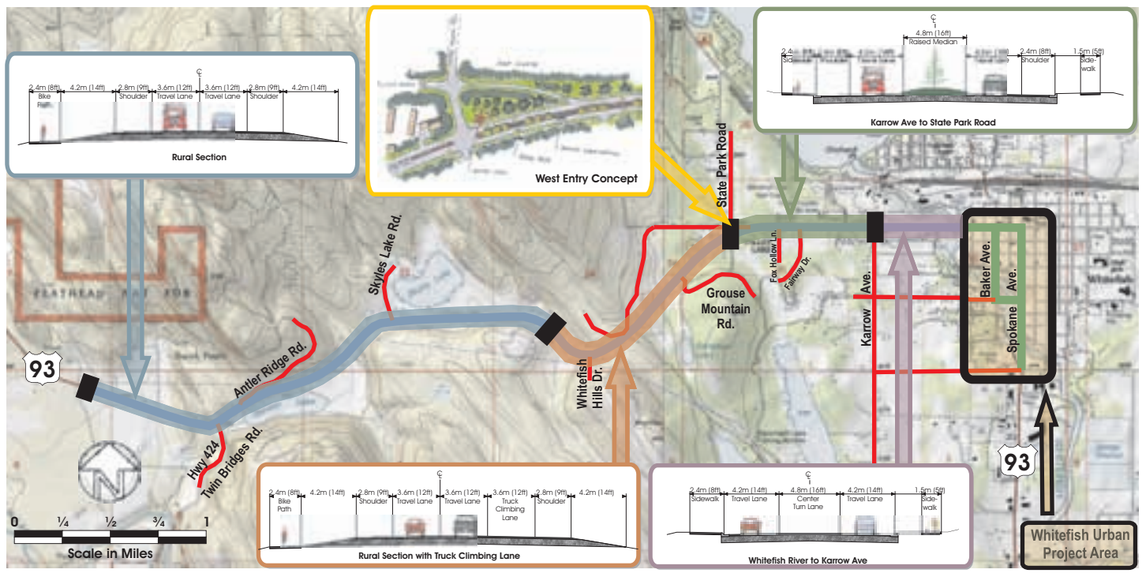
SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

Record of Decision: The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in cooperation with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), selected Alternative A (COMBO) and C (COUPLET-3) for the reconstruction of US Highway 93 through Whitefish. These alternatives include the following elements:

- A four-lane facility (urban section) from the Whitefish River (South) to Seventh Street, including replacement of the large culverts with a new bridge over the Whitefish River
- A one-way couplet (urban section) on Baker and Spokane, each carrying two through lanes of traffic, including a new bridge over the Whitefish River at Seventh Street
- A three-lane facility (urban section) from the Whitefish River (West) to Karrow Avenue, including replacement of the 2nd Street Bridge over the Whitefish River
- A two-lane facility with raised median (urban section) from Karrow Avenue to west of Lion Mountain Road (State Park Road)
- A three-lane facility (rural section) with truck climbing lanes from west of Lion Mountain Road to Milepost 130.6
- A two-lane facility (rural section) from Milepost 130.6 to Milepost 133.0
- On-shoulder bike path from Whitefish River (South) to Whitefish River (West)
- Separated bike path from Whitefish River (West) to Milepost 133.0 (where feasible)

ALTERNATIVE A (COMBO)
The Preferred Option Whitefish West

- Provides a Combination of Median and Turn Lane features



What is an Environmental Reevaluation?

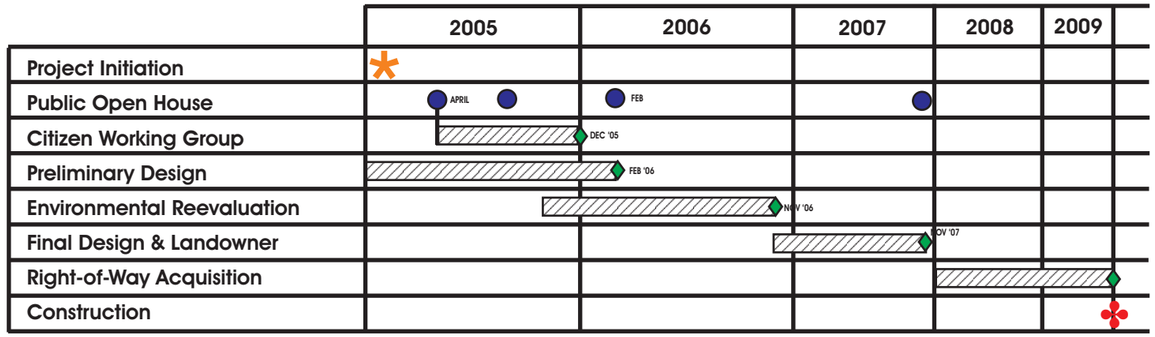
- An Environmental Reevaluation is a written document prepared to determine whether the contents of an environmental document are still valid, up-to-date, and complete.
- Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Reevaluation is required on projects with an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) where no action to advance the project has occurred within a three-year period.
- Changes in any of the following items, and the relevance of the change, are considered in the Environmental Reevaluation:
  - Scope of the proposed project
  - Social, economic, or environmental circumstances of the project study area (i.e. the affected environment)
  - State-of-the-art practice for environmental analysis (i.e. new technology)
  - Federal or state statutory environmental standards
  - Information available related to possibly significant social, economic, or environmental impacts of the proposed project
  - Proposed mitigation measures
- The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) reviews the Environmental Reevaluation to determine if the changes or new information may result in significant environmental impacts that were not evaluated in the EIS.
- If significant environmental impacts may result, a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) will be required.
- There is no formal NEPA requirement for Public Involvement with an Environmental Reevaluation. However, in keeping with the spirit of an open, collaborative process, a draft Reevaluation will be made available for public comment.

What is the Citizen Working Group?

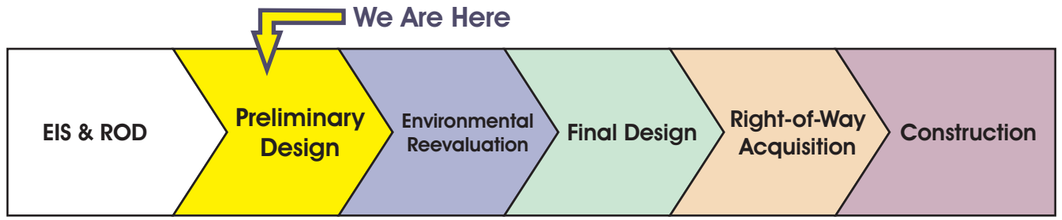
- The Citizen Working Group will be assembled by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to involve a broad representation of Whitefish residents in focused discussion about implementation issues and design details.
- The Citizen Working Group will provide input on both the Urban and West projects.
- The Citizen Working Group will be comprised of approximately 18 citizens from both the City and County.
- Meetings will be held six times between the end of May 2005 and early December 2005.
- The first meeting will be on May 24, 2005.
- Interested citizens are invited to complete an application. Applications are available at the Whitefish City Clerk's Office in City Hall and online at www.wgmgroup.com. The application deadline is May 6, 2005

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

PROJECT SCHEDULE



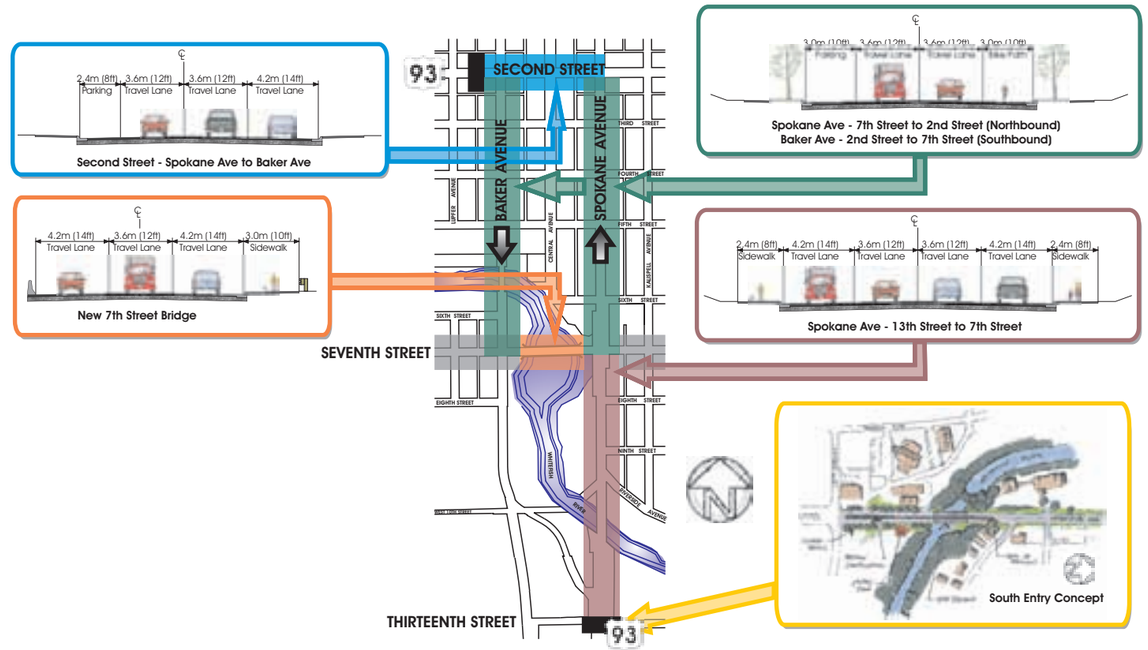
Design Process



- An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) for U.S. Highway 93 was completed in 1994. Design of the Whitefish area projects was initiated in February 2005.
- A Preliminary Design is developed based on the Preferred Alternative identified in the EIS.
- An Environmental Reevaluation is prepared to determine whether the EIS is still valid, up-to-date, and complete.
- If the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) determines that there are no new significant environmental impacts identified in the Reevaluation, the project proceeds to Final Design.
- Right-of-Way is acquired where necessary.
- Construction begins when funding is available (tentatively scheduled for 2009).

ALTERNATIVE C (COUPLET-3)
The Preferred Option Whitefish Urban

- Provides the best level of community service while offering enhanced traffic operation
- Results in the least amount of out-of-direction travel
- Protects the residential character along Baker Avenue south of 7th Street
- Relieves traffic on 2nd Street
- Supports city goals, enhances circulation to Whitefish Schools, supported by City Council
- Reduces Pm10 air emissions due to less out-of-direction travel



WHITEFISH AREA PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION SUMMARY

ISSUES	IMPACTS (Positive and Negative)	MITIGATION MEASURES
TRAFFIC OPERATIONS	• Improved traffic circulation • Improved Level of Service (LOS) and operations • Increased traffic on Baker Ave. • Increased out-of-direction travel time on one-way streets	• Reconstruct and improve intersections where applicable • Improve major commercial driveways along Baker Ave. • Coordinate existing, and plan new, traffic signals • Reclassify and design Baker Ave. to arterial specifications • Post one-way signs on Baker & Spokane • Flexible designs consistent with local conditions
ROADWAY ACCESS	• Some access impacted by one-way streets • Some modified driveways and access consolidations • New bridge for east-west 7th St. connecting route • Installation of new traffic signals	• Develop guidelines for access management • Evaluate opportunities for access consolidation • Improve access to cross streets • Install internal circulation roads to serve multiple driveways • Provide new and larger signage to alternative access routes • Evaluate intersections for future signalization
TRAFFIC SAFETY	• Reduced potential for accidents on US Hwy 93 • Improved pedestrians and bicycle safety • Potential for increase in speeds/accidents on Baker Ave. • Impaired pedestrian and bicycle travel on Baker Ave.	• Reconstruct intersections to accommodate large trucks and increased cross-street traffic • Improve vertical geometry and stopping sight distances • Enforce speed limits • Construct sidewalks, cross-walks, and bike paths • Improve signing and pavement markings
RIGHT OF WAY	• Private property acquired for highway right-of-way • Some residential and business relocations • No households or business displaced along Baker Ave.	• Design to minimize right-of-way impacts and relocations • Adhere to the Uniform Relocation Assistance & Real Property Acquisition Policy Act of 1970, as amended, insuring rights of private property owners and tenants.
PARKING	• Some on-street parking eliminated • Loss of parking may affect downtown business • Baker Ave. route improves public parking access in areas south of the central downtown district	• Explore parking mitigation during design • Improve crosswalks to encourage pedestrian traffic downtown

ENERGY	• Construction operations consume energy
	• Greater roadway surface requires more maintenance
	• Decreased vehicular fuel consumption due to better traffic flow
	• Median areas used for snow storage reduce hauling offsite
		• Provide construction operations mitigation plan:
		  ○ Maximize use of on-site material to reduce haulage
		  ○ Include construction phasing, staging areas, access and detour layout
		  ○ Provide construction vehicle maintenance
		  ○ Ensure equipment turned off when not in use

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS	• Potential for hazardous materials site encounters and impacts • Petroleum hydrocarbons are likely contaminants in disturbed soils	• Sample and test questionable soils and water • Develop mitigation or cleanup plans where appropriate • Locate and avoid underground storage tanks (USTs)
IMPLEMENTATION & CONSTRUCTION	• Through traffic delayed during construction • Local access to businesses and property inconvenienced • City streets impacted by drivers seeking alternative routes	• Develop construction-staging plan to minimize impacts • Maintain two travel lanes during construction whenever possible • Avoid or minimize detours from existing US 93
CULTURAL/ HISTORICAL	• New sidewalks adjacent to W. 2nd St. properties constitute an Adverse Effect to historical setting • No direct or indirect physical impacts on Baker Ave. or Spokane Ave. properties contributing to the Whitefish Historic Residential District or the Whitefish Historic Business District	• Confine construction to existing right-of-way whenever possible to avoid and minimize impacts • Preserve trees wherever possible • Continue coordination with the Flathead Cultural Committee • Survey to prepare nominations from Whitefish Residential Historic District for the National Registry of Historic Places (NRHP) • Provide signs describing historical significance for accepted historic nomination sites

SOCIAL	• Highway related impacts for residents adjacent to US 93
	• Impacts to low-intensity neighborhoods along Baker Ave.
	• Improved highway system:
	  ○ Reduces traffic congestion
	  ○ Provides safer travel conditions
	  ○ Reduces traffic-related stress
	  ○ Improves emergency services
	  ○ Supports City goals for growth
		• Consider opportunities to enhance overall community benefits during design:
		  ○ Minimize loss of parking
		  ○ Examine opportunities to replace parking
		  ○ Minimize right of way impacts
		  ○ Improve pedestrian crossings
		  ○ Improve streetscape and landscape

LAND USE	• Some residential and commercial land displaced • Denser, more coordinated development may be encouraged • May influence Baker Ave. commercial development • Improved traffic circulation may stimulate development of 3rd St. businesses	• Utilize right of way as much as possible
PEDESTRIANS/ BICYCLISTS	• Overall safety and mobility for pedestrians/bicyclists improved • Connects larger areas of community to pedestrian/bicycle traffic	• Improve crosswalks and sidewalks • Separate bike path or bike lanes on shoulders • Continued coordination with Flathead County bicycle groups • Provide bicycle/pedestrian accommodation on bridges

VISUAL	• Short-Term:
	  ○ Construction visual impacts (stockpiles, dust, debris, vegetation removal, traffic congestion)
	• Long-Term:
	  ○ Wider pavement, right-of-way, and clear zones
	  ○ More organized access
	  ○ Cut and fill sections
	  ○ Special design features and landscaping
	  ○ Permanent structures (bridges, railing, retaining walls)
	  ○ Changes in adjacent land use
	  ○ Potential light pollution from new highway lighting
		• Provide construction plan that minimizes impacts
		• Include special design features to enhance scenic vistas and natural resources
		• Add medians to break up large expanse of pavement and enhance gateway to Whitefish
		• Design to best fit within existing topography and compatibility with adjacent slope
		• Utilize native materials (trees, shrubs, grasses, wildflowers) in landscaping
		• Seek assistance from local community in maintaining special features
		• Consider special light fixtures to minimize stray light pollution

NOISE	• Existing noise levels along US 93 approach or exceed Noise Abatement Criteria (NAC) • No receptor sites expected to receive substantial increase in noise	• Adhere to Title 23 CFR 772 requiring the consideration of noise abatement measures if traffic noise impact is identified • Consider horizontal/vertical alignment of roadway and other mitigation opportunities during design
ECONOMIC	• Increased market value for properties benefiting from improved traffic flow • Improved vehicle operation lessens costs of doing business • Business growth along commercial strips adjacent to highway improvements • Commercial properties on Baker Ave. likely to upgrade • Enhanced downtown shopping with improved driving environment • Construction jobs for local residents • Significant local contractor purchases	• Design flexibility to enhance distribution of business opportunities • Shape growth and development using City and County zoning regulations • Evaluate business access needs during design • Consider streetscape improvements for downtown area in design

AIR QUALITY	• Construction causes short-term air quality impacts due to dust
	• Increase in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) increases particulates (PM10)
	• Decrease in traffic congestion decreases vehicle emissions (CO)
		• Provide construction plan to mitigate dust impact:
		  ○ Sweep streets
		  ○ Water unpaved areas
		  ○ Use chemical stabilizers as needed
		• Obtain Air Quality Permits for asphalt/rock crushing plants as required
		• Obtain Burn Permits for burning clearing debris as required
		• Develop long-term mitigation for PM10:
		  ○ Surface shoulders
		  ○ Provide effective street cleaning

WATER RESOURCES	• No significant long term impacts associated or predicted • Minor temporary fluctuations in turbidity, sediment, and suspended material loads in the Whitefish River • Increased impurities in stormwater runoff from increased traffic flow • Increased impervious surfaces (Pavement) and maintenance activities • New bridge over Whitefish River	• Minimize impacts through permit requirements • Follow MDT Highway Construction Standard Erosion Control Work Plan • Prepare Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan • Construct curbs, gutters, stormwater detention ponds • Maintain existing highway corridor as much as possible to reduce impact area • Design perpendicular bridge crossing to minimize impact area • Limit bridge construction activities below mean high-water mark as much as
WETLANDS	• Construction activities cause short-term impacts along highway corridor • Placement of fill material and bridge construction causes some long-term impacts	• Identify and map wetlands within project area • Minimize and avoid wetland disturbances • Mitigate unavoidable impacts with onsite or off site wetland mitigations
FLOODPLAINS	• Floodplain encroachments will be minimal • Floodplain crossing occurs at 4 bridge sites on Whitefish River (Spokane Ave., Seventh St., Baker Ave., and Second St.). • Bridge construction requires placement of fill in floodplain • Floodplain encroachments occur along Spencer Lake and other drainages west of Whitefish	• Work within existing transportation corridor above 100-year floodplain to minimize encroachment • Coordinate with, and obtain permits from, Flathead County Floodplain administrators for floodplain encroachment activities • Prevent roadway fill from impacting the natural stream channel • Align encroachments perpendicular rather than parallel to the floodplain whenever possible
PRIME FARMLAND	• No prime farmland conversion is anticipated within the Whitefish project	• Anticipate no farmland mitigation measures
PARKS AND RECREATION	• No direct conversion of park property occurs • Improved park access, pedestrian/bicycle, and safety conditions • Increased noise and visual impacts to park properties west of Whitefish (Whitefish Golf Club, Tennis Courts, Soccer Fields) • Some grass converted to pavement at one park	• Contain project within established existing right-of-way wherever feasible • Include pedestrian/bike path bridge underpass at Riverside Park on Baker Ave • Improve pedestrian circulation along Whitefish Lake Golf Club and Whitefish Tennis Courts/Soccer Fields • Landscape buffers in raised medians to mitigate visual impact along Golf Course
FISHERIES & WILDLIFE	• Temporary localized effects caused by construction activities • Increased road width and new bridge removes some habitat • Increased development along new highway causes habitat impact • Highway improvements increase motorist's visibility and provide greater opportunity for drivers to avoid animals	• Contain project within established existing right-of-way, wherever feasible, to minimize wildlife impact • Secure permits defining mitigated construction impacts on fish and wildlife resources • Develop erosion control and oil spill prevention plans • Revegetate disturbed areas • Avoid loss of trees wherever possible • Size bridge structures to accommodate wildlife wherever feasible
THREATENED & ENDANGERED SPECIES	• No adverse indirect, direct, or cumulative impacts anticipated to sensitive species • One sensitive plant (Western witchgrass) associated with marsh areas near Spencer Lake	• Reevaluate species of concern during design work • Identify critical habitat and current status of species of concern within the project corridor prior to construction activities • Continue coordination with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and other resource managers