



**US 93 Whitefish Urban & West
Citizen Working Group
February 5, 2009 5:30 – 8:30 PM
Whitefish City Library**

Facilitator Summary

PROCESS OBJECTIVES

1. Update the Working Group on the process and where we are within that process.
2. Revisit the local operating environment – What’s happening in Whitefish from the Working Group’s perspective?
3. Review preliminary design agreements from the “Decision Team”.
4. Discuss priorities regarding unfunded amenities.

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Bruce Boody	Ron Brunk	John Chaney
George Gardner	Mary Jo Look	Terry Nelson

COMPLETED AGENDA ITEMS

Brief Review - Working Group Charter and Guiding Principles

Charter

The purpose of the Whitefish Highway 93 Citizen Working Group is to offer comment to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), its Consultants, and local decision makers on critical issues and design details regarding the reconstruction of Highway 93 in the Whitefish vicinity as framed by the completed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the decisions contained in the Record of Decision (ROD).

The Group consists of a diverse body of citizens representing the interests of local people who will benefit from, and feel the impacts of, the Highway 93 project individually and as a community. It is chartered to develop creative, collaborative responses, suggestions, and recommendations to the Decision Team regarding the principles and design details that will guide implementation of the project. The Group’s products should address specific questions asked by the FHWA, MDT, its Consultants, and the Decision Team, as well as implementation interests brought to the table by the Group’s members.

Guiding Principles

- We believe that economic vitality is linked to community character.
- We believe that safe design for all traffic (pedestrians, bicycles, vehicles, trucks, buses, etc.) is important to enhancing the “Whitefish” experience for visitors as well as community members.
- We believe in preserving the character and quality of life of Whitefish including a strong sense of “small community”; architectural and landscape aesthetics; and existing natural environs.
- We believe that the Highway 93 design must be adaptable and flexible to accommodate future growth in the area.
- We believe that project must be completed in a timely, organized and well-planned manner to mitigate overall impacts on the community.
- We believe that blending useful and important parts of the Highway 93 Plan with the “Heart of Whitefish” Downtown Plan will result in positive short and long term outcomes for the community.

General Update

What’s happening Whitefish?

- A limited bus transit system is in place called “Eagle Transit”. It was supported by a mill levy; is involved in long range planning for transit; and is expanding. Downtown is looking at the possibility of bus shelters.
- Whitefish has a new City Manager and that is seen as very positive.
- “Trails run through it” is approved and funded.
- The bike path on Wisconsin has been completed.
- Regardless of the temporary stalling of the economy, growth in the area continues.
- We’re expecting an economic stimulus in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. We don’t know how it might affect our area or our projects. We think we might be able to influence our legislators and Governor.
- The Big Mountain Neighborhood Plan has been adopted with potential for new houses and expansion of the ski hill.
- There has been little movement on the local Transportation Plan. The Corridor Study is expected to be completed soon.
- The scope of the Highway 93 Project shrunk at least for now. Pertaining to the Project:
 - We know that somewhere in Montana, the Montana Department of Transportation allowed 11” driving lanes.
 - Acquisitions of rights-of-way have not been done.

Where are we in the process?

Pertinent Dates and Timeframe

- October 2008 - Final Environmental Impact Study (FEIS) Re-Evaluation Completed and affirmed as still relevant
- November 2007 - Citizen Working Group meeting; [Council Meeting](#)
- January 2009 - [Council Resolution](#)
- February 2009 - [Decision Team Meeting](#)
- Final Citizen Working Group Meeting - April 23, 2009
- Spring 2009 - ["Plan-In-Hand" Review](#)
- Public Open House - Spring/Summer 2009

Design Team/Decision Team/Council Decisions and Agreements

Important Values

- Preserve the unique community character of Whitefish and seek to eliminate or minimize impacts from the reconstruction and future use of Highway 93.
- Enable timely completion of the US 93 Whitefish West Project by reducing costs for right-of-way acquisition and construction activities.
- Preserve Downtown character and minimize impact to businesses.

Specific Decisions

- Eliminate center turn lane and preserve parking east of bridge.
- Construct a two-lane bridge with wide pedestrian walkways.
- Reduce center turn lane from 14' to 12'.
- Increase striping width from 4" to 6" and include a shoulder stripe.
- Provide boulevard trees.
- Reduce shoulder widths from 9' to 8'.
- Steepen slopes from 6:1 to 4:1.
- Consider guardrails on a case by case basis.
- Eliminate eastbound passing lane and shorten westbound passing lane.
- Promote lower speeds and minimize Right-of-Way acquisition.
- Reduce costs, right-of-way acquisition, and visual Impacts in rural area.

Recommendations to be Considered in Final Design

- Minimize impacts to adjacent homes and businesses.
- Construct the Project in multiple phases.
- Provide 2 tunnels at the Golf Course.
- Provide lighting compliant with City standards.
- Manage storm water runoff utilizing low impact design.
- Investigate the feasibility of burying overhead utilities.
- Improve access at the rest area and provide an RV dump.

Project Costs

- Design changes reduced the Project cost by approximately \$13.3 million with projected costs of:
 - \$1.4 million for construction
 - \$11.9 million for right-of-way acquisition
- Segment costs are as follows:
 - Lupfer to Karrow - \$7.5 million
 - Karrow to Mountainside - \$8.4 million
 - Mountainside to Mile Post 133 - \$9.9 million
- Total construction - \$25.8 million
- Right-of-way - \$20.6 million
- Total Project cost - \$46.4 million plus utilities

What's included in projected costs?

- Standard Highway lighting
- Modular block retaining walls
- Standard metal handrails
- Landscaping and irrigation
- Median landscaping
- Entry sign
- Patterned concrete median cap
- Underpasses at the Bridge, the Gold Course, and Skyles Lake
- Standard concrete girder bridge with barrier rail and hand rail
- Boulevard sidewalks with street trees.
- Bike path
- What's not and why?

What's not included without additional funding?

- Decorative lighting
- Natural stone retaining walls
- Decorative hand rails
- Dual underpasses at the Golf Course
- RV dump station at the rest area
- Decorative Bridge rail
- Streetscape elements – planters, benches

Why Not?

- Cost
- Maintenance
- Precedent

Working Group Feedback

Community Priorities from the Working Group's Perspective

- It is important to have decorative lighting that is consistent with other lighting in town and is in compliance with the City's "dark skies" ordinance. Appropriate decorative lighting should be in place from Karrow to Fairway Drive at the entrance of the Golf Course and Grouse Mountain. "Ugly lights" should not interrupt the character of the City and should only be used outside the City area.
- The City needs a well- designed, aesthetically pleasing Bridge at the entry that does not look like our viaduct - it should reflect the character of the community. The Orange Street Bridge in Missoula is a good example of what we are looking for – decorative concrete combined with a hand rail and decorative lighting that meets our City standard.
- Standard bridge railings are okay in some places – particularly if they can be broken up with decorative concrete. We need to be very thoughtful about where we need the extra expense of decorative handrails.
- All aspects of Bridge design should consider how maintenance and snow plowing will take place.
- Decorative concrete can certainly be used instead of natural rock for nearly all retaining walls. Décor is far less important when retaining walls are below the road or paths and can be screened by vegetation. (Evaluate the difference in cost between decorative concrete and block for retaining walls.)
- Two tunnels are important to the Golf Course – look at realistic alternatives that meet their interests.
- In an effort to support "a walkable community", consider bus pull out areas.
- Safety for bikers and pedestrians should be a major criterion when deciding about hand rails or any other design. Safety should include appropriate turn signals on traffic lights and reasonable speed limits. Are 2' shoulders safe?
- Continue to apply the concept of "context sensitive" design.
- Benches and planters, etc., can come later.
- The suggested location of an RV dump station is not feasible. The City Manager will follow up on other possibilities.

Now what happens?

- The Power Point will be on the website and copies will be mailed to Working Group members.
- The agenda for the final Working Group meeting April 23 will include:
 - Final design presentation
 - Thanks and pizza