

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) proposes to reconstruct and widen 8.3 kilometers (5.2 miles) of U.S. Highway 93 (N-5) west of Whitefish, Montana. This project, known as *US 93 Whitefish West*, begins at milepost 127.8 in downtown Whitefish on West Second Street, one half block west of the Baker Street intersection, and extends westerly to milepost 133.0, west of Twin Bridges Road.

This project was approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in November 1994 under the *US Highway 93 Somers to Whitefish West Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD)*. The majority of the project segments included in the 1994 FEIS have been, or are currently being, constructed.

The purpose of this re-evaluation is to determine if changes to the proposed action, or new information or circumstances relevant to environmental concerns, would result in new significant impacts that were not evaluated in the FEIS.

Description of Changed Conditions

The purpose and need for the project has not changed from the 1994 FEIS. The primary purpose and need for improvements, as stated in the FEIS, is to “reduce congestion on the existing facility, provide for planned growth and development, improve safety, provide for improved intermodal facility connections and provide for enhanced scenic values.”

The *Current Proposed Action* for the Whitefish West segment is the Preferred Alternative identified in the FEIS and ROD with modifications to provide the desired level of service, safety, and benefits identified in the FEIS.

New or Revised Features of the Preferred Alternative

Development of a more detailed preliminary design revealed that, due to the rolling terrain, it was not possible to meet current design standards for clear zones and stopping sight distance in the FEIS typical sections without acquiring additional right-of-way. Additional right-of-way would also be required to accommodate utilities, signs, light poles, and construction of slopes and retaining walls. A traffic analysis identified the need for turn lanes at several new locations to safely remove turning vehicles from through traffic.

In addition, the City of Whitefish and Citizens Working Group identified a strong desire to preserve the character of downtown Whitefish and minimize right-of-way impacts to residences and businesses along the highway. Preserving downtown character and minimizing right-of-way impacts would result in changes to lane configurations, lane widths, and the use of a curb and gutter section at various locations within the Whitefish West project segment that were not included in the FEIS typical sections.

New or Revised Laws, Regulations, and Local Ordinances

A number of relevant laws, regulations, and local ordinances have changed since the FEIS was written. These include:

- Clean Air Act
- Montana Water Quality Integrated Report 2004

- Executive Order (E.O.) 13112
- Flathead County Growth Policy (2007)
- 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy (updated from the 1996 Whitefish City-County Master Plan)
- Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)
- Whitefish Downtown Master Plan (2005)

Changes in the Affected Environment

New information and changes to the existing environmental conditions have occurred since the 1994 FEIS. These changes affect the following:

- Water Resources and Quality
- Wetlands
- Fisheries and Wildlife
- Threatened or Endangered Species
- Cultural and Historic Resources
- Parks and Recreation
- Hazardous Materials

How Changes Affect the FEIS

The effects of the changed conditions under the Current Proposed Action were compared with the impacts related to the Preferred Alternative described in Chapter 4 of the FEIS, and a conclusion as to the significance of the changes was made for each of the criteria.

Conclusion

Changes to the Preferred Alternative and the affected environment would occur within the Whitefish West project segment that were not evaluated in the 1994 FEIS. This re-evaluation concludes that the current conditions, new circumstances, and changes to the Preferred Alternative within the Whitefish West project segment would not result in any new significant impacts that were not evaluated in the 1994 FEIS. The FEIS, along with the information presented in this re-evaluation, adequately describes the impacts of the Current Proposed Action and provides mitigation for those impacts.