ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

JUNCTION US 2 – NORTH
STPS 325-1(3)0; CN 4478
Blaine County, Montana

This document is prepared in conformance with the *Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA)* requirements and contains the information required for an Environmental Assessment under the provisions of ARM 18.2.237(2) and 18.2.239. It is also prepared in conformance with the *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)* requirements for an Environmental Assessment under 23 CFR 771.119 and Section 4(f) of the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION ACT under 23 CFR771.135.

Submitted pursuant to: 42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(c), 49 U.S.C. 303 and Sections 2-3-104, 75-1-201, M.C.A.

by the

Montana Department of Transportation

and the

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration

Cooperating Agencies
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Montana Department of Environmental Quality
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1 Project Location and Description

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) proposes a highway reconstruction project on Secondary 325 located in Blaine County, Montana. The functional classification of the project roadway is a "rural major collector". The project begins at the connection with U.S.2 east of Chinook (RP 0.00) and stretches 17.30 km (10.75 miles) north (RP 10.75). The project ends just south of Hanson Coulee in the SE ¼ NE ¼ of Sec. 7, T34N, R19E (see Fig. B – Project Location Map). The existing road is paved from its connection to U.S.2 for a distance of approximately 3.35 km (2.1 miles) north. The remainder of the existing road within the project length has a gravel surface. The entire length of the roadway was originally built under S-106(1) in 1952. The project included a 24.0' top-width gravel road with 6" of gravel surfacing and no asphalt. The road template for S-106(1) featured fill slopes of 4:1 for fills 5.0' or less and 1½:1 for fills over 5.0'; cut section inslope was a 4:1 with a variable ditch width (10:1 slope) and backslopes ranging from 1½:1 to 5:1. The first 3.4 km (2.1 miles) of the roadway was capped with 4" of asphalt at an unknown date with a top width of 24.0 ft. See Section 1.2.1 for information on the horizontal and vertical alignment of the existing road. The project is nominated as a reconstruction of the full 17.30 km (10.75 miles) of Secondary 325 to meet current Secondary Highway Design Standards. The first 3.35 km (2.1 miles) of existing roadway traverses the designated floodplain and floodway of Lodge Creek and the remainder of the project roadway is located on rolling open terrain consisting of irrigated and dryland pasture and grain cropland. Adjacent to U.S.2, S 325 crosses three sets of railroad tracks.

The design speed for the project is 80 km/hr (50 mph) as required for a "rural major collector" in rolling terrain. The proposed roadway typical sections are shown on Figure A and include a 9.2 m (30.2 ft.) wide finished top surface (plant mix bituminous surface), which provides for two (2) 3.6 m (12.0 ft.) driving lanes and two (2) 1.0 m (3.3 ft.) shoulders. The design width would provide 0.6 m (2.0 ft.) shoulders after the 'future overlay" as per current MDT policy.

1.2 Purpose and Need for Reconstruction of Secondary 325

The MDT proposes to reconstruct and widen a portion of Secondary 325. The primary purpose and need of the project is to improve safety by reconstructing the roadway. The proposed project is intended to improve safety by providing a modern, safe roadway that would satisfy current MDT design standards, as described below.

The MDT also needs to improve several undesirable conditions associated with the Secondary 325 and the connection of Secondary 325 to U.S.2. These undesirable conditions, which include roadway characteristics that do not meet current standards, traffic and accident issues, roadway blockage by idle trains, lack of truck storage between the railroad tracks and U.S.2, and issues involving rear-ending accidents at the junction with U.S.2, are described in detail below.

1.2.1 Unsatisfactory Roadway Characteristics

The entire length of existing roadway was built in 1952 with a 7.31 m (24.0 ft.) wide gravel surface. The first 3.4 km (2.1 miles) was paved at a later date unknown. The top width of asphalt on the first section is also 24 ft. There are no records of any additional construction on the project length. Maintenance grading, traffic, and gravel surfacing of the road have expanded the roadway width in many areas to be over 30 ft. in apparent width.

The majority of the cut/fill slopes do not meet current standards. Approximately 16 of 95 of the vertical curves in the project length do not meet the minimum design standards for rolling terrain sight distance. The horizontal alignment does not meet the standard for an 80 km/h design speed in some areas due to the lack of spiral transitions. The gravel portion of the roadway creates dust, increases vehicle wear, and requires regular maintenance activities.

1.2.2 Traffic/Accident Data

The current average daily traffic (ADT) on the project roadway is 165 vehicles per day with a projected ADT of 240 vehicles per day for the year 2024. The accident study for the project covered the period from January 1990 to December 2004. In that 15-year period, there were 15 crashes in the project area for a rate of 1.75 compared to the statewide average of 1.71. The severity rate and index values were higher than the statewide averages. No addressable accident trends were identified.

The current ADT for US 2 at the connection location is 2,554 vehicles per day with a projected ADT of 3,720 VPD for the year 2024. There were 6 crashes at the connection of U.S.2 and Secondary 325. Five of the crashes occurred when east-bound vehicles on U.S.2 were rear-ended as they stopped or slowed to turn left on Secondary 325.

1.2.3 Roadway Blocked frequently by Idle Trains

Secondary 325 crosses three sets of Burlington Northern Railroad (BN) tracks just north of its intersection with U.S.2. One of the three BN tracks is an actively used siding. The Burlington Northern Railroad (BN) Roadmaster, Mr. Gary Sheets, estimated that Secondary 325 is blocked 2-3 times a day for periods of time averaging 30 minutes to 1 hour, with an occasional blockage exceeding 2 hours due to sided trains on this active siding. This situation is not only a huge inconvenience to the roadway users, but it also creates a safety problem, as emergency vehicles are effectively blocked from a very large geographic area. Mr. Sheets stated that BN can remove the sided trains from the crossing in an emergency situation, but it would require 15-20 minutes of work time. At the present time, there is no viable detour route to bypass the blockage.

The blockage created by the sided trains also creates problems for the school buses, students, and teachers. The school bus supervisor stated that a bus travels Secondary 325 as do several student drivers and a teacher. All of the above have experienced delays and have been late to class and events due to the train blockage problem.

1.2.4 Lack of Storage Length

The distance from the nearest track to the North edge of the lane on U.S.2 is only 23 meters (75 feet). The distance between a correctly placed stop sign, 2.4 meters (8 ft) from the edge of near lane on U.S.2, and a point 15 feet from the tracks is only 15.8 meters (52 feet). Vehicles stopped on Secondary 325, waiting to access U.S.2 do not have an adequate amount of storage space to avoid encroaching on the track. Many of the vehicles utilizing this approach are semi-trailers or other large vehicles, which exceed 11.3 meters (37 feet) in length.

1.2.5 Rear-Ending Accidents Involving Vehicles Turning onto Secondary 325 from U.S.2

The accident study for the project covered the period from January 1990 to December 2004. In that 15-year period, six crashes occurred at the intersection of U.S.2 and Secondary 325. Five of the crashes occurred when eastbound vehicles on U.S.2 were rear-ended as they stopped or slowed to turn left onto Secondary 325.

1.3 Project Objectives

In order to determine the effectiveness of an alternative, with respect to meeting the defined needs discussed in Section 1.2, measurable project objectives were developed.

- Bring roadway up to current MDT design standards.

  Design features, which are currently below current MDT standards and practices, include roadway surface and width, cut/fill slopes, vertical and horizontal curvature, clear-zone hazards, and pavement markings.

- Reduce rear-end accidents on U.S.2 while turning onto Secondary 325.

  There were five rear-end accidents at the intersection of U.S.2 and Secondary 325 in the 15-year time period from January, 1990 to December, 2004.

- Eliminate extended roadway blockage by sided trains.

  This objective is a high priority for the local users of the road. The comments from the public meeting (Appendix A.2) and the title of the resident petition (Appendix A.4) both indicate that elimination of the train blockage problem is an important objective of this project from the perspective of the local users.

- Increase storage length between U.S.2 and the railroad.

  As described in 1.2.4, this is a safety issue.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

2.1 Process Used to Develop the Alternatives

2.1.1 History and Development Process of Alternatives

The project design consultant, in conjunction with the Montana Department of Transportation and Blaine County, identified a number of alternatives to complete the project goals and objectives. A total of five alternatives were developed during the initial development process. A public meeting was held at Chinook on March 21, 2002 to introduce the project to the public and to gather comments, opinions, and input on the project and possible solutions/alternatives to the problem. Approximately 15 people attended the meeting. Minutes of the meeting are included in the Appendix. The alternatives to complete the project goals were modified and further developed using the information and input gathered at the initial public hearing.

There were a total of five alternatives developed as described below:

- No-build alternative – described in 2.2.1.
- Alternative A – Relocate Connection East – This alternative would relocate the U.S.2 –Secondary 325 connection approximately 2 km (1 ¼ miles) to the east where a public approach for a county gravel road currently exists. The existing county road crosses the BNSF RR tracks and immediately turns eastward and parallel to U.S.2. The connection back to the existing alignment of Secondary 325, as shown on the drawing in Fig. C, would require approximately 2.8 km (9,200 L.F.) of new roadway, which would connect to the existing alignment on a bluff northeast of Chinook at current RP 0.8.

  The entire roadway would be built/reconstructed to meet current MDT design standards. The roadway would cross an overbank/floodplain area of Lodge Creek and would be designed to remain above the 25-year flood elevation.

  The BNSF RR tracks at the proposed connection location are not blocked by sided trains. A left-turn lane on U.S.2 at the new connection location would be constructed as part of this alternative.
- Alternative B – Reconstruct Existing Road Only – This alternative includes reconstructing the existing roadway to current standards. The alignment, grade, and connection to U.S.2 would remain the same.
- Alternative C – Construct low-level Road – This alternative includes all items discussed in Alternative B and also includes construction of a connecting road north of the railroad tracks, which would connect to an existing street in North Chinook. The connecting road would allow traffic to avoid the existing U.S.2 Secondary 325 approach if trains were blocking the access. The connecting road would cross Lodge Creek and the designated floodway; therefore, the connecting road surface could not be elevated above the existing ground surface elevation due to floodplain regulations.
- Alternative D – Route Directly into Chinook - This alternative would include 1.8 km (5,590 L.F.) of new roadway heading due north from Chinook, across Lodge Creek, and connecting to the existing roadway approximately 1.6 km (1 mile) North of Chinook. The new roadway would require new right-of-way and would cross the Lodge Creek floodplain in an area with an allowable flood elevation increase of 0.0 feet (Ref: FIS for Blaine County, MT unincorporated areas, May 19, 1987). In other words, this restriction means that new construction activity cannot create any increase in the flood elevation. In order to cross the floodplain in compliance with the floodplain rules, the roadway would either have to be built at ground level or placed on a very long bridge (915 meters, 3,000 feet).

A report was prepared by Delta Engineering on the feasibility of the various alignment alternatives. The report was submitted in January, 2002.

A petition was prepared, distributed, and submitted by the local users of the project roadway supporting Alternative A.

A second public meeting was held at Chinook on May 23, 2002 to allow additional discussion on the refined alternatives.

2.1.2 Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study

The following comparison matrix provides an illustration of each reasonable alternative's efficacy in regard to the project objectives.

	PREDICTED ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES			
ALTERNATIVE	**BRING ROADWAY TO CURRENT MDT DESIGN STANDARDS**	**REDUCE REAR-END ACCIDENTS ON U.S.2**	**ELIMINATE LENGTHY BLOCKAGE BY SIDED TRAINS**	**INCREASE STORAGE LENGTH AT JUNCTION**
A	X	X	X	X
B	X	NO	NO	NO
C	X	NO	X Low level road would be overtopped by flood	NO
D	X	X	X	X

Based on the engineering and environmental factors associated with this project and the preliminary analysis and report, the following alternatives were eliminated from a detailed study:

- Alternative B – Reconstruct Existing Road Only
- Alternative C – Construct Low-level Road
- Alternative D – Route Directly into Chinook

Alternatives B & C did not complete the project goals and needs. Alternative D would complete the project goals but would require a very long bridge (≈ 900m), which is not economically feasible or justified.

2.2 Alternatives Carried Forward for Further Study

After consideration of all alternatives for this project, Alternatives B, C, and D were eliminated from further study and Alternative A was carried forward as part of the selection process. Subsequent to the decision to carry Alternative A forward, the Montana Department of Transportation has acquired 160 acres of property at the connection area as part of an "advance acquisition of right-of-way".

This acquisition of property allowed a modification to "Alternative A", which would further improve the geometrics of the route. The connection of the "modified Alternative A" to U.S.2 would be moved approximately 70 meters eastward and the alignment would be shifted and straightened to create a more direct and shorter reconnection route to the existing road. The connection of the realignment section to the existing alignment of Secondary 325 would remain in the same location as the original Alternative A. Throughout this document, any mention of "Alternative A1" will pertain to this new modified alignment.

2.2.1 No-Build Alternative

The no-build alternative would retain the existing two-lane roadway in its current location. No improvements would be made to the roadway with this alternative. General maintenance would continue on the roadway in the future. Maintenance activities would not be improvements but would maintain the roadway in its current condition.

2.2.2 Alternative A1 - Relocate Connection East

This alternative would relocate the U.S.2 - Secondary 325 connection approximately 2 km (1¼ miles) to the east. The proposed connection location is approximately 70 meters east of an existing public approach for a county gravel road that crosses the BNSF RR tracks and proceeds eastward. Existing traffic signing at the proposed connection includes a stop sign for traffic entering U.S.2 and minimal railroad signage. This project would include the installation of the necessary traffic control devices for at-grade railroad crossings with the projected ADT. The existing public approach and railroad crossing would be moved 70 meters eastward to combine with the new connection and the existing crossing and approach would be removed. The connection, as shown on the Drawing in Figure C, would require approximately 2.8 km (9,200 L.F.) of new roadway, which would connect to the existing alignment on the bluff northeast of Chinook at current RP 0.8.

The horizontal and vertical alignments of the entire roadway would be built to meet current MDT design standards. The entire length of the new roadway would be built to the criteria indicated on the attached "Figure A - Roadway Typical Section" including an asphalt pavement surface. The new roadway would cross irrigated pastureland and several canals. New right-of-way would be required.

The portion of existing roadway, which would be bypassed by Alternative "A" would no longer be a state highway and responsibility for the roadway would revert to Blaine County. The existing connection of U.S. Secondary 325 to U.S.2 and the railroad crossing at that location would be closed to vehicular traffic. The roadway itself would not be abandoned as there are several residences served by the road. A public approach would be included in the project to connect the roadway to the new alignment of Alternative "A1".

The new roadway would not cross Lodge Creek, but would still cross the floodplain and the overbank. The road elevation across the floodplain area would be designed to remain above the 25-year flood elevation and still comply with the regulatory floodplain criteria detailed in the FIS for "Blaine County, Montana – unincorporated areas", Community Number 300144.

A left-turn lane on U.S.2 at the new connection location would be part of this project. The left-turn lane construction would create widening of U.S.2 at the connection area to allow for the extra lane and tapers required to construct the turn lane.

2.3 Comparison of Predicted Achievement of Project Objectives

The two alternatives carried forward would have the following predicted effects in regard to the project objectives stated in Chapter 1.

COMPARISON OF PREDICTED ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES		
OBJECTIVE	**NO-BUILD ALTERNATIVE**	**ALTERNATIVE A1**
Improve roadway to current design standards.	Does not meet objective.	Vertical curvature, horizontal alignment, & roadway template constructed to desirable criteria. Roadway surface improved to asphalt compared to existing gravel.
Reduce rear-end accidents on U.S.2 while turning onto Secondary 325.	Does not meet objective.	Provides a left-turn lane on U.S.2 to reduce accidents.
Eliminate roadway blockage by trains.	Does not meet objective.	Provides a new connection, which is never blocked by sided trains.
Increase storage length between U.S.2 and the railroad.	Does not meet objective.	Provides an additional 9.7 m (23 ft) of storage length for vehicles staged on Secondary 325.

2.4 Comparison of Predicted Effects of Proposed Alternatives

Wild and scenic rivers are not in existence in the project area therefore they were not evaluated in the preparation of this document. The two alternatives carried forward would have the following predicted effects in regard to the affected environment:

COMPARISON OF PREDICTED EFFECTS TO AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT		
RESOURCE	**NO-BUILD ALTERNATIVE**	**ALTERNATIVE A1**
Social and economic	Continuation of safety and delay concerns.	Improves transportation system. Short-term economic benefits from construction.
Relocation	No effect.	No effect.
Air quality	No effect.	Short-term effects due to construction activities. Beneficial reduction of dust load due to elimination of gravel surface.
Noise	No effect.	Noise reduction due to elimination of gravel surface.
Irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources.	No effect.	Construction materials and lands required for the new alignment and right-of-way would be a commitment of resources.
Floodplains	No effect.	Floodplain development permit required.
Water Quality	No effect.	No significant effect. Erosion control plan would be required.
Land Use	No effect.	No effect.
Prime and Unique Farmland	No effect.	Farmland conversion impact rating would be less than 160.
Cultural/Historical Resources	No effect.	SHPO concurred with a finding of No Effect to the NRHP-eligible railroad grade & two irrigation ditches.
Fish, Wildlife, and Threatened/ Endangered Species	No effect.	No effect.
Hazardous Materials	No effect.	No effect.
Right-of-Way	No effect.	Would require 27 hectares (67 acres) of additional right-of-way.
Wetlands	No effect.	Would effect 1.00 ha (2.5 acres) of category 3 wetlands.
Parks & Recreation	No effect.	No effect.
Pedestrian and Bicyclists	No effect.	Would expand hard surface bicycle route.
Visual	No effect.	Fill slope flattening would alter land form adjacent to roadway.
Utilities	No effect.	Minor relocations required.
Indirect and Cumulative Effects	No effect.	There are three other projects planned in the vicinity. Minimal cumulative environmental impacts are expected.

2.5 Identification of the Preferred Alternative

Based on public support and the ability of the alternative to meet the project objectives while minimizing the effects to the affected environment, the build alternative "Alternative A1 – Relocate Connection East" has been identified as the preferred alternative. A "press release" issued in June, 2004 publicized the selection of "Alternative A" as the preferred alternative for the location of the connection. The press release did contain an error in wording, however. The press release says "a consensus was reached to direct the design consultant to proceed with the design for "Alternative A"." The wording "preliminary" should have been inserted in front of "design" in this sentence. The actual article published by the regional newspaper did not contain any form of the erroneous statement (copy in Appendix A.2). Alternative A1 was developed subsequent to the press release.

2.6 Permits Required

Permits necessary for any build alternative would include, but is not limited to:

- A Notice of Intent for storm water discharges under the NPDES General Permit would be required with the U.S. EPA for the control of water pollution for both specific and non-point sources.

- A "section 404" permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The build alternative should qualify for a "nation wide" 404 permit under the provisions of 33CFR330.

- A floodplain development Permit would be required from Blaine County as the floodplain administrator for work in the floodplain.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

3.1 Social and Economic

The following is a summary of the population of Blaine County by race and/or national origin based on U.S. Census Data (1999).

White	-	3685
Black	-	12
Asian & Pacific Islander	-	6
American Indian & Eskimo	-	3180
Total	**-**	**6883**

There are no known concentrations of minorities and/or low-income groups in the proposed project area.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: Overall, the build alternative (Alternative A1) would be an improvement to the public road system in the area. There will be some short-term economic benefits to the local communities during the construction period. Residents who regularly use the roadway would also realize an economic benefit due to reduced vehicle maintenance and operation costs as a result of the upgrade in surfacing from gravel to plant mix.

There would be a small increase in vehicle miles traveled as a result of the proposed project. Residents who are traveling to Chinook or westward on U.S.2 would have a slightly longer route to travel as a result of the alignment change.

Mitigation: No mitigation required.

3.2 Relocation

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: There will be no relocation of homes, or businesses required for this alternative.

Mitigation: No mitigation required.

3.3 Air Quality

This proposed project is in an unclassifiable/attainment area of Montana for air quality under 40 CFR 81.327, as amended. As such, this proposed project is not covered under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Final Rule of November 24, 1993 on Air Quality conformity. Therefore, this proposed project complies with Section 176(c) of the Clean Air Act (42 USC 7521(a), as amended.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: There are no long-term impacts associated with air quality as a result of the build alternative. The build alternative would have minimal short-term impacts due to anticipated construction activities near the project area. Temporary impacts may include short-term increased emissions as a result of construction-related traffic and increases in particulate emissions from ground disturbances.

The build alternative would have the beneficial impact of reducing the airborne dust load created by traffic on the existing gravel roadway.

Mitigation: Short-term mitigation for construction impacts associated with the build alternative would include dust palliatives, stabilized soil stockpile areas, and revegetation of exposed areas.

3.4 Noise

Because the project significantly changes the horizontal alignment of Secondary 325, it is a Type I project according to 23CFR772 and potential traffic noise impacts must be considered. However, because the ADT is less than 300 and it is not expected to double in the design year, a detailed noise analysis is not required for this project.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: No Significant impact on noise levels is expected for the build alternative. The majority of the project will not be impacted negatively since the new roadway would follow the existing centerline. Noise levels would be reduced on much of the project due to the elimination of the gravel surface.

There is one residence along the alignment of the realigned connection area. The build alternative alignment would actually move the road further away from the home than the existing road alignment therefore there would be a reduction in noise levels at the residence.

Mitigation: No mitigation required.

3.5 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: Land that would be necessary to construct the build alternative and the lands acquired in the right-of-way expansion would be considered an irreversible commitment during the period that the land is used for a highway facility. This land could be converted if the highway facility was no longer needed.

Minor amounts of fossil fuel, labor, and other construction materials would be expended in the construction of any build alternative. These items are not in short supply, and their use would not have an adverse effect on continued availability of these resources.

Mitigation: No mitigation required.

3.6 Floodplains

The existing connection and the build alternative crosses over the Lodge Creek floodplain. This area is within a delineated floodplain and a FEMA-Flood Insurance Study (FIS) was completed in 1987. This project must comply with the land use regulations adopted by Blaine County in August, 1994. These regulations have a profound influence on the feasibility of the alignment alternatives, therefore it is useful to briefly summarize the relevant portions as follows:

- The floodplain of Lodge Creek and its overbank channels within the project area are shown on the official Floodplain Maps as being within a designated floodplain district. Flood elevations and delineations are established by Flood Insurance Studies and Flood Maps completed in 1987.

- Building roadways within a designated floodplain is allowed but a Floodplain Development Permit is required.

  The "Lodge Creek Overbank 1" area of the designated floodplain allows a maximum of 0.5' of increase in floodwater.

  Certain areas in the floodplain have an even more restrictive "allowable increase in flood elevation". The floodplain area upstream of the existing Secondary 325 crossing of the Lodge Creek overbank channel for approximately 3,500 feet upstream has an allowable increase in floodplain elevations of 0.0 feet. Essentially this means that absolutely no road fill can be placed in this area.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative:

- The proposed alignment is located on the eastern limit of the detailed study. A section of the proposed alignment create a transverse encroachment on the Lodge Creek Overbank 1 channel, but the increase in flood elevation is less than 0.5' and there will be no projected increase in flood elevation in the main Lodge Creek channel or in the Town of Chinook as a result of constructing the build alternative. See Figure E for a floodplain map showing all flood areas and the proposed alignment.
- The floodplain development permit application for any crossing must include hydraulic analysis and modeling to verify compliance with flood height restrictions contained in the regulations.

Mitigation: No mitigation required.

3.7 Water Quality

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: No significant impacts on water quality are expected for any alternative. The build alternative would not cross any rivers or creeks. The existing alignment is directly adjacent to Lodge Creek at the connection with U.S.2. The build alternative alignment would move the connection 1½ miles away from Lodge Creek.

An Erosion Control Plan for the build alternative would be submitted to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) in compliance with their Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Regulations (ARM 16.20.1314).

Mitigation: Best Management Practices (BMP's) would be included in the design of the plan for the build alternative. The objective would be to minimize erosion of disturbed areas during and following construction of the proposed project.

3.8 Land Use

The Land use along the project is predominantly rural, low-density agricultural land. Irrigated grain crops and hayland along with dryland pasture are the main land use. Scattered residences and outbuildings are located along the project but there are no areas of multiple homes. There are scattered oil/gas wells throughout portions of the project area. Blaine County has no land use policy or zoning that covers the project area.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: Land use patterns are expected to remain unchanged by the build alternative except in a portion of the realignment area. Part of the new alignment will bisect an irrigated pasture, which MDT has already purchased as an advance acquisition of R/W. The pasture is being evaluated for utilization as a mitigation wetland.

Mitigation: No mitigation required.

3.9 Prime and Unique Farmland

The project area is bordered by agricultural lands throughout the project length. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, several soils designated as "farmland of statewide importance" are located along the corridor. Direct farmland impacts can result from construction activities and/or acquisition of right-of-way.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: The build alternative would result in the conversion of "farmland of statewide importance". A Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form (#AD-1006) has been completed in accordance with the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA-7USC 4201, et seq.). The form is included in Appendix A.3. The total points on the form for the build alternative impacts is less than 160. Therefore, under the provisions of 7CFR 658, no additional consideration for protection is necessary.

Mitigation: None required.

3.10 Cultural/Historical Resources

The Cultural Resources inventory and assessment (Ethos Consultants Inc.-2003) identified five cultural resource sites within the project inventory corridor, three of which are considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and two of which fall under the terms of the "Road & Bridges PA" agreement entered into by the FHWA, MDT, the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

Under the terms of the PA, a determination of eligibility for the NRHP is not necessary. The five cultural resource sites identified within the project inventory corridor include the following:

- A wooden treated timber pile trestle bridge along U.S. Highway 2, which was formally determined ineligible for listing in the NRHP in 1986.
- An irrigation ditch – The Fort Belknap Main Canal.
- An historic highway – U.S. Highway 2, which is an on-line highway currently covered under the terms of a programmatic agreement. According to that agreement, on-line roads need not be inventoried or evaluated.
- The mainline of the BNSF Railroad, which is recommended eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A, B, and C.
- An irrigation ditch – The North Chinook Main Canal.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: The new crossing would traverse the NRHP-eligible Great Northern Railway Main Line (24BL1574). The existing alignment of the railroad would be perpetuated and there would be no change in the function of the line as a result of the project. The crossing is uncontrolled so appurtenances or other features associated with the operation of the railroad would not be impacted by the proposed project. SHPO concurred with a finding of No Effect to the NRHP-eligible railroad grade on August 4, 2004.

The project alignment will cross the Fort Belknap Main Canal and the North Chinook Main Canal. The build alternative would have no effect on either of these sites. The determination of effect for these two sites was completed by MDT and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with the Determination of No Effect.

Mitigation: None required.

3.11 Fish, Wildlife, and Threatened/Endangered Species

- Threatened and Endangered Species - A biological assessment was prepared for the project in accordance with Section 7(c) of the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973. There are no threatened or endangered wildlife, or plant species, or their habitats, found along the project corridor. There are two species of concern identified within the project area - the Swift Fox (Vulpes Verlox) and the Burrowing Owl (Athene Cunicularia).

  The range for the Swift Fox is very large - mostly north of the Milk River from Chinook to Hinsdale. MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks stated that there is more evidence of the Swift Fox being approximately 24 km (15 miles) north and east of the project location, but that the Swift Fox does migrate through the area (Rosgaard, pers.Comm.2002).

  The Burrowing Owl is seen only occasionally, as there is limited prairie dog and ground squirrel habitat in the general project vicinity. There are no documented resident locations for any wildlife species of concern within the immediate area (Rosgaard, pers.Comm.2002).

- Fish - There are no fish-bearing streams in the immediate vicinity within the project corridor.

- Wildlife - The most noteworthy wildlife species in the area include: White-tailed and Mule Deer, Pronghorn Antelope, Ring-necked Pheasant, Sharp-tailed and Sage Grouse, Gray Partridge, Canada Geese, and other waterfowl/shore-birds.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: No impacts.

Mitigation: None required.

3.12 Hazardous Materials

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: An initial site assessment for hazardous materials was conducted on the project site. There are no known hazardous substances or hazardous wastes that are expected to be impacted by the build alternative for the proposed project.
Mitigation: The contractor would be required to take precautions to minimize the effects of construction operations and to prevent leakage or spillage of fluids from equipment.

3.13 Right-of-Way

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: The project would require an estimated 27 hectares (67 acres) of additional right-of-way for the build alternative. The existing right-of-way width for much of the project length does not meet the MDT standard width for rural collectors (20 m/65 ft). There will be right-of-way taken throughout the entire project length. The alignment relocation at the connection area would also require acquisition of new right-of-way. The alignment crossing over the existing railroad tracks will require negotiations with the railroad (Burlington Northern) in regards to the required easement. The right-of-way for the realignment section at the connection area has been acquired as a protective purchase. The purchase has allowed for improvements to Alternative A and has facilitated the development of Alternative A1.

Mitigation: Acquisition of land and improvements for highway construction are governed by state and federal laws and regulations that are designed to protect both the land-owners and taxpaying public. Landowners affected are entitled to receive just compensation for any land or improvements acquired and any depreciation to remaining land due to the effects of highway construction. This acquisition will be accomplished in accordance with the applicable laws; specifically, Title 60, Chapter 4 and Title 70, Chapter 30, Montana Code Ann.; and Title 42, U.S.C., Chapter 61, "Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies for Federal and Federally Assisted Programs."

3.14 Wetlands

Executive Order 11990 Protection of Wetlands and Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 mandate that impacts to wetland areas be avoided, minimized, and mitigated where impacts are unavoidable. CWA Section 404 "water of the U.S. including Special Aquatic Sites and Jurisdictional Wetlands" were delineated in accordance with 33 Code of Federal Register (CFR) and the 1987 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) Wetland Delineation Manual.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: No wetlands exist along the existing Secondary 325 route through the project corridor. There are four (4) wetland areas within the new connection alignment corridor for the build alternative and the turning lane area on U.S.2. All four wetlands are associated with drainage/irrigation ditches. All four (4) of the identified wetlands are classified as having an "overall analysis area rating" of category 3. Wetland areas, which would be affected by the build alternative include 0.24 ha (.615 ac.) of category 3 wetlands.

Locations of the wetlands delineated and a breakdown of the areas affected per each individual wetland are shown in the attached Figure D. The wetland resource inventory is found in the Biological Resources Report for the project. The Biological Resources Report was finalized on November 21, 2003.

Mitigation: MDT is investigating on-site mitigation for unavoidable wetland losses at the Randy Reed property adjacent to the relocation portion of the project. The Randy Reed property consists of 160 acres of property, which the Montana Department of Transportation has acquired as part of an "advance acquisition of right-of-way" as discussed in Section 2.2.2 of this document. If development of the on-site mitigation is successful, the available mitigation acres are expected to be well in excess of the debit needs for the project. If the development of the on-site mitigation is not possible, MDT proposes that wetland acres be debited from the Musgrave Reserve Site at a ratio in accordance with that used by the Montana Regulatory Program. Based on this program a 1:1 ratio applies. The Musgrave Site is a restoration (re-establishment) project that is in-kind, established, and viable prior to project impacts. Recent wetland accounting shows that sufficient wetland credits are available at the Musgrave Site to provide for the Jct. U.S.2 – North debit needs.

3.15 Parks and Recreation

Specifically designated recreation facilities do not exist along the proposed project. There are no recreational section 4(f) or section 6(f) properties or involvement.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: No impacts.

Mitigation: None required.

3.16 Pedestrian and Bicyclists

Due to the lack of a hard surface, this route does not provide a travel course for bicyclists. The pedestrian traffic is essentially non-existent.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: The addition of a hard surface would provide a bicycle route for local cyclists who want to avoid the busy U.S.2 roadway. Touring bicycles will not use this route as it dead-ends at a gravel surface road.

Mitigation: None required.

3.17 Visual

Within the project area, Secondary 325 runs through rolling agricultural fields, scattered residences, and coulee lands. Foreground units include agricultural, some riparian, and limited residential.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: MDT does not anticipate any long-term visual impacts other than fill-slope flattening, which would only alter the existing land form immediately adjacent to the roadway edge.

Mitigation: None required.

3.18 Utilities

Utilities located on the project include power lines (Hill County Electric and Northwestern Energy), telephone lines (Triangle Telephone Coop.), water mains (private extension of Chinook system), and high pressure gas (Havre Pipeline Co. & Klabzuba Oil).

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: Very minor utility relocation would be required for construction of the build alternative. These generally involve moving lines or poles outside the new pavement envelope, or as a result of revised vertical alignment.

Mitigation: None required.

3.19 Indirect and Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts are defined as impacts that "result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) undertakes such other actions." Projects under construction or planned by MDT in the vicinity were reviewed to help assess the cumulative impacts of the project.

The only known projects in the vicinity, according to the various public agencies contacted, are as follows:

- U.S.2 Havre (NH1-6(28)382) – Reconstruction of 2.25 miles of U.S.2. Havre is in Hill County and is 20 miles west of this project. This project is currently scheduled for 2008 construction.
- U.S.2 Havre to Fort Belknap EIS (PLH-TCSP 1-6(44)384) – U.S.2 Environmental Impact Statement for U.S.2 from east of Havre in Hill County to its junction with Montana Highway 66 at the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. This EIS did study four alternates for road improvements. The preferred alternative described in the EIS is the "improved 2-lane with passing lanes."
- Havre East (NH-1-6( ) 384) – Reconstruction project from RP 383.66 to 393.86 that is currently scheduled for 2009 Contruction.

If the preferred alternative described in the EIS is constructed, it is almost certain that the centerline of U.S.2 will shift away from the BN tracks to allow for the improvements to U.S.2. This shift away from the tracks would improve the storage length between U.S.2 and the tracks at both the current and proposed location of the junction of U.S.2 and Secondary 325. The problem with train blockage at the existing junction would not be alleviated by the shift.

- Dodson –East (NH1-8(26)454F) Reconstruction of 4.5 miles of U.S.2. Dodson is 50 miles east of the project. The project is scheduled to be let on January 2006.

There are no other known projects planned in the vicinity of the proposed project.

Indirect effects are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable. It is foreseeable that U.S.2 will be reconstructed at some later date. The location of the junction of U.S.2 with Secondary 325 will be determined by this project and will affect the design options available to the planners of the U.S.2 project.

The FEIS for "U.S.2 Havre to Fort Belknap" lists a number of findings and identifies the preferred alternative for that project as an improved 2-lane with passing lanes in select areas. The findings in the FEIS include the following items relevant to this project:

- "Existing access should be eliminated if reasonable alternative access to the public road system can be provided."

- "consolidate existing access points where possible".

The build alternative would consolidate two public access points/railroad crossings into a single access point. The left-turn lane and additional vehicle storage between the railroad and U.S.2 featured in this alternative is also consistent and compatible with the findings in the FEIS.

No Build Alternative: No impacts.

Build Alternative: The build alternative would have minimal cumulative and indirect impacts on the environment and resources of the area. The issues/resources that were identified as being potentially indirectly affected by the build alternative include the following items:

- Land Use – could possibly be influenced "later in time" due to the project. The elimination of the railroad siding blockage problem may make it more desirable to live on this route. As a result, there may be some increase in subdivision/home building activity along the project route in the future. Population trends are downward in the entire area, therefore, this would probably be a very minor effect.

- Economic – The only significant indirect economic impact would be to the residents who regularly travel this roadway. The upgrade of the road surface from gravel to asphalt will significantly reduce vehicle wear/maintenance and repair costs over the long term for regular users of the road. The long delay times at the railroad crossing will be eliminated, creating an unrestricted travel lane for business activities in the area, which consist primarily of agricultural and natural gas production. A long term increase in productivity would result.

The cumulative impacts of the build alternative depend on the timing of the project construction. The project would increase truck traffic and travel delay times on U.S.2, which may coincide with the U.S.2 Havre project described above. No other cumulative impacts were identified for this project.

Mitigation: None required.

4.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

The following individuals had responsibility for preparing or reviewing this document:

Richard West, P.E.
Delta Engineering P.C.
PO Box 1481
Great Falls, MT 59403

John Brumley
Ethos Consultants Inc.
#14 Meadowlark Estates
Havre, MT 59501

Tracy Knoop Novak
Wetland Environmental Scientist
4862 Itana Circle
Bozeman, MT 59715-9391

Carl James
Bob Seliskar
Federal Highway Administration
2880 Skyway Drive
Helena, MT 59602-1230

Tom Gocksch
Jean A. Riley, P.E.
Environmental Services
Montana Dept. of Transportation
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

5.0 LIST OF AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONSULTED AND/OR PROVIDED COPIES OF THIS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

5.1 Agencies Contacted

The following agencies, organizations, and parties were contacted in preparing this Environmental Assessment:

- USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
  Contract: Bill Baumgartner, Land Use Specialist
  Northeastern Land Office
  613 NE Main
  PO Box 1021
  Lewistown, MT 59457-1021

- Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
  Contact: Debby Dils, Land Section Supervisor
  Contact: Walt Timmerman, Recreation Bureau Chief, Parks Div.
  1420 E. Sixth Ave.
  PO Box 200701
  Helena, MT 59620-0701

- Chinook Chamber of Commerce
  Hwy. 2
  Chinook, MT 59523

- Blaine County Superintendent of Schools
  Courthouse
  Chinook, MT 59523

- Blaine County - Disaster & Emergency Services
  Courthouse
  Chinook, MT 59523

- USPS - Chinook Postmaster
  US Post Office
  Chinook, MT 59523

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
  Contact: Todd Tillinger
  Helena Regulatory Office
  301 S Park, Drawer 10014
  Helena, MT 59626-0014

- Montana Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation
  Trust Land Management Division
  1625 11th Ave.
  PO Box 201601
  Helena, MT 59620-1601

- Montana Department of Environmental Quality
  Permitting & Compliance Division
  Contact: Jeff Ryan, Water Quality/Wetland Specialist
  Lee Metcalf Building, 1520 E. Sixth Ave.
  PO Box 200901
  Helena, MT 59620-0901
- Blaine County Commissioners
  Courthouse
  Chinook, MT 59523

Responses received are included in the Appendix.

5.2 Public Involvement

- Initial Public Informational Meeting - On March 21, 2002, a public meeting was held in Chinook, MT to gather comment, opinions, and input on the various alternative alignments to reroute the connection of Secondary 325 and U.S.2. The meeting was held at the Chinook High School Auditorium. Approximately 15 residents attended the meeting. Minutes of the meeting are included in the Appendix.
- Second Public Meeting - On May 23, 2002, a public meeting was held in the Blaine County Commissioners chambers in Chinook, MT. The purpose of the meeting was to allow additional public input into the alignment selection process and to finally select a preferred alternative. A petition was presented to the Blaine County Commissioners from landowners along the project and other residents supporting the preferred alternative. A copy of the petition is included in the Appendix.

  The meeting was attended by the Blaine County Commissioners and three local residents. Attendees at the public meetings included the following people:

Name	Address
Loren & MariAnne Skoyen	HC 69, Box 2, Chinook, MT 59523
HJ Raty	Box 1016, Chinook, MT 59523
Fay Stuker	HC 69, Box 21, Chinook, MT 59523
Curtis Moxley	HCR 70, Box 47, Chinook, MT 59523
Jack & Ann Davies	HCR 70, Box 7A, Chinook, MT 59523
Duane Skoyen	HCR 60, Box 25, Chinook, MT 59523
Ken Stuker	4304 Appaloosa Drive, Helena, MT 59602
Bob Sivertsen	PO Box 2226, Havre, MT 59501
Art Kleinjan	Blaine County Commissioner
Vic Miller	Blaine County Commissioner
Don Swenson	Blaine County Commissioner

- Public News Release – A public news release was published in the local & regional newspapers, documenting the decision on the alignment. A copy of the news release is included in the Appendix.
- Remaining Public Involvement - A public informational open house will be conducted once preliminary plans and cross-sections are complete. This open house will be held at Chinook in 2005.

- Opportunity for Comment – Copies of this Draft Environmental Assessment are available for public review at the following locations:

  Blaine County Courthouse – Courthouse, Chinook, MT 59523
  Blaine County Library – 94 4th Street, Chinook, MT 59523
  Chinook City Hall – City Hall, Chinook, MT 59523
  Chinook Opinion Newspaper – 217 Indiana, Chinook, MT 59523

A notice of availability of the Draft Environmental Assessment will be followed by a 30-day review and comment period.

APPENDIX A.1

Agency Coordination Letters

DELTA ENGINEERING P.C.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
2701 16TH STREET N.E.
P.O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

May 16, 2003

Montana Dept. Natural Resources & Conservation
Trust Land Management Division
Attn: Land Management Division
1625 11th Avenue
P.O. Box 201601
Helena, MT 59620-1601

Re: Montana Department of Transportation Project
Junction U.S. 2- North -Route 325 Reconstruction

This letter is to inform you of the intentions of the Montana Department of Transportation to develop a Federal Aid highway project on Secondary Route 325 in Blaine County, Montana. The proposed project will consist of reconstruction of the existing roadway to provide a new 2-lane facility. The project also proposes to relocate the existing connection of Secondary 325 and U.S. 2 to a location 1 ¼ miles east of the existing connection. The project will start at the connection with U.S. 2 and extend northward approximately 10 miles (16.1 km). The attached map indicates the project limits.

The purpose of this project is to upgrade the existing roadway to updated standards of design and safety and to eliminate the problem of sided trains blocking the roadway for long periods of time. The project will include reconstruction of the existing roadway and construction of the new connection to accommodate a 28-foot wide paved surface.

No firm letting date has been established for this project. This will depend on problems encountered during design, and the acquisition of new right-of-way. However, past experience has shown that projects of this nature take at least three to five years to develop.

In addition to informing you of our intentions to develop this project, we would also like to request from you any assistance that you can give us relative to information pertinent to this project. Any information regarding problems this project could cause or eliminate, environmental concerns and opinions for or against the project, or any other matter that you feel might be appropriate, will be appreciated. Also, if you know of anything existing or planned that could be affected by this project, we will appreciate your informing us of it.

Yours truly,

Richard West, P.E.
Project Engineer

RW/js

DELTA ENGINEERING P.C.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
2701 16TH STREET N.E.
P.O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

May 16, 2003

Resource Program Manager, Parks Division
Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620

Re: Junction U.S. 2 - North
STPS 325-1 (2) 0
CN 4478,

Information is requested from the MDFW&P's Parks Division for the environmental documentation on this proposed highway project. Attached is a copy of the Preliminary Field Review Report describing this proposed project, and one copy of its Project Location Map.

Please indicate if the MDFW&P has acquired, or plans to acquire lands that may be affected by this project. Also, indicate whether these lands or any other lands not owned by MDFW&P may have present or planned usage as defined by *Section 4(f)* of the 1966 *Department of Transportation Act* (**49 U.S.C.303**). These include lands that are part of a publicly-owned significant national, state or local park, wildlife refuge, or recreation area. Also, please indicate whether any lands in the project vicinity have been purchased, and/or are administered for recreational purposes under *Section 6(f)* of the *National Land & Water Conservation Fund Act* (**16 U.S.C.460**).

Statements on these matters will result, if necessary, in further inter-agency coordination to avoid or minimize potential project impacts. If no reply is received within ninety (90) calendar days, we will assume the MDFW&P's Parks Division has no concerns about this proposed project.

If there are any questions, please contact Delta Engineering at (406) 727-3687.

Richard West, P.E.
Project Engineer

RW/js

DELTA ENGINEERING P.C.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
2701-16th ST. N.E.
P.O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

October 18, 2002

Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNR&C)
Central Land Office
8001 North Montana Avenue
Helena, MT 59602

Attn: Mark Ahner, Area Manager

Subject: STPS 325-1(2) 0
Junction U.S. 2 - North
Control No. 4478

This is to request the DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES & CONSERVATION (DNR&C) to be a Cooperating Agency on this proposed project in accordance with the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION's (FHWA's) regulations under 23 CFR 771.111(d). The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is also requesting information from DNR&C to be used in the preparation of the environmental documentation on this proposed project. A copy of the Preliminary (ROUGH DRAFT) environmental document on this proposed project will be provided for review by the DNR&C as a Cooperating Agency.

Attached are copies of the Field Review Report describing the project, and a Project Location Map. Please indicate the following:

◊ Have any cultural resource surveys or historical/archaeological or paleontological resource discoveries been made on DNR&C-owned land adjacent to, or on this proposed project?

◊ Are any known active mineral leases or mining activities, abandoned mines, or reclaimed mines in the project vicinity?

◊ Any specific leases or land uses that may be adversely impacted, or that should be considered?

◊ Does the DNR&C have any lands with merchantable timber that may be impacted by the proposed project? Also indicate if the merchantable timber shall become the property of MDT's contractor through a timber purchase contract with DNR&C and removed from the job site or if other ownership/disposal arrangements are preferred.

◊ Whether the project is within what is considered the "navigable reach" of any waterway, and if an easement or license from DNR&C is necessary.

◊ If there are any lands that may have present or planned usage as defined by *Section 4 (f)* of the 1966 *Department of Transportation Act* (**49 U.S.C. 303**). These include lands that are part of publicly-owned **significant**, state or local parks, wildlife refuges or recreation areas. It also includes sites eligible for inclusion, or in the NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES (under *Section 106* of the *National Historic Preservation Act*, **16 U.S.C. 470**.

◊ Have nay lands in the project vicinity been purchased or are administered for recreational purposes under *Section 6(f)* of the *National Land & Water Conservation Fund Act* (**16 U.S.C. 460**)?

◊ Does the DNR&C have any ongoing or presently planned projects for the particular area that could affect, or be affected by this proposed action? Is the DNR&C aware of any proposed or current projects by others (public or private agencies) that pose similar affects?

A written response to this Cooperating Agency/information request is needed for the environmental documentation on this proposed project. A response on these matters may result, if necessary, in further inter-agency coordination to avoid or minimize potential project impacts. This proposed project is now scheduled to be "Ready" for letting to contract by 1/2006.

Please contact Delta Engineering at the address on the first page's "letterhead", or phone (406) 727-3687 if there are any questions about this request. If no reply is received within two weeks, it will be assumed the DNR&C has no concerns about this proposed project.

Richard West, P.E.
Project Engineer

Enclosures

cc: Tom Martin, P.E. - MDT Consultant Design

DELTA ENGINEERING P.C.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
2701-16th ST. N.E.
P.O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

October 16, 2002

Jeff Ryan, Water Quality/Wetland Specialist
Permitting & Compliance Division
Department of Environmental Quality
Lee Metcalf Building
1520 East Sixth Avenue, P.O. Box 200901
Helena, MT 59620-0901

Subject: STPS 325-1(2) 0
Junction U.S. 2 - North
Control No. 4478

Information is requested from the DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY (DEQ) for the environmental documentation on this proposed highway project. Attached is a copy of the Preliminary Field Review Report describing this proposed project, and one copy of its Project Location Map.

Please indicate if the DEQ has any waterbodies (i.e., streams or lakes) listed on the 305(b) report published for the State of Montana that may be affected by this proposed project. Also, indicate whether such streams or lakes are called "water quality limited" and are in need of Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) development. We would also like you to identify in your response what parameters are present that may be limiting water quality in the waterbody that is affected by this proposed project.

If there is any additional pertinent information available at this time from DEQ that would be useful for MDT in the development of this proposed project's design and preparation of the environmental documentation, please include it. This information may include stream classifications in this proposed project's vicinity, wetlands, unique "problems" or items of concern, management goals, etc. statements on these matters will result, if necessary, in further inter-agency coordination to avoid or minimize potential project impacts. If no written response is received within forty-five (45) calendar days, we will assume DEQ has no concerns about this proposed project.

If there are any questions, please contact Delta Engineering at (406) 727-3687.

Richard West, P.E.
Project Engineer

RW/js US2-No #12

Encl.

DELTA ENGINEERING P.C.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
2701 16TH STREET N.E.
P.O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

May 16, 2003

U.S. Postmaster
U.S. Post Office
Chinook, MT 59523

Re: Montana Department of Transportation Project
Junction U.S. 2- North -Route 325 Reconstruction

This letter is to inform you of the intentions of the Montana Department of Transportation to develop a Federal Aid highway project on Secondary Route 325 in Blaine County, Montana. The proposed project will consist of reconstruction of the existing roadway to provide a new 2-lane facility. The project also proposes to relocate the existing connection of Secondary 325 and U.S. 2 to a location 1 ¼ miles east of the existing connection. The project will start at the connection with U.S. 2 and extend northward approximately 10 miles (16.1 km). The attached map indicates the project limits.

The purpose of this project is to upgrade the existing roadway to updated standards of design and safety and to eliminate the problem of sided trains blocking the roadway for long periods of time. The project will include reconstruction of the existing roadway and construction of the new connection to accommodate a 28-foot wide paved surface.

No firm letting date has been established for this project. This will depend on problems encountered during design, and the acquisition of new right-of-way. However, past experience has shown that projects of this nature take at least three to five years to develop.

In addition to informing you of our intentions to develop this project, we would also like to request from you any assistance that you can give us relative to information pertinent to this project. Any information regarding problems this project could cause or eliminate, environmental concerns and opinions for or against the project, or any other matter that you feel might be appropriate, will be appreciated. Also, if you know of anything existing or planned that could be affected by this project, we will appreciate your informing us of it.

Yours truly,

Richard West, P.E.
Project Engineer

RW/js

DELTA ENGINEERING P.C.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
2701 16TH STREET N.E.
P.O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

May 16, 2003

Chinook Chamber of Commerce
Hwy 2
Chinook, MT 59523

Re: Montana Department of Transportation Project
Junction U.S. 2 - North - Route 325 Reconstruction

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Yours truly,

Richard West, P.E.
Project Engineer

RW/js

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CONSULTING ENGINEERS
2701 16TH STREET N.E.
P.O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

May 16, 2003

Blaine Co. Disaster & Emergency Services
Courthouse
Chinook, MT 59523

Re: Montana Department of Transportation Project
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Yours truly,

Richard West, P.E.
Project Engineer

RW/js

DELTA ENGINEERING P.C.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
2701 16TH STREET N.E.
P.O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

May 16, 2003

Blaine Co. Superintendent of Schools
Courthouse
Chinook, MT 59523

Re: Montana Department of Transportation Project
Junction U.S. 2- North -Route 325 Reconstruction

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Yours truly,

Richard West, P.E.
Project Engineer

RW/js

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL
RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION
NORTHEASTERN LAND OFFICE

STATE OF MONTANA

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PO BOX 1021
LEWISTOWN, MONTANA 59457-1021

November 13, 2002

Delta Engineering P.C.
PO Box 1481
Great Falls, MT 59403

Attn: Rich West, Project Engineer

Subj: STPS 325-1(2)0
Junction U.S. 2 – North
Control No. 4478

State Lease 4218
Sec. 10, T33N, R19E
Land Lying E of CNTY RD in E2SE4

Sec. 14, T33N, R19E
NW4, N2SW4

Sec. 15, T33N, R19E
Land Lying E of CNTY RD in E2NE4

State Lease 1274
Sec. 10, T33N, R19E
All Lying W of county road in E2SE4

Sec. 15, T33N, R19E
N2SE4, All lying W of county road in E2NE4

Dear Mr. West:

The following is the reply to the questions you had regarding the above noted project:

A field evaluation was conducted on these state land tracts on 5/2000 & 6/2002. There were no historical/archaeological or paleontological resource discoveries noted in the project area.

There are no known mineral leases or mining activities, abandoned mines, or reclaimed mines in the project vicinity.

These state lands within the project area are leased for grazing and agricultural uses. The project may adversely impact these leases. The surface lessee's should be contacted prior to project initiation.

There is no merchantable timber.

The project is not within the "navigable reach" of any waterway.

There are no lands that are part of publicly-owned significant, state or local parks, wildlife refuges or recreation areas, or in the NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES.

No state lands within the project area been purchased or are administered for recreational purposes under *Section 6(f)* of the *National Land & Water Conservation Fund Act* (16 U.S.C. 460).

The DNRC has no ongoing or presently planned projects for the particular area. The DNRC is not aware of any proposed or current projects by others that pose similar affects.

If you have any further questions, please contact our office.

Sincerely,

Bill Baumgartner
Land Use Specialist
Northeastern Land Office

cc: Barny Smith, Lewistown Unit Manager, NELO

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1420 East Sixth Avenue
P O Box 200701
Helena MT 59620-0701
June 2, 2003

Richard West, P.E.
Delta Engineering, P.C.
P O Box 1481
Great Falls, Montana 59403

Montana Department of Transportation Project STPS 325-1(2)0 Junction U.S.2 North

Dear Mr. West:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks received your letter regarding the above project last month. FWP does not hold any property interest in the direct vicinity of the proposed project nor do we anticipate any future acquisitions in this area. I will forward a copy of this letter along with your inquiry to FWP regional staff in Glasgow and Walt Timmerman, LWCF Coordinator in Helena, for any additional comments they may wish to include in response. If you do not hear from them, please assume they have no concerns about the proposed project.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Debby Dils
Land Section Supervisor

Cc: R6, Walt Timmerman

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1420 East Sixth Avenue
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701
June 3, 2003

RE: Montana Department of Transportation Project STPS 325-1(2)0 Junction U.S.2 North

Richard West, P.E.
Delta Engineering, P.C.
P.O. Box 1481
Great Falls, Montana 59403

Dear Richard West, P.E.:

Regarding the above-mentioned project, our maps and records to not indicate any FWP or local community projects acquired or developed with Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) resources in the vicinity of the proposed activity. Projects funded by LWCF in Blaine County include Chief Joseph State Monument, Blaine County Zurich Park Improvements, Chinook Northside Park, Chinook Swimming Pool, Chinook Tennis Courts, Harlem Centennial Park, and Harlem Swimming Pool.

Sincerely,

Walt Timmerman
Recreation Bureau Chief
Parks Division

APPENDIX A.2

Public Involvement Documentation

- Public Meeting Minutes
- News Releases

Project Location: This is an aerial photograph of the project area. I threw this in here to give you a good overview of the extent of the flood plain in this area because that is a real critical issue on this project. Here is Chinook (referring to photo), and this is the existing connection right here. This is Lodge Creek flowing through here. The Lodge Creek Flood Plain basically encompasses this whole area in here. This is high ground up here, but the rest of it is included in the flood plain. A couple of other feature that I want to point out -the Lodge Creek Bridge, the numerous railroad tracks that come across here and across here. You can't see them very well, but it gives you an idea of where the project is.

Traffic Projections: Here is MDT's traffic projections for the project (referring to graphic). You can see the projected growth on this project, so the problems that we have right now are not going to get any better. As traffic increases on the road, the chances of having some serious accidents here or a blockage for emergency vehicles just increases.

Summary of Issues

Blockages: Here is a summary the most obvious problems with the existing connection. Number one is the blockages. Burlington Northern has estimated that they get two-to-three train through there anywhere from ½ hour to one hour. Does that sound about right? They say if they have an emergency, they can move those trains but it takes almost 20 minutes from the time they are notified to get those trains off the tracks. So if somebody is hurt, cut their leg with a chain saw or whatever, and they are back behind that blockage, they are not going to be reached by emergency services. Other problems with the blockage that we've been told about- buses are stopped there, students and teachers get stopped behind that thing, etc. So that is a real critical issue and there is no bypass that I know of.

> Question: There is a no passing zone across the bridge, but a lot of people don't even come right out on that bridge, if a little sports car coming along, you can't see it. You can pullout and I've had it happen to me, so that is another thing that is a problem.
>
> Answer: Sure, that kind of ties in with the fourth issue down there.

Vehicle Storage: Number Two is the lack of vehicle storage. There is only 52 feet from where a stop bar would be located. I know there is no stop bar there now, but where one would be located if we built the road. The back-end of your vehicle is butting against the tracks. Fifty-two feet is not very much room. If you've got a pickup truck and a horse trailer there, he is almost onto the railroad tracks. If someone comes up behind him, he thinks the pickup is going to move and he comes up behind him and the pickup stops again, they are right on the tracks. That is a serious problem too.

Accidents: Rear-ending accidents on U.S. Hwy 2, according to the accident records, there have been four accidents there. People going east slowing down to take a left-turn on Hwy 325 have been rear-ended. Nobody has been killed there, but there is definitely a small cluster of accidents that did occur in there.

Congestion: The last is the congestion that I pointed out and it ties in with your comment. There are lots of things happening there. There is a major approach across the road, there is railroad tracks, there is a bridge right there. When you stop at the approach looking towards Chinook, you can't see very well. There are lots of things happening there. People are starting to accelerate coming out of town, and little sports cars are passing people on the bridge, so it is really a poor location for an approach. There are other problems, but these are the main ones.

Flooding: This is a picture of the 1952 flooding. We threw this in there to show you exactly what is happening there. Basically, the whole valley is pretty much inundated. The existing road has never overflowed the top -I learned that tonight. That road was built before the flood plain was officially designated as a flood plain and the current regulations in place now would not allow you to even build that road.

Because of the flood way and the existence of the flood plain, which is such an important issue on this project because it really restricts what we can do out there, we need to talk about that a little bit. When I say "designated flood plain" that basically means the Federal Government has done a study on the road and they put what are called "fern maps" or "insurance rate maps" and they basically restrict what we can do in that whole area. In this particular area, they have listed in the regulations that anything built in that flood way cannot raise the height of the flood elevation -zero height increase in that whole area by our approach. So in other words, we can put fill out in the flood way. If we put fill in the flood way, that raises the flood and they won't allow us to do that. So a lot of our alternatives we are going to talk about tonight are in that flood way and because of the restrictions, we either have to build a bridge or build those roads at ground level. Unfortunately, that really restricts what we can do.

Alternatives: I'm going to talk about our four alternatives. We've identified four possible routes. Each one of those routes has pros and cons and not all of the alternatives are really feasible. There may be some other alternatives that we can talk about tonight but these are the ones that look the most logical to us.

Alternative A: First is what we have identified as Alternative A (referring to graphic). This is the existing route right here and there is our connection. We are proposing to take off on the existing route right there, swing across the hill and hook into US 2 here. That is approximately one mile -this distance from here to here. Now the trains are sided all the way from here all the way down to right there (referring to graphic). So if we want to avoid the training siding problems, this alternative accomplishes that. There is an existing approach here and it is past the point where the trains are sided. Another advantage of this alternative is that we are avoiding Lodge Creek. We area still in the flood plain but we are not in the flood way. As a result, we can build this alternative like a standard elevated road. So in other words, when it floods this road will not be inundated. The disadvantage of this particular alternative is that it is further from town -a mile further down the road. Another advantage of this alternative is that it avoids all the congestion at the existing approach and gets you away from town, from the bridge, and any other approaches. Another factor is that in the future or possibly with this project we can build a turn lane so vehicles wanting to turn left onto Hwy 325 would have an additional lane to get out of the stream of traffic eliminating the rear-ending problems.

> Comment: The only thing I can see about that would be to get where I have to go, it would give me another five miles to get around 100 feet across the tracks.
>
> Answer: That is a disadvantage of this particular alternative. Like I said, each one of these alternatives are going to have pros and cons and some these cons will affect some of you more than others. I'll go through all these alternatives and then we can start discussing some of these issues later.

Alternative B: Basically Alternative B is to build the existing road where it is at - reconstruct the road, replace the bridges and leave the approach where it is. The advantages of Alternative B are we don't have to buy a whole bunch of new right-of-way, it is cheaper, and we don't have to move the road. Unfortunately, Alternative B doesn't solve any of our problems except it gives us a little nicer road to drive on. We can't put a turn lane in, the railroad track blockage isn't going to change, the _____ problems isn't going to change, we would just have a little nicer road to drive on. But it is an alternative.

Alternative C: Alternative C includes construction of a bypass road on the north side of the railroad tracks into town. The red marks (referring to graphic) are bridges that would have to be built. Alternative C, once again, would be constructed in the flood way, so we have to put bridges in, or we have to build the road at ground level. In other words, when it floods this bypass road would be inundated. Now along with Alternative C we can either leave the approach open or shut it off. If we leave the approach open, what the bypass road does is allow emergency traffic to travel through there. Lots of undesirable things with Alternative C -the 90 degree corner is undesirable, of course, and the road would be subject to flooding, and we can't put a turn-lane on U.S. 2 to get onto the existing approach. We would have to buy some right-of- way. There are a lot of wetlands in there, and that would be a real negative. But this would be an alternative that would solve the emergency vehicle problem.

Alternative D: Lastly Alternative D takes off, once again, at the top of the hill, crosses the flood way, crosses Lodge Creek, and enters the north end of town. The red lines would be bridge. That is the length of bridge we would need to comply with the flood plain regulations. Obviously a bridge that long would be tremendously expensive and way beyond the scope of this project. The ground level road between the bridges would be inundated during the flood. Right- of-way would be expensive. We are going through somebody's yard on the north end of town, but it does eliminate the problem with the existing approach.

Some of these alternatives can be modified. I talked about that with some of your folks already. For example, with this alternative (referring to graphic) the existing approach could be maintained for local traffic or local users and for the people who live up in here. The same thing with Alternative A -the one east of town, we may be able to turn this road into a local user road only. The only problem is that if everyone still uses this road, then we still end up with a safety problem down here at this intersection. Unfortunately, these people who live here don't want to come all the way around here, around here, and back into town. Like they say, it is an extra three miles of driving.

Summary Chart: This is a matrix or summary chart of all the alternatives and shows you that none of these answer all of our questions. Some are better than others. The one that jumps out to me as probably the best solution is the eastern bypass. The eastern bypass or Alternative A eliminates our problems, stays out of the flood plain, gives us a lot more flexibility in what we can do with the turn lane, and it keeps our approach away from the congested area, and the cost is reasonable. Alternative B -resurface the existing road, doesn't solve our problems, none of them. If we want to keep it as is, that is a possibility, but I don't think that is why we are here tonight. Alternative C-the low level bypass, does solve some of our problems. It solves the major problem, the blockage of traffic from the stopped trains. During flood events, that bypass would not be open. The construction cost is a little more expensive than Alternative A and more expensive than Alternative B. Alternative D -entering north of Chinook, is not really an alternative. We don't have $10 million to spend on the project. In our report, we recommended Alternative A as being the solution that, to us, seemed the most logical. That ends my summary of our report. John, do you want to take questions on the Alternatives now?

QUESTION/COMMENTS

Q: (Emma Raty) I'm concerned about when you are coming from the north to turn onto Hwy 2 to go north, that is a no passing zone over the bridge, but if a small sports car is passing a car you cannot see it and you can turn on right in front of that. Also, I heard about having an overpass there at that intersection, but I'm sure -that seems like an expensive alternative? But it is something I heard mentioned.

A: (Rich West) An overpass over the railroad tracks?

Q: (Emma Raty) I'm not quite sure.

A: (Rich West) Bob, do you know anything about an overpass?

A: (Bob Thomson) No I don't. One of the rules we have on the National Highway System, which U.S. 2 is a part of, is that we can't have any new at-grade railroad crossings. There is currently an at-grade railroad crossing just west of the Lodge Creek Bridge that goes over the alternative track. Now there has been talk, if that crossing were to be maintained when Hwy 2 is rebuilt, that there would have to be some consideration given to an overpass. Maybe that is where that is coming from, but that doesn't have a lot to do with this secondary road project.

Q: (Buck Raty) On this route here (referring to graphic) I'm on the building site right here. I would have to come to here, come to here, and back to here to get 100 feet across the tracks. That is just too far to drive to get 100 feet from my place. The other project, if you do that thing, I don't know what would happen to my house and barn and shop and everything else, but from here to here is a long ways.

A: (John Robinson) So you don't want Alternative C?

Q: (Buck Raty) That is what I'm trying to explain. I don't know how I'm going to get through there. Alternative B is the most logical one.

A: (John Robinson) So really that would be the best for you?

Q: (Buck Raty) Well, it sure isn't better for me on account of the buildings, my barnyard would have to move, and I'd have to do something with the barn, and the house is there and my shop is there, and everything. I don't want to. ...right-of -way. (inaudible)

A: (John Robinson) You would prefer this to. ...(inaudible) ?

Q: (Duane Skoyen) I live on Secondary 325 up at the end of the pavement. To me if you combined the existing route with Alternative C, I would prefer that. It would also help a lot of people that trail cows on that road and across the tracks there, and they couldn't do it going into Main Street. I guess that is the best way. The top over the hill, you can't really see if there is a train on that tracks until you get down there. This way, you've got the existing crossing there but you could also head into town on Alternative C if they were combined. The other way would be feasible too with Alternative A, as long as the existing road was maintained.

Q: (John Robinson) Would this existing road be maintained here with Alternative C?

A: (BobThomson) That would no longer be a secondary system road and the maintenance would be up to the county, and whether they choose to maintain it or not. Once we select a different route and build on that route, that would become the secondary route and whatever we abandoned would either go back to the county or be obliterated.

A: (Rich West) To me this Alternative A perhaps in conjunction with maintaining something in here (referring to graphic) to provide local access, looks like it might serve everyone's purposes the best. Alternative A would be a high standard road, and this would be the county's baby -that approach apparently would have to be maintained for cattle purposes anyway. The only thing we need to assure is that the general motoring public doesn't continue to use this road because then we've kind of defeated our purpose. That is the problem and maybe that can be worked out.

Q: (John Robinson) So they are going to use that no matter what.

Q: (Duane Skoyen) If there is no train there, they will use it but if there is a train there, then they would have to go around.

A: (Rich West) I'm thinking of some creative ways -perhaps the county may be able to gate that off.

Q: (Art Kleinjan) Blaine County Commissioner. It is my understanding and there is one important party that isn't here tonight and that is Burlington Northern. It is my understanding that they are not going to allow two crossings. Yes, we can leave it for a stock crossing with no planks in the middle but the last word I heard from them is there is no way they would allow two crossings. They would take the signals out, probably pull the signals down and there would be no signals, but they are not going to maintain the timbers and everything at two crossings. As far as the county maintaining that road, it would be our responsibility to maintain that road for the individuals that live there. That would not be a problem but I foresee the actual crossing being gone.

Q: (Loren Skoyen) I live up there about a mile just across the canal. If they did that, that is a long ways for me to come back into town, just like Buck said. I guess I can do it but if they are not going to maintain that crossing and only have one crossing, I guess the idea of using both of those is out of the question. There is only three or four of us down there, but I guess it is whatever is best. I would hate to be in the ambulance and waiting behind that train just because I didn't want to travel that extra mile and half, or if my house was burning down or something like that. I guess it is worth it to me and I would travel that extra mile and go around there, just to know that I could cross the track every time. It is pain, but you know sometimes you have to take the bad with the good.

Q: (Mari Anne Skoyen) I hope I don't repeat what someone else has said. My concern is with this approach on the highway. I was wishing we could have a passing lane but there are so many tractors and semi' s and swather's, and big equipment coming off the road and off the approach, and I just thought there would be a concern with someone going 70 mph and having to slow behind a tractor or truck or car to turn without a passing lane. I think that is kind of a dangerous situation, having to turn from off that highway.

Q: (Duane Skoyen) They've got their steam wound up by the time they get down to that approach. So there is going to have to be a turning lane there.

A: (Rich West) We talked about a turning lane possibly being incorporated into the project on U.S. 2.

A: (Bob Thomson) That might be somewhat of a problem because the money and the funding for this project is Secondary Road Fund money and we can't spend secondary money on the National Highway System. So any turn lane on U.S. 2 would have to be funded from a different source. That funding hasn't been currently identified but that is not to say that it couldn't be. It is kind of getting a little ahead of ourselves to think of that as part of the secondary project. We do plan to improve U.S. 2 sometime in the future as certain things are settled and there is money available. That would probably be the time a turn lane would be considered and probably not with this project, unless we could find Safety money or some other pot of funds based on an identified need on the NH System.

A: (Rich West) So it is a possibility then.

A: (John Robinson) But it could be years down the road. Does that kind of clarify that for you? It could be later if that turn lane does happen.

Q: (Bob Thomson) Currently there is an environmental study underway in this area of the NH System in conjunction with the proposed 4-lane system and until that study is completed, the projects on the main line are at a moratorium. Depending on when this is scheduled to be built, depending on the funding, depending on where they go with the environmental impact statement, a Shaped project on U.S. 2 wouldn't even be considered until the environmental document is done, I believe.

Q: (Bob Sivertsen) I would just be interested if you could divulge a little bit on the project from this point on. Will these folks have an opportunity to express their views after they have had an opportunity to think about this thing a while? We have no information on how to do that.

A: (John Robinson) I've given to all comments forms tonight and you can have a couple of them if you want. You have 30 days to think about it and send them in. On the top of the sheet, there is an address: Michael Johnson at the Department of Transportation in Great Falls. The address is right on there, you can just stick it in an envelope and put that same address on it. If you want to think it over, you have 30 days to put that in the mail and send us your comment on what you feel is the best alternative. Plus Michael Johnson's business card if also there and you could even call if you wish. You do have more time. You don't have to decide right now.

A: (Bob Thomson) If any of you would like to have one of Mick Johnson's cards, we will leave them on the table and you can pick them up on your way out. As I said earlier, Mick Johnson is the District Administrator for the Great Falls District and he was unable to be with us tonight but I brought along a supply of his cards if you want to contact him with any questions you may have.

Q: (Ken Stuker) I grew up on that road and if you eliminate this train blockage problem. .. when I was in High School, I used that as an excuse for being late a lot of nights. Really I think all the alternatives you are looking at with the exception of B, are solving a critical problem. I really complement you and the County Commissioners on looking at this problem and trying to find a solution because it has been there a long time and it's been a concern for a long time. I think the alternatives you are looking at, whichever one you pick, is going to make it better than it currently is.

Q: (Art Kleinjan) I guess I have a question for Bob. You were with us when we went on that original tour? (Yes) At that time, Mick Johnson made a comment that if one of these other alternative routes was not used, then he absolutely could not build a new road from Bob Warren's house to the highway due to the restrictions on Hwy 2. Now since that has turned up to be an alternative, what happened to that?

A: (Bob Thomson) I think you would have to forward that comment to Mick. I do remember him making that comment.

Q: (Art Kleinjan) Yes he did, he said absolutely he would not build a new road from approximately Bob Warren's house south to the highway.

A: (Bob Thomson) Do you recollect that Mick said we would move the start of the project to some point north of the highway and not even build this highway?

Q: (Art Kleinjan) That is correct.

A: (Bob Thomson) That is what I remember from that meeting. I remember some of that same conversation. That is an alternative that hasn't been considered here before.

Q: (Art Kleinjan) That would eliminate two of those alternatives -the one that runs up to buildings and the one that comes straight down to the highway. If they can't construct a new piece of road in there, we've defeated our whole purpose for the road - through that mile of nothing.

A: (Bob Johnson) To reiterate what Art has said, if we can't come to some suitable means of connecting the secondary road to the highway at its existing location, another alternative would be to move the start of the project some distance north and build the rest of the road up north. Art, would you care to address how you feel about that alternative one more time?

Q: (Art Kleinjan) I don't see any purpose of building the road for ten miles and leaving *Y2* to 3/4 of a mile closest to town unbuilt. We still have the same problem with the railroad tracks. I fought those railroad tracks for 18 years now and I've gotten no closer with Burlington North and I was 18 years ago. I'm not a big fond person for Alternative A either, but at least it eliminates that congestion on the railroad tracks and eliminates our fire and ambulance problem that we now have. Since the engineers. ...(inaudible) ... we've got some part of an alternative emergency route, but it's not real good.

A: (Bob Thomson) From the engineering and operational standpoint, Alternative A would probably be preferred by the department, but one other thing that is a pretty big unknown right now is that when Hwy 2 is reconstructed from Chinook east towards the next terminal point, we really don't know what is going to happen to the Lodge Creek Bridge or the actual alignment of the roadway in there. That would be the easiest one to adapt to a new road alignment, I believe. I believe our consultant would probably agree that it is the easiest one to adapt. Is that a true statement Rich?

A: (Rich West) Absolutely. Where it is at right now, it is a mess. There are so many things going on there. As U.S. 2 goes through Chinook, we looked at which way the road would shift if it was widened or turned into a 4-lane. It is not going to be able to hook onto 325 here very easily. As we get down here (referring to graphic), it is wide-open country down here. U.S. 2 can be realigned in there very easily. And the turning lane thing, obviously we can't put a turning lane right there in the future. If we can incorporate a turning lane right here now, we can certainly do it when U.S. 2 is reconstructed in the future.

Q: (Mari Ann Skoyen) I think it would be nice to have a brochure of the map available to take home and show people that weren't here tonight and discuss it a little bit. Can we get that?

A: (Rich West) Yes, I did bring some copies of that and you are welcome to them. If anyone else wants one, I've got a stack of cards up here. So take my card and write your address on it and I will send you one.

Q: (John Juras) Is the place the County Commissioners could put our signboard with the map? Maybe we can turn this over to you and allow people to come look at it at their leisure.

A: (Art Kleinjan) I guess I have one request that I would like to have on the record, and that is the fact that whatever route is finally determined, that the existing crossing be left enough for a stock crossing.

A: (Bob Thomson) I just might mention that if anybody would like to talk to our right-of - way expert about right-of-way concerns, we have our District Right-of-Way Supervisor, Pat 0' Connell, with us and if you would like to get together with him or any of us after the formal meeting is concluded, we will be around for whatever period of time you need.

CLOSING

(John Robinson) Like I said, you have 30 days to send in your comments. Unless anyone has any more questions or comments, we can call the meeting to an end and let you go home and think it over. Thank you very much for coming and thank you for your comments. If any of you have not received a comment form or any other information, please let me know. I can also give you extras if you want them; we have plenty of them back there. Thank you for coming.

JCT U.S.2 NORTH – CHINOOK
PUBLIC MEETING
Chinook High School
Chinook, MT
March 21,2002

OPENING

Welcome: Good evening. Thank you very much for coming. My name is John Robinson, I'm from the Public Involvement Section of the Montana Department of Transportation. As you know the County Commissioners have nominated Secondary 325 for reconstruction in Blaine County .They are looking at reconstructing approximately 10.4 miles of Secondary 325. In order to look at the different alignments and the different alternatives, we have to see what alternatives are best for the junction where Secondary 325 intersects with U.S. Hwy 2. So the purpose of the meeting tonight is to first find out where you feel the best place is to put that junction. You will hear from Rich West, Delta Engineering, who will present the alternatives.

Introduction: First of all I would like to make some introductions. From the Department of Transportation, we have Robert Thomson, the Engineering Services Supervisor from the Great Falls District. Mick Johnson, our District Administrator was unable to make it tonight but if you have any questions for Mick, please feel free to call Mick or Bob. Also with us from the Department of Transportation is Bob Sole, the Consultant Design Engineer, Patrick O'Connell, Right-of- Way Supervisor from the Great Falls District. The project consultant is Delta Engineering from Great Falls. The consultant design Engineer is Rich West. Also from Delta Engineering is John Juras, the Hydraulics Engineer. Also with us tonight is Art Kleinjan, Blaine County Commissioner, Vic Miller, Blaine County Commissioner, and Don Swyman, Blaine County Commissioner.

Meeting Format: We always conduct all our meetings using this format. First Rich West will present the alternatives and explain the proposed project. After Rich is finished, we will open it up to your questions, comments, and concerns. To maintain order, we ask that only one person speak at a time. Please state your name before you speak, and every time you speak. We always record the meetings to make sure we know exactly what was said, and this way the person who is transcribing this meeting will know who is saying what. Believe me after 48 hours and 20 pages of transcription, you don't know who said what if they haven't said their name every time they speak. With that, we can turn it over to Rich West.

PRESENTATION -Rich West, Delta Engineering

Thank you John. I'm Rich West, Delta Engineering. Let me just give you an update on this project. We were assigned the project six months ago and obviously the connection with U.S. 2 is the "biggy" on this project. So we were instructed to evaluate the different alternatives. What we've put together is what we think are the most logical alternatives for the connection, but that doesn't mean there isn't one out there that may be better. We haven't started to design the project so the purpose of tonight is to get some input from the users so that we can get all the information together to make a logical decision. I've already received some information I didn't know about and that is really the purpose of this meeting, to talk to people who use this road. After this project is done, quite frankly, I'll probably never be on that road again. But some of you will be using it for the rest of your lives, so it is important for you guys to make yourselves heard tonight.

MDT studying new highway connection

The Montana Department of Transportation has been analyzing various alternatives to relocate the connection of Secondary Highway 325 with US Highway 2 on the east side of **Chinook**. The existing connection has a variety of safety problems and is frequently blocked by waiting trains.

The Blaine County Commissioners, along with representatives from the Department of Transportation and their design consultants, held a meeting in May to select a final location for the connection. A petition was presented from various residents who selected "Alternative A" location for the new route.

"Alternative A" is approximately 1 ¼ miles east of the existing connection and will require construction of 2 ¼ miles of new roadway to reconnect the existing roadway.

After the new intersection is completed, the existing approach cannot be left open to traffic due to safety and liability issues. The approach will still be open for usage as a livestock crossing after new construction is complete.

The new road will contain cross-bar crossing signals and will be designed to accommodate large truck traffic.

Construction is anticipated to begin in 2006, depending on funding and completion of design.

For more information, contac Michael Johnson, District Administrator, P.O. Box 1359, Great Falls MT, 59407, or by phone at (406) 454-5880 or (888) 730-0898.

GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE

JUNE, 2002

PRESS RELEASE

DECISION REACHED ON SECONDARY 325 CONNECTION TO U.S. 2

The Montana Dept. of Transportation has been analyzing various alternatives to relocate the connection of Secondary 325 with U.S. 2 on the east side of Chinook. The existing connection has a variety of safety problems and is frequently blocked by waiting trains. The various alternatives for the location of the new connection were presented and discussed at a public information meeting held in March, 2002.

The Blaine County Commissioners along with representatives from the Montana Dept. of Transportation and their design consultants held a meeting on May 23, 2002 to select a final location for the connection. A petition was presented from various residents who supported the selection of the "Alternative A" location for the connection. The "Alternative A" location, as presented in the Public Meeting, is approximately 1¼ miles east of the existing connection and will require construction of 2¼ miles of new roadway to reconnect to the existing roadway.

The various alignment alternatives were reviewed at the meeting and a consensus was reached to direct the design consultant to proceed with completing the design for "Alternative A".

Additional issues related to this project were outlined as follows:

- The existing approach cannot be left open to traffic due to safety & liability issues. The approach will still be open to usage as a livestock crossing after the new construction is complete.

- The new connection will contain railroad crossing signals and a cross-bar and will be designed to accommodate large truck traffic.

- Construction on the project will probably not begin for four years.

APPENDIX A.3

Farmland Conversion Rating Form AD-1006

U.S. Department of Agriculture

FARMLAND CONVERSION IMPACT RATING

PART I *(To be completed by Federal Agency)*	Date Of Land Evaluation Request
Name Of Project: JUNCTION US2-NORTH CN4478	Federal Agency Involved: USDOT-FHWA
Proposed Land Use: HIGHWAY RIGHT-OF-WAY	County And State: BLAINE COUNTY, MT

PART II *(To be completed by SCS)*	Date Request Received By SCS	
Does the site contain prime, unique, statewide or local important farmland? *(If no, the FPPA does not apply – do not complete additional parts of this form).* Yes ☐ No ☐	Acres Irrigated	Average Farm Size
Major Crop(s)	Farmable Land In Govt. Jurisdiction Acres: %	Amount Of Farmland As Defined in FPPA Acres: %
Name Of Land Evaluation System Used	Name Of Local Site Assessment System	Date Land Evaluation Returned By SCS

PART III *(To be completed by Federal Agency)*	Alternative Site Rating Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D
A. Total Acres To Be Converted Directly				
B. Total Acres To Be Converted Indirectly				
C. Total Acres In Site				
PART IV *(To be completed by SCS)* Land Evaluation Information				
A. Total Acres Prime And Unique Farmland				
B. Total Acres Statewide And Local Important Farmland				
C. Percentage Of Farmland In County Or Local Govt. Unit To Be Converted				
D. Percentage Of Farmland In Govt. Jurisdiction With Same Or Higher Relative Value				
PART V *(To be completed by SCS)* Land Evaluation Criterion Relative Value Of Farmland To Be Converted *(Scale of 0 to 100 Points)*				

PART VI *(To be completed by Federal Agency)* Site Assessment Criteria *(These criteria are explained in 7 CFR 658.5(b)*	Maximum Points				
1. Area In Nonurban Use	15	15			
2. Perimeter In Nonurban Use	10	10			
3. Percent Of Site Being Farmed	20	5			
4. Protection Provided By State And Local Government	20	0			
5. Distance From Urban Builtup Area	N/A	-			
6. Distance To Urban Support Services	N/A	-			
7. Size Of Present Farm Unit Compared To Average	10	0			
8. Creation Of Nonfarmable Farmland	25	0			
9. Availability Of Farm Support Services	5	5			
10. On-Farm Investments	20	10			
11. Effects Of Conversion On Farm Support Services	25	0			
12. Compatibility With Existing Agricultural Use	10	0			
TOTAL SITE ASSESSMENT POINTS	160	45			
PART VII *(To be completed by Federal Agency)*					
Relative Value Of Farmland *(From Part V)*	100	100			
Total Site Assessment *(From Part VI above or a local site assessment)*	160	45			
TOTAL POINTS *(Total of above 2 lines)*	260	145			

Site Selected:	Date Of Selection	Was A Local Site Assessment Used? Yes ☐ No ☒

Reason For Selection:

APPENDIX A.4

Resident Petition Supporting Alternative A (original)

NOTE: The modification to Alternative A had not been developed at the time this petition was collected.

April 30, 2002

We the undersigned support the Eloam road project #325 Alternative A and feel that it should be completed as soon as possible. The additional pavement and detour around the railroad siding would increase the efficiency and response time of emergency personal.

Melissa Russell
Dan Skoyen
[illegible]
Wayne Skoyen
[illegible]
[illegible]
Debby Call
[illegible]
Jim S. Dyle
Laurie Nordrum Huestis
Alan Huestis
Debbie Gomke
Dean Wilkinson
[illegible]
Perry Wendell
Pat [illegible]
Mark Weber
[illegible]
Cindy Dennis
[illegible]

Shannon Gallus
Scott Gallus
DAN FRIEDE
Traci Gallus
[illegible]
Clinton Zweigand
Jody R. Skoyen
Beulah Skoyen
Bob Watkins
Lenore Watkins
Larry Stanley
Connie Stanley
Scott DePriest
[illegible] DePriest

April 30, 2002

We the undersigned support the Eloam road project #325 Alternative A and feel that it should be completed as soon as possible. The additional pavement and detour around the railroad siding would increase the efficiency and response time of emergency personal.

Vanessa Surber
Jennifer Grossman
Mary Golie
Tammie Morgan
Brenda Seymour
D Mayer
Jennifer Madick
Evelyn Smith
Jessica Bigleggin
Irena Kennedy
Neil [illegible]
Sandra Sorensen
Dan Millar
Gayle Karl
Connie Dietrich

Rosella Higgins
Sandi Luevan
Linda Young
Mary Mine
[illegible] FIRECHIEF
[illegible]
Kathy Harbolt
[illegible] Burkhartmeyer
Frances Hodgson
Elmer D Zane
Karla K Kemp
Thomas J Murray

April 30, 2002

We the undersigned support the Eloam road project #325 Alternative A and feel that it should be completed as soon as possible. The additional pavement and detour around the railroad siding would increase the efficiency and response time of emergency personal.

Richard L Stuker

Rosemary Stuker

Gary Stecker

Laurence [illegible]

Don Ulrich

[illegible]

Lance B. Haligstad

Lars N. Nalugstad

Preston S. Cline

Jim Pursley

Betty S Liston

Larry Liston

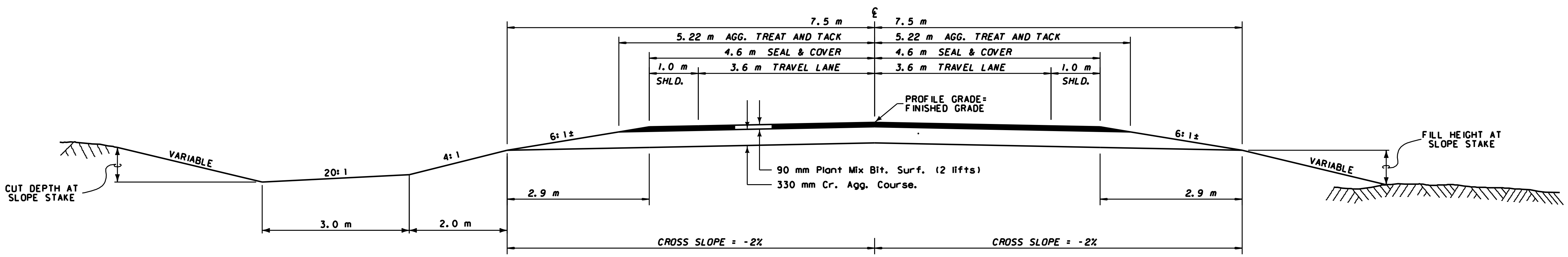
Bruce E Hoffelder

Floyd Skoyen

FIGURE A – Roadway Typical Section

STATE	PROJECT NUMBER	SHEET NO.
MONTANA	STPS 325-1(2)0	5

TYPICAL SECTION NO. 1



DESIGN "R" VALUE = 5

QUANTITIES

UNIT	AGGREGATE					UNIT	BITUMINOUS MATERIAL				
	COVER	PLANT MIX	CR. AGG. COURSE				ASPHALT CEMENT	DUST PALLIATIVE	SEAL	TACK	AGG. TACK
AREA square meters		.884	4.198			square meters PER STATION		1044	920	1044	1044
cubic meters PER STATION		88.4	419.8			tons PER STATION	12.13	1.90	1.69		
tons PER STATION	12.9	202.2				liters PER STATION				125	240

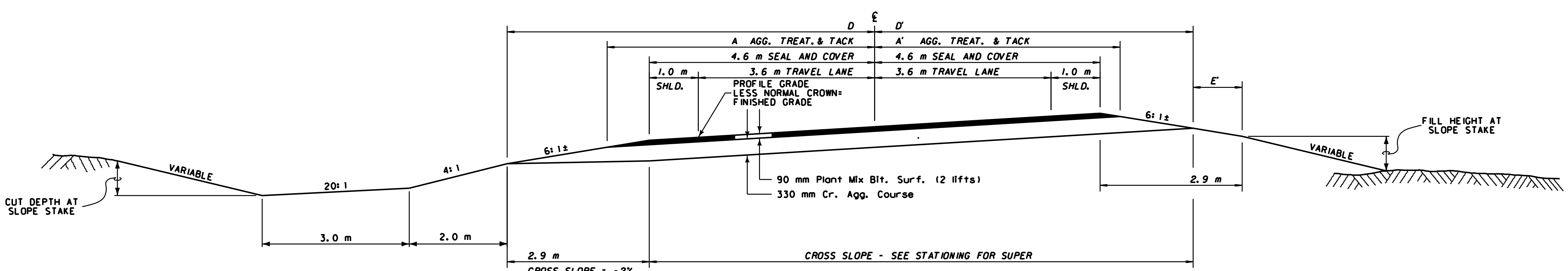
BACK SLOPES

0 - 1.5 m	5:1
1.5 - 3 m	4:1
3 - 4.5 m	3:1
4.5 - 6 m	2:1
OVER 6 m	1.5:1

FILL SLOPES

0 - 3 m	4:1
3 - 6 m	3:1
6 - 9 m	3:1
OVER 9 m	2:1

TYPICAL SECTION NO. 2



FOR QUANTITIES SEE TYPICAL NO. 1

DESIGN "R" VALUE = 5

SUPER %	WIDTHS (m)								
	A	B	C	D	A'	B'	C'	D'	E'
3 %	5.27	0	0	7.5	5.05	0	0	6.7	.8
4 %	5.32	0	0	7.5	5.03	0	0	6.6	.9
6 %	5.46	0	0	7.5	5.01	0	0	6.5	1
8 %	5.66	0	0	7.5	4.96	0	0	6.3	1.2

REVERSE DIMENSIONS FOR CURVES RT.

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MONTANA CADD

DELTA ENGINEERING P.C.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
P.O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

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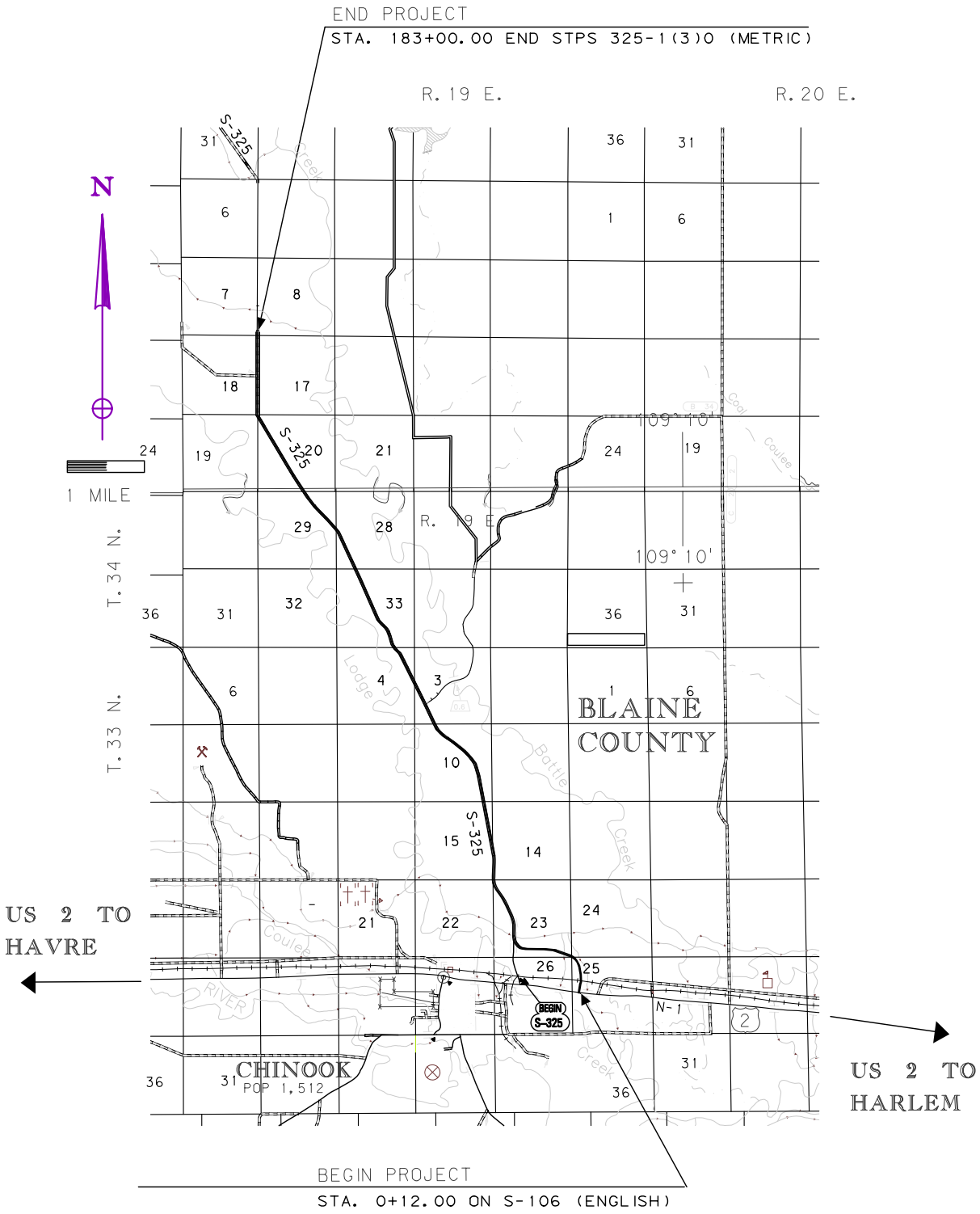
DRAWN BY
APPROVED BY
REVISED BY
Owner

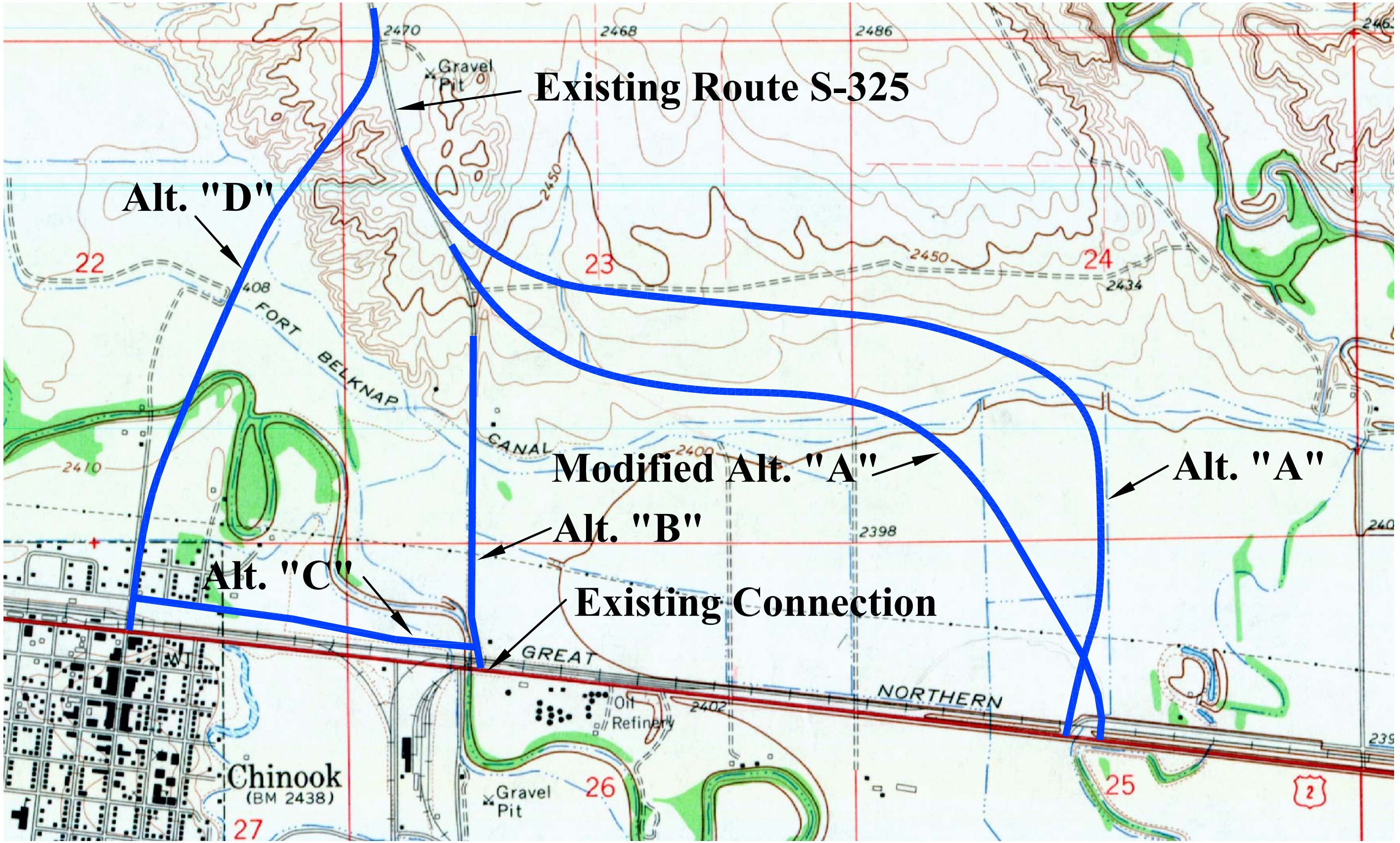
FIGURE B – Project Location Map



PROJECT LOCATION MAP

FIGURE B

FIGURE C – Alignment Alternatives Overview Map



DELTA ENGINEERING P.C.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
P. O. BOX 1481
GREAT FALLS, MT 59403
(406) 727-3687

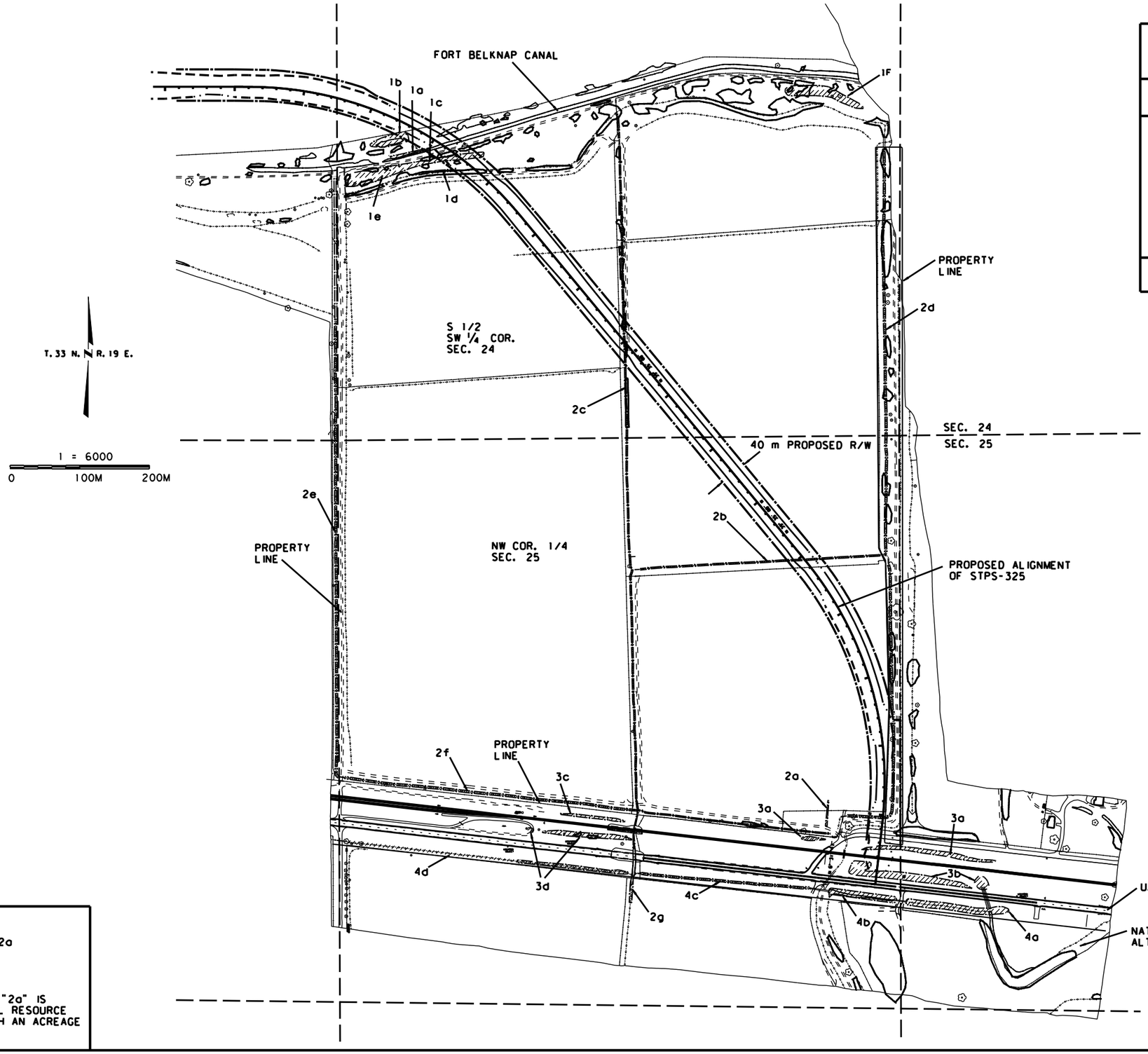
CHINOOK - NORTH
ALTERNATIVES OVERVIEW

FIGURE D – Wetland Location Map

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MONTANA CADD

WETLAND ACREAGE WHICH WOULD BE AFFECTED BY THE BUILD ALTERNATIVE		
WETLAND NUMBER	AFFECTED AREA (m²)	AFFECTED AREA (ha)
1c	321 m²	.03
2c	78 m²	.01
2b	95 m²	.01
2d	482 m²	.05
3a	103 m²	.01
3b	62 m²	.01
4c	490 m²	.05
4b	858 m²	.09
TOTAL	2489 m²	.24 ha (.615 acres)



LEGEND

2a

WETLAND AREA - THE NUMBER "2a" IS REFERENCED IN THE BIOLOGICAL RESOURCE REPORT FOR THE PROJECT WITH AN ACREAGE AND WETLAND TYPE/RATING

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	DRAWN BY
	APPROVED BY
3	
2	REVISED BY

WETLANDS AND WATERS OF THE U.S.
FIGURE D

FIGURE E - Floodplain Map

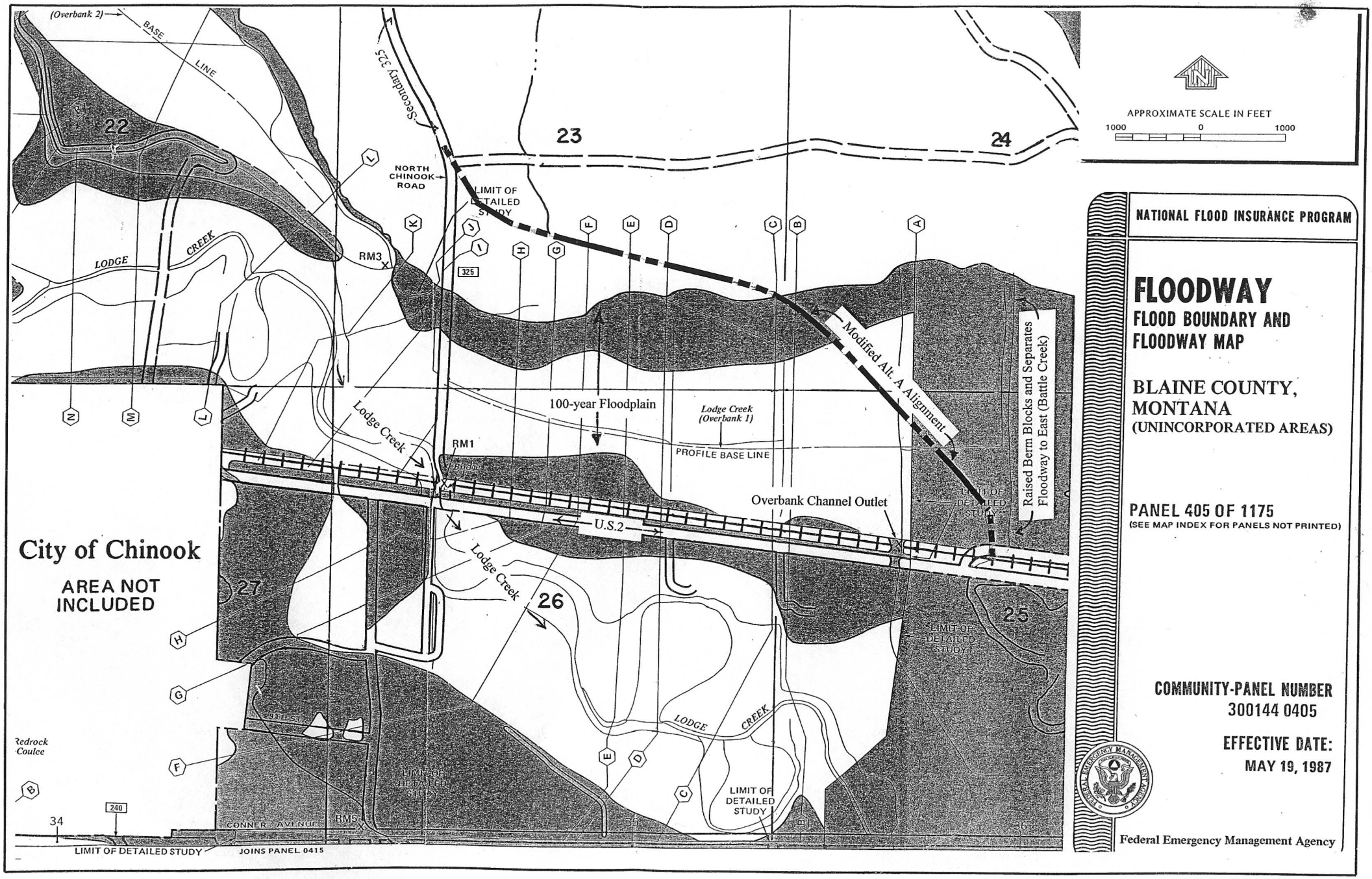

FIGURE E
FLOODPLAIN MAP