

PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT PLAN (PAIP)

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prepared for:

Montana Department of Transportation



prepared by:

Robert Peccia & Associates
Helena, Montana



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	i
List of Figures	i
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1. Corridor Planning Process	1
1.2. Study Area	2
1.3. Goals of Public and Agency Outreach Effort.....	2
2.0 Participation Procedures	4
2.1. Study Contacts	4
2.2. Publications	5
2.3. Radio and Television	5
2.4. Stakeholder Contact List	5
2.5. Study Website	5
2.6. Document Availability	6
3.0 Meetings	6
3.1. Advisory Committee Meetings.....	6
3.2. Informational Meetings	7
3.3. Resource Agency Meeting/Involvement.....	7
3.4. Considerations for Traditionally Underserved Populations	7
3.5. Study Schedule	8
4.0 Overall Study Communication	8

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Vicinity Map.....	3
Figure 2: Study Schedule.....	8

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and in coordination with the Great Falls MPO, is developing a corridor planning study of Interstate 15 (I-15) in the Great Falls Area. The 2014 Great Falls Area Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) identified the need for an Interstate corridor study. The LRTP states that, “*due to the need for improvements to both Emerson Junction and Gore Hill interchanges and other identified needs for added lanes and operational improvements on I-15 and I-315, an Interstate Corridor Study for the Great Falls area is recommended.*”

The study, referred to as the *I-15 Corridor Study*, will identify feasible improvement options to address safety, operational, and geometrical concerns (i.e. road width, horizontal curves, vertical grades, approach density, etc.) within the study area based on needs identified by the public, the study partners, and resource agencies. Data examined will include geometric characteristics, crash history, operational characteristics, land uses, and environmental resources.

The study will include a comprehensive package of feasible short- and long-term recommendations intended to address the transportation needs over the next twenty years. Developing these recommendations will help the study partners define the most critical needs and allocate resources.

An initial step in the corridor planning process is to develop a *Public and Agency Involvement Plan (PAIP)* that provides for and identifies public, stakeholder, and other interested parties involvement activities needed to communicate information about existing and future corridor needs. The purpose of the *PAIP* is to establish a process that provides opportunities for interested parties to participate in all phases of the corridor planning process. Providing complete information, timely notices, and opportunities to comment, as well as ensuring full access to key decisions, will help achieve the *PAIP* objectives.

1.1. CORRIDOR PLANNING PROCESS

MDT established the corridor planning process to investigate improvement options for the corridor via the Pre-National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Study, as provided for in the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). The corridor planning process will inform any projects that may develop from improvement options identified in the study. The process will help advance viable options for use in the NEPA/MEPA process, while providing an opportunity for partner involvement at all stages.

The purposes for conducting a corridor study are to analyze existing data to determine current and future deficiencies and needs within the corridor and to identify potential environmental constraints and mitigation opportunities. The *I-15 Corridor Study* is a pre-NEPA/MEPA study that allows flexibility in examining improvement options for the roadway system should any project move forward. Public, stakeholder, and interested-party involvement are important components of any successful corridor planning process. For this study, a number of proposed involvement strategies will aid in reaching the most people possible to elicit meaningful participation. These opportunities will achieve the following goals:

- Educate corridor users regarding the critical elements included in the Pre-NEPA/MEPA Corridor Planning Study process for the I-15 corridor through Great Falls.
- Provide opportunity for input and to solicit questions throughout the corridor planning study.
- Present findings and recommendations.

1.2. STUDY AREA

The study area includes I-15 through Great Falls, beginning southwest of the Gore Hill Interchange (I-15 Exit 277) near Reference Post (RP) 277 and ending northwest of Emerson Junction (Exit 282) near RP 284. The study area also includes Interstate 315 (I-315) and 10th Avenue South west of the Missouri River (RP 95). **Figure 1** presents the location of the corridor and the study area.

1.3. GOALS OF PUBLIC AND AGENCY OUTREACH EFFORT

The primary goal of this *PAIP* is to provide ongoing opportunities for involvement by members of the public, stakeholders, and resource agency representatives throughout the planning study process. Education and outreach are essential elements in keeping individuals apprised about the planning study process.

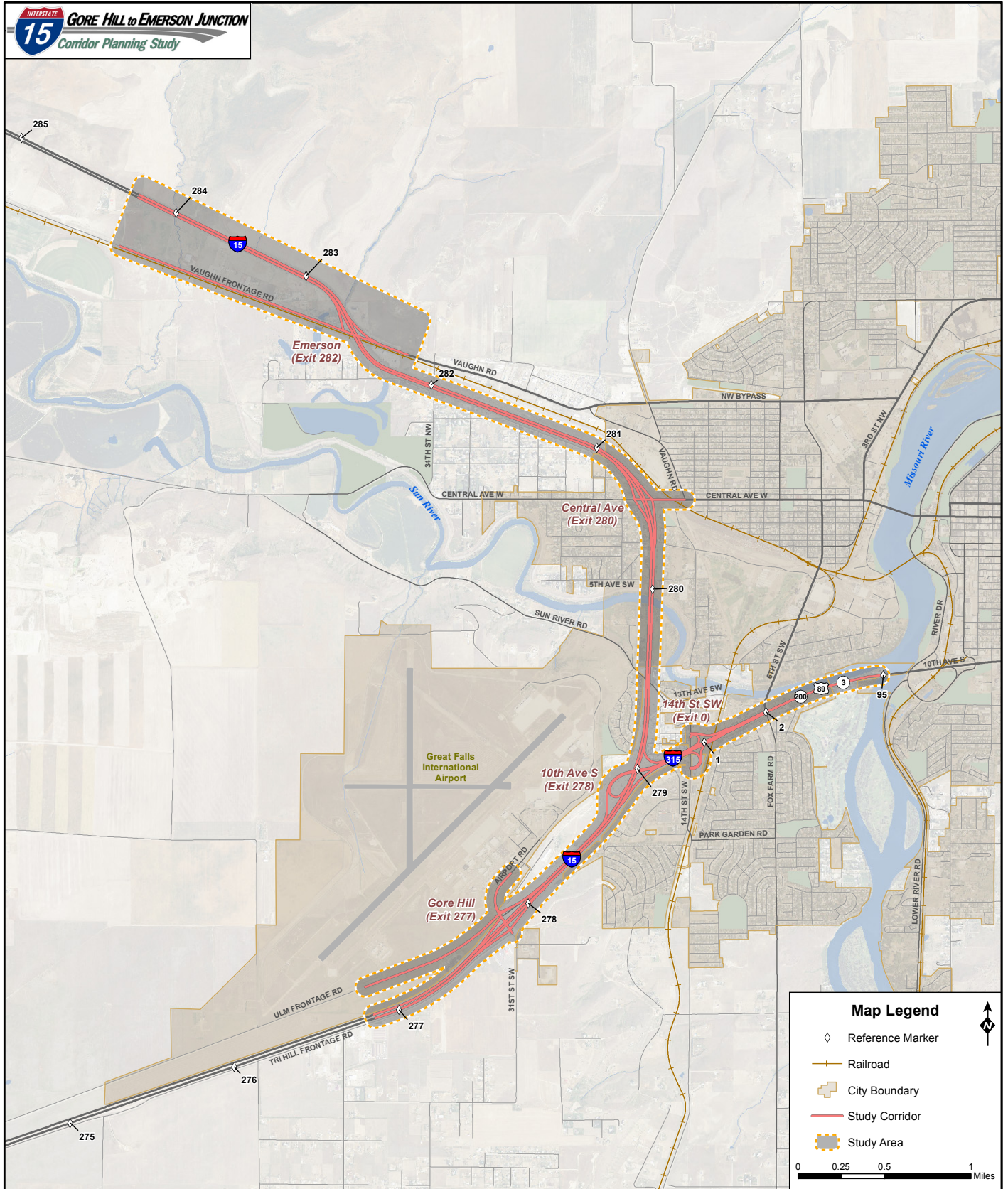


Figure 1: Vicinity Map

2.0 PARTICIPATION PROCEDURES

The *PAIP* describes the information and input opportunities that will be provided while developing the *I-15 Corridor Study*. This plan encourages active participation in identifying and commenting on study issues at every stage of the planning process. Participant involvement includes the following:

- The general public – residents of the city of Great Falls, Cascade County, and adjacent areas
- Landowners and business owners within the study area boundary
- Resource agencies
- Stakeholders and outreach groups
- Other interested parties

This document contains descriptions of notification for informational meetings and other information. MDT, the Great Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and Robert Peccia and Associates (RPA) will provide information regarding all aspects of the study to the public and interested parties and will seek their input throughout the process.

2.1. STUDY CONTACTS

All information published regarding the *I-15 Corridor Study* will have contact information for MDT and RPA. Comments can be submitted throughout the study process via the website (see **Section 2.5**) or by contacting those individuals listed below:

- **Dave Hand** – *MDT Great Falls District Administrator*
MDT Great Falls District
200 Smelter Avenue NE
PO Box 1359
Great Falls, MT 59403-1359
406-454-5880
dhand@mt.gov
- **Corrina Collins** – *MDT Project Manager*
MDT Statewide and Urban Planning
2960 Prospect Avenue
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001
(406) 444-9131
ccollins@mt.gov
- **Scott Randall** – *RPA Project Manager*
Robert Peccia and Associates (RPA)
825 Custer Avenue
PO Box 5653
Helena, MT 59604
(406) 447-5000
scottr@rpa-hln.com

2.2. PUBLICATIONS

MDT and RPA will jointly develop meeting announcements. MDT will advertise the announcements at least twice before informational meetings (three weeks and one week before the meeting). The ads will contain the meeting location, time and date, meeting format and purpose, and locations for document review (if applicable). The following print publication will carry the display ads:

- **Great Falls Tribune** – print and online: <http://www.greatfallstribune.com/>

In addition, RPA will publish newsletters, flyers, or both, one month before each informational meeting. The newsletters will describe work in progress, results achieved, preliminary recommendations, and other related topics. RPA will deliver each newsletter and flyer to the Great Falls MPO, MDT, and select stakeholders for distribution and posting to their respective internet sites. Print copies of newsletters will be available at the public meetings.

2.3. RADIO AND TELEVISION

Meetings may also be announced on local radio and/or television stations.

2.4. STAKEHOLDER CONTACT LIST

A stakeholder contact list will include individuals, businesses, or groups identified by the Great Falls MPO and MDT. The stakeholder list will identify individuals and groups with likely project interests and will enable actively seeking out and engaging them in all phases of the study process. A sign-in sheet for individuals who attend informational meetings will facilitate expanding the stakeholder list. The groups listed below (at a minimum) will be included in the initial list. Additional stakeholders may be identified throughout the development of the study.

- City of Great Falls
- Great Falls City Commission
- Cascade County
- Cascade County Commission
- Great Falls Air National Guard
- Malmstrom Air Force Base
- Great Falls International Airport Authority
- Great Falls Policy Coordinating Committee
- Great Falls Transportation Technical Advisory Committee
- Great Falls Northern Industrial Task Force
- Others as Requested

2.5. STUDY WEBSITE

A study website will be used to encourage public interaction and to provide study information. The website will be hosted by MDT at the following address: www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/i15/

The website will be updated as needed throughout the study process. The website will contain contact information, meeting announcements, frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the corridor study process, a description of the study, finalized documents, and interim memorandums. Upon completion, the following documents will be made available on the study website:

- Study Schedule
- Study Newsletters
- Public and Agency Involvement Plan

- Environmental Scan
- Existing and Projected Conditions Technical Memorandum
- Needs and Objectives Technical Memorandum
- Improvement Options Technical Memorandum
- Informational Meeting Presentations
- Public Draft Corridor Planning Study Report
- Final Corridor Planning Study Report

2.6. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY

Electronic copies of study deliverables and technical memorandums will be posted on the study website. Additionally, hard copy materials may also be made available at the following locations:

- **City of Great Falls** – Planning and Community Development Department
#2 Park Drive South
PO Box 5021
Great Falls, MT 59403
- **Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)** – Great Falls District
200 Smelter Avenue NE
PO Box 1359
Great Falls, MT 59403-1359

The following required Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) statement will be included on all published materials:

Great Falls, MDT, and RPA attempt to provide accommodation for any known disability that may interfere with a person participating in any service, program, or activity associated with this study. Alternative accessible formats of this information will be provided upon request. For further information, call (406) 447-5000, TTY (800) 335-7592, or Montana Relay at 711. Accommodation requests must be made a least 48 hours prior to the scheduled activity and/or meeting.

3.0 MEETINGS

The I-15 Corridor Study will require various planning and informational meetings. The following sections will describe the various functions that each meeting type will serve.

3.1. ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Advisory Committee meetings will be scheduled every 4 weeks over the 12-month study period. Groups included in the meetings will be the Great Falls MPO, MDT, FHWA, RPA, and others as appropriate. The meetings will track progress and address study development issues and questions. The meetings are important for the exchange of technical information and ideas during the development of the study. Throughout the meetings, the Advisory Committee will identify and discuss issues, problems, and possible solutions.

The Advisory Committee will consider all public comments received for the duration of the study. All comments received from the public will be considered. Public comments received on the draft report during the public comment period will be logged into a public comment matrix for consideration by the Advisory Committee. Written responses will not be offered to the individual making the comment unless a specific question response is warranted. Following publication of the draft report, an additional public comment matrix will be created to log public comments received specific to the draft report. The matrix will contain written responses as applicable. All public comments received, and any provided responses, will be duly considered and placed in the appendices to the final report.

3.2. INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS

Two informational meetings will take place in Great Falls during the study. The first informational meeting will occur following evaluation of the existing conditions of the study area. The meeting will focus on introducing the study, presenting existing conditions, and discussing preliminary issues and concerns within the study area. The meeting will allow members of the public to provide information about the needs and constraints of the corridor.

The second informational meeting will occur following completion of the draft *I-15 Corridor Study* report. The purpose of this meeting will be to present the draft report and to discuss the recommended improvement options. Members of the public will be encouraged to provide feedback on the draft report.

Comments will be considered throughout the planning process. An official comment period will be provided after the release of the draft report. Additionally, RPA staff will record comments and concerns at all meetings for consideration throughout the planning process.

3.3. RESOURCE AGENCY MEETING/INVOLVEMENT

A resource agency meeting will be scheduled and held at the MDT Planning office in Helena. Polycam arrangements will be provided at the MDT Great Falls District Office, as appropriate. The purpose of the meeting will be to present the findings of the draft *Environmental Scan* developed by MDT. The resource agencies will be asked to help identify initial avoidance areas, mitigation needs, and opportunities.

3.4. CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Additional efforts are necessary to involve traditionally underserved segments of the population, including the disabled, minorities, and low-income residents. Including these groups helps to ensure planning that reflects everyone's needs. The following steps will help with these efforts:

- **Plan meeting locations carefully:** Hold informational meetings in locations that are accessible and compliant with ADA. If a targeted population is located in a certain geographic part of a city or county, then the meeting location should be close to the area for convenience.
- **Seek help from community leaders and organizations:** To facilitate involvement of traditionally underserved populations, consult with community leaders and organizations representing these groups about the most effective ways to reach their members.
- **Be sensitive to diverse audiences:** At informational meetings, study partner staff and RPA will attempt to communicate as effectively as possible. Presenters will avoid using technical jargon, and staff will wear appropriate dress and adhere to common rules of conduct.

3.5. STUDY SCHEDULE

Adherence to the study schedule is important to stay on track and to keep all participating parties engaged. **Figure 2** contains the study schedule for the *I-15 Corridor Study*. It is RPA’s intent to adhere to this schedule.

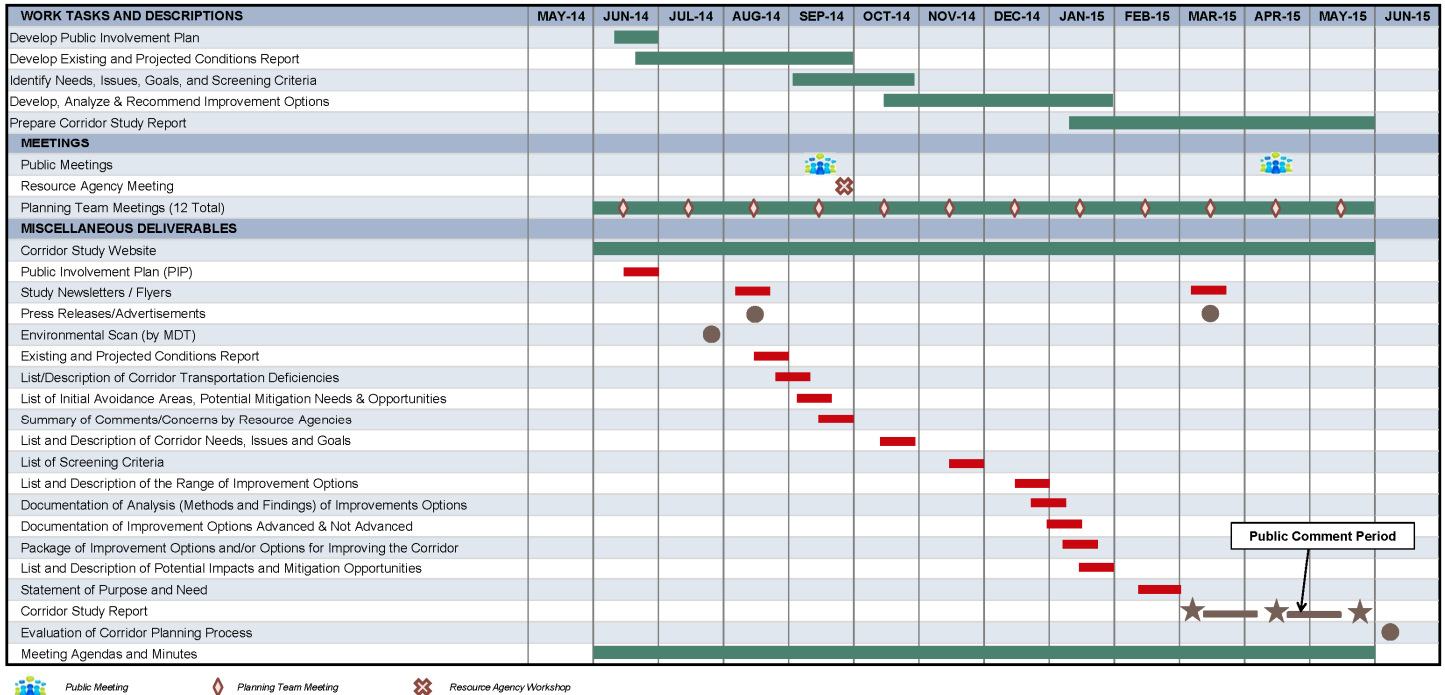


Figure 2: Study Schedule

4.0 OVERALL STUDY COMMUNICATION

The PAIP establishes guidelines and procedures for encouraging participation. The following communication strategies and techniques will be used to distribute study information to the community at large and to seek a higher level of engagement. RPA will apply the techniques that best suit the *I-15 Corridor Study* development.

- All relevant deliverables and associated materials will be posted on the study website at the following address: <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/i15/>
- Public service announcements and interviews on radio and television may be conducted to explain the subject matter and promote participation.
- Newsletters will be provided at least one month before each informational meeting.
- Press releases for the newspaper or other widely circulated publications will be developed.
- Technical memorandums will be provided to MDT for posting to the study’s internet site. They will also be distributed to the Advisory Committee to provide a better understanding of proposed issues and recommendations and, in return, to provide the study partners with feedback and an opportunity for continual comment.
- Hard copies of all materials can be made available at the locations described previously, as well as at the MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (2960 Prospect Avenue).
- Upon request, special presentations may be made to groups and organizations.
- Fact sheets may be developed to help explain or describe study-related issues.

- Special issues documents may be announced or reported on at meetings and/or via email.

Questions and comments from interested parties concerning the participation process, working draft technical memorandums, the draft *I-15 Corridor Study* documents, and other work products will be included in an appendix to the actual documents.