2.0 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS OF THE 1994 FEIS AND ROD

2.1 PURPOSE AND NEED

The 1994 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) indicated the primary transportation needs on US 93 were to reduce congestion on the existing facility, provide for planned growth and development, improve safety, provide for improved intermodal facility connections, and provide for enhanced scenic values. These overall needs have not changed aside from those addressed by improvements already made by Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) during implementation of the Preferred Alternative in the 1994 FEIS and Record of Decision (ROD).

The purpose and need for the bypass was further elaborated in the 1993 Kalispell Bypass Feasibility Study commissioned by the Flathead Regional Development Office. This document contains an overview of existing conditions, population and employment projections, traffic projections, and bypass alternatives development and evaluation. The document described a long-term need for a bypass around Kalispell that has the following goals:

- Relieve traffic congestion in the Central Business District (CBD), especially on Main Street.
- Reduce truck traffic in the CBD.
- Relieve traffic congestion at the intersection of Main Street and Idaho Street.

At the time the FEIS was prepared, the accident rate on US 93 between Somers and Whitefish was higher than the statewide average for similar highways. Accidents were significantly higher in the urban city areas and in areas where there were multiple access points. Safety problems were occurring in the downtown areas from large commercial vehicles mixing with automobiles, bicycles, and pedestrian traffic. This condition continues to contribute to safety issues in the downtown Kalispell area.

In 1994, US 93 operated at a level of service (LOS) D or E in many locations. LOS defines the conditions in terms of speed and travel time, freedom to maneuver, traffic interruptions, comfort, convenience, and safety (A is best and F is worst). LOS D is characterized by

movements that are more restricted and queues and delays occurring during short peaks. LOS E is characterized by delays to all motorists from congestion. 2015 traffic forecasts projected US 93 to lower to LOS F throughout the Kalispell area, with traffic volumes greater than the capacity of the roadway. Capacity issues caused by the large volume of trucks, recreational traffic, and local business traffic in the downtown Kalispell area were an important factor leading to a recommendation to evaluate a bypass around Kalispell, a need that remains valid.

Access points to US 93 were and still are concentrated in the Kalispell city limits, particularly in the downtown area. This concentration continues to lead to congestion and safety issues. The majority of these access points are poorly designed such that there is no opportunity for drivers accessing US 93 to accelerate to higher speeds. Traffic lights on every block in downtown Kalispell further slow traffic and cause congestion. The proposed bypass is still needed to improve these conditions in the downtown area by diverting through traffic around Kalispell.

Economic and social needs were also addressed by including the Kalispell Bypass with the Preferred Alternative. US 93's growing reputation for being a difficult and dangerous driving experience was anticipated to deter some people from visiting, and increased congestion was negatively impacting businesses. This economic condition continues to remain valid, particularly in the downtown Kalispell area. Social needs were addressed by providing provisions for bicycle and pedestrian facilities and reducing barriers created by crossing a busy state highway in downtown.

2.2 Preferred Alternative for the Bypass

The Preferred Alternative selected in the ROD included the Kalispell Bypass Alternative B, which was a rural four-lane facility south of US 2 and an urban four-lane facility with median north of US 2. The Preferred Alternative also included a separated bike path along the bypass south of US 2 and a separated bike path (where feasible) along the bypass north of US 2. The 1994 alignment is depicted in **Figure 1.2**. A general description of the 1994 bypass includes:

Alignment and Location

- At the southern termini, begins just north of US 93 and the Burlington Northern Railroad (BNRR).

- Follows the BNRR alignment north and crossing Airport Road.
- Continues along the BNRR alignment to Foys Lake Road.
- Crosses Foys Lake Road curving west then north to cross US 2 west of the Appleway intersection.
- Extends north of US 2 on a new road alignment through Two Mile Drive area, crossing Two Mile and Three Mile Drives.
- Just south of Two Mile Drive the alignment was shifted during the FEIS process to avoid impacts to the Greenbriar Subdivision.
- Continues to extend north and west to Stillwater Road, then north to Reserve Drive, crossing Four Mile Drive.
- Follows Reserve Drive east to US 93.

Other Design Elements

- South of US 2, the typical section is four 12-foot (3.6-meter) lanes with left-turn lanes as needed at critical intersections.
- Right-of-way to be acquired is sufficient to allow for future implementation of a depressed median.
- Four intersections require major cross-street realignments:
  - Airport Road
  - Sunnyside Drive
  - US 2
  - Reserve Drive and Stillwater Road
- Route signing.
- Virtually all future access rights would be purchased.

Furthermore, the FEIS notes that because of limited funding, the bypass alternative would likely be built as staged construction.

2.3 Impacts And Mitigation

This section summarizes of impacts and mitigation described in the FEIS specifically related to the Kalispell Bypass portion of the Preferred Alternative.

2.3.1 Impacts

Impacts disclosed in the FEIS related to the Kalispell Bypass are summarized in **Table 2.1**.

TABLE 2.1 - SUMMARY OF IMPACTS FROM THE 1994 FEIS (FOR KALISPELL BYPASS ALTERNATIVE ONLY)

RESOURCE	IMPACTS
Transportation	The bypass would accommodate increasing travel demand, relieve congestion on existing US 93 through Kalispell, and decrease overall accident potential.
Land Use	Development currently occurring in the west Kalispell area would continue and be accelerated upon completion of the bypass.
Farmland	Approximately 40 acres (16 hectares) impacted.
Social/Economic	Less through traffic on neighborhood streets. Bypass would have little impact on population growth, but could influence spatial distribution. Highway-related impacts will occur to residences along corridor. Improved mobility would create economic benefits.
Right-of-Way/Relocation	Displacement of three residences, three businesses, and one outbuilding.
Pedestrian/Bicycles	Would provide improved accommodations, relocation of Ashley Creek Trail.
Air Quality	Would meet emissions standards. Projected PM_{10} emissions determined to be lower than the projected emissions from future no build alternative.
Noise	51 receptors impacted.
Water Resources	Potential for increased pollutants and sediment from stormwater runoff.
Wetlands	Approximately 4.2 acres (1.7 hectares) impacted.
Wildlife/Fisheries	Approximately 88 acres (36 hectares) of wildlife habitat converted.
Floodplains	Approximately 9 acres (4 hectares) of floodplain encroachment.
T&E Species	No impacts.
Historic/Cultural	Adverse effect to railroad spur; no adverse effect to McCormack property.
Parks and Recreation	Direct impact to Ashley Creek Trail—relocation required.
Hazardous Waste Sites	Six sites identified that could pose contamination risk.
Visual Quality	Roadway would be a new visual element; visible to adjacent properties
Energy	Reduced congestion would decrease fuel consumption. Construction and maintenance activities would expend fuel.
Implementation	Short-term benefits stemming from construction (e.g., hiring of local construction works, materials purchase). Temporary effects to traffic flow during construction.
Cumulative	Future projects identified.
Section 4(f)	Bypass would use a 0.25-acre (0.1-hectare) portion of the Ashley Creek Trail and a portion of the historic Kalispell-Somers railroad spur.

2.3.2 Mitigation

Section 4(f) Mitigation. The ROD contained commitments to mitigate for unavoidable impacts from the bypass. Commitments for the Section 4(f) use of the Ashley Creek Trail included:

- Purchasing property for and building approximately 2,050 feet (625 meters) of relocated trail generally south of Ashley Creek, just south of US 2.
- Providing an at-grade signalized intersection across the Kalispell Bypass at US 2.
- Providing a grade-separated bike path crossing adjacent to and on the south side of Ashley Creek as it crosses the Kalispell Bypass just south of US 2. Equestrians use would be provided for if possible.
- Connecting the Ashley Creek Trail with the new bike lane along the Kalispell Bypass.
- Providing approximately 5.2 acres (2.1 hectares) of property to Flathead County Parks. This is planned for at least partial use as parking and a trailhead facility to compensate for the approximately 0.25-acre (0.1-hectare) of Section 4(f) land converted from a recreational use. If the appraised value of the replacement land is less than the appraised value of the impacted property, additional property to make up the difference would be provided to Flathead County Parks as replacement property.

Mitigation commitments made in the ROD for the historic Kalispell-Somers Railroad Spur include installation of a historic marker describing the history and significance of the railroad spur.

Other Mitigation. Other mitigation commitments made in the ROD regarding the Kalispell Bypass included:

- Relocation mitigation (under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended).
- Wetland mitigation at two or three "on-site locations" adjacent to the area of impact, with locations to be determined during the final design process.
- Hazardous materials mitigation for Site B6 (Montana Forest Products) which would include excavation and/or land-farming of potentially-contaminated soils in concert with roadway construction (if necessary).
- Construction mitigation to provide adequate safety and convenience to motorists, pedestrians, and construction workers at all times. Also, traffic control plans and public information plan would be prepared.