

## Bell Crossing Roundabout Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### Project Overview

#### Q: What is the Bell Crossing Roundabout Project?

A: The Bell Crossing Roundabout Project is a construction project at the Bell Crossing and US Highway 93 (US 93) intersection north of Victor. A two-lane roundabout has been selected as the design alternative to enhance safety features and improve traffic flow at this location. Construction is anticipated to begin in 2025.

#### Q: Where is the project located?

A: This project is at the intersection of US-93 and Bell Crossing. The map at the right shows this location. 

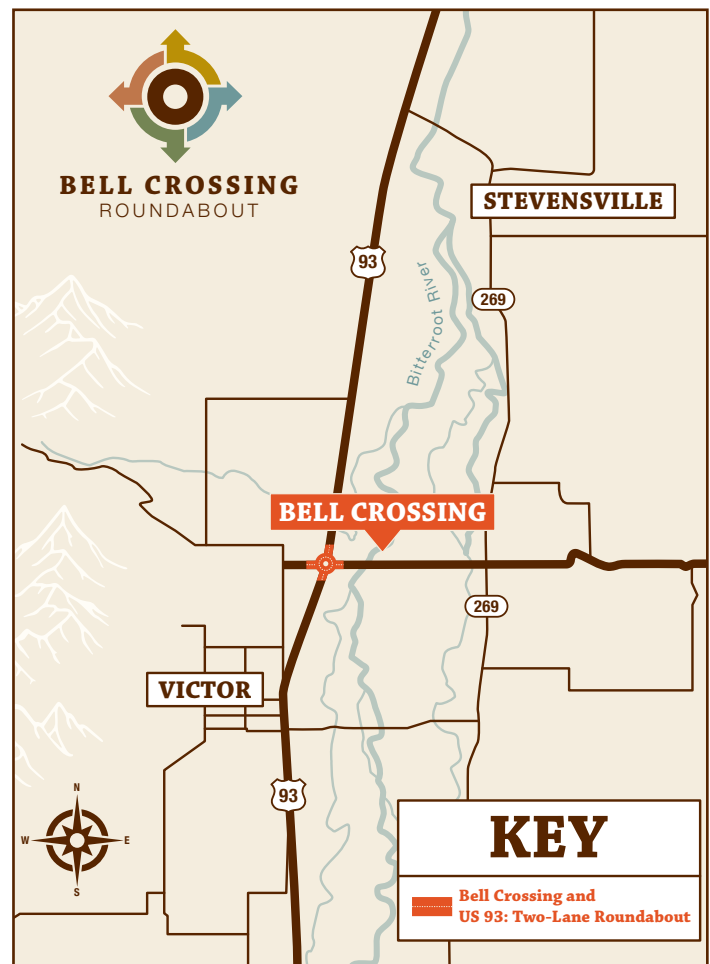
#### Q: Why is the project necessary?

A: Multiple crashes and near misses have occurred at this intersection, requiring upgrades to the existing intersection. MDT has selected the two-lane roundabout design to enhance roadway safety features.

An intersection traffic study has been completed by MDT, which indicates the strong need for safety enhancements. A roundabout has been selected as the safest alternative for this intersection.

#### Q: When will the project be complete?

A: Construction is anticipated to begin in 2025 and will likely be completed early in the 2026 construction season. All timelines are subject to unforeseen factors, such as the availability of contractors, materials, and weather.





## Roundabout at Bell Crossing

### Q: Why would MDT install a roundabout at Bell Crossing?

A: Safety is our top priority and the primary reason a roundabout was selected. We know the existing flashing light isn't enough to alert drivers of the intersection. Roundabouts are a safer alternative to traditional stop signs or signal-controlled intersections. They reduce fatal crashes by about 90%, injury crashes by 75%, and overall crashes by 37%. This largely happens because you can't run a roundabout like you can run a red light at a traffic signal. When approaching a roundabout, drivers are forced to slow down to circulate around the roundabout, thereby nearly eliminating the opportunity for a T-bone collision. Crashes in roundabouts most often are property damage only, which is why we see the encouraging statistics shared above.

At appropriate intersections, roundabouts facilitate smoother traffic flow compared to intersections controlled by traffic signals or stop signs. Roundabouts can reduce congestion and delay by eliminating the need to stop and wait at red lights. Vehicles yield to circulating traffic, enter the roundabout at a controlled speed, and then exit, maintaining a continuous flow that keeps traffic moving efficiently. This continuous movement can result in shorter travel times and reduced fuel consumption, benefiting both drivers and the environment.

For details on general roundabout safety, please visit the webpage:  
[www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/roads/roundabouts/](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/roads/roundabouts/).

### Q: Emergency services use this route. Will a roundabout make it difficult for fire trucks and other large vehicles to safely travel through the corridor?

A: No. The roundabout will be designed for large trucks and first responders. Numerous observations have shown that well-designed roundabouts not only support trucking operations but also add additional benefits unique to truck operators.

Operators often recognize the ease of entering into the roundabout due to the one-way circulating traffic, no longer having to wait for a gap in two-way traffic (particularly in multilane facilities), and very often slowing, not stopping, results in reduced wear and tear on equipment.

When lives are on the line, seconds matter. Roundabouts have been highly effective in other, similar Montana communities in supporting EMS, large loads, and other oversized vehicles.



## **Q: Cyclists and pedestrians also travel this area. Will a roundabout be safe for them?**

A: Roundabouts typically feature designated crosswalks and pedestrian islands, making them safer for pedestrians to navigate than traditional intersections. Pedestrians only need to focus on crossing one direction of traffic at a time, and vehicles entering and exiting the roundabout are generally moving at lower speeds, reducing the risk of crashes involving pedestrians. Additionally, the circular design of roundabouts discourages speeding, further enhancing pedestrian safety.

At this location, the Bell Crossing roundabout project will have a roadway crossing on the western side of Highway 93 for the existing shared-use path.

## **Q: How do you navigate a two-lane roundabout?**

A: A two-lane roundabout is very similar to a single-lane roundabout.

1. As you approach a two-lane roundabout, slow down.
2. Choose the lane you need to travel in based on the exit you need to take.
  - If you plan to turn right, use the right lane.
  - If you plan to travel straight, use either lane.
  - If you plan to turn left, use the left lane.
3. Then, look left and yield to drivers inside the roundabout. Never change lanes once inside the roundabout.
4. Turn your blinker on as you exit the roundabout.

## **Q: Why don't you reduce speeds through the area?**

A: MDT reviewed traffic speeds while assessing the Bell Crossing project. It's clear that a physical change in the roadway is needed to force slower speeds. Often, signage is posted and not followed. We've heard time and time again that drivers "fly through" this corridor. Posting signage and lowering the speed limit doesn't change driving patterns. Safety is our top priority, and a roundabout is the best engineering solution to see speeds truly slow. As such, no proposed regulatory speed reduction is planned at this time. However, the roundabout introduces a natural speed reduction as drivers navigate it between 15 and 20 mph. The Bell Crossing roundabout project will also include traffic calming features to help slow Highway 93 speeds when approaching.

Some often ask more about setting speed limits. If you are interested, please click this link: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/roads/speed-limits.aspx>.



## Timelines & Construction

### Q: When will this project be constructed?

A: In 2024, the project team will select a design-build team, consisting of both the contractor and the consulting design firm, and then work to finalize right-of-way agreements and the two-lane roundabout design.

### Q: How long will construction take?

A: We are still early in the design phase of this project. A contractor will be selected in 2024. That team will be able to provide more accurate updates about construction timelines. Once MDT can coordinate with the contracting team, we will share this information with residents and travelers.

### Q: When will MDT select a contractor?

A: A contractor is likely to be selected in late 2024. This is a design-build project, which means that both the design (engineering) firm and the construction contractor will collaboratively submit plans to MDT. Design-build provides for accelerated timelines and helps ensure that the proposed design can also be well constructed within the schedule. The contractor, designers, subcontractors, and MDT work together as one team to build a project that meets or exceeds outlined specifications.

Once this team is selected, MDT will share this information with the public. Construction is anticipated to begin in the spring or summer of 2025, dependent on the completion of the design and the availability of funding.

### Q: What will construction delays look like?

A: At this time, a traffic control plan still needs to be developed. Once a contractor is on board, MDT will have a better sense of delays, traffic sequencing, and all other construction details. More information will be shared as details are finalized.

## Public Outreach

### Q: Why didn't I get a chance to vote on the selected design?

A: A crash trend has been identified at the Bell Crossing intersection. When that happens, MDT initiates a number of internal processes to determine why crashes are occurring, their severity, and what solutions can best address the specific concerns.



When we had information to share about the Bell Crossing intersection, we began working to disseminate the roundabout design as the best safety solution. This is where we are today. Our work does not solicit voting.

In some planning projects, where multiple, safe solutions are considered, we will ask the community about their preference or what aspects of a project are most important to them. Those points of feedback are then further weighed against the same criteria we used to evaluate Bell Crossing.

The fact is, for this particular location, there is only one design solution for safety at Bell Crossing, and that is a roundabout.

When MDT reviews an intersection to determine if an upgrade is necessary (signal, roundabout, or other), a signal warrant analysis is conducted, which uses nationally accepted warrant criteria that consider traffic volumes and crash history. When the analysis was conducted for this intersection, multiple volume warrants (related to the number of vehicles using the intersection at certain times) were satisfied. Therefore, both the traffic signal and the roundabout alternatives were initially advanced for further consideration. However, from a safety standpoint, the history of several addressable high-speed, right-angle crashes makes the roundabout alternative superior from a safety perspective.

A Restricted Crossing U-Turn (RCUT) alternative was also considered. The RCUT's acceleration/merge features are not cost-effective at this location due to the large right-of-way acquisition needs that would be required. Furthermore, the RCUT is not as effective at reducing crashes as a. Also, the individual approaches onto US 93, both north and south of the Bell Crossing intersection, present additional conflict points that result in diminished safety for high-speed merge lanes.

Best engineering practices show that the roundabout will handle the traffic volume and address the high-speed, high-severity T-bone collision that often involve injuries or, unfortunately, death.

### **Q: Will a public meeting be held?**

A: The project team plans to host an open house this spring. This will be a great forum for community members to share their comments, including feedback and input for the roundabout's actual design.

Those interested in being notified of the meeting are encouraged to sign up for project updates by emailing [Katie@BigSkyPublicRelations.com](mailto:Katie@BigSkyPublicRelations.com) or calling (406) 207-4484.

Information will also be updated on the project webpage:  
<https://mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/bellcrossing/default.aspx>.

### **Q: Many have said they don't want a roundabout. Why would you make that choice?**

A: First and foremost, we are listening, and we do care. MDT has heard from many diverse perspectives in Ravalli County regarding the Bell Crossing project. Some are strongly in favor of a roundabout, and others are not. It is our charge to ensure we design a project that is in the best interest of all users.



We know that roundabouts save lives.

We have implemented many similar configurations across the state and have seen tremendously positive results: a significant reduction in severe injuries and fatalities.

As engineers, we must balance public feedback with known best practices. We are confident that Victor and the surrounding communities will see a net positive benefit after this project is complete.

Safety is our top priority and the primary reason a roundabout was selected. We know the existing flashing light isn't enough to alert drivers of the intersection. Multiple crashes and near misses have occurred in this area, requiring an improved intersection design. MDT has selected the two-lane roundabout design to enhance roadway safety features.

Roundabouts are a safer alternative to traditional stop signs or signal-controlled intersections. They reduce fatal crashes by about 90%, injury crashes by 75%, and overall crashes by 37%. This largely happens because you can't run a roundabout like you can run a red light at a traffic signal. When approaching a roundabout, drivers are forced to slow down to circulate around the roundabout, thereby nearly eliminating the opportunity for a T-bone collision. Crashes in roundabouts most often are property damage only, which is why we see these encouraging statistics.

At appropriate intersections, roundabouts facilitate smoother traffic flow compared to intersections controlled by traffic signals or stop signs. By eliminating the need to stop and wait at red lights, roundabouts can reduce congestion and delay. Vehicles yield to circulating traffic, enter the roundabout at a controlled speed, and then exit, maintaining a continuous flow that keeps traffic moving efficiently. This continuous movement can result in shorter travel times and reduced fuel consumption, benefiting both drivers and the environment.

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### **Q: Do my comments matter?**

A: Yes. We are listening and we do care. MDT is committed to addressing the comments gathered from all in the community to ensure that the proposed roundabout meets the needs of all road users.

Detailed comments are most helpful. When specific feedback is given, MDT is able to dive in fully to address these comments and investigate what can be adjusted in the design or during construction. When residents share that they are either in support or not in support of a project, there isn't more that MDT can do. This feedback isn't necessarily actionable and one person's support or opposition is often canceled out by another roadway user with an opposing view. This is why we do not solicit votes. We must use the best engineering and safety practices and can further refine a design, as appropriate, with actionable suggestions.

Your feedback will be considered as part of the ongoing design process, and we will continue to engage with the community to address any issues or questions that arise.



### **Q: How can I stay updated on this project?**

A: Public participation is highly encouraged in all MDT projects. Please get in touch with Katie Hodge at (406) 207-4484 or via email at [Katie@BigSkyPublicRelations.com](mailto:Katie@BigSkyPublicRelations.com) to sign up for project updates. All are also encouraged to reach out with questions at any point in the process.

## **Budget**

### **Q: How much is this project going to cost?**

A: The total project cost is estimated to be about \$8.5 million, including the design, acquisition of right-of-way, relocation of utilities, and construction of the infrastructure.

### **Q: How is this project being funded?**

A: The project is funded primarily through a combination of federal National Highway (NH) and Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds allocated to Montana, supplemented with a smaller percentage of state funds raised from state fuel tax revenue, which are required to receive federal funding.

### **Q: Are roundabouts more expensive than a signal?**

A: While the construction of roundabouts does require more of an initial financial investment, they offer long-term cost savings compared to traditional signalized intersections. Roundabouts typically have lower maintenance costs due to the lack of signalization hardware and other components prone to wear and tear. Moreover, the safety benefits of roundabouts result in reduced healthcare costs associated with traffic crashes and fewer expenses related to vehicle damage and insurance claims.