

Montana Transportation Commission
Minutes
June 15, 2022

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The Montana Transportation Commission met via Zoom on June 15th the meeting was called to order by Commissioner Frazier at 9:06 a.m. with the following participants:

Tammi Fisher, Commissioner (District 1)
Shane Sanders, Commissioner (District 2)
Loran Frazier, Commissioner (District 3)
Noel Sansaver, Commissioner (District 4) – Excused
Scott Aspenlieder, Commissioner (District 5)
Malcolm Long, MDT
Julie Brown, MDT
Dwane Kailey, MDT
Dustin Rouse, MDT
Jake Goettle, MDT
Chris Nygren, MDT
Lori Ryan, MDT
Ryan Dahlke, MDT
Jim Wingerter, MDT
Bill Fogarty, MDT
Paul Johnson, MDT
Lucia Olivera, FHWA

Dustin Rouse presented Speed Zone Recommendations for the following locations:

1. Montana 200 (P6) – Trout Creek

Sanders County requested MDT review the posted speed limits on MT-200 east of Trout Creek. The request was specifically to lower the speed limit near 3020 Highway 200 due to the presence of a church holding classes for K through 8th grade and other businesses. DOWL performed the study on behalf of MDT.

Summary

This portion of MT-200 was improved in 2020. Typical sections are generally comprised of two 12-foot travel lanes with no shoulders. The speed limit is 35-mph in downtown Trout Creek, with a 55-mph transition zone, and 70-mph speed zone east of town. In 2020, the AADT on MT-200 in Trout Creek was about 1,900 vehicles per day. Heavy vehicles on MT-200 make up about 8% of traffic. Within the study area, commercial development and access density increases west of Park Street. Minimal pedestrian activity was observed within the study area. Within the area of primary concern, the access density is notably higher with two roads that provide access to residential developments. The adjacent land use in this area includes two institutional establishments (one church and one private school/church) and some residential homes.

Observed 85th percentile speeds in the 35-mph speed zone were 7-mph to 10-mph above the posted speed limit. However, the site characteristics match with the existing 35-mph speed limit. Considering the roadside environment (the institutional land use and higher access density) extending the 55-mph speed limit approximately 1,100-feet can be supported even though the 85th percentile speeds near 3020 Highway 200 are between 10-mph and 12-mph higher than the proposed 55-mph speed limit.

No Change to the existing 35-mph speed limit.

A 55-mph speed limit beginning approximately 300-feet east of Park Street (straight-line station 775+50) and continuing east to just north of Washington Drive South (straight-line station 796+00), an approximate distance 2050-feet

Commissioner Aspenlieder moved to approve the to the speed limit recommendation for Montana 200 (P6) – Trout Creek, Commissioner Fisher seconded the motion, all Commissioners voted aye.

2. Montana Highway 82 (P-82) – Somers

Flathead County submitted a request for a speed limit study on Montana Highway 82 between US Highway 93 and Montana Highway 35 for the purpose of reducing the statutory 70-mph speed limit.

Montana 82 was last improved in 2017. The typical sections are comprised of two 12-foot travel lanes (one in each direction) with at least 4-foot shoulders. Shoulder widths increase to about 8-foot for the curves to the west and east of Fennon Way. When crossing the Flathead River bridge, the typical section reduces to two 10-foot wide travel lanes and no shoulder. There are also auxiliary right-turn lanes for School Addition Road and Somers Road and a 14-foot center-left-turn lane between milepost 0.5 and milepost 1.3. Average annual daily traffic volume from 2020 range from about 8,000 vehicles to almost 8,300 vehicles. Over the past 5-years there has been a 25-percent increase in traffic volumes and on average there is a 30-percent increase during the summer months. The roadside environment for MT-82 can be considered rural in nature.

Summary:

The speed profile shows that the prevailing speeds along MT-82 are on average 5-mph below the posted speed limit of 70-mph. Roadway context indicates that a 65-mph speed limit may be slightly elevated above what would be considered reasonable and prudent. There is an elevated crash rate for the length of MT-82 and only 4-foot shoulders for the majority of the roadway. Further reductions to the typical sections occurring at the Flathead River bridge to 10-foot travel lanes and no shoulder support a greater reduction in the speed limit. A 60-mph speed limit is supported contextually and is 5-mph below the average 85th percentile speeds. Flathead County Commissioners support the speed reduction. Their email is attached.

MDT recommends the following speed limits:

A 60-mph speed limit beginning at the intersection with US 93 (straight-line station 4+50) and continuing east to the intersection with MT-35 (straight-line station 366+03.7), an approximate distance of 6.8-miles.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the to the speed limit recommendation for ontana Highway 82 (P-82) – Somers, Commissioner Aspenlieder seconded the motion, all Commissioners voted aye.

3. Continental Drive (U-1807) – Butte

Butte-Silver Bow City-County submitted a request for a speed limit study on Continental Drive from Mount Highland Drive to Nine Mile due a concern about speeds and amount of recreational bicycling in the area. The existing speed limit approved in 2002 is 60- mph.

This portion of Continental Drive (U-1807) was constructed in 1957 and last improved in 2005 through resurfacing. The typical section on this minor arterial is comprised of two 12-foot travel lanes (one in each direction) with 1-foot shoulders. AADT volumes range from 2020 were estimated at approximately 2,000 vehicles in the northern section of the study and at approximately 1,100 in the southern section. These values are 50 to 150 vehicles less than what was recorded in 2019. Adjacent roadside can be considered rural and open with some residential development centralized

around five specific areas. There is an ATV track that runs from approximately Passmore Canyon Road to Mount Highland Drive on both sides of the roadway. Just south of the intersection with Mount Highland Drive in the southbound lane there is a sharrow pavement marking which tells drivers to share the road with bicyclists.

Summary

The speed profile shows that the prevailing speeds along Continental Drive match with the set speed limits. The 85th percentile speeds and upper limits of the pace are on average within ± 2 -mph. Excluding the data near the stop-controlled intersections prevailing speeds are shown to be about 5-mph higher than the posted 60-mph speed limit. The 50th percentile speed along most of the roadway is on average at the posted 60-mph speed limit. The presence of vulnerable road users such as bicyclists introduce a dilemma. A total amount of bicyclists utilizing the highway is unknown, but observations indicated bicyclists for the most part utilize the ATV track running next to the highway and are most active during the morning hours. The existing speed limit is approximately at the 50th percentile speed and bicyclist have a secondary option to riding with motor vehicles except near the stop-controlled intersections. Bicycle signing and pavement markings that raise awareness specific to bicyclist presence on the roadway may be more effective, especially on seasonal routes, for changing driver behavior than a reduction in speeds.

MDT recommends "No Change" to the existing speed limit configuration at this time.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the to the speed limit recommendation for Continental Drive (U-1807) – Butte, Commissioner Aspenlieder seconded the motion, all Commissioners voted aye.

4. Hansen Road (U1820) – Butte

Butte-Silver Bow County submitted a request for a speed limit study for the purpose of lowering the existing posted 35-mph speed limit to 25-mph on Hansen Road.

This portion of Hansen Road (U-1820) was added to the urban highway network in 2005 and last improved by MDT between Beef Trail Road and Washoe Street in 2015. The typical section on this major collector is comprised two 12-foot travel lanes (one in each direction) with varying shoulder widths. The shoulder width starts out at 11-feet near Beef Trail Road allowing for parallel parking on both sides and provides a buffer for pedestrians on the sidewalk. After the intersection with Washoe Street shoulder widths are reduced to 2-feet on the northeastern side of the road and 10-feet on the southwestern side of the road. The 10-foot shoulder is used for parallel parking. Shoulder widths then vary from no shoulder to 2-feet after Wathena Drive until just east of the railroad. East of the railroad crossing shoulder widths are a consistent 3-feet with a sidewalk. AADT volumes from 2020 ranged from an estimated almost 2,800 vehicles on the northeastern section to an estimated 2,400 vehicles on the southeastern segment. Around the intersection of Rowe Road there was an estimated 1,700 vehicles for 2020's AADT. Adjacent roadside can be considered urban on the southwestern side of the roadway. On the northeastern side of the roadway, the roadside environment is primarily open and rural with some residential and institutional development between the intersections of Beef Trail Road and Washoe Street.

Summary

The speed profile shows the prevailing speeds along Hansen Road match with the set speed limits. The 85th percentile speeds and upper limits of the pace are for the most part within 3-mph of the 35-mph and 25-mph posted speed limits. MDT recognizes that the speed limit may be set lower to 25-mph based on the location being within the urban limits of Butte. However, further reduction of existing speed limit is not supported by the speed statistics or roadway context.

The City-County of Butte-Silver Bow concurs with MDT's recommendation of no change. Their email is attached.

Staff recommendations

MDT recommends **"No Change"** to the existing speed limit configuration at this time.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the to the speed limit recommendation for Hanson Road (U1820) Butte, Commissioner Fisher seconded the motion, all Commissioners voted aye.

5. **US 191(P-50) – Gallatin Gateway**

Gallatin County submitted request for a speed limit study along US 191 from the mouth of Gallatin Canyon (Gateway South Road) to Mill Street in Gallatin Gateway. After review in the field and conversations with Gallatin County, it was decided to split the speed study at Cottonwood Road. A second speed study will be completed after completion of the new subdivision and MDT project in 2023. The main concern was the appropriateness of the existing speed limit with the increased amount of development and traffic in the area.

Summary

This portion of US 191 was constructed in 1960 and improved through resurfacing with added left-turn lanes in 2013. The roadway typical section is primarily comprised of two 12-foot travel lanes with 4-foot to 8-foot shoulders. There is an auxiliary passing lane from approximately milepost 71 to milepost 72 and left turn lanes for Little Bear Road and Cottonwood Road. The average annual daily traffic volume was 8,607 for 2019.

Due to the ongoing pandemic effecting traffic volumes 2020 counts were not used. The roadside environment is primarily rural with some residential development. Most of the residential development is located in the subdivisions between Wilson Creek Road and Hawk Hill Road.

The speed profile shows prevailing speed of drivers around the statutory 70-mph speed limit. The 85th percentile and upper limit of the pace are on average right around 70- mph for a prevailing speed. Increases in the prevailing speeds were observed near the mouth of Gallatin Canyon can be attributed to the presence of an auxiliary passing lane. The number of improper passing citations and crashes around the mouth of Gallatin Canyon shows drivers disregard for the speed limit and passing laws. Traffic operation and surrounding environment are primarily rural in the 70-mph speed zone and does not support further reduction in the posted speed limits. A reduction in the existing speed limit would likely cause an increase in disregard for the posted speed limit and the probability for improper passing maneuvers.

Gallatin County concurs with MDT's recommendation. Their letter is attached. MDT recommends **"NO CHANGE"** to the existing speed limit at this time.

Commissioner Fisher moved to approve the to the speed limit recommendation for US 191(P-50) – Gallatin Gateway, Commissioner Sanders seconded the motion, all Commissioners voted aye.

6. **287 (N-8) - Winston**

Broadwater County submitted a request for a speed limit study on US-287 between mileposts 64 and milepost 63 for the purpose of extending the 55-mph school zone speed limit. The public's main concern is the existing 70-mph speed limit within the area of seven turnouts (Broadwater County Transfer Station, Pole Creek Road, State Land Turnout, Several Resident Accesses, and a Field Turnout), wildlife crossing, and limited visibility due to a corner at each end of the area of concern. To determine the viability of extending the existing 55-mph school zone, the study was extended south to milepost 66.

This portion of US-287 was improved in 2011 through resurfacing. Typical sections are primarily comprised of two 12-foot travel lanes with 4-foot shoulders. At the intersection with Main Street

there is a partial right-turn lane and partial acceleration lane. The shoulder widths begin at 6-feet for the first 2,800-feet of the study beginning at milepost 66. Average annual daily traffic (AADT) volume from 2020 was recorded at approximately 5,300 vehicles. There was an observed decrease of approximately 900 vehicles due to the ongoing pandemic. During the summer months traffic volumes are on average 20 percent higher. The roadside environment is primarily open throughout the study area. There are two areas of increased rural development: around the intersection of Main Street and from milepost 63.8 to milepost 63. The Big Bull Bar and Grill, rural fire department, and seasonal Mini Bull Bait shop are around the intersection with Main Street. This area is also the primary bus stop for the community of Winston. Between milepost 63.8 and milepost 63, there are multiple approaches with three approaches for residential homes, an approach for the local transfer station, Pole Creek Road, and two other approaches to vacant land.

Summary

The speed profile provides does not support further reduction to the existing speed limit configuration. Prevailing speeds indicate the existing speed limits are posted below the desired speed of the drivers. Within the statutory 70-mph speed zone the 85th percentile speed was on average 4-mph above the speed limit and 68-percent of drivers were recorded between 4-mph below and 6-mph above the posted speed limit. The 85th percentile speeds in the 55-mph speed zone were 11-mph above the speed limit and approximately 61-percent of all drivers are between 3-mph below and 7-mph above the posted speed limit. Over 50-percent of the observed vehicles were shown to be exceeding the posted speed limits. The roadway context indicates that the speed limits should be set based upon the rounded down 85th percentile. This is due to the shoulders being 4-feet wide instead of 8-feet wide.

The Broadwater County Commissioners recommends extending the 55-mph speed zone. County Commissioners cite “21 accidents from 2018 to 2020”, a “large increase in the number of vehicles”, “several curves”, and “7 turn outs which greatly increases the chance for accidents”. The county commissioners further state “enforcement may be limited due to MHP limitations that is no reason NOT to lower the speed.” Their email is attached.

A letter was also received from two local residents. Bob and Kathy Brekke have property northwest of Cold Creek Ranch Road and request the speed limit be reduced to 55-mph. Their letter is attached.

MDT took several factors into consideration when reviewing the speed limit. There were 21 crashes, but only two resulted in injury and seven involved possible speeding. Of the seven, six were under adverse winter road conditions. Speed limits are set based on dry road conditions. An increase in traffic has been observed but has remained relatively stable over past 5 years. There is adequate sight distance for the curves, but it may be advisable to have maintenance trim some of the trees in the area. Over 50-percent of the observed vehicles were shown to be exceeding the posted speed limits. The commissioners requested 55-mph speed limit is 20-mph below the observed prevailing speeds. Without increased enforcement there is no indication drivers will obey an extended 55-mph speed zone. Furthermore, a study conducted by MDT shows that speed limits set 15-mph or more below the prevailing speeds to possibly increase crashes. However, there was a discrepancy found between the school speed limit set by MDT on February 10th, 2015 and Broadwater County’s school speed limit resolution date February 23rd, 2015. The existing speed zone configuration matches with what MDT recommended and no objections have been recorded from Broadwater County.

There is no school in Winston. The crosswalk at the intersection of Main Street and US 287 was designated a school zone in 2015.

Staff recommendations

Based on these findings MDT recommend “No Change”.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the to the speed limit recommendation for 287 (N-8) – Winston, Commissioner Aspenlieder seconded the motion, all Commissioners voted aye.

7. Montana Avenue (U-5809/S229) Helena

MDT approached Lewis and Clark County and the City of Helena about a possible review of the speed limit on Montana Avenue after receiving multiple correspondences from local residents. The county agreed with conducting a speed study and requested the study extend from Custer Avenue to Lincoln Road. The main area of concern is the transition from the 50-mph speed limit to the 35-mph speed limit. There are desires to reduce the speed limit between this transition point and Sierra Road to 35-mph or 40- mph due to concerns raised by the public.

This portion of Montana Avenue was improved in sections from 2005 to 2019. Montana Avenue is part of the urban highway network (U-5809) and the state secondary highway system (S-229). Both segments are classified as a minor arterial. There are primarily three typical sections: four 12-foot travel lanes (two in each direction) with a center turn lane, two 12-foot travel lanes (one in each direction) with a center turn lane, and two 12- foot travel lanes (one in each direction) without a center turn lane. Shoulder widths vary from no shoulder to a 5-foot shoulder. Pedestrian facilities are present on the east side of the road from Custer to Forestvale Road. There are three striped passing zones north of Crestwood Lane on the Secondary Highway portion of Montana Avenue. No centerline or shoulder rumble strips are present. The sight distance was determined to be adequate because of the roadway being tangent and flat.

Average annual daily traffic volume from 2020 range from about 17,500 vehicles near Custer Avenue to about 3,600 vehicles nearing Lincoln Road. For the most part the 5- year peak AADT was observed in 2019. During the summer months, traffic volumes on average were 14 percent higher.

The roadside environment starts out as urban and then transitions to a more rural setting. Between the intersections of Custer Avenue and Ptarmigan Lane the primary land use is for box stores. North Ptarmigan Lane until Sorenson Road the primary land use is for residential homes in multiple subdivisions. Currently there are small sections on the east between Forestvale Road and Sierra Road that can be classified as rural, but the main rural segment begins north of Sorenson Road and continues to Lincoln Road. The primary land use in the rural segment is agricultural, but there is some residential development.

Summary

A review of the spot speed samples shows there are four unique speed zones. When entering and exiting the 35-mph speed zone there is blatant disregard for the posted speed limit. The 50-mph speed limit has two segments with prevailing based on the

85th percentile and upper limit of the pace speeds within ± 2 -mph and ± 6 -mph of the posted speed limit. Prevailing speeds in the 60-mph speed zone are shown on average to be about 2-mph above the posted speed limit. Roadway context indicates the existing speed limits should be reduced. The typical section for the 35-mph speed zone continues into the existing 50-mph speed zone for a short distance. Extending the 35- mph speed zone north would be advisable. Within the 50-mph speed zone, the first segment has an elevated number of approaches and a sidewalk only on the east side of the roadway. Use of the rounded down 85th percentile and posting a 45-mph speed limit would be advisable. Based on prevailing speeds, the second segment within the 50-mph speed zone should be raised to 55-mph. State statute and engineering judgement indicates raising the speed limit in this area would be ill advised. Within the 60-mph speed zone the typical section consists of 12-foot lanes and no shoulder. Based on these contextual aspects use of the closest 50th percentile speed is advised. The advised 55-mph speed limit is still within 5-mph of the 85th percentile.

Comments were received from the City of Helena and Lewis and Clark County. The city of Helena concurs with the recommendation to extend the 35-mph speed limit just north of Ptarmigan Lane and transition to 45-mph instead of the existing 50-mph speed limit. County staff and the local fire chief have observed that drivers are disregarding the speed limit reductions and believe more attention should be brought to the signs. The local fire chief does not see a need to reduce the posted speed limit. A majority of the county staff agree with the recommendation but

would like to see the 35-mph speed limit extended to the intersection with Valley Forge Road, Mill Road, or Sierra Road and then beginning the 45-mph speed limit until the proposed 55-mph speed limit at the existing 50/60-mph transition point. All three of the Lewis and Clark County Commissioners agree with their staff's comments. A letter was also received from a local resident. Their emails and letter are attached.

MDT would like the commission to be aware of a couple items. Extending the 35-mph speed zone past the proposed location north of Ptarmigan Lane is not supported by the speed statistics, crash data, or any other contextual aspects. Roadway context north of Ptarmigan Lane supports a 45-mph speed limit and instituting a 35-mph speed limit out to Valley Forge Road, Mill Road, or Sierra Road would result in the speed limit being set approximately 15-mph to 19-mph below the prevailing speeds. The proposed 45-mph speed limit is already 5-mph below the prevailing speed to account for the increased access density. Speed reductions of 5-mph because of crash rates or increased conflict points has been shown to reduce the number of fatal, injury, and all crashes. Extending the 45-mph speed limit to the proposed 55-mph speed limit is not supported by the speed statistics, crash data or any other contextual aspects. MDT will admit that including a 2.17-mile 50-mph speed limit segment was not desired, but the prevailing speeds were already observed 5-mph above the posted speed limit. MDT does not recommend posting the speed limit 10-mph below the prevailing speeds. Setting speed limits 10-mph below engineering recommendations are shown to have an increase in the number of fatal and injury crashes.

Staff recommendations

MDT recommend the following speed limits:

A 35-mph speed limit beginning 440-feet north of the intersection with Cedar Street and continuing north to a point 35-meters (115-feet) north of the intersection with Ptarmigan Lane (straight-line station 39+10), an approximate distance of 1.15-miles.

A 45-mph speed limit beginning approximately 35-meters (115-feet) north of the intersection with Ptarmigan Lane (straight-line station 39+10) and continuing north to 34-meters (113-feet) north of Valley Forge Road (straight-line station 55+60), an approximate distance of 1650-meters (1.03-miles).

A 50-mph speed limit beginning approximately 34-meters (113-feet) north of Valley Forge Road (straight-line station 55+60) and continuing north to the existing 50/60-mph transition point (straight-line station 5.1), an approximate distance of 2.17-miles.

A 55-mph speed limit beginning at the existing 50/60-mph transition point (straight-line station 5.1) and continuing north to the intersection with Lincoln Road (straight-line station 7.42), an approximate distance of 2.32-miles.

Commissioner Sanders moved to approve the to the speed limit recommendation for 287 (N-8) – Winston, Commissioner Aspenlieder seconded the motion, all Commissioners voted aye.

8. North Santa Rita Highway (S-213) – Cut Bank

Glacier County Commissioners requested a speed study be performed on Secondary 213, North Santa Rita Highway, from Cut Bank City limits through the community of Santa Rita to milepost 6. The main concern is reducing the 60-mph speed limit through the community of Santa Rita. After a review of the requested study area, it was decided to extend the study from US-2, Main Street, to the intersection with Chalk Butte Road.

Summary

This portion of Santa Rita Highway (S-213) was improved in 2013 and 2015. Typical sections are primarily comprised of two 12-foot travel lanes with no shoulder. There are 5-foot shoulders between milepost 0 and milepost 1 and 2.5-foot shoulders from milepost 7 to the end of the study. The study begins with a 25-mph speed limit and continues north transitioning to 40-mph, 50-mph, then 60-mph through Santa Rita. After passing the census-designated place of Santa Rita the

speed limit increases to the statutory speed limit of 70-mph. Average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes from 2020 were estimated around 1,250 vehicles from Cut Bank to the community of Santa Rita.

After Santa Rita estimated AADT traffic volumes dropped to around 600 vehicles. Within the past five years AADT has been on average decreasing. It should be noted that traffic volumes on average were 40 percent higher during the summer months. The roadside environment for the most part can be described as rural and open. There are some clusters of rural residential development upon leaving Cut Bank and around the area of Santa Rita.

The speed profile does not support further reduction to the existing speed limits. The 85th percentile speeds and upper limits of the pace are for the most part 10-mph above the posted 25-mph speed limit, within ± 3 -mph of the 50-mph and 70-mph speed limits, and within ± 4 -mph of the 60-mph speed limit. No contextual aspects of the roadway point towards further reduction in the posted speed limit. Experience shows a reduction in the speed limit would be an artificial attempt to change driver behavior and would be unsuccessful without increased enforcement.

Glacier County Commission concurs with MDT's recommendation. Their email is attached.

Staff recommendations
MDT recommends "NO CHANGE"

Commissioner Aspenlieder moved to approve the to the speed limit recommendation for North Santa Rita Highway (S-213) cut Bank, Commissioner Sanders seconded the motion, all Commissioners voted aye.

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.