Chapter 8 Corridor Study Conclusion

The segment of US 93 from RP 56.5 to RP 63.0 was evaluated at a planning level to obtain a better understanding of the corridor needs, objectives, constraints and opportunities, and to determine what alternate alignment(s), if any, could be pursued. Potential alternate alignments for US 93 were evaluated by reviewing all existing engineering and known environmental resource information and soliciting input from the community, stakeholders, and resource agencies. Eleven potential alignments were established to address the needs and objectives for the US 93 corridor. These alignments are recognized as various alternate routes that have the potential to be developed to satisfy the long-term needs of US 93. The development and locations of these potential alignments are best considered in terms of general corridor "swaths".

A screening process was completed to provide qualitative and quantitative analysis of potential alignments. Through this process, the eleven alignments were screened down to five. Community input, coupled with direction from the TOC, led to slight modifications of the five selected alignments to form three hybrid alignments in order to minimize residential impacts. The three hybrid alignments were the southern bridge crossing hybrid alignment, northern bridge crossing hybrid alignment, and modified EIS Alignment 6. For informational purposes, an operational analysis was performed to evaluate the shift in thru-truck traffic, intersection level of service, travel time, and costs. Subsequent to the screening process and the operational analysis, the modified EIS Alignment 6 was dropped from further consideration. Reasons for eliminating the modified EIS Alignment 6 were the greater potential to disturb undeveloped land (as compared to the other two), and the high degree of public opposition to the route.

The conclusion of the corridor study is that either the southern bridge crossing hybrid alignment or the northern bridge crossing hybrid alignment are suitable for development as an alternate alignment to US 93. Both alternate alignments would satisfy the needs and objectives for the US 93 corridor. Design activities and determination of roadway configurations are not part of the pre-NEPA/MEPA Corridor Planning process.

Of particular note, however, is the local partners' support for pursuing improvements to the existing US 93 corridor before contemplating and/or pursuing an alternate route. Based on all the available information, local community representatives sitting on the TOC have expressed their preference for revitalization of the existing US 93 before considering an alternate route any further. Although the conclusion of this study is that two alignments may be recommended as an alternate route, it will ultimately be the responsibility of the local stakeholders to continue the discussion on whether they believe an alternate route is needed.

If improvements are ultimately made on the existing US 93, the local community representatives have indicated their desire for planning for amenities to supplement any needed geometrical improvements. These amenities may include:

- Bicycle facilities,

- Pedestrian facilities,
- Raised medians,
- Appropriate lighting, and
- Heightened wayfinding/signage.

Information contained in this corridor study can be used to document why certain alignments were removed from consideration. As funding becomes available, MDT in cooperation with the study partners may elect to enter into the next phase of project development.

8.1 Next Steps

The ability to develop a US 93 alternate route project is a function of the availability of existing and future federal, state, local, and private funding sources. At the current time, there is no funding identified to begin the process of implementing a new alternate route to existing US 93. Either the northern or southern route may be recommended. However, as part of any alignment discussion through or around Polson, the existing US 93 corridor will need to be considered as an option. To continue the development of these alignments as alternate route(s), the following steps will be needed:

- Identify and secure a funding source or sources, and
- Preserve the corridor surrounding the route(s).

Should this corridor study lead to a project (or projects), compliance with NEPA (if federal funding is utilized) and MEPA (regardless of funding source) will be required. Further, this corridor study will be used as the basis for determining the impacts and subsequent mitigation for the selected alignment in the future NEPA document. Any project (or projects) developed will need to be in compliance with CFR Title 23 Part 771 and ARM 18, sub-chapter 2 which sets forth the requirements for documenting environmental impacts on highway projects.