

Chapter 3 Consultation, Coordination and Community Involvement

An important goal of the US 93 Polson Corridor Planning Study process was to have ongoing community involvement. Education and community outreach were an essential part of achieving this goal. A Public Participation Plan (Appendix C) was developed to identify community involvement activities needed to gain insight and build consensus about existing and future corridor needs. The purpose of the Public Participation Plan was to ensure a proactive community participation process that provides opportunities for the community to be involved in all phases of the corridor study process.

3.1 Informational Meetings

The purpose of the first informational meeting was to inform the community on the corridor study and gather community input on the existing conditions and concerns within the corridor. The purpose of the second informational meeting was to inform the community on the progress of the study and present potential US 93 alternate routes addressing safety and environmental concerns based on needs presented by the community, study partners, and resource agencies. A third and final informational meeting presented the findings of the corridor study and solicited comments from the community on the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report.

3.1.1 Meeting Description and Context

The first informational meeting for the US 93 Polson Corridor Study was held on Thursday, September 9, 2010, from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm at the Polson City Library. A total of 76 members of the community were in recorded attendance at this first informational meeting. This number does not include individuals on the Technical Oversight Committee (TOC).

The second informational meeting for the US 93 Polson Corridor Study was held on Thursday, February 24, 2011, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at the Polson High School Auditorium. A total of 38 members of the community were in recorded attendance at this second informational meeting. This number does not include individuals on the TOC.

The third and final informational meeting for the US 93 Polson Corridor Study was held on Wednesday, June 29, 2011, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm, at the Polson High School Auditorium. A total of 35 members of the community were in recorded attendance at this final meeting. This number does not include individuals on the TOC.

3.1.2 Community Notification

Display ads within the *Char-Koosta News*, *Polson Lake County Leader*, and the *Kalispell Daily InterLake* announced informational meetings both three weeks and one week prior to the meeting. The ads announced the meeting location, time, date, meeting format, meeting purpose, and locations where documents may be reviewed. News releases were submitted to the *Char-Koosta News*, *Polson Lake County Leader*, *The Valley Journal*, *The Missoulian*, *Kalispell Daily InterLake*, and *Flathead Beacon*. The newspapers published the news releases at their discretion. Additional notification was sent via email

to interested individuals who provided contact information by participating in informational meetings and/or provided written comments on the study. Copies of approved meeting announcements are contained within Appendix A – Consultation, Coordination and Community Involvement.

3.1.3 Meeting Format

The first informational meeting began with a two-hour open house. The open house provided an opportunity for the community to interact one-on-one with the study team and provide input on the corridor issues and concerns. A formal PowerPoint presentation followed the open house which introduced the corridor planning study, allowed attendees to ask questions, and allowed attendees to solicit input on the existing conditions and concerns within the corridor. The presentation provided an overview of the corridor planning process and the history of the US 93 Polson corridor. Graphics showing known environmental resources and potential constraints within the corridor study boundary were displayed to present potential areas of concern throughout the corridor. After the formal presentation, an opportunity was given for the community to ask questions and provide comments regarding the corridor.

The second informational meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation reviewing conditions and characteristics of the existing corridor and presenting the needs and objectives of the corridor. Additionally, 11 potential alternate routes were presented based on the 1996 FEIS and Quantm software. After the presentation, an opportunity was provided for the community to ask questions and provide comments.

The third and final informational meeting was not equipped with a screen, so a PowerPoint presentation was not utilized, but instead, large display boards were used throughout the presentation. The presentation highlighted the results of the screening process, and explained the recommendations contained in the corridor study. The outcome of the screening process and consideration of other information resulted in two potential alternate routes that may be recommended for future consideration, should funding become available. However, as part of any alignment discussion through or around Polson, the existing US 93 corridor will need to be considered as an option. After the presentation, the community provided questions and input.

3.1.4 Issues and Comments by the Community

Following the PowerPoint presentation at the first information meeting, questions and discussion items were recorded. A detailed list of questions and discussion topics is present in the meeting minutes contained in Appendix A. Questions and discussion topics evolving from the meeting are summarized below:

- Traffic considerations such as peak summer traffic and vehicle types should be made.
- Analyze new and 1996 FEIS alignments, including a two-way couplet.
- Comments arose regarding information available to the public and the commenting process.

- Consider impacts to economics, bridges, wildlife, access points, connectivity to parks, bicycle/pedestrians, etc.
- Consider adding additional entities to the list of stakeholders.
- Look into soils classifications and flooding frequency (occasional/frequent).

A summary of the discussion items evolving from the second informational meeting are presented below. A detailed list of comments and questions/answers is provided in Appendix A on the CD.

- Issues and constraints were identified including the railroad tracks, transfer station, pump station, and noise pollution and exhaust from truck traffic in residential neighborhoods.
- Lake County has extensive geographic information system (GIS) information available for use.
- Quantm generated new bridge crossing locations and these alignments on the map are approximately 300 feet in width. They are preliminary “swaths”.
- The community asked that the following list be taken into consideration: Improvements along 7th Avenue, the area from Cougar Ridge west to the hospital, access control, the approved Super WalMart property, and a couplet.
- Negative economic impacts resulting from a “bypass”.
- Questions were asked about the corridor study process, cost of an alternate route, next steps including the NEPA/MEPA process, availability of information, the influence of Tribal Trust and Tribal Lands, a do-nothing option, the public’s influence, and funding.
- Property values are impacted.
- Do Polson businesses rely on thru-traffic or passers-by? Or do businesses rely on destination traffic?
- Look at the 1910 Bridge location.

The questions and input resulting from the third and final informational meeting are summarized below:

- Commenters noted that traffic volumes have increased in the past 8 years and have also increased due to the aquatic center and shops. Traffic volumes would decrease at the museum if an alternate route were implemented.
- MT 35, Kerr Dam Road, and Back Road are seeing increased truck traffic.
- Consideration should be given to alleviate the increase in traffic near MT 35 and US 93.
- The potential negative impacts to 4(f) properties, homes, and farms along Kerr Dam Road and Ponderilla Hills Subdivision were noted. 4(f) properties are important when Federal funding is used for construction.

- Commenters asked about the final design issues such as potential grade issues on Kerr Dam Road, turn lanes needed for safety, right-of-way needed, and the location of an alternate route within current easements.
- Support was voiced for improvements to US 93. The flexibility for US 93 to transition from a 3-lane section to a 5-lane section, or vice versa was noted.
- Commenters asked if the existing bridge met design standards and if a second bridge near Glacier Bank has been considered.

3.2 Stakeholder Involvement

A stakeholder contact list was developed to include individuals, businesses, or groups identified by the TOC and community based on their knowledge of the study area and their usage within the study area.

The intent of developing the stakeholder list was to identify individuals and groups to actively seek out and engage in the various phases of the study. The following groups or businesses were included in the initial list, and study newsletters were sent out to each group as they were developed:

- CSKT Tribal Council
- City of Polson
- Lake County Commissioners
- Lake County Planner
- Polson Chamber of Commerce
- Polson Airport
- Polson K-12 School District
- Downtown Chamber of Commerce
- US 93 User's Group
- Water User's Group (Flathead Lake and Flathead River)
- Flathead Irrigation District
- Polson Bike Group
- Lake County Community Development
- Tribal Law and Order
- Tribal Fish and Wildlife
- Office of Emergency Management

- Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)
- County Fire Departments and Emergency Medical Personnel
- County Sheriff and Montana State Highway Patrol
- Montana Trucker's Association
- Interested Landowners
- Employers:
 - *KwaTaqNuk Resort*
 - *St. Joseph Medical Center*
 - *Businesses along US 93*

3.3 Resource Agency Workshop

A resource agency workshop was held on September 30, 2010. The resource agency workshop was held to introduce the US 93 Polson Corridor Study process and gather resource agency concerns regarding resources that could be affected by potential alternate routes. Each agency was sent an *Environmental Scan Report*, newsletter, and study area boundary map prior to the meeting to ensure adequate preparation for further discussion. The agencies involved in this meeting included MDT, FHWA, CSKT, Tribal Preservation Office, Lake County, City of Polson, DEQ, EPA, MFWP, and USACE.

The meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation containing an overview of the pre-NEPA/MEPA corridor study process, a summary of the community involvement at the first informational meeting, and an introduction to the resource areas potentially impacted. Following the presentation, there was an opportunity for specific discussion on resource areas that the agencies considered needed further investigation and addressing. Meeting notes from this meeting can be found in Appendix A.

3.4 Other Community Involvement Efforts

Three newsletters were produced to describe the corridor study process, potential alignments, the screening process, and the results from the screening process, and can be found in Appendix A. In addition to mailing each newsletter to the identified stakeholders, the newsletters were also made available as handouts during informational meetings and at the following locations:

- Polson City Hall
- Lake County Planning Department
- CSKT Tribal Land Use Planning Office
- Polson City Library
- MDT District 1 Office – Missoula

- MDT Area Office – Kalispell
- MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section Office – Helena

A website was established to provide up-to-date information regarding the study as well as an opportunity for the community to provide comments on the study. The website www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/polsoncorridorstudy was maintained by MDT.

On December 9, 2010, the consultant project manager had the opportunity to meet with the Polson Chamber of Commerce membership. There were approximately 36 members in attendance. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Chamber to learn about the corridor planning process and also ask questions and identify concerns within the corridor.

On April 21, 2011, the consultant project manager attended the CSKT Tribal Council meeting. The meeting was an opportunity to present the outcome of the screening process.