



The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and its partners, Schellinger Construction and DJ&A Engineering, are collaborating on the Reserve Drive: Hutton Ranch Road to Whitefish Stage Road design-build project. MDT performed a detailed noise analysis for this project, due to the planned addition of two traffic lanes and other significant changes to the roadway. The purpose of the analysis was to evaluate existing traffic noise and predict future sound levels of vehicles traveling on the improved roadways. The noise analysis was conducted in 2024 by Big Sky Acoustics (BSA) and evaluated the impact on residences and businesses, specifically houses adjacent to West Reserve Drive.

BSA's analysis identified 71 noise-sensitive receptors, or locations, such as a backyard, along the project corridor. BSA predicted traffic sound levels for existing conditions and compared these to a No Build and a Build Alternative. Five traffic noise impacts were predicted in 2024, compared with a small increase to nine traffic noise impacts projected with a No Build Alternative in the design year of 2044. A design year is calculated by adding 20 years to the initial construction date and helps anticipate future travel demands and estimate probable traffic volume along the project corridor. With the completion of the Reserve Drive project (Build Alternative), 13 traffic noise impacts are predicted in 2044. This is not considered a significant increase in noise impact from the project.

To complete the analysis, BSA used the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)-approved Traffic Noise Model (TNM) computer software, which is a regulatory tool that predicts and analyzes highway traffic noise, specifically for state transportation agencies. BSA completed two sound level measurements across the project area to determine the typical noise levels and provide baseline data for the TNM software. MDT policy is to identify a noise impact wherever traffic noise is expected to approach 66 decibels, or if there is a 13 decibel increase from the present year (2024) compared to the design year (2044).



MDT's decision to provide noise mitigation, such as a noise wall, depends on whether it is deemed feasible and reasonable. Several factors are considered, including the distance of the impacted area from the road, the number of residences that will receive benefits from noise reduction efforts, and cost-effectiveness. MDT purchased several Right-of-Way parcels on the north side of West Reserve Drive to accommodate additional traffic lanes for this project. Due to noise analysis results, additional right-of-way acquisitions, and utility relocation and cost, a noise wall was deemed not feasible or reasonable.

In conclusion, the study found that there will not be a significant increase in noise levels with the addition of two roadway lanes from the existing conditions. Regardless of whether the project is constructed or not, traffic noise impacts are predicted due to existing and future traffic on West Reserve Drive. MDT did not deem it reasonable or feasible to include a noise wall in the project scope.

While road construction may cause some temporary noise impacts, the contractor will comply with all applicable noise, construction, and equipment requirements.



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