



US 93
Polson-Somers

Corridor Study Report



Prepared for:



Montana Department of
Transportation

Prepared by:



Robert Peccia &
Associates

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Montana Department of Transportation

Jackson Lang – Planning
Mitch Buthod – Planning
Vicki Crnich – Planning
Carol Strizich – Planning
Bob Vosen – Missoula District
Joel Boucher – Missoula District
Ben Nunnallee – Missoula District
Rebecca Anderson – Missoula District
Justun Juelfs – Maintenance
Jon Burnett – Traffic and Safety
Joe Zody – Traffic and Safety
Shane Talley – Environmental Services
John Heinley – Environmental Services

Federal Highway Administration

Katie Potts – Statewide & Urban Planner
Jeff Patten – Operation Engineer (Missoula District)

Lake County

Bill Barron – County Commissioner

Flathead County

David Prunty* – Public Works Director
Beth Kappes – County Engineer

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

Richard Janssen* – Natural Resources Dept. Director
Scott Johnston* – Roads Program Manager
Whisper Camel-Means* – Fish, Wildlife, Recreation and Conservation Manager
Chauncey Means* – Environmental Protection Manager

CONSULTANT TEAM

This plan was developed by consulting firms Robert Peccia and Associates (RPA) and Ethnotech with contributions from the following team members:

Robert Peccia and Associates

Scott Randall, PE, PTOE – Senior Advisor
Sarah Nicolai, PE, PTP – Project Manager
Kerry Lynch, PE, RSP2B – Safety Eng./Trans.Planner
Shane Forsythe, PE, PTOE – Traffic Engineer
April Gerth, PE – Senior Advisor
Mike Johnson, PE – Senior Design Team Leader
Ashley Schuler, EI – Engineering Designer
Rebekah Rongo, ASLA – GIS Mapping

Ethnotech

David Schwab – Principal Investigator
Alex Schwab – GIS Professional

Numerous individuals contributed to the successful completion of this study. The following people offered guidance, support, and technical expertise throughout its duration.

RESOURCE AND REGULATORY AGENCIES

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

Vernon Finley – Kootenai Culture Committee
Patricia Courchane – Social Services
Justin McCollum – 87A Field Technician
Craig Pablo – 87A Field Technician
Evan Smith – Water Quality Regulatory Specialist
Blair Libby – Wetlands Conservation Plan Coordinator

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Tim McNew – Project Manager
Jeremy Andersen – Project Manager
Nathan Green – CSKT Liaison

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Jason Garber – Stream Protection Coordinator

STAKEHOLDERS

Flathead County

Pete Melnick – County Administrator
Erik Mack – Planning Director
Larissa Van Riet – Planner

Lake County

Tiffani Murphy – Planning Director

City of Polson

Ed Meece – City Manager

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

Janet Camel – Planning Director
Velda Shelby – Economic Development Dept. Director
Alfred Bigby – Tribal Lands Dept. Director

**Indicates an Advisory Committee member who also participated in agency and stakeholder coordination activities.*



ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS

AC.....	Advisory Committee
ADA.....	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADT.....	Average Daily Traffic
BIL.....	Bipartisan Infrastructure Law
BUILD.....	Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development
CMAQ.....	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality
CSKT.....	Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
CWA.....	Clean Water Act
DUI.....	Driving Under the Influence
ESA.....	Endangered Species Act
FHWA.....	Federal Highway Administration
FLAP.....	Federal Lands Access Program
FSA.....	Fire Service Area
HSIP.....	Highway Safety Improvement Program
ITS.....	Intelligent Transportation Systems
LWCF.....	Land and Water Conservation Fund
MACI.....	Montana Air and Congestion Initiative Program
MDEQ.....	Montana Department of Environmental Quality
MDT.....	Montana Department of Transportation
MDNRC.....	Montana Department of National Resources and Conservation
MEPA.....	Montana Environmental Policy Act
MFWP.....	Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
MPH.....	Miles Per Hour
MSWP.....	Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage
MUTCD.....	Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices
MWTP.....	Montana Wildlife & Transportation Partnership
MWTSC.....	Montana Wildlife and Transportation Steering Committee
NBI.....	National Bridge Inventory
NEPA.....	National Environmental Policy Act
NGO.....	Non-Governmental Organization
NH.....	National Highway Performance Program
NHS.....	National Highway System
NRHP.....	National Register of Historic Places
NSFLTP.....	Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects
NRCS.....	Natural Resources Conservation Service
PHB.....	Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon
PMT.....	Project Management Team
RAISE.....	Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity
RFD.....	Rural Fire District
RP.....	Reference Post
RPA.....	Robert Peccia and Associates
RRFB.....	Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon
SHPO.....	State Historic Preservation Office
SIAP.....	Systems Impact Action Process
SOC.....	Species of Concern

ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS

SUP	Shared Use Path
TA	Transportation Alternatives
TDM	Transportation Demand Management
THPO	Tribal Historic Preservation Office
TWLT	Two-Way Left-Turn Lane
USACE	US Army Corps of Engineers
USEPA	US Environmental Protection Agency
USFWS	US Fish and Wildlife Service
VMS	Variable Messaging Sign
VSL	Variable Speed Limits
WCPP	Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

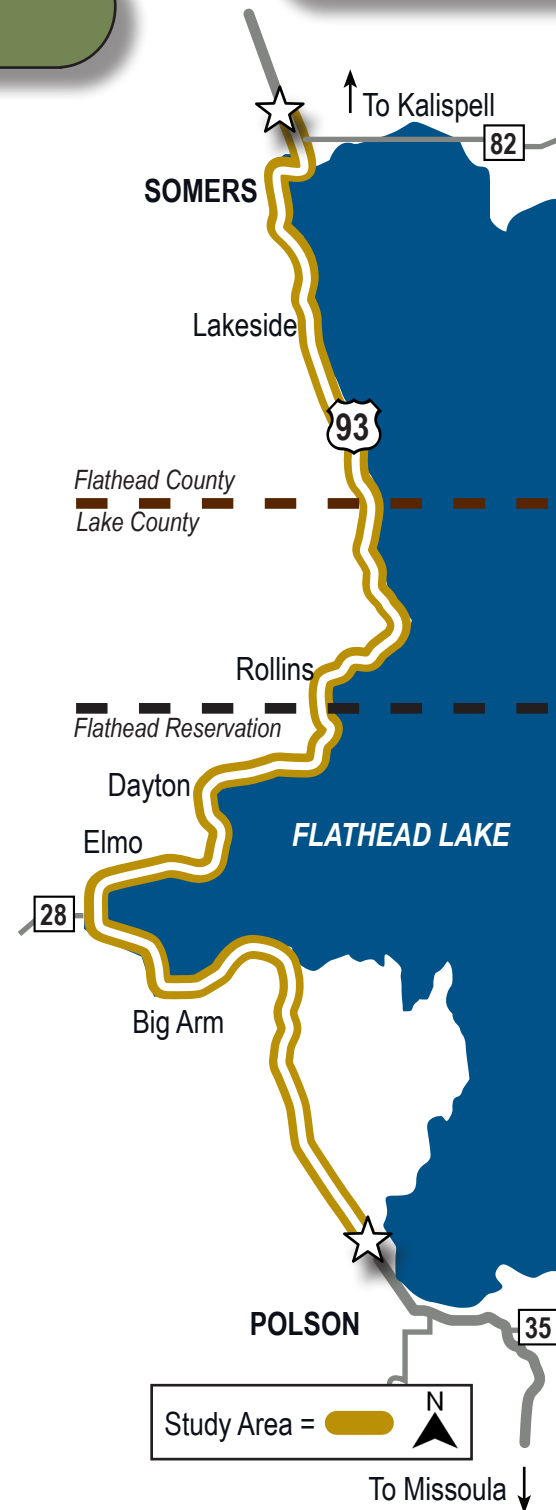
The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has completed the *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study*, a long-range plan for managing the highway through feasible improvements. The study involved collaboration with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), local jurisdictions, various stakeholders, and the public. A subsequent component was to develop an updated *Access Management Plan*, intended to help enhance roadway safety, functionality, and compatibility with future development.

The study followed MDT's planning guidelines, evaluating existing conditions, projected growth, traffic operations, safety, and environmental impacts. It identified short- and long-term recommendations to address the corridor's needs through 2045, ensuring informed funding decisions for future project development.

The study area spans US 93 from north of Polson to north of Somers, following the western edge of Flathead Lake, passing through Lake County and Flathead County and crossing the Flathead Reservation. The corridor is a vital route in the National Highway System (NHS), linking Missoula and Kalispell, while also serving as a popular scenic route and access point for recreational activities. Local communities, alongside growing commuter, tourist, and commercial traffic, face challenges in balancing infrastructure needs with environmental and cultural preservation. This study builds on past planning efforts and provides a foundation for sustainable development along the corridor.

TRIBAL, AGENCY, AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study* incorporated extensive public, agency, and Tribal engagement to ensure broad participation and gather input from stakeholders. The study team employed multiple engagement methods during the study, including website updates, interactive commenting maps, event announcements, and email updates to a contact list of stakeholders and interested members of the public. Additionally, targeted outreach was conducted to encourage meaningful input and dialogue with agencies, stakeholders, and the public. The following activities helped the study team identify areas of concern and evaluate corridor improvements.





STUDY OVERSIGHT AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

- ✓ **Project Management Team:** Regular meetings kept the study on track with status updates and task reviews.
- ✓ **Advisory Committee:** Key MDT representatives and stakeholders met regularly to review deliverables and guide the process.
- ✓ **Tribal Coordination:** MDT collaborated with the CSKT Tribal Council and Elders to ensure that cultural and historical concerns were addressed.
- ✓ **Resource Agencies:** Meetings with agencies like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks helped confirm resources and identify mitigation measures.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- ✓ **Website & Interactive Maps:** A study website provided a hub for updates, and interactive maps gathered public feedback on the corridor.
- ✓ **Stakeholder Outreach:** A Safety Summit was organized to involve local safety stakeholders in the identification of safety concerns. The event was poorly attended so key stakeholder groups were specifically contacted and invited to participate in focused discussions with the study team.
- ✓ **Public Informational Meetings:** Two sets of in-person and virtual meetings were held to inform the public and collect input throughout the study development. Extensive outreach through media and direct invitations was conducted to encourage participation.



Feedback collected throughout the study process reflected a common goal to **enhance safety and traffic flow** while preserving the region's character. These concerns and recommendations helped inform the development of improvements for the corridor.



ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The study conducted a high-level analysis of physical, biological, social, and cultural resources within the study area to identify resources that may be affected by potential future improvements arising from the *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study*. Key findings from this effort are summarized below.

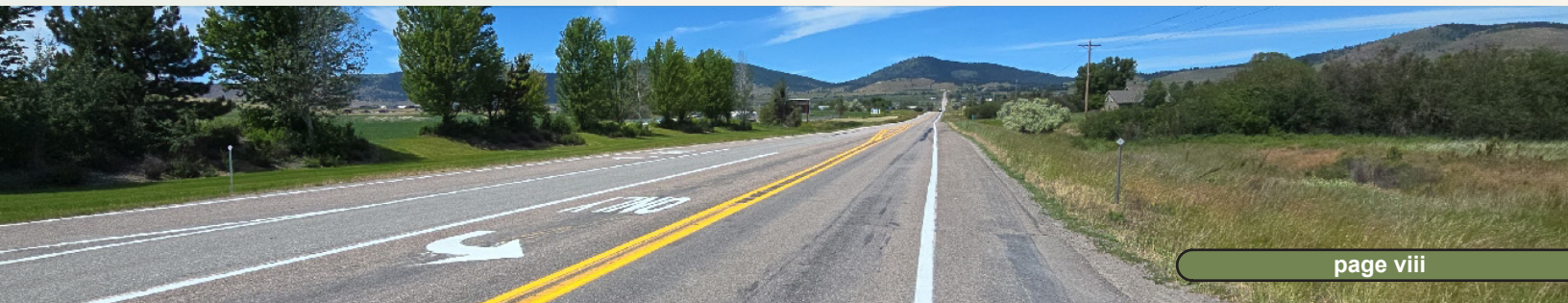


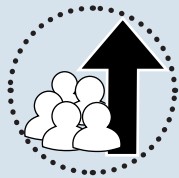
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

- ✓ Nearly 40 species of **invasive and noxious weeds** are present within the study area.
- ✓ Flathead Lake and the lands surrounding the US 93 corridor provide forested and riverine **habitat for a variety of wildlife species** including large ungulates, carnivores, small mammals, raptors, amphibians, reptiles, and aquatic species.
- ✓ The adjacent Salish Mountains provide suitable habitat for elk, black bear, and deer while also playing a role in maintaining **habitat connectivity** for wide-ranging wildlife species.
- ✓ There is concern for **wildlife-vehicle conflicts** due to wildlife habitats in proximity to US 93 and the increasing number of carcasses collected along the highway.
- ✓ Canada lynx, grizzly bear, wolverine, bull trout, monarch butterfly, and Spalding's catchfly are **listed species, or candidates to be listed, under the Endangered Species Act**. Grizzly bears have been observed throughout the study area. Flathead Lake provides **critical habitat** for bull trout. Several other Montana species of concern have also been observed in the study area.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- ✓ Some lands adjacent to the US 93 corridor are publicly held by **State, Federal, and Tribal agencies**. About 23 miles of the study corridor traverse the **Flathead Reservation**. Several conservation easements exist near or adjacent to the study corridor.
- ✓ The study area contains some soils classified as prime **farmland**, prime farmland if irrigated, and farmland of local or Statewide importance that may be subject to protections.
- ✓ The US 93 study area is in a moderate to high **seismic risk** zone. Seismic history suggests that larger earthquakes of higher magnitudes occur infrequently (every ten to 15 years).
- ✓ US 93 generally follows the western shore of **Flathead Lake** throughout the study area and crosses several perennial, fish-bearing **streams**, additional unnamed streams, and **wetlands**.
- ✓ Flathead Lake is listed as **impaired** due to mercury and polychlorinated biphenyl contamination from various municipal sources, dam impacts, and atmospheric deposition.
- ✓ High **groundwater** may be locally present near drainages; however, elevated groundwater is not anticipated to be a widespread problem within the study corridor. There are 32 public water supply wells and six water and sewer districts within the study area.
- ✓ **Flooding** in the Flathead Watershed is generally constrained to rivers and streams since Flathead Lake water levels are regulated through the use of dams.
- ✓ There are two unresolved **hazardous waste** release sites, two priority remediation response sites, 16 active underground storage tanks, two unresolved petroleum tank release sites, one permitted opencut mine, and one landfill drop off site within or near the study corridor.
- ✓ The study corridor is currently outside the Kalispell and Polson **air quality** non-attainment areas.
- ✓ Residences and Section 4(f)/Section 6(f) properties in the study area are **sensitive noise receptors**, which could be affected by future roadway improvements.





AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

- ✓ Between 1970 and 2020, Flathead County and Lake County have seen a 150 percent **population increase** with Kalispell's population doubling in that timeframe.
- ✓ From 2010 to 2020, Flathead County and Lake County experienced significant **population growth**, with a collective increase of 13 percent, bringing their combined estimated population to over 135,000 residents. Approximately 50 percent of this population resides in unincorporated areas, while the remaining 50 percent resides in urban centers such as Kalispell and Polson.
- ✓ Lake County has a higher percentage of individuals classified as American Indian compared to Flathead County and Census designated places in the corridor (22.1 percent) while Lindisfarne has a notably **older population**, with 40 percent aged 65+.
- ✓ Most workers in the study area **commute by personal vehicle**. Carpooling is most common in Lake County (13.2 percent) while walking to work is highest in Lakeside (6.4 percent). Workers in Lakeside generally have slightly longer commute times compared to other areas.
- ✓ The **tourism and outdoor recreation industries** play a very important economic role in the region.
- ✓ **Median household income** ranges from \$55,000 to \$135,000. **Unemployment** is lowest in Lakeside (0 percent) and highest in Lake County (6.5 percent).



The study area is popular for **tourism and outdoor recreation industries** such as: sailing, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, water skiing, wildlife viewing, bird watching, camping, hiking, and photography.



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

- ✓ The US 93 corridor provides direct access to Flathead Lake, multiple parks, and many other **recreation areas**, which may be subject to Section 4(f) protections.
- ✓ Four State Parks, all subject to protections under Section 6(f), are located adjacent to the study corridor or are readily accessible via the highway.
- ✓ A total of 34 **cultural resource sites** have been previously documented within the study corridor. Of these, 11 are not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, seven are eligible, three are potentially eligible, two are already listed, and 11 are of unknown status. Some unknown eligibility sites may represent highly sensitive Tribal heritage properties with potential for buried archaeological deposits.
- ✓ Three areas of **heightened sensitivity for cultural resources** were identified, including US 93 through Elmo (Reference Post [RP] 76 to RP 78), Dayton (RP 80 to RP 84), and Rollins (RP 87.5 to RP 90).

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

A field review and online review of as-built drawings, public databases, and other resources was conducted to identify existing transportation conditions within the study corridor. Key findings from this effort are summarized below.



PHYSICAL FEATURES

- ✓ **Right-of-way** widths vary considerably within the corridor. For much of the corridor, **widths are approximately 160 feet but are typically narrower beginning near Lakeside and continuing north through Somers.** There are also locations where the roadway exists on easements on public lands.
- ✓ **Roadway pavement** is in **fair condition** from the **beginning** of the **study area to RP 85.0** where it transitions into good condition. The pavement remains in **good overall condition until RP 102.0** through the end of the study area, where it is considered to be in **poor condition.**
- ✓ The study corridor has varying access density with an average of **9.8 access points per mile.** Three existing access control plans are in place along the study corridor but are generally out of date. A new *Access Management Plan* was developed as a supplemental component of the study and will supersede all previous resolutions upon adoption.
- ✓ Most of the study corridor is signed as a highway with a **70 miles per hour (mph) daytime limit for passenger vehicles and 65-mph limit for heavy trucks and at nighttime.** Slower speed zones also exist through the main communities including Somers (45-mph), Lakeside (35-mph), Elmo (45-mph), and Big Arm (45-mph).
- ✓ There are **eight designated passing lanes** near Jette, Lindisfarne, Dayton, Rollins, and Somers totaling over seven miles for the combined northbound and southbound directions. There are also a total of **37 segments where passing is allowed** between Jette and Lakeside totaling about 19 miles.
- ✓ There are **26 hazardous rock slopes** on the study corridor, of which **ten** are conditionally rated as **good** and **16** are rated as **fair.**
- ✓ There is **one bridge** on the study corridor at **Dayton Creek (RP 82.3).** The bridge is in **fair to good condition** and may be a potential candidate for repair and/or preservation.
- ✓ Within the study area, a total of **102 drainage features** cross underneath the study corridor. Specific **drainage concerns** have been noted near **RP 63 and at RP 97.8** in Lakeside.
- ✓ The study corridor is **commonly used by recreational bicyclists in the summer months.** The highway is not heavily used by pedestrians, except within the communities of Somers, Lakeside, Elmo/Big Arm, and associated recreation areas. However, **sidewalks are discontinuous, curb ramps are not provided consistently,** and pedestrians were observed crossing US 93 in undesignated locations.



GEOMETRIC CONDITIONS

- ✓ The study corridor is considered a **rural principal arterial** on the Non-Interstate NHS and was generally **constructed** on its current alignment in the late **1950s** and throughout the **1960s**.

- ✓ Approximately **36 percent of horizontal curves** (22 curves) **do not meet baseline criteria** for a 70-mph design speed on level terrain. Of those curves, **13 meet the baseline criteria** for rolling terrain (**60-mph design speed**) and **nine meet the baseline criteria** for mountainous terrain (**50-mph design speed**). No horizontal curves were identified as not meeting baseline criteria for a rural principal arterial route.

- ✓ The **recommended shoulder width for the corridor is six feet**. However, **two-foot shoulders exist** at the southern end of the corridor (~RP 63 to 66) and through the Lakeside area (~RP 95 to 102). Wider, **six-foot shoulders are present** in the segment through Dayton and Rollins (~RP 79 to 93). The remainder of the **corridor generally has four-foot shoulders** with some variation in constrained areas or where turn lanes/improvement projects have been completed.

- ✓ Nearly **50 percent of vertical curves** (55) **do not meet baseline criteria** for a **70-mph design speed** for level terrain. Of those curves, **42 meet baseline criteria** for a rolling terrain (**60-mph design speed**), and **ten meet baseline criteria** for mountainous terrain (**50 mph design speed**). **Three curves do not meet baseline criteria** for a rural principal arterial route.

- ✓ Portions of the corridor are **narrow with limited room for road expansion**. The proximity of rock outcroppings, Flathead Lake, and steep side slopes in certain locations may limit sight distances and also restrict the ability to provide recommended clear zone widths.

TRAFFIC CONDITIONS

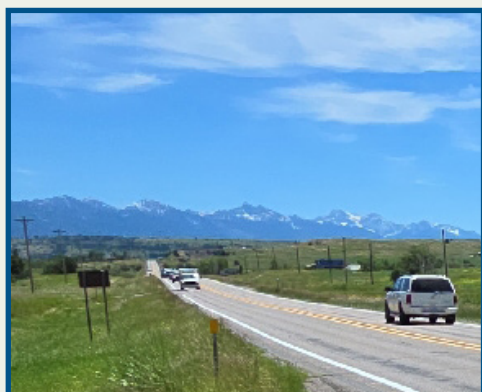
- ✓ Traffic **volumes are increasing** throughout the study corridor at an average **annual rate of 2.1 percent per year**.

- ✓ **Heavy vehicle traffic** along the corridor remains relatively **constant** in terms of total number of vehicles.

- ✓ Traffic varies daily, with **more traffic on the weekends** (Friday through Sunday) than during the week (Monday through Thursday), and **seasonally**, with the **highest traffic** reported during the **summer** (July and August).

- ✓ **Intersection operation** generally **decreases** traveling **north on the corridor**, indicating more delay and increased difficulty making left turns. This coincides with the increased traffic at the north end of the study corridor. These conditions are worse on weekends versus weekdays, and are expected to continue declining.

- ✓ Under existing traffic conditions, the **corridor operates at fair to good conditions south of Lakeside, and poor conditions north of Lakeside**. The operational efficiency of the highway is anticipated to continue to decrease as traffic volumes increase.



Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. § 407, reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data compiled or collected for the purpose of identifying, evaluating, or planning the safety enhancement of potential accident sites, hazardous roadway conditions, or railway-highway crossings, pursuant to sections 130, 144, and 148 of Title 23, U.S.C., or for the purpose of developing any highway safety construction improvement project which may be implemented utilizing Federal-aid highway funds shall not be subject to discovery or admitted into evidence in a Federal or State court proceeding or considered for other purposes in any action for damages arising from any occurrence at a location mentioned or addressed in such reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data. This publication is not intended to waive any of the State of Montana's rights or privileges under 23 U.S.C. § 407.

SAFETY

- ✓ A total of **814** crashes were reported **during the five-year period** between January 2018 and December 2022.
- ✓ Single vehicle crashes accounted for **76 percent** of all reported crashes. The **most common** crash types were **wild animal (50 percent)**, **fixed object (14 percent)**, **rear-end (12 percent)** and **roll over (eight percent) crashes**. About 89 percent (721) of crashes were non-junction related.
- ✓ There were **nine fatal crashes** resulting in nine fatalities. There were **28 suspected serious injury crashes** and a total of 33 suspected serious injuries. **Impaired driving** appeared to be the **largest contributing factor** in fatal or suspected serious injury crashes (32 percent).
- ✓ About **26 percent** of all crashes and 35 percent of severe crashes were reported as having occurred on **wet, snowy, or icy/frost-covered roads**.
- ✓ About **37 percent** of all crashes were reported as occurring **at dark**, with **96 percent** of those occurring where street **lighting was not present**. Similarly, severe crashes occurred at dark without street lighting approximately 32 percent of the time.
- ✓ A total of **1,130 citations** were issued with the greatest number being related to **speeding, seatbelt violations, driving under the influence or possession of alcohol/drugs, and license, insurance, or registration related infractions**.
- ✓ A minimum of **2,443 animal carcasses** were collected and documented by MDT along the study corridor over the five-year analysis period. **Deer** accounted for over **90 percent** of the carcasses collected.
- ✓ A separate safety analysis was conducted for the 62 crashes that occurred in the vicinity of the US 93/MT 82 intersection. About **29 percent** of crashes resulted in some form of injury. The majority of crashes were **rear-end crashes, right angle, and left-turn opposite direction crashes**. About 21 percent of crashes occurred at night and about 29 percent of crashes occurred on adverse roadways (wet, snowy, or icy).

KEY FINDINGS:

From **January 1, 2018** to **December 31, 2022**

814 Total crashes were reported within the corridor.

That is **165** crashes per year!



1,638 people were involved in **814** crashes



9

Crashes

Fatal

9

Injuries



28

Crashes

Serious Injury

33

Injuries



125

Crashes

Minor/Possible Injury

193

Injuries



652

Crashes

PDO/Unknown

1,403

Non-Injuries



IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS

The study identified and evaluated potential improvement options for US 93, aimed at addressing identified issues and areas of concern. The options took into account feedback from stakeholders and the public, along with an analysis of the current environmental conditions in the study area. The following steps were taken:

- ✓ **Identify roadway issues** through field reviews, engineering analysis, crash data, consultations with resource agencies, and public input.
- ✓ **Define corridor needs** and objectives.
- ✓ **Analyze the collected information** to develop a range of feasible improvement options that address the issues, reflect public and stakeholder input, and meet the identified needs and objectives.

Corridor Needs and Objectives

Needs and objectives were identified to guide the development and evaluation of improvement options. The identified improvement options aim to address these needs and objectives as much as possible, within the constraints of other limiting factors. As projects move forward, these needs and objectives will be integrated into purpose and need statements for future environmental documentation.



NEED 1: IMPROVE CORRIDOR SAFETY

- Reduce fatalities and serious injuries in support of Vision Zero.
- Reduce animal-vehicle conflicts.
- Reduce roadside hazards.
- Reduce vehicle conflicts.



NEED 2: IMPROVE CORRIDOR OPERATIONS

- Accommodate existing and future travel demands.
- Maintain reasonable access to adjacent lands.
- Improve non-motorized mobility and accessibility.



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Environmental resource impacts
- Social and cultural resource impacts
- Multimodal transportation accessibility
- Construction feasibility and impacts
- Local, Tribal, State, and Federal interests
- Corridor context, function, and use
- Funding availability
- Maintenance operations, responsibility, and costs

Identified Improvements

To address the needs and objectives of the US 93 corridor, a range of improvement options has been identified, focusing primarily on infrastructure enhancements such as roadway, intersection, and multimodal upgrades. While infrastructure is the core focus, a limited number of policy-based strategies are also recommended due to their role in improving overall corridor performance. These corridor-specific recommendations are further supported by applicable strategies from MDT's *Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan*¹ (CHSP), which outlines behavioral and educational safety strategies that support a holistic approach to improving safety outcomes. The improvement options are organized into three categories, as outlined below.



Spot Improvements: Focus on enhancing safety, traffic flow, and access management at key locations with measures such as enhanced traffic control, improved visibility, and multimodal accommodations.



Corridor-wide Improvements: Emphasis on enhancing traffic operations and safety across the entire US 93 corridor, including striping revisions, rumble strips, speed limit adjustments, shoulder widening, passing lanes, and wildlife conflict mitigation.



Policy Improvements: Aim to improve safety and operations through access management, speed limit adjustments, travel demand management, and maintenance practices, with implementation depending on available resources and coordination.



For each of the identified improvement options, several key factors were considered and outlined, as described below.



Implementation Partners: Successful implementation will involve a variety of stakeholders who will provide resources, funding, and expertise.



Timeframe: The timing for improvements is based on project complexity and funding availability. Timeframes include **Short-term** (0-5 years), **Mid-term** (5-10 years), **Long-term** (10-20 years), and **as needed**.



Estimated Cost: Costs were estimated at the planning level, including construction, engineering, drainage, and miscellaneous expenses. An annual inflation factor of three percent was applied to reflect the estimated year of expenditure, and contingencies are included to account for uncertainties.



Potential Funding Sources: Improvements may qualify for funding through Federal, State, local, and private sources, though no funding has been secured at this time.



Project Development Considerations: Projects will follow MDT's standard development process, including public coordination, environmental analysis, traffic assessments, and right-of-way acquisition. Additional considerations include stakeholder interests, resource impacts, and necessary permits.

A summary of the identified improvement options is presented in **Table ES.1**, with a graphical representation in **Figure ES.1**.

Table ES.1: Improvement Options Summary

Options		Description	Implementation Partners	Timeframe ¹	Cost Estimate ²	Potential Funding Sources ³
Spot Improvements						
S1	Jette (RP 62.2 to 64.7)	Flatten roadway grade; assess passing zone	MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Long-term	\$32.2M	NH, HSIP, Federal Grants
S2	Big Arm (RP 71.3 to 73.8)	Construct consistent three-lane configuration with left-turn lane; review passing zones	MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Long-term	\$19.1M	NH, HSIP, Federal Grants
S3	Elmo Pedestrian Crossings	Install RRFBs and ADA accommodations at pedestrian crossings	MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Mid-term	\$850,000	NH, TA, CMAQ/MACI
S3-a	Skookum Drive (RP 77.2)				\$420,000	
S3-b	Cemetery Road (RP 77.3)				\$430,000	
S4	MT 28 Intersection (RP 77.6)	Install additional traffic control and accommodate business access as warranted with future development	Private, MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Mid-term	\$2.1M to \$4.9M	Private (Development), Local
S5	Blacktail Road/Stoner Loop Intersection (RP 97.9)	Construct a northbound left turn lane and evaluate intersection configuration	MDT, Flathead County, Private	Mid-term	\$1.7M	NH, HSIP, Local, Private
S6	Adams St Intersection (RP 98.1)	Install additional traffic control as warranted based on future development	MDT, Flathead County, Private	Mid- to Long-term	\$310,000 (PHB) to \$6.1M (Roundabout)	NH, Local, Private
S7	Lakeside (RP 97.8 to 98.4)	Install pedestrian and roadway infrastructure improvements	MDT, Flathead County	Mid- to Long-term	\$1.3M to \$12.8M	NH, HSIP, TA, CMAQ/MACI
S7-a	Pedestrian Accommodations	Extend existing sidewalk, curb, and gutter; upgrade 2 crosswalks and add 1		Mid-term	\$1.3M	
S7-b	Urban Reconstruction	TWLTL; sidewalk and boulevard on both sides; upgrade 2 crosswalks and add 1; lighting upgrades		Long-term	\$12.8M	
S8	Somers (RP 102.4 to 103.0)	Install pedestrian/bicycle and roadway infrastructure improvements	MFWP, MDT, Flathead County, Walleyes Unlimited	Mid- to Long-term	\$1.7M to \$13.0M	NH, HSIP, TA, MFWP, NGO/Private (Walleyes Unlimited)
S8-a	Pedestrian Accommodations	Extend and improve existing SUP; upgrade crosswalks		Mid-term	\$1.7M	
S8-b	Urban Reconstruction	TWLTL; sidewalk/SUP and boulevard on both sides; crosswalk improvements; lighting upgrades		Long-term	\$13.0M	
S9	MT 82 Intersection (RP 104.2)	Modify business access; upgrade traffic signal	MDT, Flathead County, Private	Mid-term	\$1.2M	NH, HSIP, Private
S9-a	Upgrade Traffic Signal	Upgrade signal timing and turn lanes			\$600,000	
S9-b	Define Access Points	Assess and define access points			\$560,000	

Options		Description	Implementation Partners	Timeframe ¹	Cost Estimate ²	Potential Funding Sources ³
Corridor Improvements						
C1	Turn Lanes and Approach Realignment	Install turn lanes and realign approaches as warranted	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, Private	Mid- to Long-term	\$40,000 (realignment) to \$1.3M (turn lanes)	NH, Local, Private
C2	Passing/No-Passing Zones	Evaluate and modify existing passing/no-passing signing and striping	MDT	Short-term	\$19,000 per mile	NH, HSIP, Maintenance
C3	Passing Lanes	Construct additional passing lanes	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	Long-term	\$4.7M to \$11.4M	NH, HSIP
C4	Turnouts	Construct/modify turnouts as appropriate; add appropriate signage at and in advance of each location	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, School Districts	Mid- to Long-term	\$230,000 to \$1.3M per location	NH, HSIP
C5	Shoulder Widening	Widen roadway shoulders where feasible	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	Mid- to Long-term	\$3.0M to \$6.2M per mile	NH, HSIP
C6	Rumble Strips	Install shoulder rumble strips throughout the corridor	MDT	Short-term	\$26,000 per mile	NH, HSIP, Maintenance
C7	Rockfall Hazard Mitigation	Conduct rockfall hazard mitigation	MDT	Mid- to Long-term	\$18.9M to \$45.8M	NH, Maintenance
C8	High-Visibility Improvements and Advance Warning Signs	Install curve warning signs, reflectors, and reflective paint on striping	MDT	Short-term	\$50,000 per mile	HSIP, Maintenance
C9	Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)	Install ITS technologies where appropriate	MDT	Mid-term	\$2.1M (VMS), \$240,000 each (VSL)	HSIP, CMAQ/MACI, Maintenance
C10	Cultural Signage	Install cultural signage throughout the corridor	MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Short-term	\$1,100 each	NH, Maintenance, CSKT/Local
C11	Wildlife-Vehicle Conflict Mitigation	Install appropriate wildlife accommodations resulting from MDT project development process; coordinate with MWTSC and other organizations to identify partnership opportunities and advance wildlife accommodation priorities	MDT, CSKT, USFWS, MFWP, NGOs, Lake and Flathead Counties	Short- to Long-term	\$1,100 (Static Sign) to \$5.6M (Overpass)	Programmed MDT Projects (NH), MWTP, WCPP, State and Federal Agencies, NGOs, Private

Options		Description	Implementation Partners	Timeframe ¹	Cost Estimate ²	Potential Funding Sources ³
Policy Improvements						
P1	Access Management	Develop and implement an <i>Access Management Plan</i>	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, Private	Short- to Long-term	N/A	N/A
P2	Speed Considerations	Conduct speed studies and implement recommendations	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	Short- to Mid-term	N/A	N/A
P3	Transportation Demand Management (TDM)	Develop and implement transportation demand management campaigns	Private Employers, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, Transit Operators	Short- to Mid-Term	N/A	N/A
P4	Maintenance	Continue to address highway maintenance issues and research and implement best practices	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	As needed	N/A	N/A
P5	Noise Abatement	Continue to address highway noise issues and research and implement appropriate mitigation measures	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	As needed	N/A	N/A

¹**Timeframes:** The timing and ability to implement improvement options depends on factors including the availability of funding, right-of-way needs, and other project delivery elements. Implementation timeframes are not a commitment to developing recommendations.

- Short-term: Implementation is feasible within a 0- to 5-year period.
- Mid-term: Implementation is feasible within a 5- to 10-year period.
- Long-term: Implementation is feasible within a 10- to 20-year period.
- As needed: Implementation could occur based on observed need at any time as needed.

²**Cost Estimates** were developed using 2024 pricing and include estimates for construction, engineering, drainage, miscellaneous items, and indirect costs. In addition to 2024 base pricing, an inflationary factor of 3.0 percent per year was applied to the planning-level costs to account for an estimated year of expenditure. Contingencies were added to account for unknown factors at the planning-level stage. Costs may vary due to changed conditions at the time of construction.

³**Potential Funding Sources** are based on minimum eligibility criteria given the system classification and primary project purpose(s). Additional evaluation may be required to determine specific project eligibility and competitiveness for available funds.

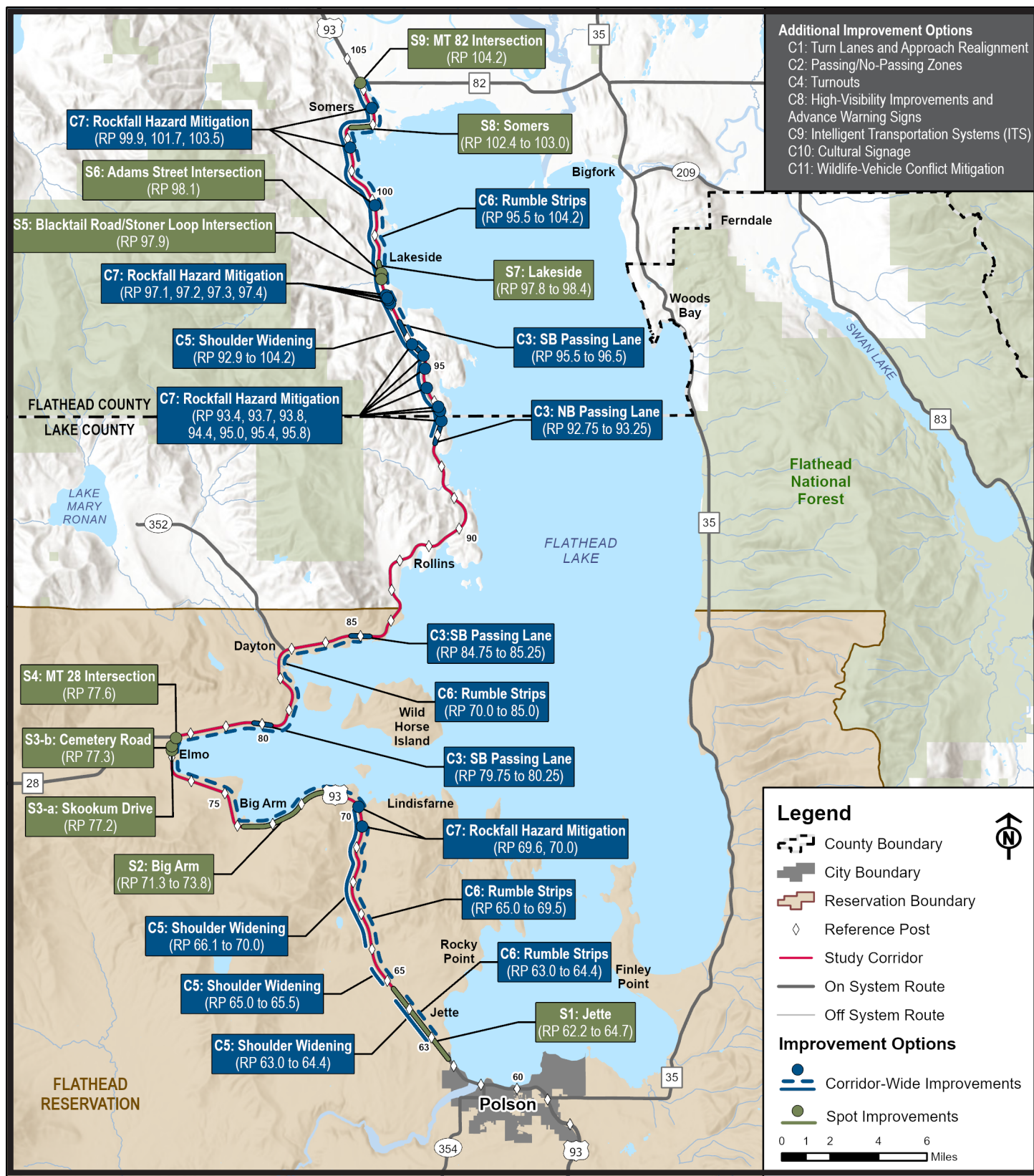
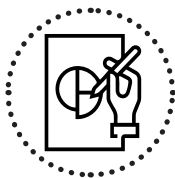


Figure ES.1: Improvement Options



ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This study evaluated the US 93 corridor between Polson and Somers to identify improvement options that address traffic, safety, and access management needs for the next 20 years. The recommendations include short- and long-term improvements, such as improved access management, safety enhancements, multimodal considerations, and traffic flow optimization measures. Ultimately, the implementation of future improvements in the corridor will depend on funding availability, coordination with adjacent landowners and partner agencies, and environmental mitigation activities.

No funding has been identified for corridor projects at the time of this report. However, multiple funding sources may be available to support development of future projects, including MDT's core funding programs for NHS routes and other funding sources including the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and Montana Air and Congestion Initiative (MACI) Programs. Additionally, discretionary Federal grant funding offered under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) may be applicable, along with other potential partnership opportunities.

For any future projects advanced from this study, next steps would need to include funding identification, project nomination, project development including environmental documentation, and appropriate collaboration with resource agencies, stakeholders, and the public.



1.0

INTRODUCTION



The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has completed a corridor study of US 93 between the communities of Polson and Somers, Montana. The purpose of the *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study* was to develop a comprehensive long-range plan for managing the highway corridor and identify feasible improvements to address identified needs given public and agency input, environmental constraints, access management, and financial feasibility. The study was a collaborative process with MDT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), local jurisdictions, resource agencies, and the public to identify transportation needs and potential solutions.

As a supplemental component of the study, MDT developed an *Access Management Plan* for the Polson to Somers corridor to improve roadway safety, functionality, compatibility with development, and overall operation. Previous access management efforts within the corridor dated back to the 1980s and 1990s, and in some areas, no formal access management had been implemented. The updated *Access Management Plan*, included in [Appendix 1](#), applies to the entire corridor and will supersede any prior resolutions or plans upon adoption.

1.1. STUDY PROCESS

The *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study* followed the 2009 *Montana Business Process to Link Planning and National and Montana Environmental Policy Act Reviews*², MDT's guideline for conducting planning studies. This process is intended to facilitate a smooth and efficient transition from early transportation planning to project development and may be used to help determine the level and scope of required environmental review, should a project advance from this study.

The planning process evaluated existing and projected conditions, including demographic characteristics, physical roadway features, geometric and traffic conditions, crash history and safety performance, and environmental conditions of the US 93 corridor. The study also identified needs and objectives; provided opportunities for engagement with the public, stakeholders, and resource agencies; and identified a package of feasible short- and long-term recommendations to address the needs of the highway over the 2045 planning horizon. Additionally, the planning process documented potential environmental impacts and constraints and disclosed pertinent information to the public, stakeholders, resource agencies, and transportation officials before funding decisions were made. The corridor planning process does not replace the need for environmental documentation, and it is not a design or construction project.



1.2. STUDY AREA

The study area includes US 93, starting north of Polson at reference point (RP) 63.0 and ending north of Somers at RP 104.2, as illustrated in **Figure 1**. The Polson to Somers corridor traverses through parts of Lake County and Flathead County, crosses the Flathead Reservation, and follows the western shore of Flathead Lake. The corridor passes through many small and medium-sized communities including Polson, Big Arm, Elmo, Dayton, Rollins, Lakeside, and Somers.

US 93 is a major north/south route in the National Highway System (NHS), connecting local, State, and Federal transportation systems. Regionally, it plays a key role in linking the urban cities of Missoula and Kalispell. Beyond serving local residents, US 93 is also a popular scenic route for travelers journeying between Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. Its proximity to Flathead Lake—the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi River—adds another layer of importance. The lake and its surrounding lands are not only a critical fishery but also hold deep cultural, historical, and ecological significance for the CSKT.

The corridor also provides access to numerous recreation sites for activities such as boating, fishing, swimming, and camping. In addition to these recreational opportunities, US 93 serves individual residences, rural subdivisions, and a wide range of commercial enterprises. Historically, the lands, water sources, and recreational areas accessible via US 93 have been key to the local economy, supporting substantial tourism traffic and economic subsistence for the rural communities along the corridor. However, recent growth in the area has contributed to commuter, tourist, recreation, and commercial/construction truck traffic along US 93, raising concerns about the capacity of the road infrastructure to meet growing demand.

The combination of high traffic volumes, environmental significance, and cultural heritage calls for a delicate balance between development and preservation. To address these challenges, local communities have previously undertaken various planning and visioning efforts, providing a foundation for current efforts. The *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study* builds on past initiatives, aiming to identify improvements that will support continued growth while preserving the area's unique ecological, cultural, and economic resources. This study provides a framework for ensuring that US 93 remains a functional, safe, and sustainable route for years to come.

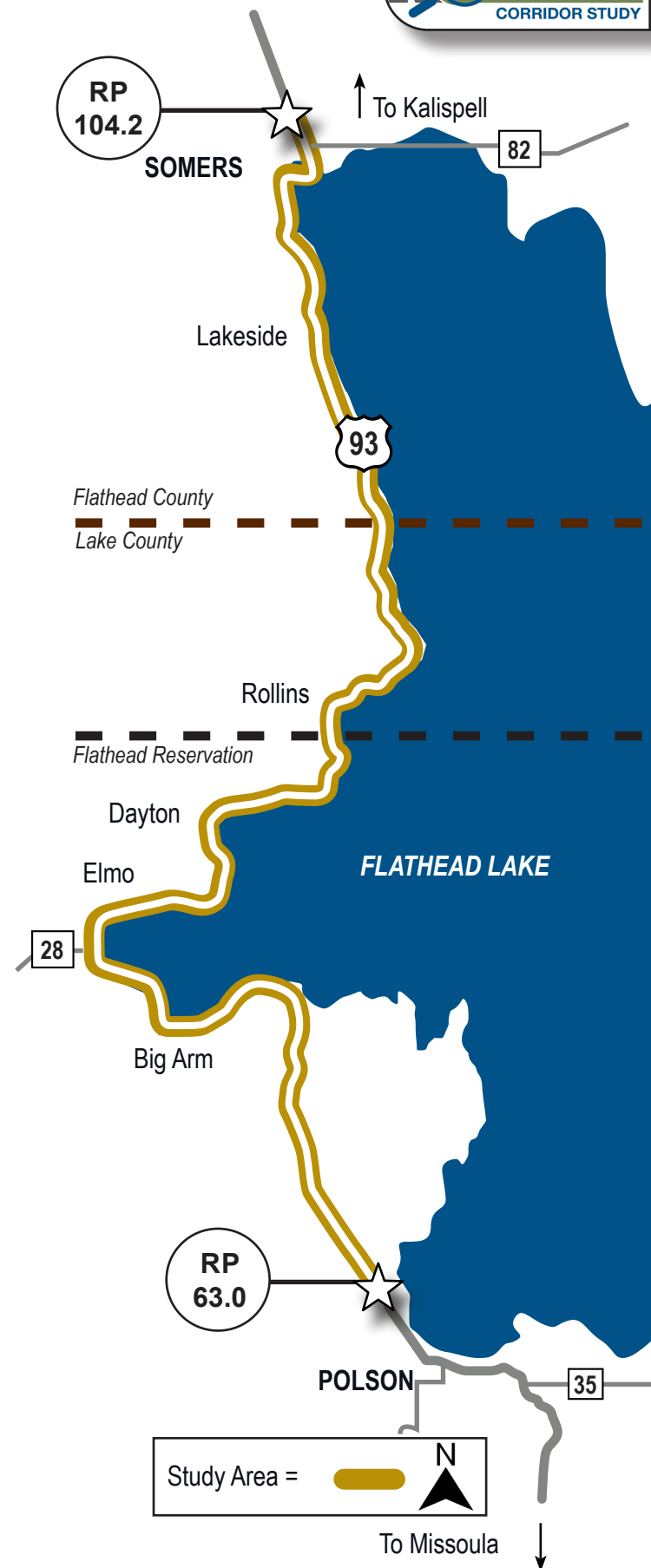


Figure 1: Study Area

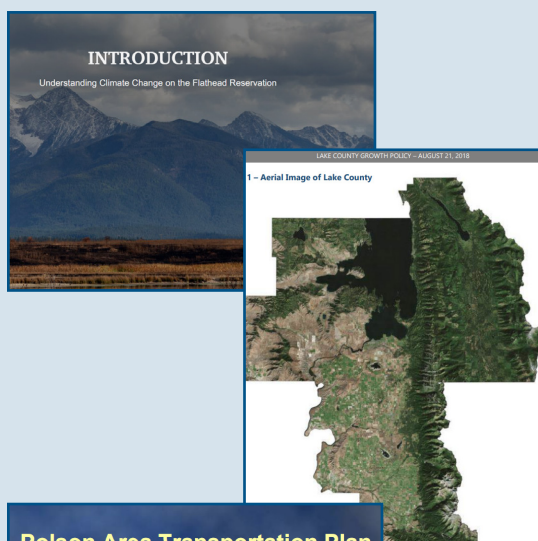


1.3. BACKGROUND

The study area has seen significant growth in recent years, leading to an increase in commuter, tourist, recreational, and commercial/construction truck traffic along the corridor. This surge in traffic has placed considerable strain on the existing infrastructure. To address the growing demand and improve transportation conditions, MDT and local agencies have completed the following plans and projects.

1.3.1. Local and Regional Planning

Multiple Tribal, Federal, State, and local plans and regulations provide relevant information on transportation and land use within the study area. Land use policy and development regulation on private lands are governed by Lake County, Flathead County, the City of Polson, and CSKT. The planning documents listed to the right were reviewed to provide context for the study and identify considerations that may be relevant to improvement options on US 93.



Polson Area Transportation Plan US 93 Polson Corridor Study

Public Meeting No. 2
February 24, 2011



- ✓ Aquatic Lands Conservation Ordinance of the CSKT (1986)³
- ✓ US 93 Evaro to Polson Final Environmental Impact Statement (1996)⁴
- ✓ US 93 Polson Corridor Study (2011)⁵
- ✓ Polson Area Transportation Plan (2011)⁶
- ✓ CSKT Tribal Transportation Safety Plan (2014)⁷
- ✓ City of Polson Extension of Services Plan (2015)⁸
- ✓ Polson Growth Policy (2016)⁹
- ✓ Polson Development Code (2016)¹⁰
- ✓ Flathead Reservation Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan (2016)¹¹
- ✓ CSKT Climate Change Strategic Plan (2016)¹²
- ✓ Flathead National Forest Land Management Plan (2018)¹³
- ✓ Lake County Growth Policy (2018)¹⁴
- ✓ Melita Island Road/Labella Lane Zoning District Regulations – Lake County (1986)¹⁵
- ✓ Masumola Zoning District and Regulations – Lake County (2000)¹⁶
- ✓ Stone Ridge Estates Zoning District Regulations (2007)¹⁷
- ✓ Upper West Shore Zoning District and Regulations (2013)¹⁸
- ✓ Lake County Long Range Plan (2019)¹⁹
- ✓ Flathead County Lake and Lakeshore Protection Regulations (2021)²⁰
- ✓ Flathead County Growth Policy (2023)²¹
- ✓ Cooper Farms Neighborhood Plan (2008)²²
- ✓ Lakeside Neighborhood Plan (2010)²³
- ✓ Flathead County Zoning Regulations (2023)²⁴
- ✓ Flathead County Economic Development Strategy (2023)²⁵
- ✓ Polson Local Bypass Study and 7th Avenue & Hillcrest Drive Assessment (2023)²⁶
- ✓ Lake County Lakeshore Protection Regulations (2024)²⁷

1.3.2. Past, Current, & Planned Projects and Studies

MDT has planned or recently completed a number of projects within the US 93 highway corridor. Other projects developed by CSKT are also expected to be completed in the coming years. Collectively, these projects will address safety, roadway maintenance, as well as non-motorized needs. A summary of planned and recently completed highway projects is provided below.

ACTIVE AND ANTICIPATED FUTURE PROJECTS/STUDIES

In addition to the projects listed below, MDT intends to apply epoxy striping as needed throughout the corridor and conduct periodic reactive maintenance.

- **SF 209 Missoula North Signs:** MDT developed a safety project to address identified crash trends in Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, and Sanders Counties. The improvements include a varying combination of signing, lighting, flashers, curve signing, and delineation. Some work on this project is located within the boundaries of the Flathead Reservation. The project will occur in 2025.
- **Elmo to Dayton Speed Study – US 93:** MDT collected data during September 2023 to support a speed analysis for the portion of US 93 from RP 76.96 to RP 85.00. The study recommended 1) extending the existing 55 mph transition zone north of Elmo beginning 400 feet north of the Spinnaker Lane intersection and continuing north approximately 2,700 feet, to 1000 feet south of the Old US 93 intersection, and 2) reducing the existing 70 mph speed limit to 65 mph beginning 1000 feet south of the Old US 93 intersection and continuing north for approximately 8 miles, to 490 feet north of the Northaire Lane intersection.
- **Adams Street Traffic Study in Lakeside – US 93:** MDT received a request to evaluate signal warrants and pedestrian crossing enhancements at the Adams Street intersection in Lakeside. MDT collected traffic and non-motorist data in August 2022 and recommended no additional enhanced traffic control devices to the existing intersection at this time based on failure to meet warrants.
- **Big Arm – Elmo Trail:** This CSKT project aims to enhance community connectivity and safety by improving and extending the shared use path (SUP). Planned in two phases, Phase I will link the Elmo Community Center to the Kupawicquk Picnic and Swimming Area, while Phase II will extend an eight-foot-wide path to homesites and the Big Arm State Park entrance. Improvements include 3,320 feet of accessible asphalt path, 1,900 feet of retaining wall, and pedestrian-activated crossings. Funding for Phase I is currently being pursued.
- **CSKT Safety Action Plan:** The CSKT are developing a Transportation Safety Action Plan for the Flathead Reservation. The effort aims to reduce fatal and severe injury crashes for everyone, including people walking, driving, riding in a car, biking, or using public transportation. This initiative is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Safe Streets and Roads for All program. Comments are being collected through an online commenting map, with several comments addressing the portion of US 93 within the Flathead Reservation between Polson and Dayton.
- **Conclow Fishing Access Site:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) is developing a new fishing access site on Flathead Lake located northeast of Dayton at approximate RP 84, with access provided via Montibello Lane. A new left-turn lane will be constructed on US 93 at this location.
- **S&K Gaming Casino:** S&K Gaming is proceeding with development of a casino complex northwest of Polson just outside the study limits, with access to US 93 via Irvine Flats Road. In the future, the complex may include an RV park and additional residential/commercial developments.
- **Flathead County Development:** Several subdivisions have recently been proposed and/or approved in Flathead County in the vicinity of the US 93 corridor, including Discovery Land Company's proposal for the Flathead Lake Club development in Lakeside.



RECENTLY COMPLETED PROJECTS/STUDIES

- **Lakeside Intersection - Bierney Creek Road with US 93 (2025):** MDT received a request from Flathead County on behalf of the community of Lakeside to upgrade the intersection of Bierney Creek Road with a higher form of pedestrian treatment. The study concluded a rectangular rapid flashing beacon (RRFB) is recommended for the crossing at Bierney Creek Road, however, appropriate accessible pedestrian facilities must be provided on both sides of US 93 before pedestrian crossing improvements can be implemented.
- **Lakeside Speed Study – US 93 (2024):** MDT conducted a speed study focused on the portion of US 93 from RP 93.0 to 104.2 near Lakeside. It proposed a speed limit of 65 miles per hour (mph) beginning at RP 93 and continuing until RP 97.0 (previously posted at 70 mph), as well as a 30-mph speed limit between Blacktail Road and Old Orchard Road in Lakeside at approximate RP 98.0 (previously posted at 35 mph), followed by a lengthened 45-mph transition zone extending 1,600 feet.
- **Rollins Speed Study – US 93 (2023):** Based on elevated crash rates, the speed study recommended a five mph reduction from the statutory 70-mph speed limit to 65-mph from approximately Northaire Lane until RP 93 within the Rollins area.
- **US 93 Rumble Strips (2023):** MDT installed rumble strips on US 93 north of Polson between Wilderness Valley Road and Melita Island Road.
- **Lakeside N&S (2021):** MDT completed a pavement preservation project on US 93 spanning from RP 93 to 102. The project focused on enhancing the roadway by applying a chip seal treatment.
- **Elmo - West (2020):** This project was completed on MT 28 from RP 36.1 to 46.6 (at the intersection with US 93) and involved the application of a chip seal for pavement preservation.
- **North of Polson – North (2018):** Completed in 2018 on US 93 from RP 67.4 to RP 79.2, this project involved the application of chip seal for pavement improvement.
- **Rollins N&S (2018):** This project involved applying chip seal on US 93 from RP 85 to RP 93.
- **Somers Safety Improvements (2017):** This safety project spanned a quarter-mile stretch of US 93 in Somers starting at RP 102.5. The project included the installation of an RRFB and the upgrading of crosswalk pavement markings at the existing crosswalk.
- **Turn Lanes NW of Polson (2017):** This project involved the installation of left-turn lanes at the intersection of US 93 and Flathead View Road as well as improvements to the intersection alignment. The project spanned from RP 64 to RP 64.8 on US 93.



2.0



TRIBAL, AGENCY, AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

An essential component of the planning study process is ensuring ongoing and meaningful public engagement. Education and outreach are key to achieving this goal. To facilitate active participation, a *Tribal, Agency, and Public Involvement Plan* was developed, outlining strategies to encourage involvement from all stakeholders. This plan aimed to foster a proactive public involvement process, allowing key stakeholders and the public to engage in every phase of the corridor study. Through this approach, the study seeks to gather input on needs, constraints, opportunities, and feasible improvements, considering available resources and local support. The specific outreach and engagement activities conducted for this study are summarized in this chapter, with additional meeting materials—including press releases, advertisements, agendas, presentations, and meeting summaries—provided in [Appendix 2](#).

2.1. STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH AND COORDINATION

Effective oversight and guidance were essential to ensuring that the *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study* was developed in a thoughtful, inclusive, and transparent manner. To achieve this, a variety of stakeholder groups, including the Project Management Team (PMT), Advisory Committee (AC), Tribal representatives, and resource agencies, were actively involved throughout the study process. Collaboration with these stakeholders helped guide the project's direction, ensured that all relevant perspectives were considered, and facilitated critical feedback at key study milestones. This comprehensive approach fostered a balanced and well-informed planning process meeting both technical and community-driven needs.





2.1.1. Project Management Team Meetings

The PMT was composed of representatives from MDT Planning and the consultant team directly involved in the development of the corridor study. PMT Meetings were held approximately every two weeks throughout the course of the study. Brief check-in meetings were used to provide status updates and discuss ongoing tasks to ensure accurate and timely delivery of all components of the planning study.

2.1.2. Advisory Committee Meetings

An AC was established to guide the study process and review deliverables produced by the consultant team. The AC was composed of MDT representatives from Planning, Missoula District, Traffic and Safety, Environmental Services, and Maintenance, in addition to representatives from FHWA, Lake County, Flathead County, and CSKT. Over the 15-month study period, the consultant team facilitated multiple AC meetings, which aligned with key deliverables and public outreach efforts. These meetings were critical for tracking progress, addressing study development issues, and fostering the exchange of technical information and ideas.

2.1.3. Tribal Coordination

The CSKT Tribal Council consists of a Tribal Chairperson and ten members representing eight districts of the Flathead Reservation to oversee community matters. MDT regularly engages with the Tribal Council on transportation issues and ongoing projects within the Flathead Reservation. During the study, MDT and RPA representatives made presentations to the Tribal Council at three key points. These presentations provided study updates, facilitated government-to-government communication, and fostered the exchange of ideas to build support for the corridor study.

MDT's historians and archaeologists also kept the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) apprised of the study's progress and any relevant Tribal and cultural resource matters. Continued coordination with the THPO, Tribal Council, and Elders was crucial to identify and understand culturally significant and historic resources along the study corridor, as well as to communicate the study process. At the Tribal Council's request, the planning team met with Kootenai Elders twice to provide study updates and gather feedback, with these meetings also aligning with public informational meetings.

2.1.4. Resource Agency Coordination

A virtual resource agency meeting was held on July 2, 2024, to present the findings of the draft *Environmental Scan* as well as the initial findings of the *Existing and Projected Conditions Report*. Participating resource agencies were asked to help confirm resources within the study corridor, identify potential avoidance areas, define mitigation requirements, and explore opportunities to reduce or offset potential project impacts. The following agencies participated in the meeting.

- ✓ Montana Department of Transportation
- ✓ CSKT Natural Resources Department
- ✓ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- ✓ Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

2.1.5. Stakeholder Outreach

To ensure broad participation, stakeholders were identified and contacted as part of the outreach efforts for all public informational meetings. A special stakeholder coordination initiative, called a Safety Summit, was organized to conduct an in-depth safety review of key locations identified through data analysis and stakeholder input. Nearly 40 stakeholders representing local law enforcement, officials, educators, maintenance, and emergency management personnel were invited to participate in the Safety Summit, however no stakeholders attended.

To improve stakeholder engagement towards the end of the study, key stakeholder groups were specifically contacted and invited to attend the second public informational meeting. Additionally, the planning team conducted four targeted stakeholder meetings with Flathead County, Lake County, CSKT, and the City of Polson. Land use planning staff and AC members from these agencies were invited to participate. The meetings involved a general overview of the corridor study, an introduction to access management, and a request for input on proposed developments within each jurisdiction.



2.2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Public engagement was a key component of the *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study* to ensure that stakeholders and the community could provide input throughout the planning process. Various strategies were used to facilitate participation, including a dedicated study website, interactive commenting maps, targeted stakeholder outreach, and public informational meetings. These efforts aimed to ensure transparent communication, gather feedback, and incorporate community input into the study's recommendations and decision-making process.

2.2.1. Study Website

A study website was developed to encourage public interaction and provide easy access to key study information. The website was hosted by MDT and regularly updated throughout the study process as new content was finalized. The website served as a central hub for informational materials, including contact information, meeting announcements, frequently asked questions about the corridor study process, a description of the study, and study documents.



www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/us93polsonsomers/

2.2.2. Interactive Commenting Maps

In addition to MDT's traditional online written commenting system, an interactive map using the ArcGIS Online platform was available to gather public feedback on the existing transportation corridor. Visitors to the platform were able to leave comments tagged to specific locations, noting their concerns and suggestions. This commenting map was active for the initial months of the study process to collect valuable input. Once potential improvement options were identified, the commenting map was replaced with an interactive map showcasing the study recommendations. Users were able to provide feedback on these proposed improvements, either voicing support or suggesting alternatives.

2.2.3. Public Informational Meetings

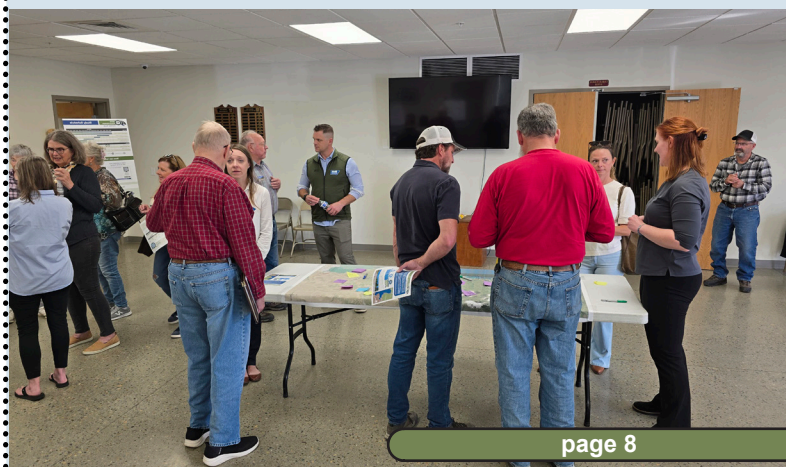
Two sets of public informational meetings were held at critical points during the planning study to engage the public and gather feedback. The first set of meetings took place after an initial evaluation of existing and projected conditions and was designed to discuss preliminary issues and concerns within the study area. The second set of meetings occurred after the identification of initial recommendations and focused on collecting feedback regarding the proposed improvements. These meetings were key opportunities for the public to stay informed and share their perspectives on the study's progress.

PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING #1

MDT hosted a set of in-person informational meetings on September 18th and 19th, 2024 in addition to a virtual meeting on September 26, 2024. The in-person meetings were formatted as an open house, held from 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the Polson Library and Somers Fire Hall, while the virtual meeting was held over the lunch hour using the Zoom platform. The purpose of the meetings was to provide an overview of the study process, summarize initial findings from the study, and offer an opportunity for the public to ask questions and share feedback.

Public notice was provided in multiple formats in advance of the informational meetings. A news release was issued to regional media outlets, and advertisements were placed in the *Daily Interlake* and *Lake County Leader* newspapers. Postcard invitations were mailed to 5,113 adjacent residents and landowners while electronic invitations were sent to identified stakeholders and other study contacts. Electronic notice was also posted to the study website.

A series of exhibits were displayed at the two in-person meeting locations summarizing the planning process and study schedule, corridor characteristics, and key findings about traffic, safety, and environmental conditions in the corridor to guide discussions. During the in-person meetings, attendees also had an opportunity to use markers or sticky notes to provide comments about specific locations on a printed aerial map of the corridor. The virtual meeting began with a brief presentation summarizing the same information followed by a question-and-answer period. Copies of the meeting materials and recordings were posted to the study website following the meetings.



A total of 27 people signed in at the Polson open house, 63 signed in at the Somers open house, and 19 people attended the virtual meeting. Several PMT and AC representatives also participated in one or more meetings and are not included in these counts. Public comments were collected through informal conversations at the open houses, comments on the aerial maps, written comment cards, and written comments through the Zoom question-and-answer portal.

PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING #2

MDT hosted a second set of in-person meetings on February 18th and 19th, 2025 in addition to a virtual meeting on February 20, 2025. The three meetings followed the same format, timing, and locations of the first round of public outreach to maintain consistency. The purpose of the second round of meetings was to provide an overview of the study recommendations and offer an opportunity for the public to ask questions and share feedback.

Public notice was again provided in multiple formats to advertise the informational meetings. A news release was issued to regional media outlets, and advertisements were placed in the *Daily Interlake* and *Lake County Leader* newspapers. Postcard and e-mail invitations were sent to adjacent landowners, identified stakeholders, and other study contacts with a notice also posted to the study website.

A series of exhibits were displayed at the two in-person meeting locations summarizing the study schedule, needs and objectives, preliminary recommendations, and next steps. During the in-person meetings, attendees also had an opportunity to use markers or sticky notes to provide comments about the specific recommendations which were illustrated on an enlarged aerial map of the corridor. The virtual meeting began with a brief presentation summarizing the same information followed by a question-and-answer period. Copies of the meeting materials and recordings were posted to the study website following the meetings.



A total of 7 people signed in at the Polson open house, 59 signed in at the Somers open house, and 19 people attended the virtual meeting. Other attendees were present but chose not to sign in. Several PMT and AC representatives also participated in one or more meetings and are not included in these counts. Public comments were collected through informal conversations at the open houses, comments on the aerial maps, written comment cards, and written comments through the Zoom question-and-answer portal.

PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Public and stakeholder comments were collected and considered throughout the study process. Overall, community opinions about issues, needs, and preferred improvements were aligned, though there were some instances of contradictory perspectives. Concerns and suggestions reflect the diverse range of issues affecting the corridor, with a common goal of improving safety, traffic flow, and environmental stewardship while preserving the region's unique character and cultural significance. Common opinions relating to primary topics of interest are summarized on the following page.



ACCESS

Stakeholders emphasized the need to improve existing highway access and limit future access, suggesting that existing driveways create safety hazards, particularly where visibility is restricted and high-speed traffic is involved. Potential improvement to consider included consolidating accesses, adding turn lanes, and implementing traffic control measures like signals or roundabouts at high-volume intersections to improve safety. New or improved turn lanes and possible acceleration/deceleration lanes would help facilitate safer entering and exiting maneuvers on the highway.

DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM

Many expressed concerns about additional development in the area, citing the potential for increased traffic congestion. Some wished local residents could have more influence over development decisions. During peak tourist seasons, the highway can become congested, making turning movements difficult to make. Some residents are concerned about increasing tourism, particularly because they feel out-of-state drivers often exceed posted speed limits. Suggestions to alleviate congestion from growth included adding more turn/travel lanes to improve traffic flow during busy periods.

SAFETY & DRIVER BEHAVIOR

Excessive speeds along the corridor, especially in residential areas, were a recurring safety concern. Recommendations included lowering speed limits in specific areas, enhancing speed enforcement, and considering variable speed limits based on traffic conditions. Unsafe passing maneuvers and turning actions were also frequently noted, with suggestions to improve enforcement and driver education on safe driving practices.

INCIDENT/EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The narrow, two-lane sections of the corridor were identified as a major challenge for incident management, with crashes potentially shutting down the highway and complicating emergency response. Stakeholders called for alternate routes to reroute traffic during emergencies and improved access for emergency responders, particularly from the fire halls throughout the corridor.

NOISE

Rising traffic volumes, along with noise from older trucks and motorcycles, were noted as increasing concerns, especially in residential areas. Recommendations included installing noise barriers or thick vegetation and enforcing noise restrictions, such as those related to compression brakes.

NON-MOTORIST ACCOMMODATIONS

Many stakeholders requested additional shared-use facilities, such as a continuous bike/pedestrian path along the highway, as well as improved highway crossings in high-traffic areas using pedestrian bridges or other traffic control devices like RRFBs or Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHB).

PASSING LANES, PASSING ZONES, & PULLOUTS

Several concerns were raised about large trucks, RVs, and other slow-moving vehicles causing delays, especially in areas with short passing zones or those intersected by driveways and intersections. Suggestions included extending passing zones and adding more passing lanes throughout the corridor to alleviate congestion during peak travel times. There was a call for more pullouts for slow-moving vehicles and law enforcement stops, particularly in areas with heavy traffic.

ROADWAY GEOMETRICS

A consistent request for widened shoulders and additional travel lanes was made, especially in areas where congestion is frequent. Limited visibility due to curves, intersections, and skewed road alignments were also identified as major safety concerns. Improvements to sightlines and clearer signage were suggested.

WILDLIFE

Wildlife activity, particularly involving deer, bear, and elk, is common along the corridor, creating safety hazards for vehicles. Stakeholders recommended implementing wildlife management practices such as fencing, wildlife crossings, and better signage to enhance safety for both wildlife and motorists.





PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD

A formal Tribal, agency, and public review period was held from July 19 through September 19, 2025, to obtain input and feedback on the draft *US 93 Polson to Somers Corridor Study and Access Management Plan*.

MDT issued news releases and placed display advertisements to announce the review period. Additionally, MDT sent notification emails to the study contact list and certified mailings to individual property owners directly adjacent to US 93 throughout the study corridor.

A total of 41 comments were received during the review period, and an additional 6 comments were received from September 19 through October 2, 2025. Common topics and locations of concern included:

- ✓ Lakeside area:
 - ✓ Blacktail Road/Stoner Loop
 - ✓ Bierney Creek Road
 - ✓ Discovery Lands/Flathead Lake Club
- ✓ Jette, Dayton, Big Arm
- ✓ Speeds
- ✓ Enforcement
- ✓ Enhanced intersection control
- ✓ Turn lanes (at multiple approaches)
- ✓ Passing lanes
- ✓ Warning signs
- ✓ Wildlife conflicts
- ✓ Traffic noise
- ✓ Highway maintenance
- ✓ Access recommendations (specific approaches)

Individual comments and responses are provided in [Appendix 2](#).



3.0



ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The environmental setting encompasses both natural features and human influences, providing essential context for transportation projects and helping to identify potential constraints or opportunities to be considered in the development process. This section summarizes the environmental factors that may need to be addressed during future phases, based on available information as of May 2024. Further details are provided in the *Environmental Scan* ([Appendix 3](#)).

Should improvement options move forward from this study into future development, a thorough analysis for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) will be required. The information gathered in this study may support the necessary environmental documentation for these future phases.

3.1. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment encompasses natural features like soil and rock formations, farmlands, water sources, wetlands, and floodplains, as well as human influences such as developed land, hazardous materials sites, residences, and areas sensitive to noise impacts. These elements shape the landscape and must be considered when planning transportation projects to identify potential challenges and opportunities.

3.1.1. Soil Resources and Prime Farmland

The US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) determines which soils qualify as farmland, given their physical and chemical characteristics. Soils that qualify as farmland may be classified as either prime farmland, unique farmland, and farmland of Statewide or local importance. Farmland subject to

protections under the *Farmland Policy Protection Act* does not have to be currently used for cropland. Lands already in or committed to urban development are not subject to Federal farmland protections.

Within the study area, less than one percent of the lands are classified as prime farmland, nine percent as prime farmland if irrigated, seven percent as farmland of Statewide importance, 22 percent as farmland of local importance, and 20 percent as farmland of unique importance. Some of these farmlands occur in undeveloped areas without buildings, roads, or utilities and could potentially be subject to the *Farmland Policy Protection Act* if impacted by future projects.



3.1.2. Geologic Conditions

The study area is along the western shore of Flathead Lake, which is surrounded by mountains and drained by the Flathead River. Flathead Lake was once part of Glacial Lake Missoula, which existed about 15,000 years ago. Floods from this lake carried large amounts of sediment across the region. Over time, tectonic movements, erosion, and glaciation shaped the land.

The area's geology includes glacial deposits (mainly silt, sand, and gravel), as well as rock formations like the Helena and Wallace formations, which consist of layers of quartzite, siltite, and argillite, with some dolomite and limestone. There are also areas with Precambrian rocks, such as quartzite and limestone.

Montana is seismically active, especially in the western part of the State. The study area is in a moderate to high seismic risk zone, with frequent small earthquakes and a few larger ones documented in the area. While seismic activity is common, large earthquakes happen about every ten to 15 years. Although significant fault lines exist in the area, none of the strongest earthquakes in the valley can be clearly attributed to activity along known faults.

For any major reconstruction or improvements to US 93, geotechnical investigations would be needed to assess potential concerns like slope stability, erosion, settlement, and other geotechnical factors.



Photo conveys geological conditions around Flathead Lake

3.1.3. Surface Waters

US 93 runs along the western shore of Flathead Lake, crossing seven streams, including Stoner, Forrey, Big Lodge, Birch, Spring, Proctor, and Dayton creeks. With the exception of Dayton Creek, all streams are conveyed under the highway via culverts. The highway corridor is also located within 0.25 mile of the lake shoreline, except between approximately RP 63.0 and 70.0 and at various peninsulas.

Road work, like bridge building or culvert installation, could affect these streams and may require permits. Coordination with Federal, State, and local agencies would be necessary for permits, and impacts to streams and associated wetlands might require mitigation.

WATER QUALITY

The Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) protects water quality, with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) overseeing the CWA outside reservation lands while the CSKT and US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) regulate water quality within the Flathead Reservation. Flathead Lake is generally known for its high water quality but has faced pollution problems in the past, especially from phosphorus, nitrogen, and mercury. Despite successful water quality management efforts, MDEQ currently lists the northern part of the lake as being impaired due to pollutants like mercury and polychlorinated biphenyl. Streams along US 93 are not impaired, but they fall within the Flathead Lake watershed and are therefore addressed under applicable management and restoration plans for the entire watershed.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

In Montana, stormwater management is regulated by MDEQ outside of Reservation lands. On the Flathead Reservation, the USEPA regulates stormwater discharges in coordination with CSKT. Stormwater discharges from construction projects affecting one acre or more of land will require a permit. The applicability of stormwater permits for improvements on US 93 would need to be reviewed for any projects that may be advanced from the corridor study. The incorporation of permanent erosion and sediment control design measures should also be considered for projects that have the potential to adversely affect water quality within the study area.

LAKESHORE PROTECTION

Work near the lakeshore requires a Lakeshore Construction Permit. Lake County, Flathead County, and CSKT all administer lakeshore protection regulations within their jurisdictions. Road construction activities associated with potential future improvement that may affect the lakeshore will require coordination with local and Tribal authorities to obtain permits and ensure compliance with applicable regulations.

IRRIGATION FEATURES

The majority of farmland in the Flathead valley is irrigated, primarily by the Flathead Indian Irrigation Project. However, the acreage of irrigated land in both Flathead and Lake County has decreased by about 28 percent in the past five years as historical areas of farmland have been converted to commercial and residential developments. The US 93 corridor does not cross any mapped irrigation features, but coordination with appropriate overseeing authorities and affected landowners may be needed to avoid impacts to agricultural operations and downstream users.

3.1.4. Groundwater

Groundwater in the Flathead Lake area is an essential resource for drinking, irrigation, and livestock. Shallow aquifers are found in unconsolidated alluvial deposits along streams or in bedrock near the surface and are important water sources but are mostly limited to floodplains associated with rivers and streams. Deeper aquifers are the most used sources of groundwater in the area. Groundwater flow is generally sufficient, but bedrock permeability can be unpredictable.

As of April 2024, there are over 21,000 wells in Flathead County and 8,000 wells in Lake County. Most wells are used for domestic purposes, with a smaller percentage used for agricultural needs. In the study area, there are more than 600 wells within 0.25 miles of the highway, with most wells drilled to depths of 100-400 feet.

High groundwater levels may be found near drainages, but widespread issues with elevated groundwater are not expected along the corridor. There are 32 public water supply wells in the study area, with 100-foot setback requirements to prevent contamination. The study area also includes six water and sewer districts providing services to local communities.

Any proposed improvements to the US 93 corridor should take groundwater impacts into account to protect local water supplies.

3.1.5. Floodplains and Floodways

Floodplains are generally flat areas near rivers or streams that experience occasional flooding. They consist of the “floodway,” which carries floodwaters, and the “flood fringe,” which is the area covered by water during floods. Executive Order 11988 requires efforts to minimize flood risks, protect human safety, and preserve the natural benefits of floodplains, like habitat, water quality, and groundwater recharge.

For projects involving regulated floodplains, a review must be done to assess potential impacts, especially in the “base” floodplain, which is defined by the 100-year flood (a flood with a one percent chance of happening in any year). In the study area, most of US 93 is outside the floodplain, in a Zone X area (minimal flood hazard). Parts of the Flathead Lake 100-year floodplain cross the 0.25-mile study area buffer but do not cross the roadway.

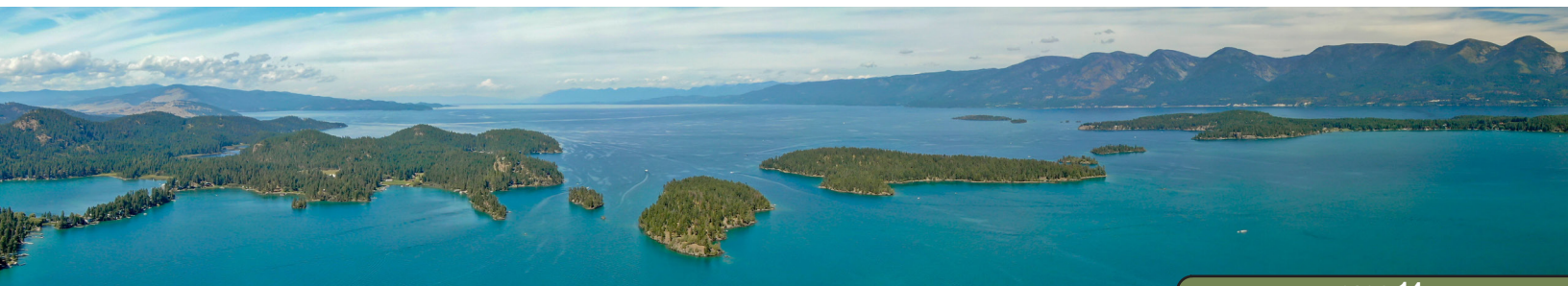
While past flooding has occurred in the Flathead Watershed, it has typically been confined to rivers and streams, with Flathead Lake itself remaining stable as dams regulate water levels. The Hungry Horse Dam and Selis Ksanka Qlispe Dam (formerly Kerr Dam) help control the flow of water into and out of the lake.

Flathead County and Lake County regulate development in floodplains, and coordination with local floodplain administrators would be necessary for any proposed improvements within regulated flood hazard areas.

3.1.6. Wetlands

Wetlands are areas that are regularly saturated with water, supporting plants and animals adapted to these conditions. Wetlands include marshes, bogs, shorelines of lakes, ponds, reservoirs, seasonal wet meadows, and areas along streams or floodplains.

USFWS compiles data on wetlands through the National Wetlands Inventory, which maps wetlands and deepwater habitats across the United States but does not define wetlands for regulatory purposes. Wetlands present in and near the study area include



those associated with Flathead Lake as well as riverines, freshwater forested/shrub wetlands, freshwater emergent wetlands, and forested/shrub riparian areas along the various streams and drainages in the area.

Field-based wetland delineations would be required if improvement options are forwarded from the corridor study that could potentially affect wetlands. Unavoidable impacts may require permits and compensatory mitigation.

3.1.7. Hazardous Substances

MDEQ works to clean up contaminated properties and regulate underground storage tanks to prevent environmental releases. No Superfund sites, hazardous waste generators, or abandoned mines are located within 0.25 miles of the study corridor. Seven hazardous waste release sites, including diesel and motor oil spills, have been cleaned and delisted, with one site near the intersection of US 93 and Somers Road (RP 104.2) still active. Four remediation response sites, addressed under the *Comprehensive Environmental Cleanup and Responsibility Act*, are present, with the BNSF Somers Plant and Somers Marina being the only remaining active sites. The study area also contains 18 underground storage tanks, with 16 still active and two out of use. A total of 14 petroleum tank releases have occurred within the study area, with all but two having been resolved. The region also includes a permitted opencut mine (Doten Pit), an unpermitted mine site near Dayton, and the Lakeside Landfill, which accepts household waste. Additionally, MDT is proposing a roadkill composting facility northeast of Elmo which would require appropriate licensing from MDEQ.

3.1.8. Air Quality

The Clean Air Act of 1970 established air pollution control programs, with the USEPA setting National Ambient Air Quality Standards for six pollutants to protect public health and welfare. Montana also has State-level air quality standards. Areas that meet the air quality standards are designated as “attainment” areas, while those exceeding standards are “nonattainment.” Both Polson and Kalispell are considered nonattainment areas for particulate matter. While these areas are near the study corridor, the corridor itself is outside these zones and unlikely to be subject to conformity requirements ensuring vehicle emissions associated with transportation plans, programs, and projects align with air quality goals. Future changes in air quality may trigger such requirements.

3.1.9. Noise

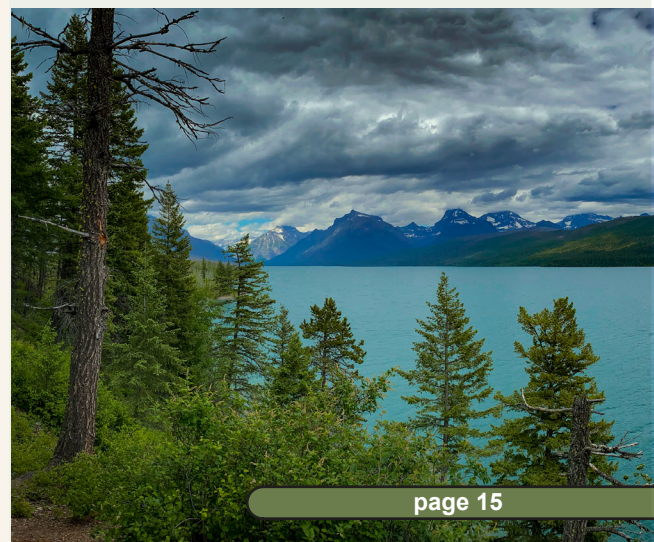
Roadway projects, including improvements to US 93, can increase noise levels during construction and operation, affecting sensitive receptors such as nearby residences and protected sites. Detailed noise analyses are typically conducted if significant changes are made to the road’s design in accordance with the federal noise regulation outlined in 23 CFR 772. Construction could result in temporary noise impacts, but measures should be taken to minimize disruptions to residents during future project development.

3.2. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Biological resources include the diverse plant and animal life within the study area, such as vegetation, mammals, birds, fisheries, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, as well as any threatened or endangered species, or species of concern. These resources are integral to the ecosystem and must be carefully considered during transportation project planning. Understanding their presence and health allows for the identification of potential impacts, guiding the development of effective mitigation and avoidance strategies to protect and preserve these resources throughout future MDT project phases.

3.2.1. Vegetation and Invasive Weeds

The vegetation along the US 93 corridor is diverse, encompassing forest, shrubland, grassland, wetland, and riparian ecosystems. Forested areas are primarily dominated by coniferous species, while grasslands feature fescue varieties, and riparian zones contain a mix of tree and shrub species. The corridor also includes cultivated crop land and developed areas.





Invasive and noxious weeds present a significant concern in both Flathead County and Lake County and both employ Integrated Weed Management strategies to control the spread of these species. Montana has 40 non-native plants listed as noxious, and it is illegal to propagate or allow these species to spread due to their negative impact on agriculture, ecology, and the economy. Lake County, with its high percentage of surface water and wetlands, has additional concerns related to aquatic weeds. Similarly, Flathead County identifies several species that require ongoing management. The Montana Weed Control Board prioritizes these weeds into categories, from those that are rare in the State to those that are more widespread and in need of containment or eradication. Additionally, five aquatic invasive species are known to inhabit the lakes, ponds, and streams within the study area, further compounding the issue.

3.2.2. Biological Community

The US 93 corridor, particularly around Flathead Lake, provides essential habitat for a variety of aquatic and terrestrial species. The riparian zones are critical wildlife habitats, supporting species of birds and small mammals. In addition, the study area features a diverse range of habitats sustaining large ungulates, carnivores, small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and aquatic species.

MAMMALS

MFWP mapping shows that half of the study area supports both general and winter ranges for whitetail and mule deer, while the area from Somers to the Flathead Reservation border provides these ranges for elk. Black bears and grizzlies have general ranges that cover the entire study corridor. The adjacent Salish Mountains offer critical habitat and connectivity for wide-ranging species like deer, elk, wolverine, and lynx. Grizzly bears are also widespread throughout the study area, which lies within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem.

BIRDS

According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program database, over 200 bird species have been documented in Flathead County and Lake County, many of which may occur in the study area. These species include songbirds, birds of prey, waterfowl, owls, and shorebirds, with several listed as Species of Concern (SOC). Most avian observations occur in riparian, open lands, and forest areas along the corridor.

Many bird species are protected under the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services (USFWS) Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Birds of Conservation Concern, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Any future improvements to the study corridor should account for potential constraints related to migratory bird nesting times and the presence of bald and golden eagle nests.

FISHERIES

Flathead Lake is the major water body that parallels US 93 and has several small streams and drainages crossing under the highway within the study area. Flathead Lake and its tributaries support a variety of Montana native and game fish, including Brook Trout, Bull Trout, and Slimy Sculpin. One species of aquatic invasive species, the virile crayfish, has also been observed within the study area. Many of the waterbodies crossed by the highway are intermittent streams, which do not hold water year-round and likely do not support aquatic life. As future projects move forward, potential impacts to fish habitats, including barriers to fish passage, may need to be addressed.

AMPHIBIANS, REPTILES, AND INVERTEBRATES

The study area is home to various amphibian, reptile, and invertebrate species, including the western toad, northern leopard frog, western skink, northern alligator lizard, and western painted turtle. Additionally, seven invertebrate species, many of which are listed as Montana SOC, have been observed or are expected to occur in the area.



3.2.3. Threatened and Endangered Species

Federal regulations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) require agencies to ensure their actions do not jeopardize the existence of Federally listed species or harm designated critical habitats. The study area contains several ESA-listed species, including the Canada lynx, grizzly bear, and North American wolverine. The area also provides critical habitat for bull trout, particularly in Flathead Lake, and potentially hosts species like the yellow-billed cuckoo, which is listed as threatened. In addition, the monarch butterfly (candidate for listing) and Spalding's catchfly (threatened), may also occur within the study area. Any projects moving forward will need to undergo ESA review to ensure compliance, and up-to-date data should be consulted regarding the current status of species and critical habitat.

3.2.4. Other Species of Concern

SOC are native animals or plants that are at-risk due to declining population trends, threats to their habitats, and restricted distribution, among other factors. Designation as a SOC is based on the Montana Status Rank and is not a statutory or regulatory classification. Rather, these designations provide information that helps resource managers make proactive decisions regarding species conservation and data collection priorities.

Within a 0.25 mile buffer of US 93, species occurrence records have been documented for a variety of species, including eight mammals, 17 birds, three fish, one amphibian, five plants, two invertebrates, two reptiles, and one "other" species, all of which are listed as Montana SOC based on these occurrences. These species may or may not be designated or protected under Federal listings. A species occurrence refers to an area where a species is, or has been, present, and these records help inform conservation efforts and project planning within the area. Note that other species have been observed in the US 93 study area but have not been documented as a species occurrence within the study area.

If any projects are advanced from the corridor study, a thorough review of wildlife occurrence databases should be conducted, and habitats near any proposed project sites should be evaluated to determine their suitability for any SOC. Measures to avoid or minimize disturbance of these species or their habitat should be incorporated into project design and implementation.



3.3. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Social and cultural resources encompass the various human-centered aspects of the study area, including recreational resources, cultural and historic sites, and visual resources. These resources are integral to the community's identity and quality of life and must be carefully evaluated during transportation project planning. Special attention is given to areas with legal protections, as well as potential impacts to local communities, cultural heritage, and visual aesthetics. Understanding these factors helps ensure that future project development respects and preserves the social and cultural fabric of the area while minimizing adverse impacts.

3.3.1. Environmental Justice

Consideration of environmental justice was revoked by Executive Order 14151 issued January 20, 2025.

3.3.2. Recreational Resources

The US 93 corridor provides access to Flathead Lake, a hub for activities like fishing, boating, and hiking, and is a gateway to Glacier National Park and multiple national forests. It also supports local tourism and economic activity, with various State, Tribal, and local parks, fishing access sites, boat launches, and other recreation areas along the route.

3.3.3. Cultural and Historic Resources

The National Historic Preservation Act, among other Federal and State directives, establishes requirements that must be addressed for projects with the potential to affect historic or archaeological sites, including those listed or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Agencies must minimize or mitigate adverse impacts on these resources and consult with Indian Tribes with interests in the area.

A review of 25 reports from the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) identified 34 cultural sites in the study area, including 23 historic and 11 prehistoric sites. While seven sites are eligible for the NRHP and two are already listed, three are potentially eligible, 11 have unknown eligibility, and the remaining 11 are not eligible. Some sites categorized as unknown eligibility may represent highly sensitive Tribal heritage properties with potential for buried archaeological deposits, regardless of eligibility status.



In addition to sensitive Tribal heritage sites, such as prehistoric occupation sites and burials, three areas of heightened cultural sensitivity were identified, including the stretch of highway through Elmo (RP 76 to RP 78), Dayton (RP 80 to RP 84), and Rollins (RP 87.5 to RP 90). Historical documentation shows that these areas are of special cultural significance to the CSKT.

Field reconnaissance is needed to assess the current condition of these sites, as much of the documentation is over 30 years old and the sites may have been damaged or removed since the original documentation. Both direct and indirect impacts (e.g., visual, noise, and access) to NRHP-listed or eligible properties will need to be considered if improvement options move forward. Early consultation with the CSKT and THPO will be necessary to address potential impacts on highway improvements, both on and off the reservation.

3.3.4. Section 4(f) Resources

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 protects public parks, recreation areas, wildlife refuges, and historic sites eligible for the NRHP. Projects receiving Federal funding must coordinate with the relevant authorities to assess potential impacts on these resources. If a project impacts a Section 4(f) property and cannot avoid it, the FHWA must ensure that all possible measures are taken to minimize harm. Recreation facilities qualify if they are publicly owned, open to the public, and serve recreational purposes. National Forest lands are generally not subject to Section 4(f) unless designated for specific recreational purposes. If projects move forward from this study, potential effects on recreational resources discussed in the *Environmental Scan* should be evaluated as per Section 4(f).

3.3.5. Subject 6(f) Resources

Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act protects public recreational sites funded by the LWCF. Conversion of these lands to non-recreational uses is prohibited unless approved by the National Park Service. If approved, the converted property must be replaced with equivalent recreation land. Section 6(f) encumbered lands in the study area include Big Arm State Park, Somers Beach State Park, West Shore State Park, and Wild Horse Island State Park, all funded by the MFWP through the LWCF program.

3.3.6. Visual Resources

Visual resources include natural and cultural features that create a landscape's aesthetic qualities. The study area has diverse landscapes, such as forested lands, rural residences, lakefront views, and wetlands. Projects that alter the character of the landscape (e.g., realigning roads or expanding areas) could impact visual resources. This may include changes that bring roadways closer to residential areas, parks, or culturally significant sites, altering the visual character of the area.



3.4. AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic and socioeconomic information was reviewed to help determine recent trends in population, age distribution, employment, economic status, and commuting for area residents. Historic and recent trends in area demographics help define existing conditions and aid in forecasting techniques, as there is a direct correlation between motor vehicle travel and socioeconomic indicators. For more information about data and sourcing please refer to [Appendix 4](#).

3.4.1. Population

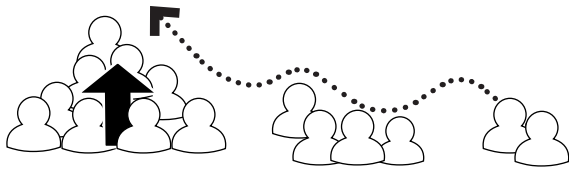
Understanding population composition is necessary, as the data may influence the types of improvements identified. For example, an aging population may indicate a need for specific types of transportation improvements such as transit services and/or non-motorized infrastructure improvements. The presence of a disadvantaged population may warrant other considerations.

POPULATION GROWTH TRENDS

Flathead County and Lake County have been among Montana's fastest-growing regions. From 1970 to 2020, these Counties added over 81,000 residents, marking a 150 percent population increase. The City of Kalispell, located northeast of the US 93 corridor, saw its population more than double, from 10,526 in 1970 to 24,558 by 2020. Similarly, Polson's population grew from 2,464 in 1970 to 5,148 in 2020.

Between 1970 and 2020, Flathead County's population grew at an annual rate of 2.0 percent, while Lake County grew at 1.6 percent. By contrast, Montana and the US saw slower growth rates of around 1.0 percent annually, highlighting the rapid population expansion in Flathead County and Lake County. From 2010 to 2020, Flathead County and Lake County experienced significant population growth, with a collective increase of 13 percent, bringing their combined estimated population to over 135,000 residents. Approximately 50 percent of this population resides in unincorporated areas, while the remaining 50 percent resides in urban centers such as Kalispell and Polson.

This population growth is expected to continue. According to recent Census estimates, in-migration from other Counties within Montana is playing a notable role in local population increases—particularly in Lake County, where intra-state movers account for the largest share of new residents. These trends suggest that both regional and statewide dynamics are contributing to the area's continued growth.



POPULATION, HOUSING, AND TRAVEL CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic information is important to assist in identifying populations that might be affected by improvements in the study area. Recent demographic data was obtained for the three largest communities in the corridor (Lindisfarne, Lakeside, and Somers), Lake County, Flathead County, and Montana.

✓ Population Characteristics

Lake County's demographic makeup stands out in comparison to neighboring geographies. It has the highest percentage of individuals identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, at 22.1 percent, compared to 1.1 percent in Flathead County and 5.8 percent in the State. Lake County also has the highest proportion of people classified as other races or two or more races at 11.8 percent, while the White (non-Hispanic or Latino) population is the lowest compared to other geographies at 65.2 percent.

In terms of age distribution, the Lindisfarne and Somers areas have notably low populations under the age of 18, at around 4 percent, compared to 21-25 percent in other areas. Lindisfarne also has the highest percentage of residents aged 65 and older, with more than 40 percent of its population in this age group.

✓ Housing Characteristics

From 2017 to 2022, housing units in the Lakeside, Lindisfarne, and Somers areas grew at significantly higher rates (11.5 percent to 53.8 percent) compared to Flathead County (4.4 percent), Lake County (-2.2 percent), and the State (3.3 percent) as a whole. The share of owner-occupied housing has increased slightly in Lakeside and at the County and State levels; however, there was a sharp decline in owner-occupied housing in both Lindisfarne and Somers (-16.0 and -41.2 percentage points, respectively). In general, a notable increase in housing occupancy was observed in the study area, although many of these units are likely vacation rentals.

✓ Travel Characteristics

Most workers in the study area commute by personal vehicle, with the highest percentage of solo drivers in Lindisfarne (90.5 percent). Carpooling is most common in Lake County (13.2 percent), while walking to work is highest in Lakeside and Lake County (6.4 percent and 4.9 percent, respectively). Workers in Lakeside and Lindisfarne generally have slightly longer commute times compared to other areas.

3.4.2. Economic Conditions

The region surrounding the corridor boasts a diverse economy, supported by sectors such as services and technology, construction, finance and real estate, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and government, positioning it well for continued economic growth. Kalispell, the largest city in Flathead County, serves as the primary economic hub, with a large portion of the workforce employed across sectors like healthcare, retail, hospitality, construction, and professional services. In Lake County, Polson acts as the main employment center, with significant employment in public administration, healthcare, retail trade, and education. With continued desirability as a place to live and work, the region is positioned favorably for sustained economic expansion.

Tourism and outdoor recreation also play a significant economic role in the region, which offers access to major attractions such as the Flathead National Forest, Lolo National Forest, Kootenai National Forest, and Glacier National Park. In 2021 and 2022, nonresidents were estimated to have spent \$818 million in Flathead County alone, the second-highest total behind Gallatin County. Retail trade and the arts, entertainment, recreation, and accommodation sectors employed the second and third largest percentages at the County levels, underscoring the significant influence of tourism and outdoor recreation industries in the region. Other key employment sectors for the communities along the study corridor include manufacturing, information, finance/insurance/real estate/rental and leasing, public administration, and professional/scientific/management/administrative services, reflecting a diverse and robust local economy.

3.4.3. Income Characteristics

The median household income in Lindisfarne is around \$135,000, more than double the Statewide value, while Lakeside reported a median income of just over \$70,000, about seven percent higher than the State average. The Somers area and Lake County both had lower median household incomes, ranging from \$55,000 to \$58,000, about 13-18 percent below the Statewide average. Flathead County's median income of \$68,000 closely matched the State value.

The unemployment rate is lowest in Lakeside and Somers (0 percent), and highest in Lake County (6.5 percent) and Lindisfarne (5.3 percent). Flathead County had an overall unemployment rate of 3.2 percent, below the Statewide average of 3.9 percent. The percentage of the population below the poverty level was highest in Lake County (19.0 percent), followed by Lakeside (17.1 percent), the State of Montana (12.4 percent), Lindisfarne (11.9 percent), Flathead County (9.3 percent), and Somers (5.1 percent).

4.0



TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

The study assessed the current and future conditions of the transportation system in the corridor. It reviewed demographic and economic factors affecting traffic, roadway and transportation facilities, geometric features, traffic volumes, and safety. This data may inform future project-level analyses if an improvement option progresses from this study. More details are contained in the *Existing and Projected Conditions Report* ([Appendix 4](#)).

4.1. PHYSICAL FEATURES AND CHARACTERISTICS

US 93 is a major north-south NHS route in the western US that is important to the local, State, and Federal transportation system. It begins in Arizona and ends in Montana at the Canadian border where it continues north as a Canadian highway. Within Montana, the Polson to Somers corridor provides a key regional travel route connecting the major cities of Missoula and Kalispell. The corridor serves a variety of uses including commuter, commercial, and recreational traffic.

Right-of-way widths vary considerably within the corridor. For much of the corridor, widths are approximately 160 feet but are typically narrower beginning near Lakeside and continuing north through Somers. There are also locations where the roadway exists on easements on managed lands. A map of existing managed lands and roadway easement locations is shown in [Figure 2](#).

4.1.1. Land Use and Right-of-Way

The land in the study area is primarily owned by private landowners, though several public lands also exist. Four State Parks, including Big Arm (RP 74.5), Wild Horse Island (RP 81.0, island within Flathead Lake only accessible by boat), West Shore (RP 92.7), and Somers Beach (RP 103.1) are located within or adjacent to the corridor. Several lands surrounding the corridor are Reservation trust lands managed by CSKT, some of which are restricted for Tribal member access only. Conservation easements held by Montana Land Reliance exist near or adjacent to the study corridor northeast of Dayton, approximately between RP 83 and 87. Additional conservation easements, held by Montana Land Reliance and the Nature Conservancy, are located approximately 0.5 mile east of RP 96 on Conrad Point.



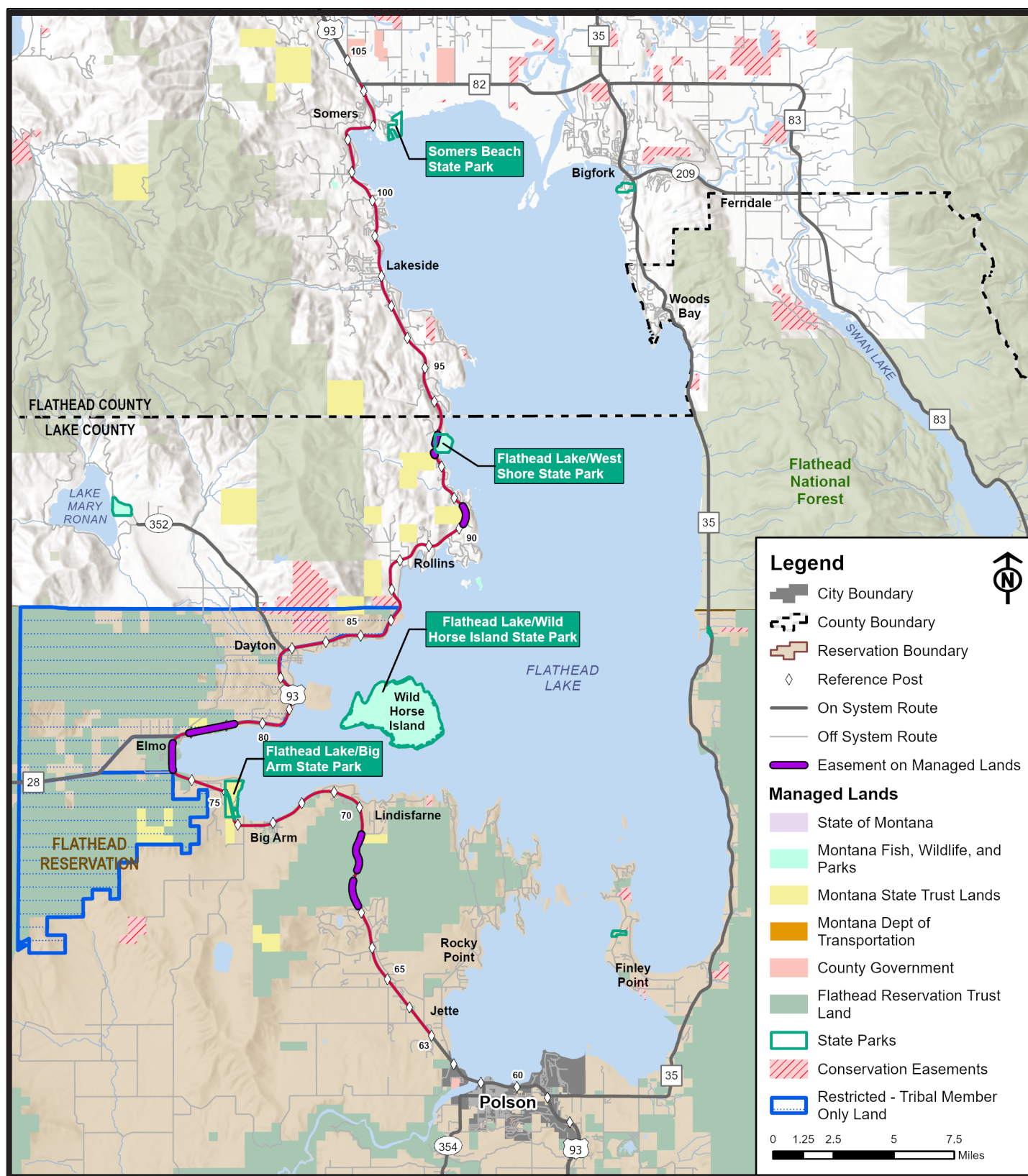


Figure 2: Managed Lands

4.1.2. Roadway Surfacing

The existing roadway width varies from 24 to 77 feet along the study corridor, with the typical paved width being approximately 32 feet, which consists of one travel lane in each direction and approximately four-foot-wide shoulders. Occasional turn lanes, a two-way left-turn lane (TWLTL) through the Lakeside and Somers areas, and intermittent passing lanes are also located within the corridor resulting in wider surface widths.

US 93 was initially established in 1926, with many stretches of the highway being widened, straightened, or rerouted as part of on-going efforts to improve safety and preserve wildlife in the corridor. The section of highway from approximately West Shore State Park north to Somers was last reconstructed in the early 1960s and the southern half of the highway was last reconstructed between 1986 and 1996. MDT performs surfacing treatments periodically to maintain the condition of the highway.

To ensure proper timing of maintenance treatments, MDT measures and tracks pavement condition in the corridor annually. Pavement condition data from 2023 indicates that the pavement is in fair condition from Polson to RP 85 (east of Dayton), good condition from RP 85 to RP 102 (south of Somers), and poor condition for the remainder of the corridor.

4.1.3. Access

Numerous public and private access points occur along the study corridor. Access points were identified through a review of available GIS data, and aerial imagery. Based on this review, 402 access points were identified along the corridor. Of the 402 total access points, 189 were considered public roadways, 158 were private approaches, 25 were farm field approaches, eight were recreation approaches, and 22 were designated turnouts. Access point density varies throughout the corridor, ranging from one access point per mile in rural segments, to nearly 40 access points per mile in the Lakeside area.



The angle of an approach refers to the angle at which the approaching road intersects the major road. Desirably, roadways should intersect at or as close to 90° as practical to provide the greatest sight lines for drivers.

A total of 64 skewed access points were identified on the corridor, about half are public approaches and half are private driveways.

The following three existing access control plans are in place along the study corridor.

- ✓ **Elmo – Rollins (RP 78.73 to 84.63):**
This 1981 resolution designates the 5.5-mile-long segment of US 93 a limited access highway.²⁸
- ✓ **Flathead County Line – South (RP 84.63 to 92.38):**
This 1985 resolution designates the 7.7-mile-long segment of US 93 a limited access highway.²⁹
- ✓ **Somers – Kalispell (RP 102.87 to 108.47):**
This 1991 resolution designates the 7.9-mile-long segment of US 93 a limited access highway.³⁰

Due to the outdated and incomplete nature of existing access management plans within the corridor, MDT has developed an updated *Access Management Plan* covering the entire corridor. The plan will supersede all previous resolutions upon adoption and serve as a supplemental component of the *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study*.



4.1.4. Posted Speeds

The study corridor has varying speed limits and intermittent speed zones. Most of the roadway is signed as a standard highway with a 70-mph daytime limit for passenger vehicles and 65-mph limit for heavy trucks and nighttime travel. Speed zones exist through the main communities along the corridor including Somers (45-mph), Lakeside (35-mph), Elmo (45-mph), and Big Arm (45-mph). In addition, a 65-mph speed zone was recently established from Rollins to Lakeside between approximately RP 86.3 and 97.0 (previously posted at 70 mph), and the Lakeside speed limit was reduced from 35-mph to 30-mph, based on recommendations made in recent speed studies. Another speed study, through the communities of Elmo and Dayton, was conducted during the summer of 2023 and recommended extending the existing 55 mph transition zone north of Elmo and reducing the existing 70 mph speed limit through Dayton to 65 mph. The existing posted speed limits are shown in **Figure 3**.

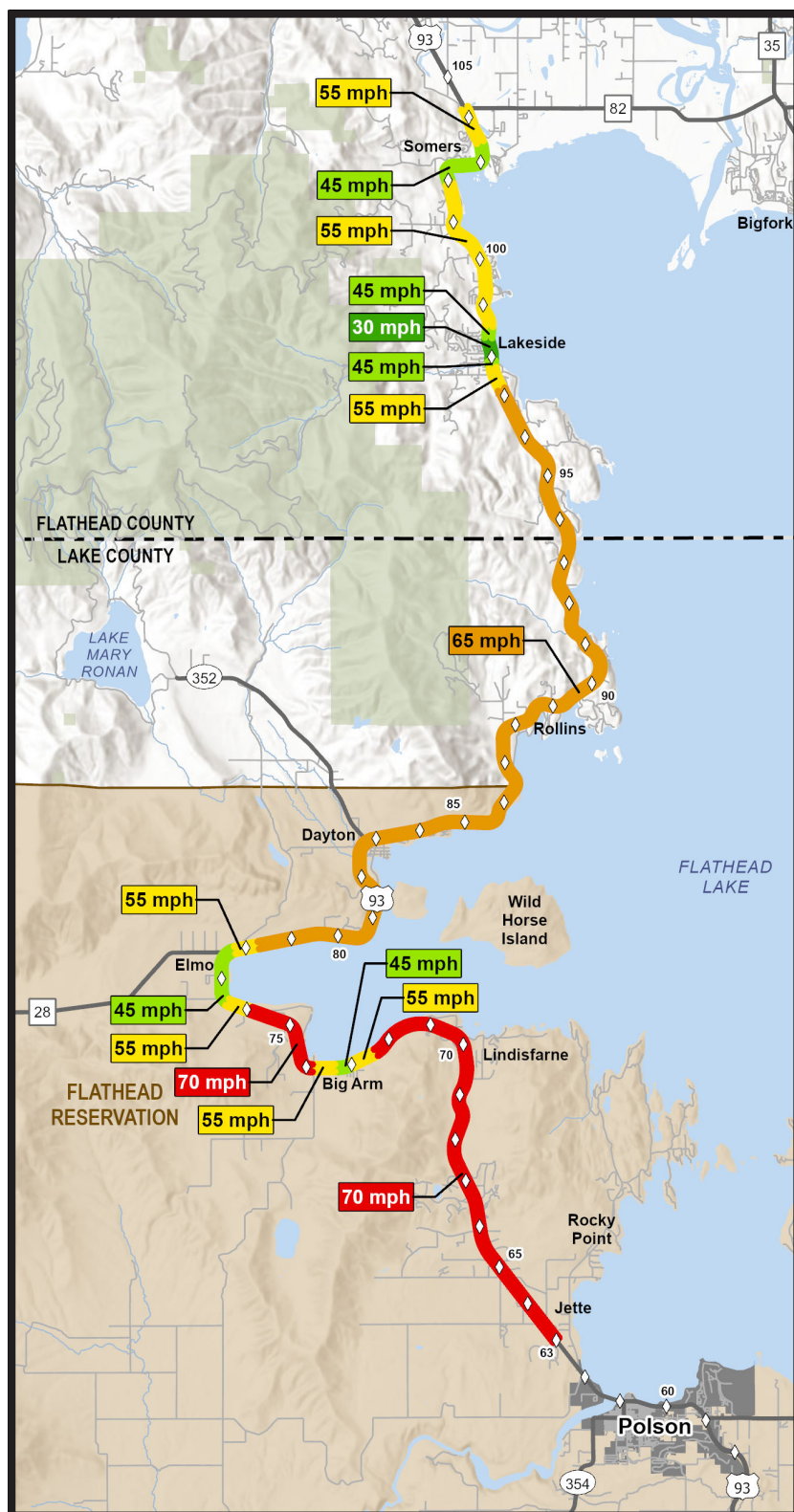
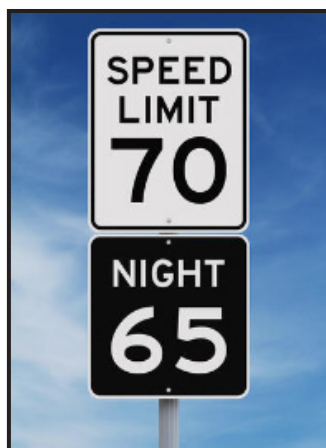


Figure 3: Posted Speed Limits

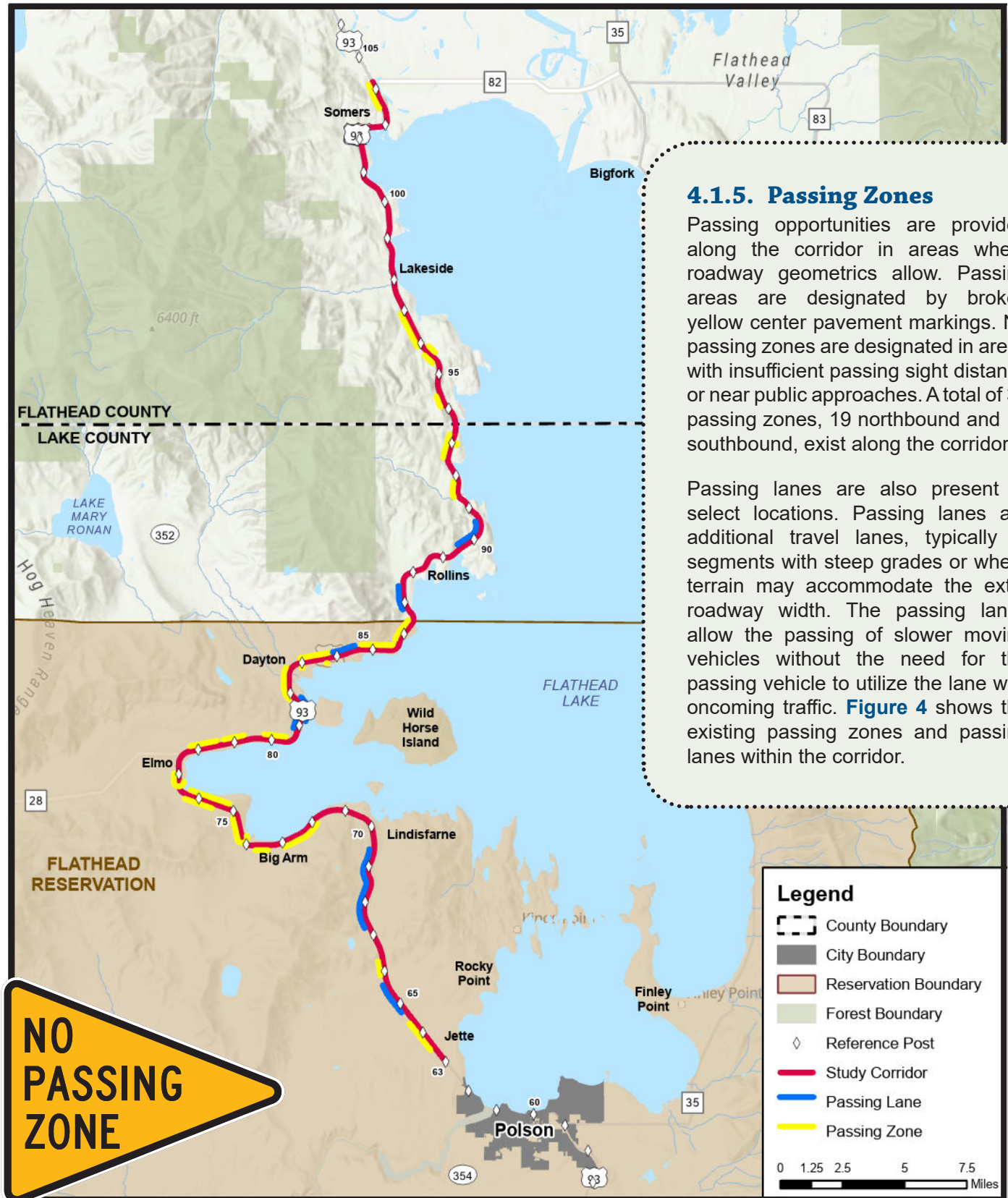


Figure 4: Passing Opportunities

4.1.6. Maintenance and Operations

MDT is responsible for maintenance of US 93 throughout the entire study area, including repairs and preventative maintenance of the roadway as well as maintenance of signs and structures within the highway right-of-way. The entire corridor is within the Kalispell Maintenance Division. Between MT 28 and MT 82, the highway falls under the Rollins Maintenance Section. South of MT 28, the corridor is part of the Polson Maintenance Section.



WINTER OPERATIONS

Winter snowplowing and sanding are also the responsibility of MDT maintenance personnel. The study corridor is considered a Level I and Level I-A winter maintenance area according to the MDT *Maintenance Operations and Procedures Manual*.³¹ The portion of US 93 within a 3-mile radius of Polson qualifies as a Level I maintenance area, meaning it is eligible to receive up to 24 hours-per-day coverage during a winter storm event. The remainder of the study corridor is classified as a Level 1-A maintenance route, indicating eligibility for 19 hours-per-day coverage, typically between 5:00 AM and 12:00 AM, during a winter storm event. Implementation of coverage is at the discretion of MDT's Kalispell Area Maintenance Chief. The primary objective is to keep the roadway open to traffic and provide an intermittent bare pavement surface in the main driving lane as soon as possible. The remaining lanes and shoulders should be cleared as soon as conditions, available manpower, and equipment allows. Anti-icing and sand/de-icing operations are typically conducted during the storm.



HEAVY VEHICLE OPERATIONS

A single portable weigh station site is listed in Rollins.



EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Flathead County Office of Emergency Services is the umbrella organization for operations relating to emergency management, incident management, hazardous materials, fire service, and 9-1-1 calls. Similarly, the Lake County Emergency Manager operates the Office of Emergency Management in Polson that also serves as the local Emergency Operations Center in the event of an emergency requiring a multi-agency response.

The corridor is served by multiple rural fire districts: Polson Rural Fire District (RFD), Chief Cliff Fire Service Area (FSA), Rollins RFD, and Somers RFD. A few segments of the corridor are located outside these districts and are under the jurisdiction of the Flathead County FSA.

US 93 is patrolled by the Lake and Flathead County Sheriff's Offices in conjunction with Montana Highway Patrol, and the Flathead Tribal Police Department.

Medical services for emergency situations are primarily served by Logan Health in Kalispell, a Level III Trauma Hospital, or the Providence St. Joseph Hospital of Polson, which is a designated Community Trauma Hospital. Both locations have on-site helipads for air ambulance transport.

Emergency response is a critical concern within this corridor, especially given the area's rural nature, which often results in long distances to the nearest medical services. When incidents occur, emergency responders may block the highway while managing the scene, leading to significant delays for other drivers. The lack of designated turn-around areas, alternate routes, and additional lanes in many sections of the highway further exacerbates the issue, making it difficult for traffic to flow smoothly and prolonging delays for those affected by road closures.

MUTUAL AID AGREEMENTS

A *Tribal-County Mutual Aid Agreement* exists between Lake County, CSKT, and Sanders County for provision of emergency services. This agreement states that although each jurisdiction possess responsibility for emergency and disaster preparedness, and recovery operations in their respective jurisdictions, they will work together in an informed, cooperative, coordinated response to provide the most cost-effective, safest response to emergencies and disasters.

The *Lake County Emergency Services Master Mutual Aid Agreement* allows the rural fire departments to respond within each other's districts.

Under the *Intrastate Mutual Aid System* (Montana Code Annotated 10-3-901) member jurisdictions, including the State, Counties, Cities, and Tribes, may request assistance from other member jurisdictions to prevent, mitigate, respond to or recover from an emergency or disaster, or in concert with drills or exercises. Any resource (personnel, assets and equipment) of a member jurisdiction may be made available to another member jurisdiction. All jurisdictions were automatically enrolled in the program when the agreement was codified in 2009 and must formally withdraw from the program if they do not wish to participate.



4.1.7. Geotechnical Conditions

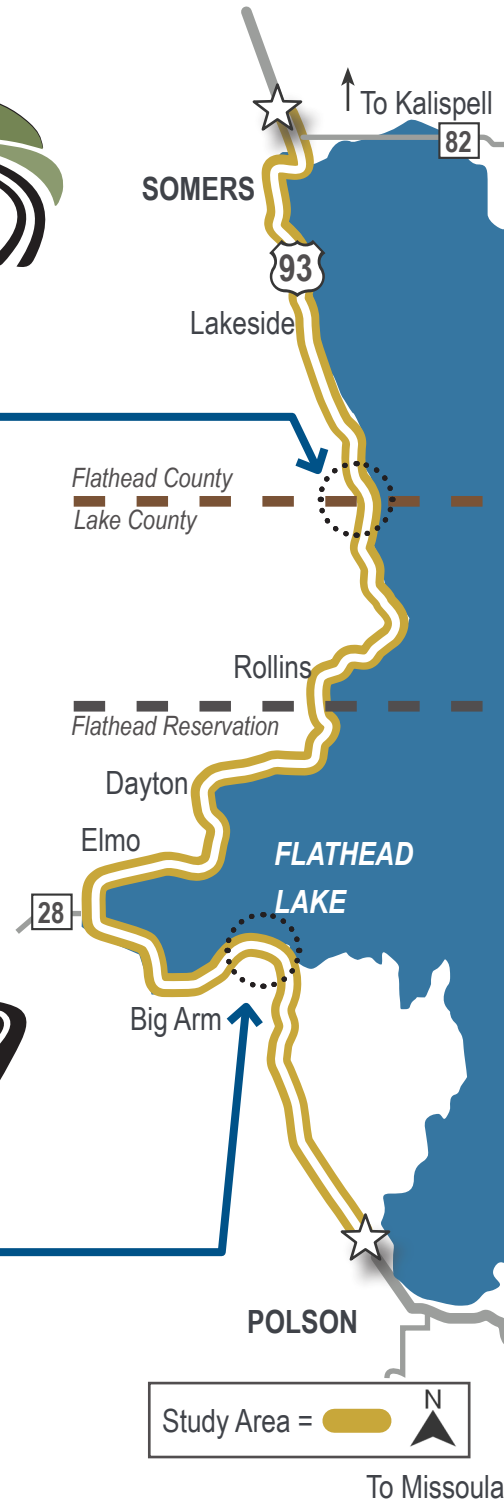
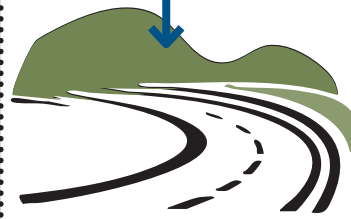
US 93 travels through hilly, mountainous terrain which has required numerous slope cuts and fill slopes to make the area passable to vehicles. If projects are advanced from the corridor study in these locations, detailed geotechnical evaluations will be required.

The study area contains many major fill slopes, including some particularly tall ones north of the Flathead-Lake County line. Many of these fill slopes are steep, possibly greater than 2H:1V.

Existing soil cuts are often steeper than 2H:1V, poorly vegetated, and prone to erosion. The soil between the rock outcrops is mainly made up of silt, sand, gravel, cobbles, and boulders, and is prone to erosion and difficult to vegetate, especially on slopes steeper than 2H:1V. In some areas, boulders are being eroded out of the slopes creating a potential rockfall hazard.

The bedrock cuts are generally steeper than 0.5H:1V, but some areas require shallower slopes due to the geologic structure. The bedrock is mostly made of metasedimentary rock. While the rock is generally hard and competent, its bedding is very planar and where it is tilted, it is prone to large-scale failure along the bedding planes. As the terrain requires cuts through this rock, potential rockfall as well as large rock mass failures may require cut angles much shallower than is usually associated with rock cuts.

MDT has identified 26 rock slopes along the corridor, which are part of the *Rockfall Asset Management Program*. MDT considers factors like geology, slope dimensions, rockfall history, and vehicle risk to assess each site's overall risk, and additional evaluation will be needed for future projects in these areas. Historically, there have been several large, road-closing failures of rock masses resulting from the cuts in this corridor. As an example, a rock cut at RP 70 is being monitored by the MDT Geotechnical Section as several large vehicle to room-sized blocks of rock are creeping towards the road and will eventually fail. It is likely that mitigation will be required at this location.

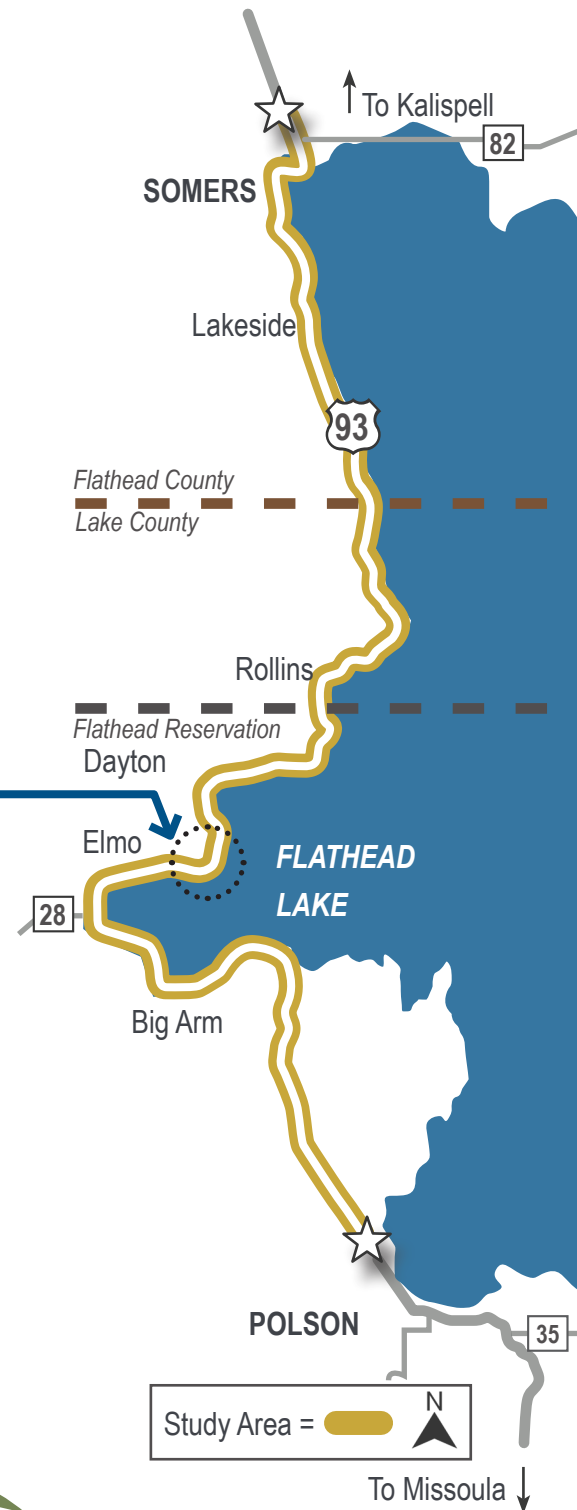


4.1.8. Hydraulic Conditions and Structures

MDT's Bridge Program emphasizes asset management and preservation. This emphasis promotes a "right treatment at the right time" philosophy in prioritizing and selecting projects on MDT's Statewide bridge system to promote cost-effective bridge preservation, appropriate safety-related work, and economic growth.

Bridge conditions are determined using the National Bridge Inventory (NBI) general condition ratings which describe the existing bridge as compared to its as-built condition. The material used, as well as the physical condition of the deck, superstructure, and substructure of the bridge are considered in the rating, ranging from 0 (failed condition) to 9 (excellent condition). Bridges are considered structurally deficient if the superstructure or substructure elements are rated less than 5 on the NBI scale.

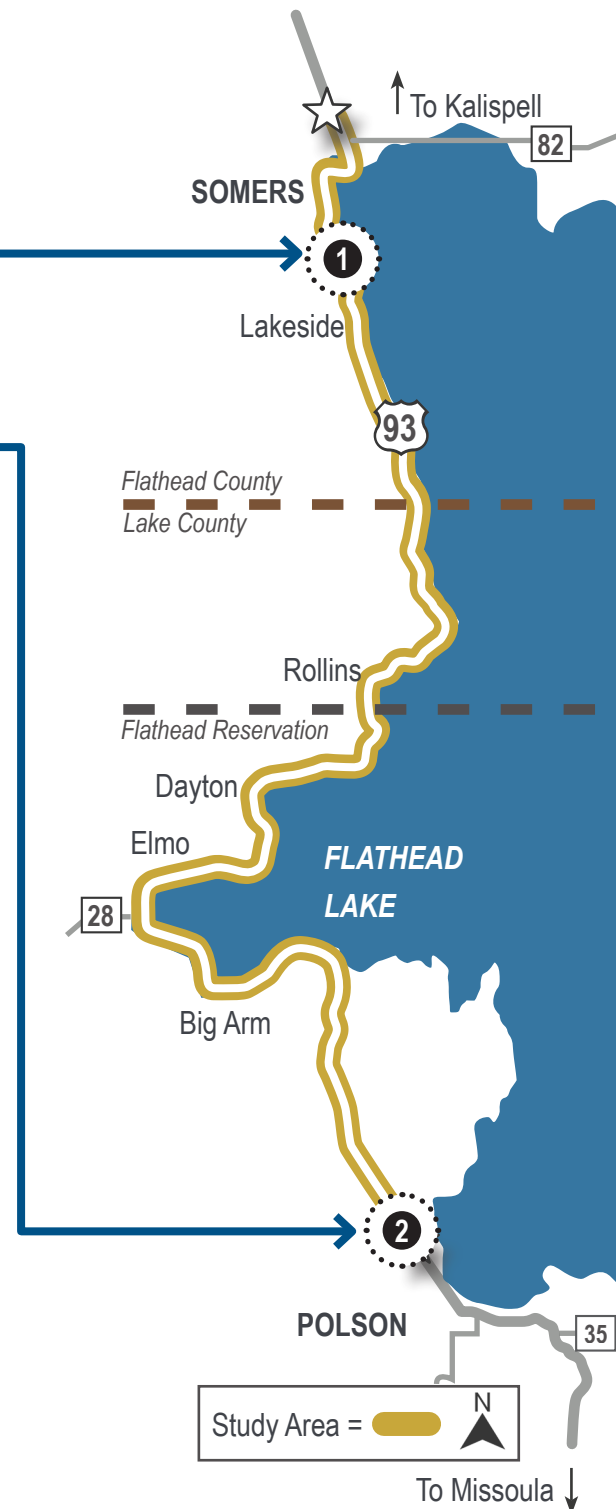
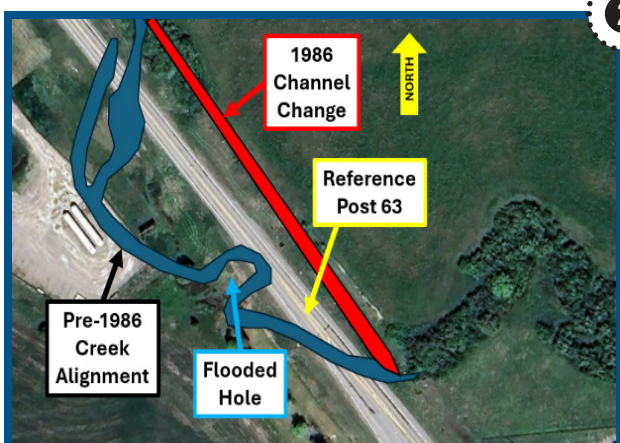
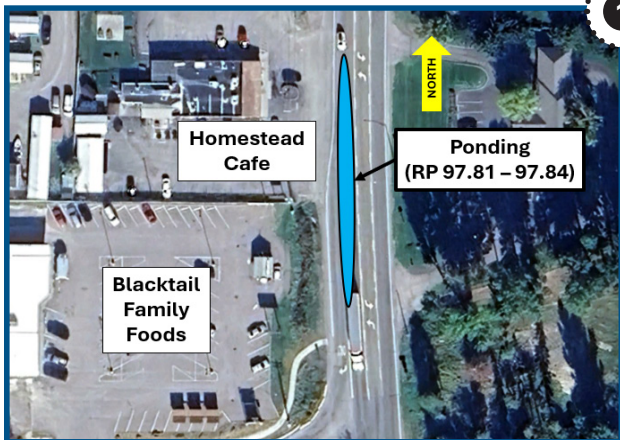
A single bridge is located within the study corridor. As of the most recent inspection in August 2023, the deck and channel were evaluated to be in fair condition, indicating a potential candidate for repair. The superstructure and substructure were both determined to be in good condition, indicating a candidate for continued preservation.



An additional 102 drainage features cross underneath US 93 within the study area. Most are small culverts or conduits ranging in size from four to 48 inches in diameter. Eight of the drainage features are considered major features sized 54 inches or larger. These features are primarily stock passes or culverts converging named streams.

MDT Maintenance personnel have identified two drainage issues in the study area. The first issue occurs near RP 97.81 to 97.84 in front of the Homestead Café in Lakeside, where water collects along the southbound lane.

The second is near RP 63, where a hole and ditch on the southwest side of the highway fill with water in wet springs, almost spilling onto the road. There is no culvert identified to prevent this ponding. As-built records from the 1986 highway reconstruction show the road was built over a creek, and a channel change was made to redirect water to the northeast side. The hole appears to be a remnant of the original creek channel.



4.1.9. Utilities

The study corridor contains various utilities providing electrical, gas, communications, sewer, and water services. Electrical services come from providers like Bonneville Power Administration and Flathead Electric Cooperative, with overhead power lines along the highway. Gas is supplied by NorthWestern Energy through underground lines. Communications, including telephone and internet, are provided by companies like CenturyLink and Charter Communications, mostly through underground lines, though some overhead lines exist. Water and sewer lines serve local districts such as Big Arm, Lakeside, and Somers, as well as other entities. Utility providers need permits from MDT to install infrastructure within the highway's right-of-way. If future projects are planned, coordination with utility owners may be necessary to address any impacts.

4.1.10. Additional Transportation Facilities

The study corridor supports various transportation modes beyond personal vehicle traffic. Freight and heavy vehicles, including trucks and construction vehicles, are common, while transit services offer regional travel options. Pedestrians and bicyclists use the corridor, with features like crosswalks, sidewalks, SUPs, and trails. Several airports also serve the broader area, providing both general aviation and commercial flight options, enhancing connectivity across the region.



FREIGHT FACILITIES

Freight and heavy vehicle traffic operating on US 93 consists mainly of commercial truck traffic, construction vehicles, and smaller delivery trucks. US 93 is one of two north-south routes through the Flathead Lake region. The other, more popular route, MT 35, follows the eastern shore of Flathead Lake. In the late 2000s, residents on Flathead Lake urged MDT to restrict truck traffic on MT 35 in response to safety and environmental risk concerns. Although MDT declined to place full truck restrictions on MT 35, MDT did, however, impose restrictions that require truck loads over 10.5 feet in width to use US 93.



TRANSIT FACILITIES

Several transit providers serve the study area, including:

- ✓ **Lake County Community Transit:** Offers on-demand rides to medical appointments and shopping in Missoula, Kalispell, and towns within Lake County.
- ✓ **Sanders County Transportation:** Provides demand response service for the elderly and disabled, including trips to Missoula, Kalispell, Polson, and Sandpoint, ID.
- ✓ **Flathead Transit:** Operates daily fixed-route buses between Missoula and Whitefish, with one stop in Lakeside.
- ✓ **CSKT Transit:** Offers both demand response and fixed route service within the Flathead Reservation and nearby areas including Kalispell and Missoula.

The study area also experiences considerable seasonal use by local, regional, and national tour and charter bus operators between April and October.



PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE FACILITIES

The US 93 corridor is frequently used by both bicyclists and pedestrians. Bicyclists use the roadway corridor heavily, while areas surrounding the highway see moderate use. Pedestrian activity is most substantial near Flathead Lake State Park (West Shore and Big Arm units) and in the vicinity of Elmo, Lakeside, and Somers. The highway corridor itself is not heavily used by pedestrians.

Notable pedestrian features include enhanced crosswalks in Elmo, Lakeside, and Somers, sporadic sidewalks in Lakeside, and an informal recreational trail in Elmo. There are also two SUPs, including one in Big Arm and another, the Great Northern Historical Trail, running from Somers to Kalispell. Multiple trails also extend into the open spaces and recreation areas surrounding the study corridor. The City of Polson's long-range plan recommends improving US 93 for bicycle use, primarily through widened roadway shoulders.

AVIATION FACILITIES



The study area is served by multiple airports:

- ✓ **Polson Airport:** A general aviation airport about a mile south of the corridor.
- ✓ **Lakeside Airport:** A private airport about 0.5 miles from US 93.
- ✓ **Kalispell City Airport:** A major general aviation hub about seven miles north of the corridor.
- ✓ **Glacier Park International Airport:** The largest airport in the region, offering both commercial and general aviation services, and located about 17 miles north of Somers.



Glacier Park International Airport



4.2. GEOMETRIC CONDITIONS

The study evaluated existing roadway geometrics within the corridor, including design features such as roadway dimensions, curve alignments, roadside recovery areas, and driver sight lines. These features influence safety and comfort for roadway users. **Figure 5** shows the locations of horizontal and vertical curves within the study corridor that do not meet baseline criteria for a 70-mph design speed.

MDT's *Baseline Criteria Practitioner's Guide* specifies quantitative design criteria to be used as uniform baseline design dimensions or values. The study corridor follows the current baseline criteria for rural principal arterials. The design speed varies along the corridor based on the terrain, ranging from 50-mph in mountainous areas, to 60-mph in rolling terrain, and 70-mph in level terrain. The corridor is mostly considered rolling terrain, with areas of mountainous terrain where the highway closely follows the lake, and level terrain on the south end. The actual posted speeds may differ from design speeds. Baseline criteria are intended to be used as a starting point. Governing design criteria for potential improvements will be determined during future project development phases.

4.2.1. Roadway Width

The study corridor typically has one travel lane in each direction, with shoulder widths ranging from about two feet to six feet. There are also some areas with turn lanes, passing lanes, and a center TWLTL. Baseline criteria recommend a minimum travel lane width of 12 feet for rural principal arterials and a minimum overall roadway width of 40 feet. While the corridor meets the 12-foot travel lane design criteria, some sections have shoulder widths of less than six feet, falling short of the 40-foot recommended width. The southern end of the corridor (~RP 63-66) and the Lakeside area (~RP 95-102) have narrower two-foot shoulders, while the segment through Dayton and Rollins (~RP 79-93) has wider six-foot shoulders. The rest of the corridor generally has four-foot shoulders with some variations in more constrained areas or where turn lanes/improvement projects have been completed.

4.2.2. Horizontal Alignment

The horizontal alignment of the road includes elements like curve radius, superelevation (road banking), and sight distance, which impact traffic operation and safety. MDT's design criteria for horizontal curves are defined in terms of curve radius and stopping sight distance, which varies based on design speed.

The study corridor includes 61 horizontal curves. Of these, 22 curves (36 percent) do not meet the baseline criteria for a 70-mph design speed for level terrain. However, 13 of those curves meet the baseline criteria for rolling terrain (60-mph) and nine for mountainous terrain (50-mph). No curves fall below the baseline criteria for a rural principal arterial. The locations of the curves with lower design speeds are shown in **Figure 5**.



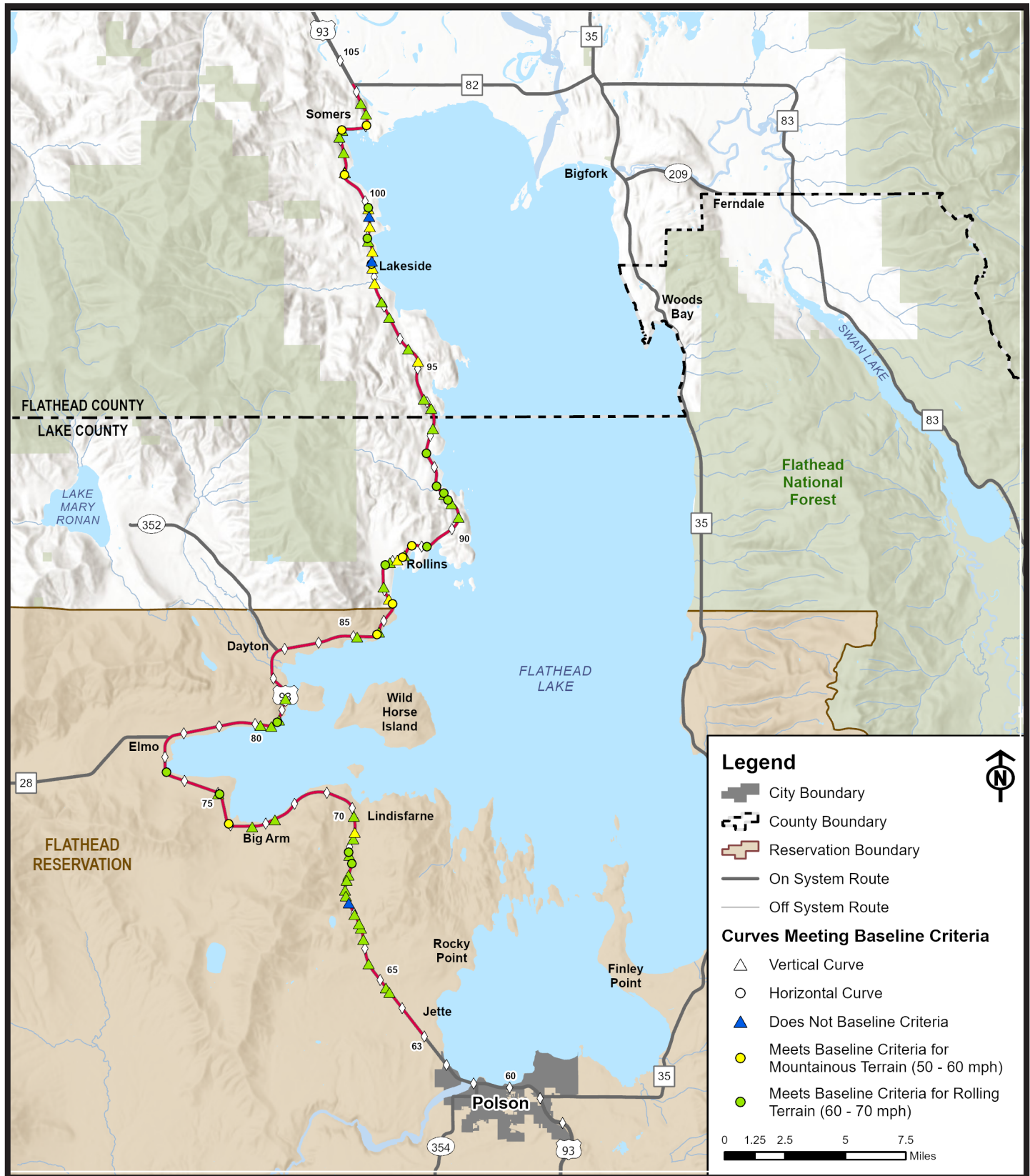


Figure 5: Existing Geometric Conditions

4.2.3. Vertical Alignment

Vertical alignment refers to the elevation changes of a roadway, and the length and steepness of grades influence how the road operates. The main factors for designing vertical curves are stopping sight distance, vertical curvature, and maximum grade. Vertical curves are either crest (at the top of a hill) or sag (at the bottom of a hill).

The study corridor has 111 vertical curves. About 50 percent (55 curves) do not meet the 70-mph design speed for level terrain. However, 42 of those meet the baseline criteria for rolling terrain (60-mph) and ten meet baseline criteria for mountainous terrain (50-mph). Three curves do not meet the baseline criteria for a rural principal arterial. The locations of curves with design speeds lower than 70-mph were previously shown on [Figure 5](#).



4.2.4. Sight Distance and Clear Zone

Sight distance refers to how far a driver can see along the road, which is affected by the road's curves and any obstacles nearby. Sight distance is commonly defined in three ways: passing sight distance, stopping sight distance, and intersection sight distance. In general, the driver of a vehicle should have an unobstructed view and enough distance to perceive, react, and safely stop for or avoid approaching vehicles and other hazards.

The roadside clear zone is the area next to the road that allows for safe use by errant vehicles. This area may include shoulders, slopes, and recovery zones. For US 93, the desired clear zone width is between 22 and 46 feet, depending on traffic volumes, speeds, and roadside geometry. In some parts of the corridor, limited space and natural obstacles like rock outcroppings, steep slopes, and Flathead Lake make it difficult to achieve the recommended clear zone widths. Guardrails are used in some areas to protect drivers from these obstacles.



4.3. TRAFFIC CONDITIONS

The study evaluated existing and projected traffic characteristics for the study corridor, including the number and type of roadway users, congestion levels, and delays experienced at corridor intersections, using available data provided by MDT supplemented by field data collected by RPA in June and July 2024. These characteristics all impact user mobility, efficiency, and comfort.

4.3.1. Traffic Volumes

In general, traffic volumes range from about 4,000 to 13,000 vehicles per day with the highest volumes at the northern end of the corridor and steadily decreasing volumes to the south. Historic traffic volumes and growth trends were reviewed for the study corridor to help predict future traffic conditions. When averaged together across the corridor, traffic volumes have increased at an annual rate of 2.1 percent over the past 20 years, as illustrated in **Figure 6**. Given demographic and development trends in the area, this growth is anticipated to continue over the next 20 years. Accordingly, the 2.1 percent growth rate was applied to existing traffic volumes for the projected operational analysis contained later in this report.



HEAVY VEHICLE TRAFFIC

About 630 trucks travel US 93 between Somers and MT 28 daily, while about 275 trucks travel the corridor south of MT 28, making up about 4-12 percent of the total traffic in the corridor.



DAILY TRAFFIC VARIATIONS

Traffic volumes along the corridor show moderate fluctuations throughout the week. In 2023, traffic was highest on weekends (Friday through Sunday), as expected in a region with significant tourism and recreation. Weekend traffic was approximately 1.1 times higher than weekday traffic (Monday through Thursday).



SEASONAL TRAFFIC VARIATIONS

Traffic volumes along the corridor vary seasonally, with the highest volumes recorded in July and August, likely influenced by recreation activities around Flathead Lake. During the peak period in July, traffic volumes are about 1.4 times higher than the annual average, as shown in **Figure 7**.

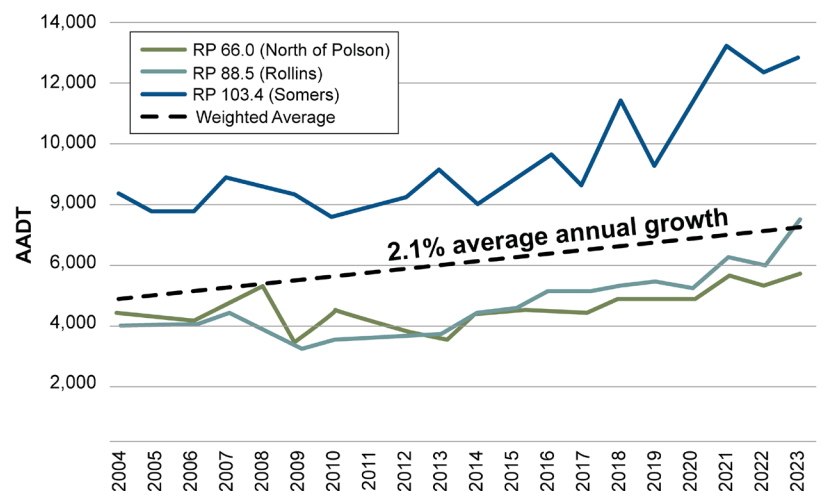


Figure 6: Historic Traffic Volumes

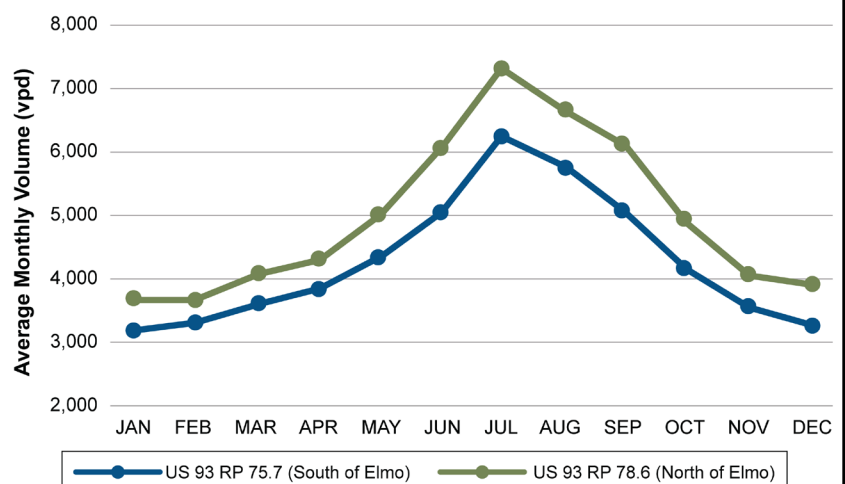


Figure 7: Seasonal Traffic Variation (2023)

4.3.2. Highway Operations

Mainline highway operations are affected by passing zones and lanes, as well as speed limit, directional and opposing traffic volumes, heavy truck percentages, roadway geometry (both vertical and horizontal), lane and shoulder widths, and access point density. A corridor analysis was performed by breaking the highway into distinct sections based on logical changes in driving context and location of available traffic count sites.

As discussed previously, traffic volumes generally increase at the north end of the corridor. The increase in traffic, combined with a decreased number of passing opportunities, results in worsening highway operations. Under existing traffic conditions, the corridor was found to experience fair to good operations from Lakeside to the southern end of the study corridor. North of Lakeside, however, the highway is shown to experience degraded operating conditions, especially in the northbound direction.

Under future 2045 conditions, the roadway is projected to operate at fair to poor conditions from Polson to Rollins and poor to failing conditions north through Lakeside and Somers. Congestion is shown to double over the next 20 years without improvements. **Figure 8** shows the existing and projected future traffic conditions within the corridor.

4.3.3. Intersection Operations

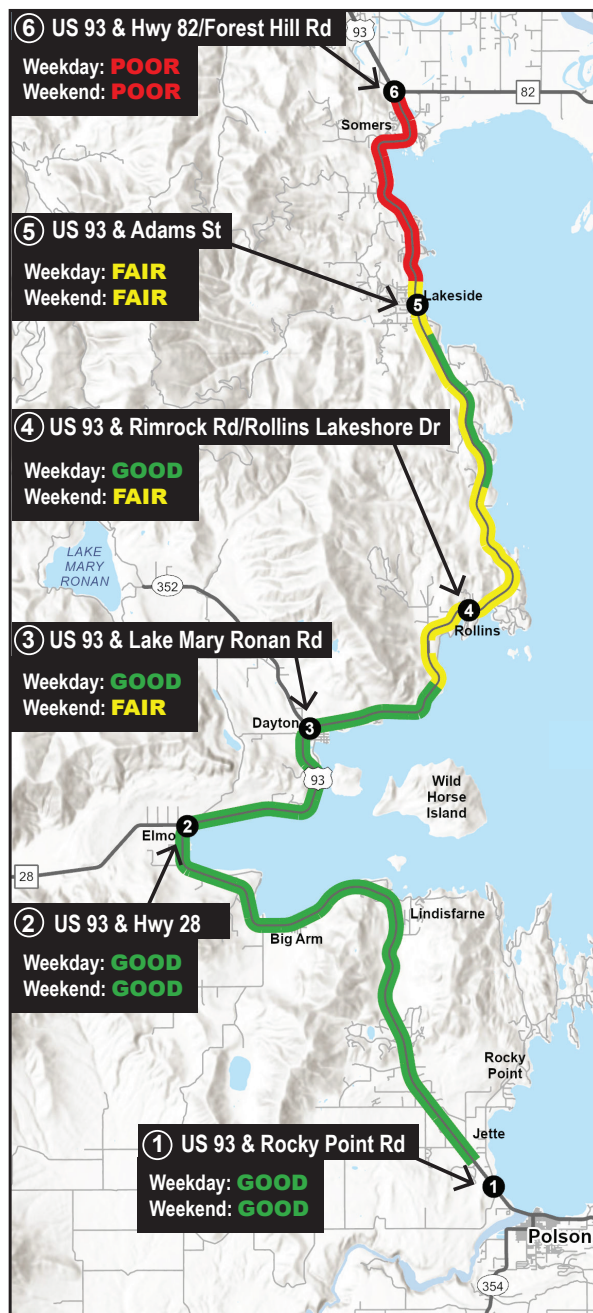
Vehicle turning movement data was collected at six major intersections along the corridor over a 24-hour period on a Thursday and a Saturday in June and July 2024 to better characterize both the weekday and weekend traffic flows during the peak summer season. Intersection operations results are based on the volumes shown in **Figure 8**.

With the exception of the intersection of US 93 and Adams Street, all of the study intersections currently operate at a fair to good condition. Adams Street, located in Lakeside, provides access to a popular city park and parking for various businesses, and therefore experiences high volumes of pedestrian traffic. The intersection currently experiences poor operating conditions.

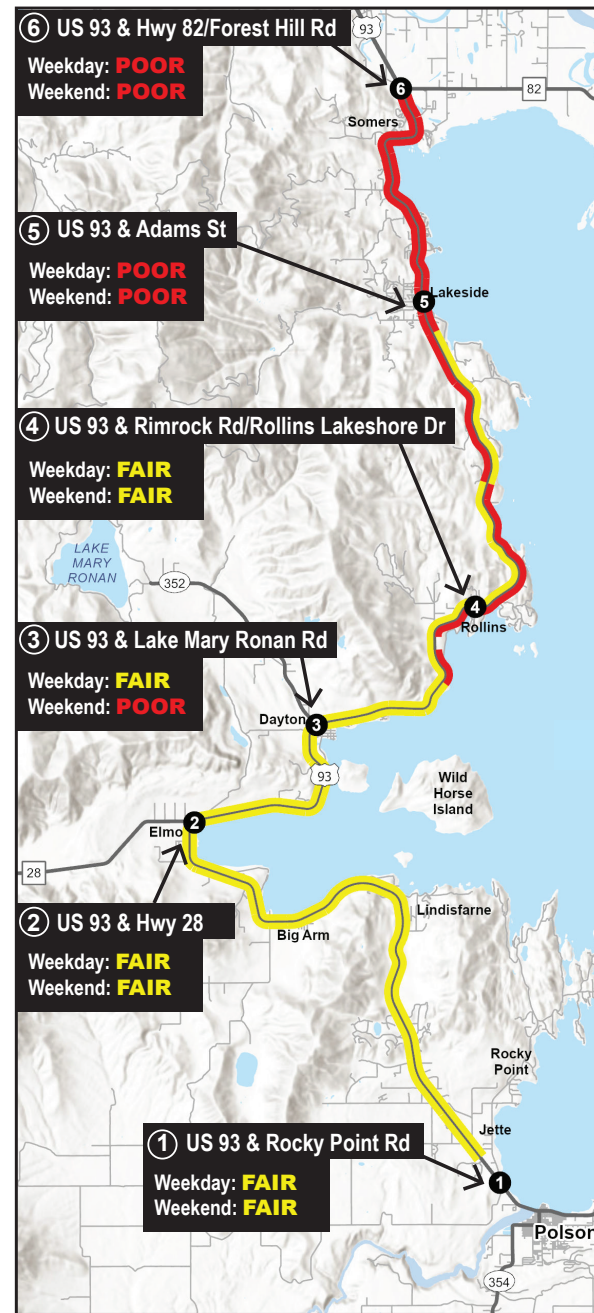
As traffic volumes are projected to increase over the next 20 years, most of the study intersections are projected to experience poor to failing operations during peak hours. Under both existing and future conditions, the weekend PM peak hours demonstrate the worst operations.



EXISTING CONDITIONS



PROJECTED CONDITIONS



LEGEND

2024 to 2045 Combined Highway and Intersection Operations

— **GOOD**
— **FAIR**
— **POOR**

* Existing highway operations are based on 2024 average daily traffic volumes and existing intersection operations are based on data collected in June and July, 2024. Projected conditions are based on a 2.1 percent growth rate applied to existing (2024) traffic volumes.



Figure 8: Existing and Projected Traffic Conditions

4.4. SAFETY

Crash data for the corridor was provided by MDT for the five-year period between January 1st, 2018, and December 31st, 2022. This information includes data from crash reports submitted to the Montana Highway Patrol from their patrol officers and from local City/County/Tribal law enforcement. The crash reports are a summation of information from the scene of the crash provided by the responding officer. Some of the information contained in the crash reports may be subjective. Any crash records from other law enforcement agencies that were not reported to or by the Montana Highway Patrol are not included in this analysis.

A total of 814 crashes were reported during the five-year analysis period, involving 1,638 total individuals. Nine (1.1 percent) of the crashes were fatal and resulted in nine fatalities, while 28 of the crashes were suspected serious injury crashes (3.4 percent) resulting in 33 suspected serious injuries. Crash locations are shown in **Figure 9**.

1,638 people involved in
814 crashes

Fatal

9 Crashes
9 Fatal Injuries

Serious Injury

28 Crashes
33 Serious Injuries

Minor/Possible Injury

125 Crashes
193 Injuries

PDO/Unknown

652 Crashes
1,403 Non-Injuries

Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. § 407, reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data compiled or collected for the purpose of identifying, evaluating, or planning the safety enhancement of potential accident sites, hazardous roadway conditions, or railway-highway crossings, pursuant to sections 130, 144, and 148 of Title 23, U.S.C., or for the purpose of developing any highway safety construction improvement project which may be implemented utilizing Federal-aid highway funds shall not be subject to discovery or admitted into evidence in a Federal or State court proceeding or considered for other purposes in any action for damages arising from any occurrence at a location mentioned or addressed in such reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data. This publication is not intended to waive any of the State of Montana's rights or privileges under 23 U.S.C. § 407.



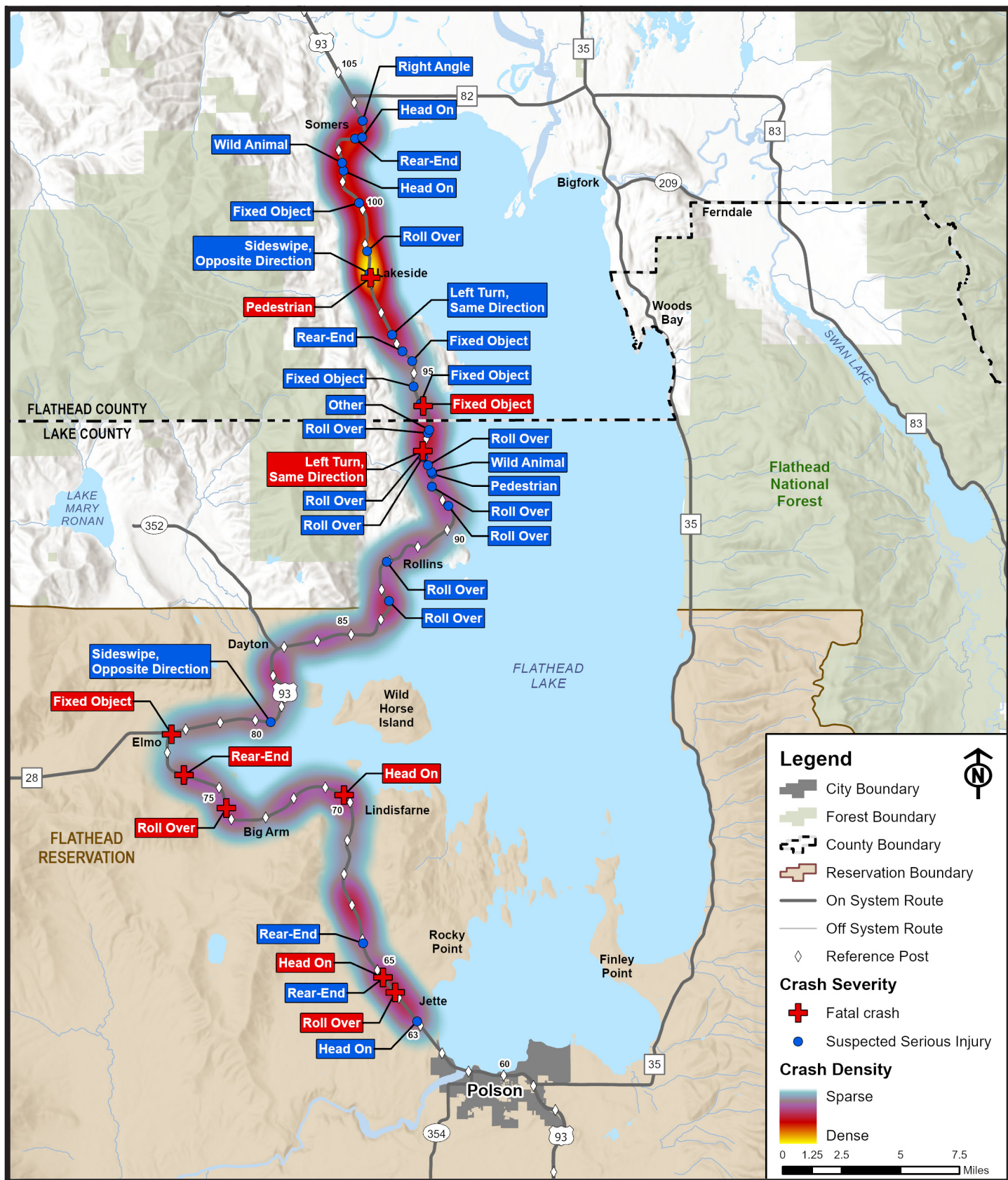
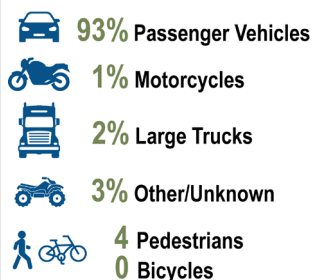


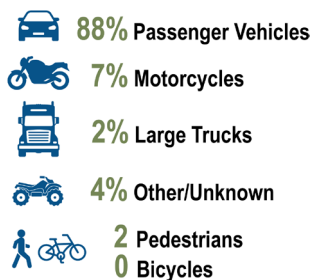
Figure 9: Crash Density and Severe Crashes



ALL CRASHES



SEVERE CRASHES



IMPAIRED DRIVERS



DRIVER ACTIONS



PERSON FACTORS

In terms of driver details, 62 percent of drivers involved in crashes were male. A notable portion of drivers involved in crashes were either over the age of 65 (17 percent) or under the age of 21 (10 percent). In terms of contributing actions, ten percent of drivers involved in all crashes were impaired at the time of the incident, while nearly one-third of severe crashes involved impaired drivers. Other common contributing actions for drivers included distraction, running off the roadway, driving too fast for conditions, and over-correcting.

Vulnerable road users accounted for less than one percent of all crashes in the study area during the five-year analysis period. Specifically, there were three pedestrian-related crashes, with no bicycle-related crashes reported. Four non-motorists were involved in these incidents, with one of these pedestrians suffering fatal injuries, another sustaining suspected serious injuries, and the third having suspected minor injuries.

VEHICLE DETAILS

Passenger vehicles (including cars, trucks, and SUVs) were most commonly involved in crashes. Large trucks accounted for two percent of both all crashes and severe crashes. Motorcycles, on the other hand, accounted for seven percent of severe crashes but only one percent of all crashes in the study area. Other vehicles involved in all crashes included ATVs (less than two percent), light trucks/cargo vans (one percent), motorhomes (one percent), and snowplows (less than one percent). ATVs were involved in four percent of severe crashes. Of the four pedestrians involved in crashes, two sustained severe injuries.

SEVERE CRASH FACTORS

After reviewing crash reports for the severe crashes (those resulting in fatalities and suspected serious injuries), the study identified several significant contributing factors. Impaired driving was the most common factor, with a significant number of crashes involving drivers under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Other contributing factors included winter weather conditions, poor tire conditions, and unrestrained occupants, with nearly half of the fatalities involving unrestrained drivers or motorcyclists not wearing helmets. The data also showed that animals on the road, particularly in unlit areas, contributed to several single-vehicle crashes.



4.4.1. Citations

During the 2018 to 2022 analysis period, a total of 1,130 citations were issued within the study corridor, primarily for speeding, seatbelt violations, driving under the influence (DUI), possession of alcohol or drugs, and license, insurance, or registration infractions. Notably, 32 percent of the citations were issued in connection with crashes, with 8 percent tied to crashes that caused injury. The highest number of citations occurred in 2018, with 354 issued, followed by a decline in 2019 and 2020, and increases in both 2021 and 2022. Geographically, the highest frequency of citations was observed in the Somers, Lakeside, and Elmo areas, with DUI violations concentrated in the northern part of the corridor (Lakeside and Somers) and speeding violations more common in the southern section, particularly south of Rollins. Citation issuance was also influenced by time of day, with 39 percent of citations occurring between 9:00 PM and 2:00 AM, indicating higher enforcement during nighttime hours, while only five percent of citations were issued during daytime hours (8:00 AM to 2:00 PM).

4.4.2. Animal Carcasses

Between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2022, a total of at least 2,443 animal carcasses were collected along the study corridor, as recorded in the MDT Maintenance Animal Incident Database. This data reflects carcasses collected by MDT maintenance personnel on MDT-maintained routes; however, due to inconsistent reporting and collection schedules, it serves more as an indicator for pattern identification rather than a statistically valid dataset.

Of the total carcasses, 90.5 percent were deer, with whitetail deer being the most common species. The remaining carcasses involved smaller mammals and a limited number of other large mammals such as elk and bears. As shown in [Figure 10](#), the following trends were seen with the locations of carcasses collected.

- ✓ **Whitetail Deer:** Collected throughout study area, but concentrated north of the County line between RP 95 and 105.
- ✓ **Mule Deer:** Collected throughout the entire study area but were concentrated in the Lake County section of the corridor.
- ✓ **Elk:** Concentrated between RP 84 to 90 at the north end of the Flathead Reservation, by Rollins.
- ✓ **Black Bear:** Collected throughout study area but concentrated in three locations: RP 80 to 82, RP 88 to 90, and RP 95 to 98.
- ✓ **Other/Unknown Mammals:** Collected throughout study area. When indicated, “other” types primarily included turkeys, skunks, fox, coyote, and raccoons.

Animal mortality was shown to peak during the fall months, particularly from August to November, with September seeing the highest number of carcasses collected. The collection of carcasses has significantly increased in recent years, with a 53 percent rise in 2021 and an 82 percent rise in 2022 compared to 2020. However, these increases may be attributed to factors such as changes in staffing or the frequency of reporting and collection, rather than an actual increase in wildlife mortality.



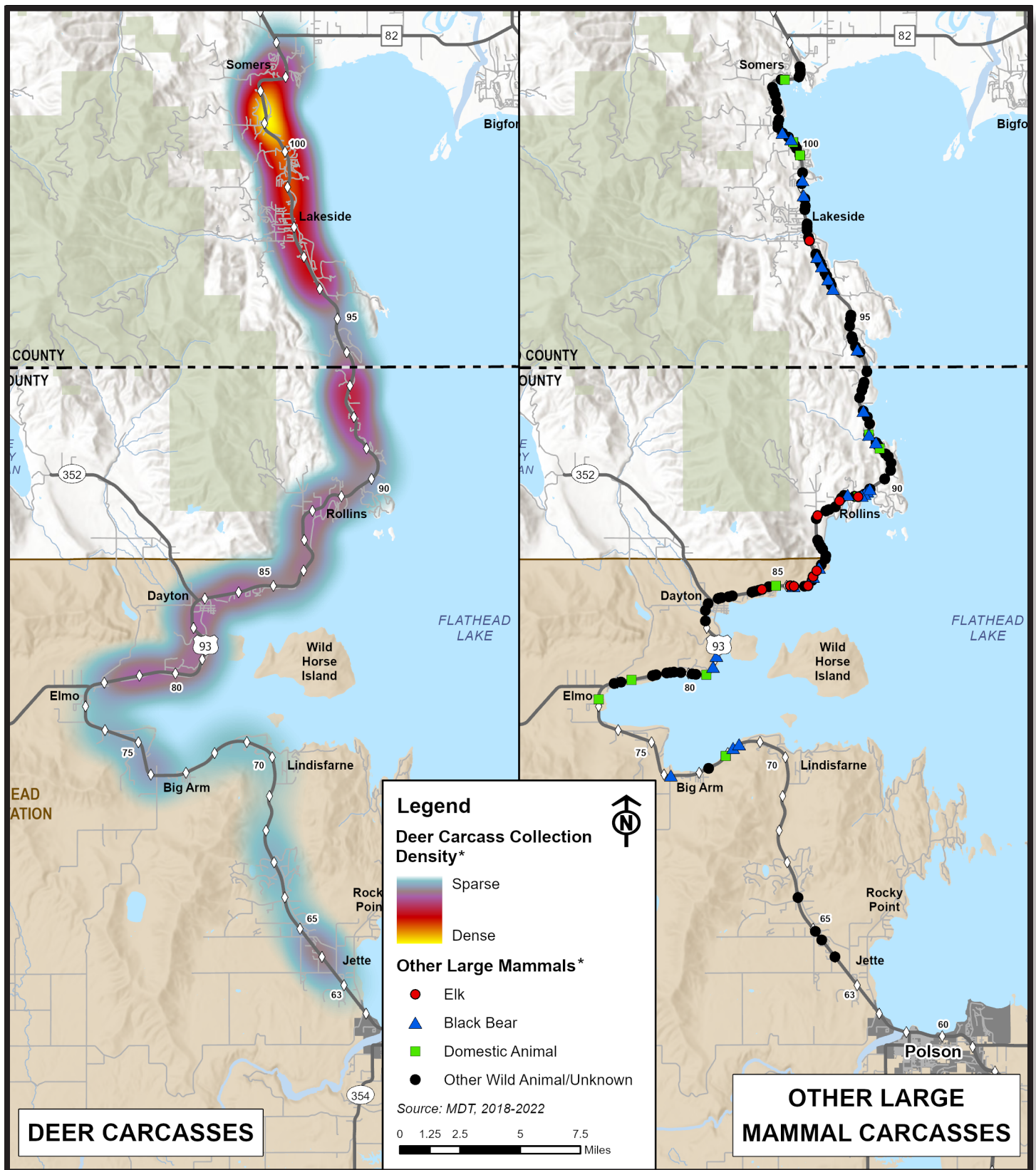
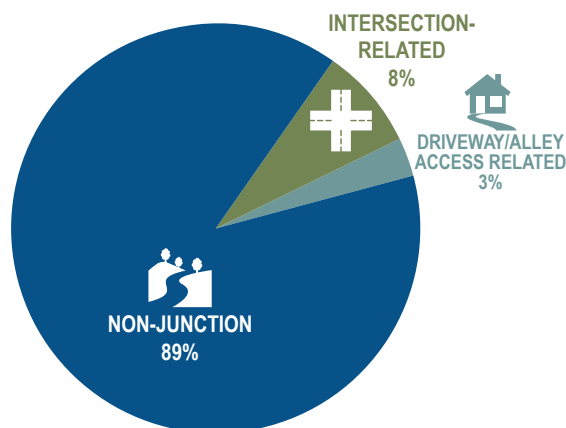


Figure 10: Animal Carcasses

Junction Type



CRASH TYPE AND LOCATION

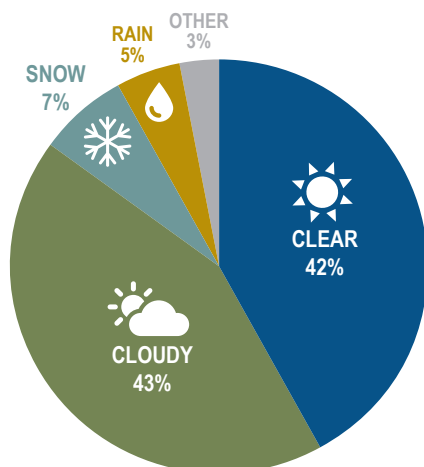
The majority of crashes (76 percent) were single-vehicle incidents, with wild animal crashes being the most common, followed by fixed-object collisions and rollovers. Multiple-vehicle crashes accounted for 24 percent of the total crashes, with rear-end, right-angle, and sideswipe crashes being the most frequent types.

The occurrence of multi-vehicle crashes was most often linked to junctions, such as intersections or driveways, while single vehicle crashes were more likely to occur at non-junction locations. Of the 814 total crashes, 89 percent (721) were not related to junctions, while 11 percent (93) involved junctions or access points.

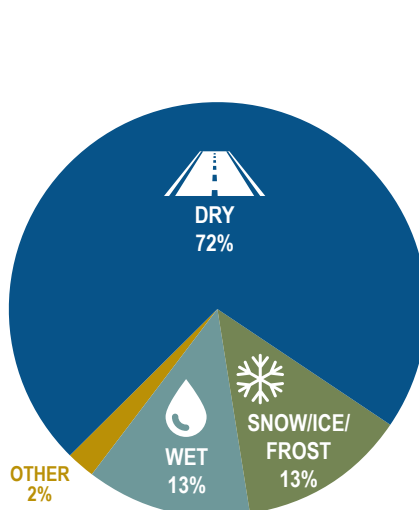
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Adverse weather conditions, including snow and rain, contributed to 12 percent of crashes, with other conditions such as fog, sleet, or blowing snow reported as factors in some incidents. Regarding road surface conditions, most crashes (72 percent) occurred on dry roads, with 26 percent happening on wet, snowy, or icy/frost-covered surfaces. When considering lighting conditions, 55 percent of all crashes occurred during daylight hours, while 37 percent occurred at night, with nearly all nighttime crashes (96 percent) happening in areas without street lighting.

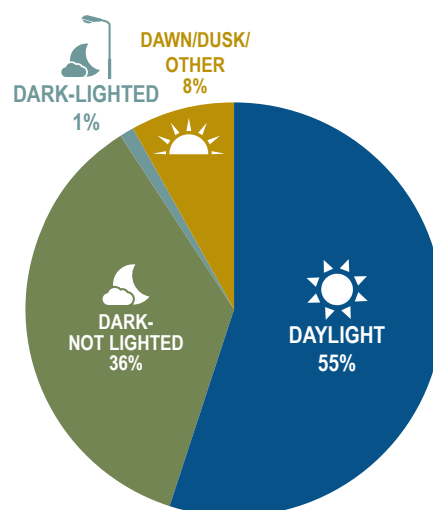
Weather



Road Surface

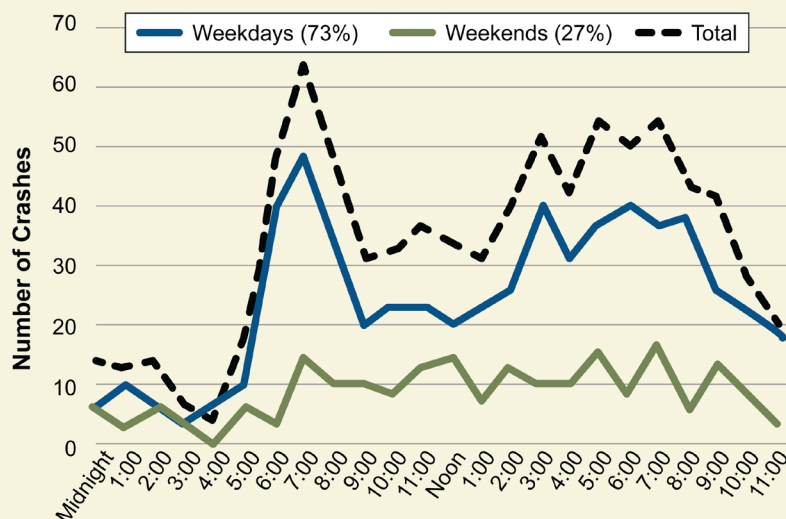
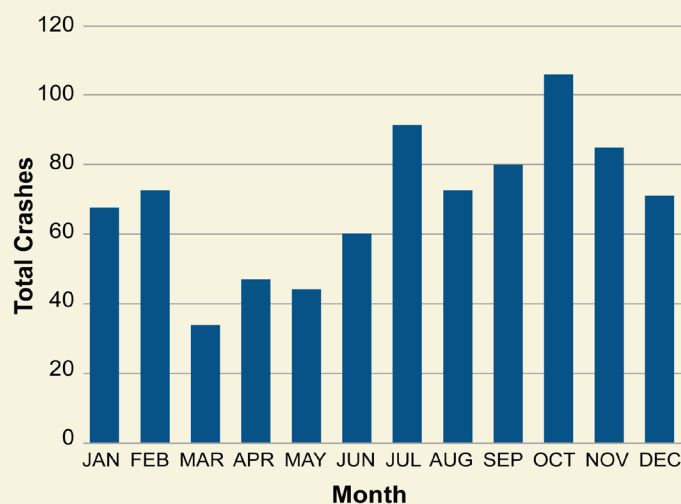


Lighting



CRASH PERIOD

The crash trends showed two peak periods during the weekdays, morning (6:00 AM to 8:00 AM) and evening (2:00 PM to 8:00 PM), while weekend crashes were more evenly distributed throughout the day, with no distinct peak periods. The highest number of crashes occurred in the winter months (November to February), with notable spikes in October and July. Over the years, the total number of crashes has remained relatively stable, with a noticeable spike in 2021, which accounted for 30 percent of the crashes during the analysis period. Severe crashes, including fatalities and serious injuries, also peaked in 2021, with eight severe crashes recorded.



4.4.3. US 93 / MT 82 Safety Analysis

A separate safety analysis was conducted for the high-volume intersection of US 93 and MT 82 due to its unique characteristics compared to the rest of the study corridor. The analysis covers all crashes, carcasses, and citations within a 1,000-foot buffer of the intersection from January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2022.

The signalized intersection involves US 93 running north and south, MT 82 extending east, and Forest Hill Road running west. Within the 1,000-foot buffer, three driveways provide access to various properties: the White Oak Gas Station/Convenience Store, Best Western Hotel, and a multi-family residential property. On the east leg of the intersection, there are two driveways for a park-and-ride lot and a commercial property. The findings of the analysis are summarized as shown to the right:



CRASH ANALYSIS

- **Total Crashes:** 62 crashes, including one suspected serious injury crash, ten minor injury crashes, seven possible injury crashes, and 44 property damage only crashes.
- **Impaired Driving:** 22 percent of injury-causing crashes involved impaired drivers.
- **Timing:** Most crashes occurred on weekdays, particularly during peak commuting hours. 21 percent of crashes occurred in the dark.
- **Crash Types:** 92 percent of crashes were multi-vehicle, with rear-end crashes accounting for 55 percent, right-angle crashes at 15 percent, and left-turn opposite direction crashes at 11 percent.
- **Locations:** Three crashes occurred at the intersecting driveways, while ten occurred at non-junction locations, including a hit-and-run and a fixed object crash in the Best Western parking lot.
- **Turning Vehicles:** Ten percent of vehicles involved in crashes were turning left, with half of these vehicles traveling southbound. About 12 percent of vehicles involved in crashes were turning right, mostly westbound.



CARCASS ANALYSIS

- **Total Carcasses:** 17 whitetail deer carcasses, mostly in spring and fall. No animal crashes were reported.



CITATION ANALYSIS

- **Total Citations:** 131 citations issued, with 31 percent being for licensing/registration violations, 24 percent for careless driving, and 15 percent for speeding.
- **Crash-Related Citations:** 56 percent of citations were issued as a result of crashes at the intersection.



82



5.0



IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS

This chapter identifies and evaluates potential improvement options for US 93, aimed at addressing the issues outlined in [Chapter 4](#). The options also took into account feedback from stakeholders and the public ([Chapter 2](#)), along with an analysis of the current environmental conditions in the study area ([Chapter 3](#)). The following steps were taken:

- 1 **Identify roadway issues** through field reviews, engineering analysis, crash data, consultations with resource agencies, and public input.
- 2 **Define corridor needs** and objectives.
- 3 **Analyze the collected information** to develop a range of feasible improvement options that address the issues, reflect public and stakeholder input, and meet the identified needs and objectives.

More information about the recommended improvement options can be found in [Appendix 5](#).

5.1. CORRIDOR NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES

The needs and objectives for the *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study* were developed through a review of local plans, input from resource agencies, stakeholders, the public, and consideration of social, environmental, and engineering factors. These needs and objectives guide the development and evaluation of improvement options. The identified improvement options aim to address these needs and objectives as much as possible, within the constraints of other limiting factors. As projects move forward, these needs and objectives will be integrated into purpose and need statements for future NEPA/MEPA documentation.



Need 1: Improve Corridor Safety



- ✓ Reduce fatalities and serious injuries in support of Vision Zero.
- ✓ Reduce animal-vehicle conflicts.
- ✓ Reduce roadside hazards.
- ✓ Reduce vehicle conflicts.

Need 2: Improve Corridor Operations



- ✓ Accommodate existing and future travel demands.
- ✓ Maintain reasonable access to adjacent lands.
- ✓ Improve non-motorized mobility and accessibility.

Other Considerations



- ✓ Environmental resource impacts
- ✓ Social and cultural resource impacts
- ✓ Multimodal transportation accessibility
- ✓ Construction feasibility and impacts
- ✓ Local, Tribal, State, and Federal interests
- ✓ Corridor context, function, and use
- ✓ Funding availability
- ✓ Maintenance operations, responsibility, and costs



5.2. IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENTS OVERVIEW

Several improvement options were identified to address the needs and objectives of the US 93 corridor, focusing on specific areas of concern. The options are categorized into spot improvements, corridor-wide improvements, and policy improvements. Spot and corridor improvements could be implemented as standalone projects or combined into larger initiatives, offering potential cost savings and operational efficiencies when bundled together.



IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

Successful implementation of improvements will require collaboration among multiple entities. Depending on the specific improvement, various agencies and stakeholders may provide the necessary resources, funding, jurisdiction, or expertise. Key implementation partners include MDT, CSKT, Federal and State agencies, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private landowners and developers, transit operators, and other interested or authorized parties.



TIMEFRAME

The timing and feasibility of implementing improvement options depend on several factors, including funding availability, right-of-way requirements, and other project delivery considerations. Estimated implementation timeframes were assigned to each improvement option based on anticipated project delivery timelines. These timeframes are not commitments but are intended to reflect the relative need, complexity, and potential funding sources for each option. The timeframes are defined as follows:

- **Short-term:** Implementation is feasible within a 0- to 5-year period.
- **Mid-term:** Implementation is feasible within a 5- to 10-year period.
- **Long-term:** Implementation is feasible within a 10- to 20-year period.
- **As needed:** Implementation could occur based on observed need at any time.



ESTIMATED COST

Planning-level cost estimates were prepared for each improvement option. These estimates account for construction, engineering, drainage, indirect costs, and miscellaneous costs (such as utilities and right-of-way). An annual inflation factor of 3.0 percent was applied to reflect the estimated year of expenditure corresponding to the anticipated timeframe. Contingencies were included to address uncertainties at this stage; however, actual costs may vary based on conditions at the time of construction.



POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Advancing improvements from this study and developing projects on US 93 will depend on the availability of current and future funding from Federal, State, local, and private sources. The options identified in this study may qualify for funding through various programs and sources outlined below. At this time, no funding has been secured to implement any of the improvements.

- National Highway Performance Program (NH)
- Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)
- Transportation Alternatives Program (TA)
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)/ Montana Air and Congestion Initiative (MACI) Programs
- Montana Wildlife & Transportation Partnership (MWTP)
- Federal discretionary grants, potentially including Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Program (formerly the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity, or RAISE Program), Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program (WCPP), and Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects (NSFLTP) Program
- Transit Programs
- State and Local Maintenance Funds
- Local Road, Bridge, and Special Revenue Funds
- Private Funding Sources and Other Partnerships





PROJECT DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Improvement options from this study will follow MDT's standard project development process, including activities like public coordination, environmental analysis, traffic assessments, and right-of-way acquisition. Projects by other entities with significant impacts to the transportation system will follow the MDT Systems Impact Action Process (SIAP).

Each improvement option includes notable project development considerations, such as stakeholder interests and potential resource impacts. As projects progress, detailed analysis will identify required permits and regulations. **Table 1** outlines relevant resource and regulatory agencies that may be consulted during the project development process depending on jurisdiction and resources affected. Any ground-disturbing activities within the Flathead Reservation would require Tribal consultation for cultural, historic, and natural resources.

Table 1: Regulatory Resource Agencies and Responsibilities

Regulatory Entity	Resources Affected
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)	All Resources on Tribal Lands including Surface Waters, Floodplains, Irrigation Features, Wetlands, Wildlife, Habitat, Historic/Cultural Resources
Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)	All Resources
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Wildlife, Habitat, Protected Species
United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)	Wetlands, Streambed, Streambanks, Irrigation Canals/Ditches
US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)	Surface Waters, Irrigation Features, Wetlands, Hazardous Materials
Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)	Wetlands, Streambed, Streambanks, Floodplains, Stormwater Discharges into Surface Waters
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)	Streambed, Streambanks, LWCF Properties
Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (MDNRC)	State Lands, Groundwater, Surface Waters, Irrigation Features, Wetlands, Floodplains
Tribal and State Historic Preservation Offices (THPO/SHPO)	Historic/Cultural/Tribal Resources
Lake County, Flathead County, and Local Communities	All Resources



5.3. SPOT IMPROVEMENTS

The improvement options in this section aim to enhance safety, traffic operations, and access management along the US 93 corridor. Priorities include reducing severe crashes, improving vehicle and pedestrian safety, and optimizing traffic flow. A traffic analysis for both current and future conditions, along with a detailed five-year crash analysis (2018-2022), informed the development of these options, highlighting congestion, performance issues, and crash trends. Public concerns, including difficulties accessing the highway due to limited visibility, high-speed traffic, and challenges with turning movements—particularly during peak traffic times—also played a role in shaping these improvements. Pedestrian and bicycle safety, as well as congestion during the summer tourist season, were additional factors considered.

Some of the proposed improvements involve adding traffic control measures, such as roundabouts or traffic signals. Traffic signals will only be considered where specific criteria are met, in line with the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD). Intersections may be monitored for signal warrants as development in the area progresses.



S1. JETTE (RP 62.2 TO 64.7)

This 2.5-mile stretch of road is straight and descends towards Polson, allowing southbound vehicles to gain speed. A partial passing zone is provided, and the downhill grade encourages aggressive southbound passing maneuvers. The Jette segment was identified as one of five priority segments in the crash analysis, with 37 crashes along this segment between 2018 and 2022 resulting in three severe crashes and five severe injuries. The majority of collisions were animal-related (26), followed by rear-end crashes (two), rollovers (two), and fixed object crashes (two). The severe crashes included a fatal head-on collision, a fatal rollover, and a serious rear-end crash. Of the total crashes, 23 occurred at night without lighting.

Although the road meets MDT baseline criteria, the roadway profile grade could be flattened to enhance safety, if determined feasible. This could reduce the speed that southbound vehicles approach Polson. There are 11 approaches in this stretch, eight of which are located within the passing zone, presenting potential safety concerns. Safety could be improved by assessing the location of the passing zone and possibly removing or adjusting it.

Recommendation: Flatten roadway grades; assess passing zone

Project Development Considerations:

- Physical and environmental constraints may limit viability of flattening curves
- Potential impacts to surface waters, irrigation features, farmland, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, geologic features, wildlife, fisheries, protected species, recreational sites, and historic/cultural properties
- Additional right-of-way may be required

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake County

Timeframe: Long-term

Estimated Cost: \$32.2M

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP, Federal Grants



S2. BIG ARM (RP 71.3 TO 73.8)

US 93 passes through the town of Big Arm for a 2.5-mile stretch, with the speed limit varying between 45 mph to 70 mph. This section is a two-lane facility with a total of 35 approaches but no dedicated turn bays. A portion of the segment is designated as a passing zone for at least one direction of traffic if not both, which raises concerns given the high concentration of approaches. Traffic data from 2023 shows that the average daily traffic (ADT) at RP 75.7, just north of Big Arm, was 4,274 vehicles.

Traffic count data shows that the ADT has gradually increased since 2004, with existing volumes hovering around 4,300 vehicles daily. To accommodate turning movements and improve safety, a left-turn lane at major approaches could be constructed through this section. The highest concentration of approaches occurs primarily on the north side of US 93 between La Bella Lane (RP 71.3) and Skipping Rock Lane (RP 73.8), making this area an ideal candidate for a turn lane to serve these properties. This would enhance roadway capacity and provide more opportunities for safe turning. During future project development activities, the specific turn lane design would be determined in conjunction with implementation of access management recommendations, potentially including consolidated approaches.

Additionally, the current passing zone locations should be reviewed to determine whether they should be adjusted or removed to further improve safety and traffic flow.

Recommendation: Construct consistent three-lane configuration with left-turn lane; review passing zones

Project Development Considerations:

- Coordination with *Access Management Plan*
- Potential impacts to surface waters, irrigation features, farmland, floodplains, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, fisheries, protected species, and historic/cultural properties
- Additional right-of-way may be required

Implementation Partners:

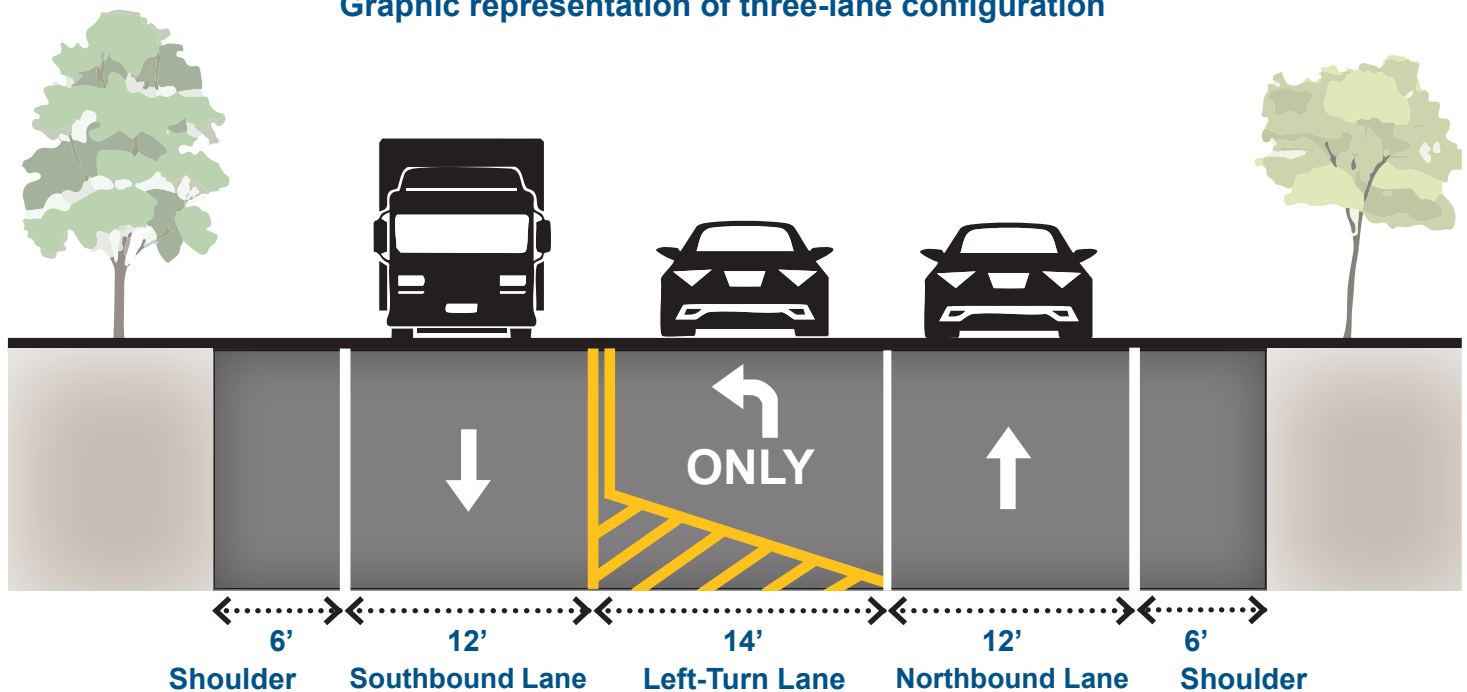
- MDT, CSKT, Lake County

Timeframe: Long-term

Estimated Cost: \$19.1M

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP, Federal Grants

Graphic representation of three-lane configuration





S3. ELMO PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS (RP 77.2 TO 77.3)

Through Elmo, sections of sidewalk provide community members with pedestrian access across the area without the need for a vehicle. Two crosswalks connect residences on the east side of the highway to key community spaces on the west side. While these crosswalks are currently in place, they are in poor condition, do not meet current design guidelines, and offer minimal protection for users. In addition, there are concerns about visibility and accessibility, particularly for those with mobility challenges. To improve safety during the winter months, it is important to ensure that sidewalks and crosswalks at the intersections are kept clear of snow and ice.

S3-a. Skookum Drive (RP 77.2)

The crosswalk at Skookum Drive connects residences on the east side of the highway to the Standing Arrow PowWow grounds. The crosswalk spans a distance of 40 feet and has longitudinal lines parallel to traffic flow (i.e., piano key markings) and a sign to warn vehicles to watch for pedestrians. To improve pedestrian safety and visibility at this intersection, an RRFB could be installed. Additionally, incorporating Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations would ensure that all community members, including those with disabilities, can safely use the crosswalk.

S3-b. Cemetery Road (RP 77.3)

Cemetery Road through Elmo connects houses on the east side of US 93 to the Elmo Community Center. A SUP alongside Cemetery Road allows people to walk to popular destinations, but pedestrians must cross US 93. Currently, a crosswalk is located across the south leg with piano key markings. The distance is about 40 feet, and the crosswalk is located along a horizontal curve with a speed limit varying from 45 to 55 mph. The crosswalk features overhead flashing lights activated by a button, but it appears that these lights have been struck by vehicles. Additionally, this type of warning signal is non-standard for a crosswalk.

At this intersection, the overhead warning signal could be upgraded to a button-activated RRFB improving pedestrian connection. This is a more effective warning signal for approaching vehicles, helping to increase driver awareness of pedestrians. ADA accommodations should also be added to this crosswalk to ensure safe access for all community members.

Recommendation: Install RRFBs and ADA accommodations at pedestrian crossings

Project Development Considerations:

- Additional right-of-way may be required
- Potential impacts to irrigation features, farmland, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, protected species, and historic/cultural properties
- Funding and responsibility for maintenance

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake County

Timeframe: Mid-term

Estimated Cost: S3-a: \$420,000, S3-b: \$430,000

Potential Funding Sources: NH, TA, CMAQ/MACI





S4. MT 28 INTERSECTION (RP 77.6)

US 93 intersects with MT 28, with a speed limit of 45-mph on US 93 and 70-mph on MT 28 (65-mph at night). This three-leg intersection has stop control on the minor leg (MT 28) and a northbound left-turn lane on US 93. During the analysis period, three crashes were recorded at this intersection, one of which was fatal. All three crashes involved fixed objects and occurred at night without lighting. Data collected in June 2024 revealed that over 7,500 vehicles use this intersection daily, with nearly 1,300 of those coming from the west (minor) leg.

Early planning has begun for a new fueling station/convenience store development located on the north side of the US 93/MT 28 intersection, which may influence future traffic operations. Since the development may have substantial and permanent impacts on the transportation system, the project applicant would be required to comply with the MDT SIAP. Additional intersection traffic control, such as a roundabout or traffic signal and access modifications at the intersection may be needed to accommodate future traffic volumes and business access.

Recommendation: Install additional traffic control and accommodate business access as warranted with future development

Project Development Considerations:

- Installation of a traffic signal would require a warrant analysis
- Additional right-of-way may be required for roundabout
- Potential impacts to farmland, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, protected species, hazardous materials, and historic/cultural properties

Implementation Partners:

- Private, MDT, CSKT, Lake County

Timeframe: Mid-term

Estimated Cost: \$2.1M to \$4.9M

Potential Funding Sources: Private (Development), Local



S5. BLACKTAIL ROAD/STONER LOOP INTERSECTION (RP 97.9)

Located at the base of Political Hill following a northbound transition into a 45 mph zone entering Lakeside, the Blacktail Road/Stoner Loop intersection provides access to a variety of businesses. Blacktail Road forms a frontage along the west side of US 93 before intersecting with Stoner Loop less than 100 feet from the intersection. Stop control is currently provided on the minor leg of the intersection. The combination of turning volumes, partially obstructed sight distance, speed transition, and poor intersection configuration create operational and safety challenges. Over the five-year crash analysis period, six crashes were reported at the intersection. Two of the crashes were right angle crashes and two were rear-end crashes. Two of the crashes resulted in minor injuries and two crashes involved impaired drivers.

To address these operational and safety concerns, a northbound left-turn lane on US 93 may be warranted based on turning volumes and roadway geometrics. With the installation of a left-turn lane, the configuration of the intersection, including Blacktail Road/Stoner Loop, should also be evaluated and addressed. Additionally, a higher level of traffic control such as a traffic signal or roundabout could be considered in the future, as warranted.

In the interim before improvements to US 93 are addressed, Flathead County is considering potential near-term improvements within its adjacent right-of-way, such as striping, delineation, and enhanced signage treatments to improve visibility and geometric alignment at the intersection.

Recommendation: Construct a northbound left turn lane and evaluate intersection configuration

Project Development Considerations:

- Installation of a turn lane and/or traffic signal would require a warrant analysis
- Additional right-of-way may be required for roundabout
- Potential impacts to vegetation, wildlife, protected species, and historic/cultural properties

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, Flathead County, Private

Timeframe: Mid-term

Estimated Cost: \$1.7M

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP, Local, Private



S6. ADAMS STREET INTERSECTION (RP 98.1)

The intersection of Adams Street and US 93 is a main access point for resorts and homes located on Lakeside Boulevard as well as multiple neighborhoods located on the west side of the highway. The intersection currently has stop control on the minor road (Adams Street), a TWLTL on the major road (US 93), and a crosswalk on the north leg. Over the five-year crash period, seven crashes occurred at the intersection with two resulting in minor injuries. Of the crashes, six were rear-ends and one involved a pedestrian. Traffic data for this intersection indicates northbound and southbound traffic make up the majority of traffic with only five percent of traffic coming from the east or westbound legs. The intersection demonstrates poor to failing operations during summer peak hours.

This intersection does not currently warrant additional traffic control based on traffic volumes, but it does meet warrants for pedestrian activity. There is an existing RRFB at this intersection to accommodate pedestrian crossings. A PHB could be considered in place of the RRFB to require drivers to come to a complete stop and wait at the stop line while pedestrians cross the intersection. It will be important to closely monitor pedestrian and traffic conditions at this intersection over time, particularly as future development projects may increase minor street traffic volumes and pedestrian activity. If future growth in the surrounding area occurs, the need for additional traffic control measures or infrastructure improvements should be re-evaluated to ensure continued safe and efficient traffic flow.

Recommendation: Install additional traffic control as warranted based on future development

Project Development Considerations:

- Installation of a traffic signal would require a warrant analysis
- Additional right-of-way may be required for roundabout
- Potential impacts to vegetation, wildlife, protected species, and historic/cultural properties

Implementation Partners:

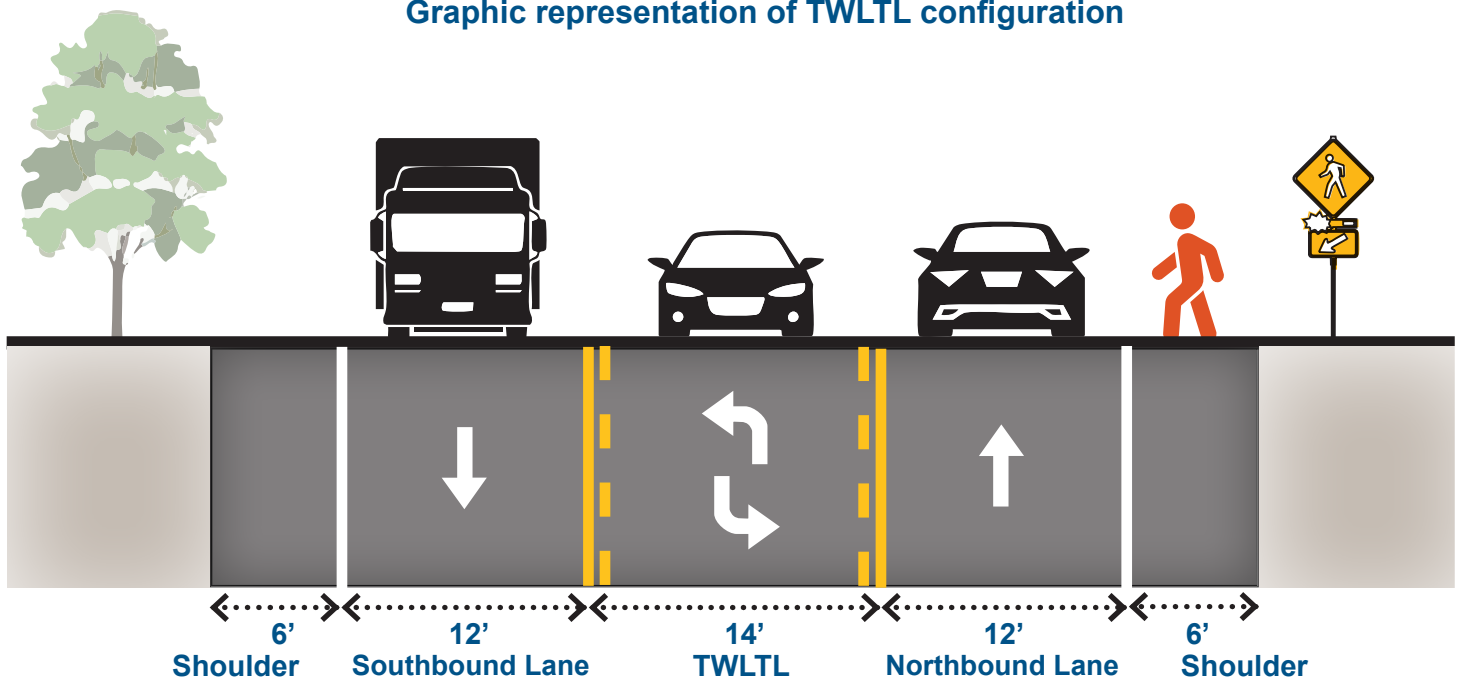
- MDT, Flathead County, Private

Timeframe: Mid- to Long-term

Estimated Cost: \$310,000 (PHB), \$2.2M (Traffic Signal), \$6.1M (Roundabout)

Potential Funding Sources: NH, Local, Private

Graphic representation of TWLTL configuration





S7. LAKESIDE (RP 97.8 TO 98.4)

Lakeside is a popular destination for people visiting Flathead Lake, and it is the busiest section of the study corridor for both vehicles and pedestrians. Sidewalks are provided along portions of the east side of US 93, however they are discontinuous with multiple gaps. Crosswalks are provided on one leg of the Adams Street and Bierney Creek Road intersections, and the crossing at Adams Street also includes an RRFB. Roadway lighting is provided in some areas, along with undefined on-street parking. The speed limit through Lakeside is currently posted at 30-mph as a result of a recent speed study.

This segment was identified as one of five priority segments in the crash analysis for the corridor. Crash data indicates 40 total crashes in this segment, with one crash resulting in a suspected serious injury, and one resulting in a pedestrian fatality. There were 13 rear-end collisions, eight fixed object crashes, five animal crashes, two pedestrian crashes, and three parked vehicle crashes. Additionally, five of the crashes involved impaired drivers.

S7-a. Pedestrian Accommodations

Extending the existing sidewalk and curb and gutter along the east side of US 93 could enhance pedestrian access throughout the town. A continuous, well-defined sidewalk would create a safer, more predictable walking environment. Upgrading the Adams Street and Bierney Creek Road intersections to provide crosswalks with RRFBs on both highway crossings and ensuring ADA compliance would further enhance safety and accessibility for all users, including those with disabilities. Adding a third crosswalk in Lakeside would also increase pedestrian connectivity. Additionally, expanding street lighting in unlit areas would improve nighttime safety for both pedestrians and vehicles.

S7-b. Urban Reconstruction

A full urban reconstruction of US 93 through Lakeside may help address safety and congestion concerns. This option would include continuous, ADA-compliant sidewalks on both sides of the highway, a boulevard, and a curb and gutter system to separate pedestrians from traffic.

The addition of curb and gutter may help improve traffic flow and safety, particularly during peak hours, by deterring roadside parking. Crosswalk upgrades at Adams Street and Bierney Creek Road to include ADA accessible crosswalks with RRFBs on both highway crossings would promote better accessibility. The option would also widen US 93 to include a TWLTL, allowing safer access to side streets and driveways. Additional enhancements, such as improved street lighting and highly visible crosswalks, would further increase safety for both pedestrians and drivers at night.

Recommendation: Install pedestrian and roadway infrastructure improvements

Project Development Considerations:

- Additional right-of-way may be required for additional lanes and realignment
- Potential impacts to street parking for businesses
- Coordination with *Access Management Plan*

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, Flathead County

Timeframe: Mid- to Long-term

Estimated Cost: S7-a: \$1.3M, S7-b: \$12.8M

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP, TA, CMAQ/MACI





S8. SOMERS (RP 102.4 TO 103.0)

MFWP is proposing to add additional parking to the Somers Boat Launch Area, which may require modifications to the highway. This proposal is anticipated to affect traffic patterns at the existing and proposed parking area, particularly during the peak summer season.

The Great Northern Historical Trail runs between Flathead Lake and US 93 through Somers, providing accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists. The SUP extends through the study corridor from RP 102.5 to RP 104.0 and is a popular route for both pedestrians and bicyclists. However, there is a small segment just east of the boat launch where bicyclists are forced to ride through the parking lot. Portions of the SUP are also in poor condition with segments located directly adjacent to US 93 with no buffer. There are two existing crosswalks with RRFBs, one at RP 102.6 and the other at RP 102.8.

Over the five-year crash analysis period, 21 crashes were reported in the area. Two of the crashes were severe, and the most common crash type was rear-end (8). Traffic data indicates that on a weekend day during the peak season, up to 60 vehicles with boat trailers utilize this area. There are currently 17 boat parking spaces, with the rest of the vehicles parking on the side of the road or in the grass near the proposed parking area. The proposed parking area will offer between 20 to 30 parking spaces, so the number of vehicles making a turn onto Sunnyside Avenue will most likely increase.

S8-a. Pedestrian Accommodations

To enhance pedestrian safety and access, the Great Northern Historical Trail could be extended and improved through Somers, creating a continuous, safe route for pedestrians. In areas where the SUP runs alongside US 93, separation between path users and vehicles could be added. In the short term, flexible delineators could be used to clearly mark the SUP, while in the long term, a boulevard could be constructed to provide physical separation. This extension would improve access to the town for both residents and visitors. Additionally, several crosswalks along the path could be upgraded with ADA-compliant connections, ensuring accessibility for all users.

S8-b. Urban Reconstruction

A full urban reconstruction of US 93 through Somers would address the current problems of on-street parking and a lack of delineation between the roadway, parking, and the SUP. Extending the existing TWLTL would help protect vehicles turning into the proposed parking areas, reducing congestion and minimizing the risk of rear-end collisions. Reconstruction would include continuous, ADA-compliant sidewalks and/or paths on both sides of the highway, a boulevard, and a curb and gutter system to separate pedestrians from traffic. The addition of curb and gutter would help improve traffic flow and safety during peak seasonal use by deterring roadside parking. The reconstruction would also involve upgrading the existing SUP, which is in poor condition, to provide a safer, more accessible route for pedestrians and bicyclists. Additional improvements, such as enhanced street lighting and high visibility crosswalks, would further increase safety for both non-motorists and drivers at night.

Recommendation: Install pedestrian/bicycle and roadway infrastructure improvements

Project Development Considerations:

- Potential impacts to surface waters, irrigation features, farmland, floodplains, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, fisheries, protected species, and historic/cultural properties
- Additional right-of-way may be required for additional lanes and realignment
- Coordination with *Access Management Plan*

Implementation Partners:

- MFWP, MDT, Flathead County, Walleyes Unlimited

Timeframe: Mid- to Long-term

Estimated Cost: S8-a: \$1.7M, S8-b: \$13.0M

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP, TA, MFWP, NGO/Private (Walleyes Unlimited)



S9. MT 82 INTERSECTION (RP 104.2)

At the high-volume intersection of MT 82 and US 93, a gas station and hotel are located in the southwest corner. All legs of the intersection have timed crosswalks aligning with the traffic signal phasing. The west leg of the intersection, Forest Hill Road, provides primary access to the gas station with fully open and undefined approaches. It is aligned with a 90-degree turn running parallel to the north leg of the intersection and is the only leg of the intersection with no dedicated left- and right-turn lanes. The intersection experiences a high percentage of southbound left-turns and westbound right-turns.

S9-a. Upgrade Traffic Signal

The existing signal phasing provides protected left-turn phasing for southbound vehicles only. The northbound and westbound directions have dedicated left-turn bays but no protected left turn phasing. No left-turn bay or protected left-turn phasing is provided for eastbound vehicles. Additional protected phasing could be beneficial to address the safety concerns and improve traffic flow at the intersection, particularly on the eastbound leg, where left turns are the most common movement. Additionally, a dedicated left-turn bay should be included for the eastbound leg. Furthermore, incorporating pedestrian signal phasing that is clearly timed with vehicle traffic phasing could enhance safety for pedestrians, aligning crosswalk activation with signal changes. Given the high volume of traffic, especially on the southbound approach, adjusting the signal timing for peak hours could also improve traffic flow.

S9-b. Define Access Points

Defining and improving the alignment of access points at and near the intersection could help improve traffic flow and enhance safety. The alignment of the west leg, which serves as the gas station driveway, currently creates confusion and potentially unsafe turning movements. Reducing conflict points by limiting and better aligning the driveway access could decrease the risk of crashes and improve safety for all users.

Recommendation: Modify business access; upgrade traffic signal

Project Development Considerations:

- Potential access impacts to business owners
- Coordination with *Access Management Plan*

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, Flathead County, Private

Timeframe: Mid-term

Estimated Cost: S9-a: \$600,000, S9-b: \$560,000

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP, Private



5.4. CORRIDOR-WIDE IMPROVEMENTS

The improvement options presented in this section focus on traffic operations, safety, and access management throughout the entire US 93 corridor. These include low-cost measures like revising striping for passing zones, updating pavement markings, installing rumble strips, adjusting speed limits, adding signage, and other high-visibility improvements. Larger-scale options, such as shoulder widening, access management, passing and turn lanes, and wildlife-vehicle conflict mitigation, would apply to the entire corridor. These larger improvements may be more cost-effective when coordinated with spot improvements.



C1. TURN LANES AND APPROACH REALIGNMENT

This option includes constructing auxiliary turn lanes at intersections along US 93 as warranted. Guidelines for turn lanes are contained in Chapter 28 of the MDT *Traffic Engineering Manual*.³² Turn lanes may be warranted based on the speed of the highway, hourly traffic volumes, and hourly turning volumes. Evidence of a crash trend may also indicate the need for a turn lane. Configurations may include dedicated turn bays or TWLTLs, depending on the number and proximity of intersecting approaches. When considering right-turn lanes, specific attention should be given to visibility on the side street as decelerating vehicles in the auxiliary lane can create a moving sight obstruction for drivers on the side street.

An *Access Management Plan* has been developed for the corridor (see [P1](#)) and suggests potential locations where turn lanes may be beneficial, however additional locations may be identified during future project development.

Additionally, this option also includes realignment of approaches that intersect US 93 at a skewed angle less than 90 degrees, which can create sight distance and operational challenges for drivers.

Recommendation: Install turn lanes as warranted

Project Development Considerations:

- Additional right-of-way or easement may be required
- Installation of turn lanes is subject to traffic volume criteria as outlined in MDT guidelines
- Potential impacts to surface waters, irrigation features, farmland, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, protected species, and historic/cultural properties
- Coordination with *Access Management Plan*

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, Private

Timeframe: Mid- to Long-term

Estimated Cost: \$570,000 to \$1.3M (turn lanes), \$40,000 to \$300,000 each (realignment)

Potential Funding Sources: NH, Local, Private



C2. PASSING/NO-PASSING ZONES

Passing opportunities are provided along the corridor in areas where roadway geometrics allow. No-passing zones are designated by solid yellow lines and are established in areas with insufficient passing sight distance or near public approaches. Passing opportunities are limited by terrain and the volume of opposing vehicles, therefore, as traffic volumes increase, the effectiveness of passing zones decreases. A total of 37 passing zones occur along the corridor, including 17 serving both directions, two serving the northbound direction, and one serving the southbound direction. Currently, all passing zones appear to be in accordance with MDT guidelines for length.

An engineering study should be completed to evaluate passing zones and determine if the removal or addition of no-passing zones is warranted. Locations to examine include those where passing may be unsafe. For example, the area from RP 71.9 to 72.9 allows for passing in both directions. The location is generally flat, straight, and free from sight obstructions. However, this location passes more than 20 approaches, four of which are public approaches. Since MDT guidelines note that no-passing zones should be established in areas near public approaches, the existing passing zone in this location may not be appropriate. Additionally, the passing zone between Big Arm and Elmo (RP 75.2 to 76.4) has a speed limit varying from 45 to 70 mph which can make passing difficult. The remainder of the corridor could be examined to determine if additional passing zones could be provided.

Recommendation: Evaluate and modify existing passing/no-passing signing and striping
Project Development Considerations:

- Compliance with current baseline criteria
- Site-specific safety considerations
- Removal of passing zones may result in increased driver frustration due to decreased passing opportunities

Implementation Partners:

- MDT

Timeframe: Short-term

Estimated Cost: \$19,000 per mile

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP, Maintenance

C3. PASSING LANES

US 93 is a two-lane highway with limited opportunities for safe passing. Currently, there are four southbound passing lanes and four northbound passing lanes, primarily located in the southern part of the corridor. While there are other passing opportunities through striped passing zones, this leaves approximately 13 miles in the northern portion of the corridor without any designated passing lanes.

A minimum of 1,000 feet (excluding tapers) is needed for a passing lane according to current design criteria. The optimal length is approximately 0.5 to 2.0 miles long, depending on traffic volumes. With additional traffic anticipated in the future, passing lanes of 0.5 to 1.0 mile are desirable.

By providing additional lanes through this section of US 93, drivers would have the opportunity to safely pass slow-moving vehicles that they may not otherwise be able to pass. This would not only help prevent traffic backups but also reduce the risk of aggressive passing maneuvers, which can lead to crashes. With more passing lanes, drivers would be less likely to engage in unsafe passing behaviors, promoting smoother, safer travel throughout the corridor. Additionally, passing lanes may enhance incident management for law enforcement and emergency service providers.

The following locations may be candidates for new passing lanes to facilitate safe passing in the northern segment of the corridor as well as additional passing opportunities in the southern portion. These locations were selected due to their available space and favorable geometric conditions for accommodating passing lanes, though some roadway realignment may be necessary.

- Southbound RP 79.75-80.25
- Northbound RP 92.75-93.25
- Southbound RP 84.75-85.25
- Southbound RP 95.5-96.5

Recommendation: Construct additional passing lanes
Project Development Considerations:

- Compliance with current baseline criteria and guidelines
- Potential impacts to surface waters, irrigation features, farmland, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, fisheries, protected species, recreational sites, and historic/cultural properties
- Additional right-of-way or easement may be required

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties

Timeframe: Long-term

Estimated Cost: \$4.7M (RP 79.75)
\$6.7M (RP 84.75)
\$5.5M (RP 92.75)
\$11.4M (RP 95.5)

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP



C4. TURNOUTS

Turnouts provide designated areas for vehicles to exit the main traffic stream, reducing congestion caused by queuing behind slow-moving vehicles, providing safe stopping opportunities for school buses and maintenance vehicles, and enhancing incident management for law enforcement personnel and emergency service providers. Within the study corridor, there are 22 existing turnouts, the majority of which are informal. The current turnouts also present challenges for buses and large trucks due to insufficient length and the absence of advance warning signage. Public feedback indicates a need for additional turnouts to accommodate slow-moving vehicles and law enforcement activities.

To increase the use of existing turnouts by slow-moving vehicles, modifications such as lengthening and widening should be considered. These improvements would allow trucks, buses, and other large vehicles to more easily exit the highway and provide additional space for safe reentry into the travel lane. In some cases, turnouts could also serve as designated scenic viewing areas.

Additional signage throughout the corridor is also required to be compliant with the MUTCD. Static signage may be installed before and at turnout areas to remind drivers that slow-moving vehicles must use turnouts. Additionally, existing signage should be supplemented with advance warning signs to allow drivers to prepare for safe entry into the turnout and promote broader utilization. School bus stop ahead signs are required in advance of locations where adequate sight distance cannot be provided at a school bus stop.

New turnouts could be constructed in the corridor to address gaps in availability and improve traffic flow. Numerous informal turnouts have been created over time, either during roadway reconstruction projects or through frequent use by drivers. These informal locations present opportunities for formalization and improvement, provided they can be safely integrated into the roadway environment.

Given the 70-mph speed limit on most of US 93, turnouts should be at least 600 feet in length. Turnouts shorter than 200 feet are not recommended, even in areas with lower approach speeds. The minimum width of a turnout should be 12 feet, with 16 feet being the preferred width. Sight distance on the approach to a turnout should be at least 1,000 feet to ensure drivers have sufficient time to identify and safely enter the turnout. Additional length, width, and signage would be necessary to accommodate combined uses such as scenic turnouts.

All but three existing designated turnouts on the corridor satisfy the 200-foot minimum length, but only 4 meet the preferred 600-foot length recommendation. Additionally, all of the turnouts meet and exceed the minimum width requirement of 12 feet. Potential locations are listed below for new turnouts and improvements to existing turnouts based on a preliminary review of roadway geometrics, terrain, safety, and known use areas. While this list highlights possible locations, it is not exhaustive, and additional opportunities may exist.

- RP 74.8 – Lengthen and pave turnout, roadside right
- RP 77.8 – Lengthen and pave turnout, roadside left
- RP 96.4 – New turnout, roadside left
- RP 99.4 – Lengthen and pave turnout, roadside right
- RP 99.6 – New turnout, roadside left

Recommendation: Construct/modify turnouts as appropriate; add appropriate signage at each and in advance of each location

Project Development Considerations:

- Additional right-of-way or easements may be required
- Sight distance and physical constraints adjacent to the roadway may present limitations for new turnouts
- Coordination with School Districts would be required for any designated school bus stops
- Potential impacts to surface waters, irrigation features, floodplains, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, protected species, recreational sites, and historic/cultural properties

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, School Districts

Timeframe: Mid- to Long-term

Estimated Cost: \$230,000 to \$1.3M per location

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP



C5. SHOULDER WIDENING

The corridor generally consists of two 12-foot travel lanes with shoulders ranging from two to six feet, and a few short segments having no shoulder. MDT baseline criteria recommend 8-foot shoulders on rural principal arterials for traveler safety. Additionally, adequate shoulders can enhance incident management for law enforcement and emergency service providers. Along this segment of US 93, eight-foot shoulders are likely infeasible due to the topography and other physical constraints. However, widening to provide six-foot shoulders may be possible through most of the corridor to help improve safety. Where the corridor is widened, side slopes should be constructed to current design criteria, where feasible. The following locations currently have less than a six-foot shoulder and are listed with their existing width.

- RP 63-64.4 (2 feet)
- RP 65-65.5 (No shoulder)
- RP 66.1-70.0 (2 feet)
- RP 92.9-104.2 (3 feet for 2.6 miles, 2 feet for the rest)

MDT frequently receives complaints about vehicles parked on the shoulders of US 93, particularly in the Somers and Lakeside areas. Concerns that widening shoulders may encourage more of this behavior have also been noted. Parking concerns and enforcement of no-parking zones should be addressed during project development.

Recommendation: Widen roadway shoulders where feasible

Project Development Considerations:

- Increased potential for roadside parking and higher vehicle speeds
- Physical constraints may prohibit widening in some areas
- Potential impacts to surface waters, irrigation features, farmland, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, fisheries, protected species, and historic/cultural properties
- Additional right-of-way may be required

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties

Timeframe: Mid- to Long-term

Estimated Cost: \$3.0M to \$6.2M per mile

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP



C6. RUMBLE STRIPS

The corridor currently has centerline rumble strips between the two travel lanes throughout the whole length, but shoulder rumble strips are inconsistent. Over the five-year crash analysis period, 175 run-off-the-road crashes occurred along the corridor resulting in four fatalities and 11 suspected serious injuries.

Rumble strips are designed to create vibrations and noise when vehicles drive over them, which can help prevent drowsy driving, alert drivers to lane departures, and provide a warning of potential hazards ahead. While rumble strips can improve road safety, some residents may oppose their installation, due to the noise they generate. Additionally, rumble strips can create challenging riding conditions for bicyclists, especially in areas with narrow shoulders. Currently, there are several areas along the study corridor that do not have shoulder rumble strips, which could benefit from their addition to enhance safety. These areas include:

- RP 63-64.4
- RP 65-69.5
- RP 70-85
- RP 95.5-104.2

Adding shoulder rumble strips to these locations could help reduce the risk of crashes, particularly those involving driver fatigue or distraction, but it's important to balance these benefits with the potential impact on local residents and bicyclists.

Recommendation: Install shoulder rumble strips throughout the corridor

Project Development Considerations:

- Potential for increased roadway noise
- Potential challenges for bicyclists in areas with narrow shoulders

Implementation Partners:

- MDT

Timeframe: Short-term

Estimated Cost: \$26,000 per mile

Potential Funding Sources: NH, HSIP, Maintenance



C7. ROCKFALL HAZARD MITIGATION

Several rockfall hazard sites have been identified by MDT within the study corridor. Available data indicates there are currently 16 areas with rockfall slope conditions rated as fair. These sites were identified based on their potential to impact the safety of the traveling public and their potential to cause disruptions to traffic operations. Although MT 35 can be used as a detour around Flathead Lake, a rockfall event causing road closure could severely impact access to businesses and residents along US 93.

This improvement option includes completing rockfall hazard mitigation at the identified sites to improve roadside clear zones and decrease the potential for rockfall events. Mitigation activities may include blasting, scaling, rock bolting, netting and drapery, rockfall retention structures/fences, and improved or reconfigured roadside ditch configurations. Site-specific conditions and needs determined during future project development phases may substantially alter costs. Site locations are listed below.

- RP 69.10 -70.01 • RP 93.73-93.82 • RP 95.75-95.92 • RP 97.11-97.39
- RP 70.03-70.04 • RP 94.31-94.48 • RP 97.02-97.11 • RP 99.79-99.94
- RP 93.36-93.52 • RP 94.97-95.00 • RP 97.11-97.28 • RP 101.62-101.75
- RP 93.60-93.71 • RP 95.30-95.40 • RP 97.28-97.39 • RP 103.43-103.52

Recommendation: Conduct rockfall hazard mitigation

Project Development Considerations:

- Temporary road closure/detours may be required during blasting and other mitigation activities
- Potential impacts to geologic resources, surface waters, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, fisheries, protected species, and historic/cultural properties
- Additional right-of-way may be required

Implementation Partners:

- MDT

Timeframe: Mid- to Long-term

Estimated Cost: \$18.9M (improve all sites one condition state), \$45.8M (improve all sites to good condition)

Potential Funding Sources: NH, Maintenance



C8. HIGH-VISIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS AND ADVANCE WARNING SIGNS

To improve safety along the corridor, particularly during nighttime driving, high-visibility treatments could be installed throughout the entire study area. While some of these elements are already in place along certain portions of the corridor, the high frequency of animal-related crashes and lane departure incidents occurring in the dark, highlights the need for these treatments to be extended across the entire study area. Key improvements could include installing reflector post delineation and double-sided reflectors to increase the visibility of road boundaries, particularly in areas with sharp curves or limited lighting.

Additionally, enhanced delineation for horizontal curves could provide drivers with clearer guidance when navigating turns, reducing the risk of crashes. Wider edge lines and safety pavement edges could improve lane visibility, while the application of reflective paint for lane markings would further enhance visibility in low-light conditions. These reflective markings would help drivers better distinguish lane boundaries, particularly in dark or foggy conditions.

Advance warning signs could also be installed to alert drivers about roadway elements that do not meet current baseline criteria. Signage for these curves may include retroreflective signing to improve visibility at night, as well as flashing or feedback signs that provide dynamic alerts based on vehicle speed or proximity. Advance warning signs could also be used to indicate approaching intersections, driveways, crosswalks, or other potentially hazardous features that may not be immediately apparent.

Recommendation: Install curve warning signs, reflectors, and reflective paint on striping

Project Development Considerations:

- Integration with existing transportation infrastructure

Implementation Partners:

- MDT

Timeframe: Short-term

Estimated Cost: \$50,000 per mile

Potential Funding Sources: HSIP, Maintenance



C9. INTELLIGENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS (ITS)

ITS technologies have been widely used throughout the country to improve safety and efficiency for the transport of people and goods by integrating advanced communications technologies into transportation infrastructure and vehicles. Potential treatments include variable speed limit (VSL) signage that adapts to changing road and environmental conditions, as discussed below. Implementation of VSLs would be subject to appropriate engineering traffic studies and approval by the Montana Transportation Commission.

- **Weather-Related** VSLs can be used on roads where fog, ice, rain, snow, or other factors often influence safety. When weather conditions deteriorate to the point that hazardous conditions are impending, the operating agency reduces the speed limit to one that helps minimize the likelihood of crashes.
- **Congestion-Related** VSLs can be used when traffic volumes are increasing and congestion is likely. When volumes and/or speed exceed a predetermined threshold, the strategy can be deployed to handle more traffic volume at a slower, but not stop-and-go, speed.
- **Wildlife-Related** VSLs can also be used during periods when wildlife is known or expected near the roadway. Lowering speed limits seasonally in wildlife areas may help reduce wildlife-vehicle conflicts.

Additional treatments could include advance or dynamic warning systems to alert drivers of upcoming hazards, variable message signs (VMS) to relay timely weather and incident alerts to the traveling public, advance queue detection to manage traffic flow by warning drivers of congestion ahead, and speed feedback signs to promote increased compliance with posted speed limits.

Recommendation: Install ITS technologies where appropriate

Project Development Considerations: • Integration with existing transportation infrastructure • Public awareness and education about new technologies • Appropriate speed studies and Transportation Commission approval for any speed changes	Implementation Partners: • MDT
	Timeframe: Mid-term
	Estimated Cost: \$2.1M (VSL), \$240,000 each (VMS)
	Potential Funding Sources: HSIP, CMAQ/MACI, Maintenance



C10. CULTURAL SIGNAGE

The US 93 corridor holds deep cultural significance for the CSKT. Installing interpretive signage would provide an opportunity to share this history and highlight how the area was used before the road was built.

In 2000, MDT, FHWA, and the CSKT developed guidelines for various types of signage along the US 93 corridor between Evaro and Polson, including portal/boundary signs, community entry signs, official highway signs, place name signs, tourist-oriented directional signs, and interpretive signs. These guidelines should be followed when adding signage to the corridor, in close coordination with the CSKT.

In 2019, a signage effort was completed at the Ninepipe and Pablo National Wildlife Refuges just south of the study corridor to display the refuge names in Séliš (Salish), Qlispé (also known as Pend d'Oreille or Kalispel), Ksanka (also known as Kootenai), and English.

These interpretive signs were developed through a collaborative process with FHWA and CSKT, consistent with applicable federal standards. Any future efforts to incorporate similar multilingual signage within the corridor would need to follow the same process and comply with the MUTCD. If such signage is pursued, the implementing agency should follow established procedures for requesting exemptions from the MUTCD.

Recommendation: Install cultural signage throughout the corridor

Project Development Considerations: • Close coordination with the CSKT • Cultural sensitivity and awareness	Implementation Partners: • MDT, CSKT, Lake County
	Timeframe: Short-term
	Estimated Cost: \$1,100 each (Static Sign)
	Potential Funding Sources: NH, Maintenance, CSKT/Local



C11. WILDLIFE-VEHICLE CONFLICT MITIGATION

Industry-accepted mitigation strategies attempt to reduce wildlife-vehicle conflict by influencing driver behavior, influencing animal behavior, and physically separating animals from the roadway. Improvement options include grade-separated crossings, animal detection systems, enhanced wildlife signage, vegetation management, and speed management.

Grade-separated crossings (overpasses and underpasses) combined with wildlife fencing are highly effective at reducing collisions and supporting wildlife movement. Animal detection systems can alert drivers to nearby wildlife, and when combined with seasonal or variable messaging signs, can improve driver awareness of potential hazards. Vegetation management helps improve visibility and reduce roadside attraction for wildlife, while speed management, although considered, is not recommended as a primary strategy due to limited effectiveness.

Grade-separated crossings, fencing, vegetation management, real-time animal detection, and strategic signing may have merit in areas of the corridor with heightened wildlife-vehicle conflict, including RP 91.5 to 93, RP 96 to 103, and RP 100 to 102. MDT will continue coordinating with the Montana Wildlife & Transportation Steering Committee (MWTSC) and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to advance wildlife accommodation priorities.

Recommendation: Install appropriate wildlife accommodations resulting from MDT project development process; coordinate with MWTSC and other organizations to identify partnership opportunities and advance wildlife accommodation priorities

Project Development Considerations:

- Additional right-of-way or easement may be required, depending on accommodation
- Potential impacts to surface waters, irrigation features, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, fisheries, protected species, and historic/cultural properties

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, USFWS, MFWP, NGOs, MWTSC, Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage (MSWP), Lake and Flathead Counties

Timeframe: Short- to Long-term

Estimated Cost: \$1,100 each (Static Sign)
 \$100,000 (Vegetation Management Plan)
 \$270,000 per mile (Fencing)
 \$840,000 per mile (Animal Detection)
 \$500,000 (Underpass)
 \$5,600,000 (Overpass)

Potential Funding Sources: Programmed MDT Projects (NH), MWTP, WCPP, State and Federal Agencies, NGOs, Private



5.5. POLICY IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to infrastructure upgrades, policy improvements play a crucial role in achieving the goals for the US 93 corridor. This section outlines several policy measures designed to improve safety and operational efficiency in response to anticipated growth. These policies focus on optimizing access management, adjusting speed limits, managing travel demand, and improving maintenance practices. While the implementation of these policies will depend on staffing and resource availability, they provide valuable opportunities to enhance the long-term performance of the corridor and meet future transportation needs. No cost estimates have been provided for these policy options, as their effectiveness relies on ongoing coordination and resource allocation.

P1. ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Appropriate management of access within a highway corridor can help improve traffic flow and reduce approach-related crashes. Good access management practices include enforcing minimum spacing distances between adjacent approaches and minimizing or eliminating direct access to the highway if a reasonable alternative access to a local street system currently exists or could be constructed in the future. Reasonable access should be maintained for all existing parcels adjacent to the highway, but some existing direct approaches could be relocated, combined, or eliminated if alternate reasonable access is available or can otherwise be provided.

In conjunction with this study, an *Access Management Plan* has been developed. The goal of the plan is to enhance safety, maintain roadway function, and consistently manage both current and future access points. The *Access Management Plan* provides specific recommendations for the number, location, and spacing of public and private access points to the highway, as well as the inclusion of frontage roads, lane treatments, intersection controls, and other necessary measures to resolve identified traffic issues. The plan also outlines guidance for addressing future developments and access requests. Implementation of the plan may be aided by future establishment of a multi-agency Access Control Committee to review access requests and modifications.

In line with the *Access Management Plan*, access points could be consolidated, particularly in high-traffic areas like Polson, Big Arm, Elmo, Dayton, Lakeside, and Somers, to improve safety and traffic flow.

Recommendation: Develop and implement an *Access Management Plan*

Project Development Considerations:

- Additional right-of-way or easement may be required
- Potential impacts to surface waters, irrigation features, farmland, wetlands, vegetation, habitat, wildlife, fisheries, protected species, hazardous materials, and historic/cultural properties

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, Private

Timeframe: Short- to Long-term

P2. SPEED CONSIDERATIONS

The speed limit within the US 93 study area varies from 30 mph to 70 mph, with multiple speed limit changes along the corridor. In some locations, the speed limit varies based on daytime and nighttime conditions. Some members of the public requested consideration of slower speeds in certain locations within the corridor, while others indicated multiple changes in speed limits can be confusing and seem illogical for drivers.

Decisions about rational speed limits are typically based on speed studies which consider roadway context, driver expectation, and crash trends when determining appropriate speed limits. MDT recently completed speed studies in the Lakeside, Elmo, and Dayton areas and is implementing recommendations.

It may be appropriate to consider additional speed limit modifications in the corridor for developed areas or for seasonal or nighttime conditions based on crash trends, non-motorized conflicts, visibility concerns, and wildlife activity. In particular, speed limit investigations from Polson to Elmo, focusing on the segment between Big Arm and Elmo, should be considered in collaboration with MDT and local officials to help determine an appropriate speed limit for this portion of the corridor. Additionally, consideration should be given to the potential for lowered speeds in developed or congested areas including Somers, during nighttime due to crash trends and wild animal conflicts, and the potential for seasonal adjustments during peak seasons. Ultimately, the Montana Transportation Commission is responsible for setting the speed limit for the highway.

Recommendation: Conduct speed studies and implement recommendations

Project Development Considerations:

- Nighttime or seasonal speed limits may be appropriate to consider in the corridor, in addition to spot speed zones through developed or congested areas
- Crash trends and known conflicts should be considered
- Effectiveness of posted speed limit signage is dependent on enforcement

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties

Timeframe: Short- to Mid-term

P3. TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT (TDM)

TDM measures were introduced in the 1970s and 1980s to conserve energy, improve air quality, and reduce peak-period congestion by promoting alternatives to single-occupant vehicle use during commuting hours. Within the study corridor, TDM measures could also reduce the potential of collisions related to reduced visibility and wildlife-vehicle conflicts at dusk and dawn overlapping with AM and PM commuting periods during certain times of the year. TDM strategies originally focused on carpooling, vanpooling, public transit, walking, and cycling for work. Over time, the concept has evolved to include strategies like flextime, compressed workweeks, and telecommuting. TDM can also help manage traffic during special events, such as the 4th of July fireworks, the Polson Main Street Flathead Cherry Festival, and other large community gatherings.

As the Polson-Somers area grows, TDM strategies could enable existing transportation infrastructure to safely serve transportation users, extend the life of the current system, and introduce potential safety benefits. Beyond commuting improvements, TDM can benefit safety, tourism, special events, emergencies, and construction projects. Additionally, TDM strategies can also promote physical activity and enhance overall quality of life. The following strategies could support a TDM program in the Polson-Somers area.

- Encourage employers to provide alternate work schedules to their employees.
- Consider ways to increase transit ridership for work and non-work purposes such as improving service frequency and coverage to increase accessibility.
- Encourage drivers to avoid driving at dusk and dawn due to animal activity and reduced visibility.

Recommendation: Develop and implement transportation demand management campaigns

Project Development Considerations:

- Commuters may be unable to adjust work schedules outside of peak travel times
- Mode shift to transit/bicycling/walking for commuting purposes would likely be limited due to public transportation service challenges and corridor length

Implementation Partners:

- Private Employers, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, Transit Operators

Timeframe: Short- to Mid-Term





P4. MAINTENANCE

Within the study area, US 93 falls under the jurisdiction of the Kalispell Maintenance Division, which is responsible for surface repairs, bridge maintenance, facility upkeep, pavement markings, signage, winter maintenance, right-of-way management, vegetation management, permitting, and other functions. MDT devotes resources to operating and maintaining existing transportation facilities while researching and adopting new technologies, materials, and equipment.

The majority of the US 93 corridor has been adopted under MDT's Adopt A Highway program, which requires roadside litter removal at least twice per year. Additional information is provided on MDT's website at: www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/hwy-adoption.aspx

Field review identified potential areas for continued monitoring and attention, including runoff impacts on Flathead Lake and winter maintenance. Best management practices for erosion and sediment control could also be applied during construction activities in addition to routine maintenance.

Snow management presents challenges during winter, particularly after heavy snowstorms. Feedback from the CSKT indicated that Tribal members often travel during late night and early morning periods to attend wintertime cultural activities. Additional consideration for maintenance coverage may be warranted due to unique Tribal travel patterns.

Temporary or permanent snow fencing could provide additional storage and improve visibility along the corridor. Snow buildup at guardrail ends and intersections can hinder visibility, creating safety concerns for vehicles entering the highway. Additionally, while US 93 turnouts are well plowed, residual snow and ice due to limited use can make them difficult to navigate during winter months.

Recommendation: Continue to address highway maintenance issues and research and implement best practices

Project Development Considerations:

- Potential impacts to stormwater, surface waters, water quality, fisheries, wildlife, vegetation, and protected species

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties

Timeframe: As needed



P5. NOISE ABATEMENT

Multiple members of the public commented on excessive noise associated with highway traffic, particularly from large trucks using compression brakes, and called for noise abatement measures.

Under Montana law (Montana Code Annotated 61-9-321), any commercial motor vehicle equipped with an engine compression brake device must be fitted with a muffler in good working condition to prevent excessive noise. Commercial motor vehicles that have proper mufflers cannot be prohibited from using engine compression brakes. State law takes precedence over local government ordinances that prohibit the use of compression brakes. As a result, it is not appropriate for MDT to maintain signs in the highway right-of-way prohibiting compression brake use.

Under the project development process, noise analysis is a required component of environmental review. While traditional noise control has involved the installation of noise barriers along the highway edge or right-of-way, noise barriers are not always feasible or reasonable in terms of cost-effectiveness. Other potential strategies to consider include alternative pavement surfaces, sound insulation for public noise receptors, buffer zones, traffic and speed management techniques, increased enforcement, and possibly revisiting Montana's compression brake laws.

Recommendation: Continue to address highway noise issues and research and implement appropriate mitigation measures

Project Development Considerations:

- Highway traffic noise analyses should be completed for all highway improvements, the study will evaluate and determine anticipated noise impacts and appropriate mitigation measures

Implementation Partners:

- MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties

Timeframe: As needed



5.6. OPTIONS ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Additional improvement options were explored in response to public and stakeholder input, but ultimately, they were eliminated due to various constraints or infeasibility. These options, which fall outside the scope of the *US 93 Polson-Somers Corridor Study* or present insurmountable challenges, are discussed below.

ADDITIONAL TRAVEL LANES

Some public suggestions included adding travel lanes to reduce congestion and improve passing opportunities. However, expanding the highway is not considered feasible due to physical limitations, high costs, and environmental or cultural impacts. Expanding the highway would face significant challenges from Flathead Lake to the east and the need for extensive rock cuts to the west. The high costs, environmental disruptions, and construction-related closures make this option impractical. As a result, the idea of adding new travel lanes was removed from further consideration. Instead, potential passing lanes at specific locations, as mentioned in [C3](#), provide a more targeted and feasible approach to improve traffic flow.

ALTERNATE ROUTES

Suggestions for alternative routes to alleviate congestion, including resurfacing Old Highway 93 or constructing a new parallel route, were also considered. However, limited remaining sections of Old Highway 93 and the high costs of constructing a new route make these options impractical. Additionally, a ferry service across Flathead Lake, though attractive to some tourists, would not provide a viable solution for most travelers and does not effectively address the core concerns of traffic and safety. MT 35, which runs along the eastern shore of Flathead Lake, already serves as an alternate route in case of an emergency or closure on US 93. Consequently, constructing a new route along the west side of Flathead Lake was eliminated from further consideration.

5.7. SUMMARY OF IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS

The *US 93 Polson to Somers Corridor Study* outlines several improvement options based on a comprehensive evaluation of factors such as field reviews, engineering analysis, traffic and crash data, consultations with resource agencies, and public input. The identified improvement options include both small-scale measures, such as adding advance warning signs at intersections, and larger, more complex reconstruction efforts, such as installing passing lanes. A summary of the improvement options is presented in [Table 2](#), with a graphical representation in [Figure 11](#).

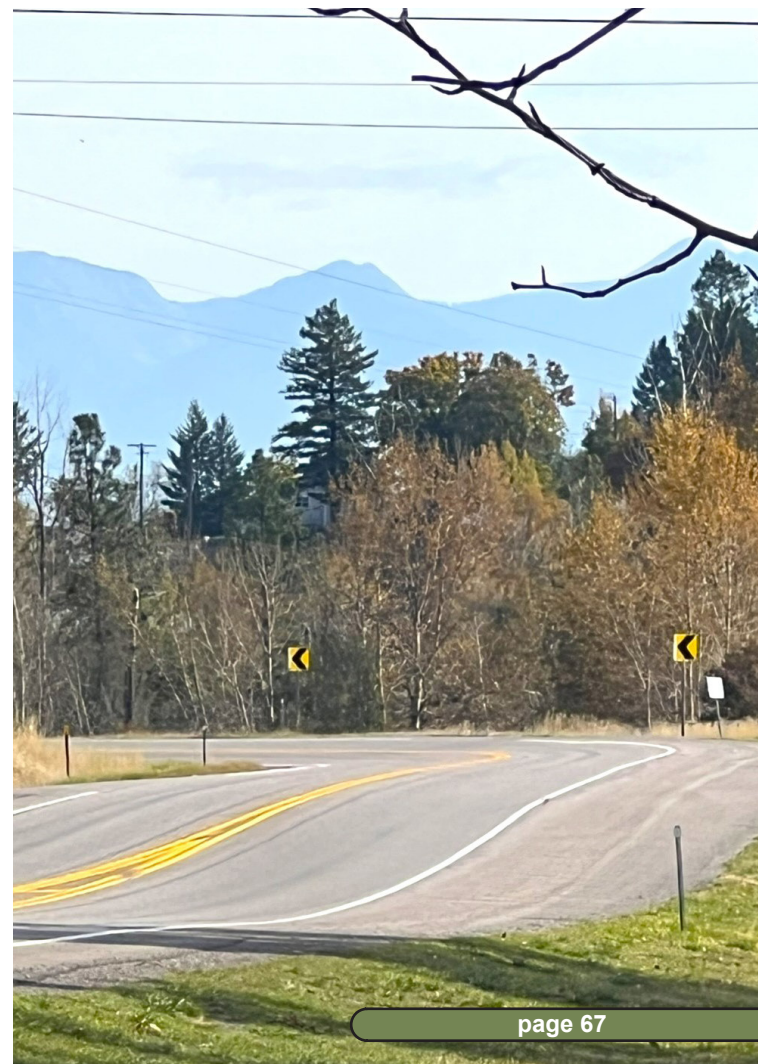


Table 2: Improvement Options Summary

Options		Description	Implementation Partners	Timeframe ¹	Cost Estimate ²	Potential Funding Sources ³
Spot Improvements						
S1	Jette (RP 62.2 to 64.7)	Flatten roadway grade; assess passing zone	MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Long-term	\$32.2M	NH, HSIP, Federal Grants
S2	Big Arm (RP 71.3 to 73.8)	Construct consistent three-lane configuration with left-turn lane; review passing zones	MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Long-term	\$19.1M	NH, HSIP, Federal Grants
S3	Elmo Pedestrian Crossings	Install RRFBs and ADA accommodations at pedestrian crossings	MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Mid-term	\$850,000	NH, TA, CMAQ/MACI
S3-a	Skookum Drive (RP 77.2)				\$420,000	
S3-b	Cemetery Road (RP 77.3)				\$430,000	
S4	MT 28 Intersection (RP 77.6)	Install additional traffic control and accommodate business access as warranted with future development	Private, MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Mid-term	\$2.1M to \$4.9M	Private (Development), Local
S5	Blacktail Road/Stoner Loop Intersection (RP 97.9)	Construct a northbound left turn lane and evaluate intersection configuration	MDT, Flathead County, Private	Mid-term	\$1.7M	NH, HSIP, Local, Private
S6	Adams St Intersection (RP 98.1)	Install additional traffic control as warranted based on future development	MDT, Flathead County, Private	Mid- to Long-term	\$310,000 (PHB) to \$6.1M (Roundabout)	NH, Local, Private
S7	Lakeside (RP 97.8 to 98.4)	Install pedestrian and roadway infrastructure improvements	MDT, Flathead County	Mid- to Long-term	\$1.3M to \$12.8M	NH, HSIP, TA, CMAQ/MACI
S7-a	Pedestrian Accommodations	Extend existing sidewalk, curb, and gutter; upgrade 2 crosswalks and add 1		Mid-term	\$1.3M	
S7-b	Urban Reconstruction	TWLTL; sidewalk and boulevard on both sides; upgrade 2 crosswalks and add 1; lighting upgrades		Long-term	\$12.8M	
S8	Somers (RP 102.4 to 103.0)	Install pedestrian/bicycle and roadway infrastructure improvements	MFWP, MDT, Flathead County, Walleyes Unlimited	Mid- to Long-term	\$1.7M to \$13.0M	NH, HSIP, TA, MFWP, NGO/Private (Walleyes Unlimited)
S8-a	Pedestrian Accommodations	Extend and improve existing SUP; upgrade crosswalks		Mid-term	\$1.7M	
S8-b	Urban Reconstruction	TWLTL; sidewalk/SUP and boulevard on both sides; crosswalk improvements; lighting upgrades		Long-term	\$13.0M	
S9	MT 82 Intersection (RP 104.2)	Modify business access; upgrade traffic signal	MDT, Flathead County, Private	Mid-term	\$1.2M	NH, HSIP, Private
S9-a	Upgrade Traffic Signal	Upgrade signal timing and turn lanes			\$600,000	
S9-b	Define Access Points	Assess and define access points			\$560,000	

Options		Description	Implementation Partners	Timeframe ¹	Cost Estimate ²	Potential Funding Sources ³
Corridor-Wide Improvements						
C1	Turn Lanes and Approach Realignment	Install turn lanes and realign approaches as warranted	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, Private	Mid- to Long-term	\$40,000 (realignment) to \$1.3M (turn lanes)	NH, Local, Private
C2	Passing/No-Passing Zones	Evaluate and modify existing passing/no-passing signing and striping	MDT	Short-term	\$19,000 per mile	NH, HSIP, Maintenance
C3	Passing Lanes	Construct additional passing lanes	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	Long-term	\$4.7M to \$11.4M	NH, HSIP
C4	Turnouts	Construct/modify turnouts as appropriate; add appropriate signage at and in advance of each location	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, School Districts	Mid- to Long-term	\$230,000 to \$1.3M per location	NH, HSIP
C5	Shoulder Widening	Widen roadway shoulders where feasible	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	Mid- to Long-term	\$3.0M to \$6.2M per mile	NH, HSIP
C6	Rumble Strips	Install shoulder rumble strips throughout the corridor	MDT	Short-term	\$26,000 per mile	NH, HSIP, Maintenance
C7	Rockfall Hazard Mitigation	Conduct rockfall hazard mitigation	MDT	Mid- to Long-term	\$18.9M to \$45.8M	NH, Maintenance
C8	High-Visibility Improvements and Advance Warning Signs	Install curve warning signs, reflectors, and reflective paint on striping	MDT	Short-term	\$50,000 per mile	HSIP, Maintenance
C9	Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)	Install ITS technologies where appropriate	MDT	Mid-term	\$2.1M (VSL), \$240,000 each (VMS)	HSIP, CMAQ/MACI, Maintenance
C10	Cultural Signage	Install cultural signage throughout the corridor	MDT, CSKT, Lake County	Short-term	\$1,100 each	NH, Maintenance, CSKT/Local
C11	Wildlife-Vehicle Conflict Mitigation	Install appropriate wildlife accommodations resulting from MDT project development process; coordinate with MWTSC and other organizations to identify partnership opportunities and advance wildlife accommodation priorities	MDT, CSKT, USFWS, MFWP, NGOs, Lake and Flathead Counties	Short- to Long-term	\$1,100 (Static Sign) to \$5.6M (Overpass)	Programmed MDT Projects (NH), MWTP, WCPP, State and Federal Agencies, NGOs, Private

Options		Description	Implementation Partners	Timeframe ¹	Cost Estimate ²	Potential Funding Sources ³
Policy Improvements						
P1	Access Management	Develop and implement an <i>Access Management Plan</i>	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, Private	Short- to Long-term	N/A	N/A
P2	Speed Considerations	Conduct speed studies and implement recommendations	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	Short- to Mid-term	N/A	N/A
P3	Transportation Demand Management (TDM)	Develop and implement transportation demand management campaigns	Private Employers, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties, Transit Operators	Short- to Mid-Term	N/A	N/A
P4	Maintenance	Continue to address highway maintenance issues and research and implement best practices	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	As needed	N/A	N/A
P5	Noise Abatement	Continue to address highway noise issues and research and implement appropriate mitigation measures	MDT, CSKT, Lake and Flathead Counties	As needed	N/A	N/A

¹**Timeframes:** The timing and ability to implement improvement options depends on factors including the availability of funding, right-of-way needs, and other project delivery elements. Implementation timeframes are not a commitment to developing recommendations.

- Short-term: Implementation is feasible within a 0- to 5-year period.
- Mid-term: Implementation is feasible within a 5- to 10-year period.
- Long-term: Implementation is feasible within a 10- to 20-year period.
- As needed: Implementation could occur based on observed need at any time as needed.

²**Cost Estimates** were developed using 2024 pricing and include estimates for construction, engineering, drainage, miscellaneous items, and indirect costs. In addition to 2024 base pricing, an inflationary factor of 3.0 percent per year was applied to the planning-level costs to account for an estimated year of expenditure. Contingencies were added to account for unknown factors at the planning-level stage. Costs may vary due to changed conditions at the time of construction.

³**Potential Funding Sources** are based on minimum eligibility criteria given the system classification and primary project purpose(s). Additional evaluation may be required to determine specific project eligibility and competitiveness for available funds.

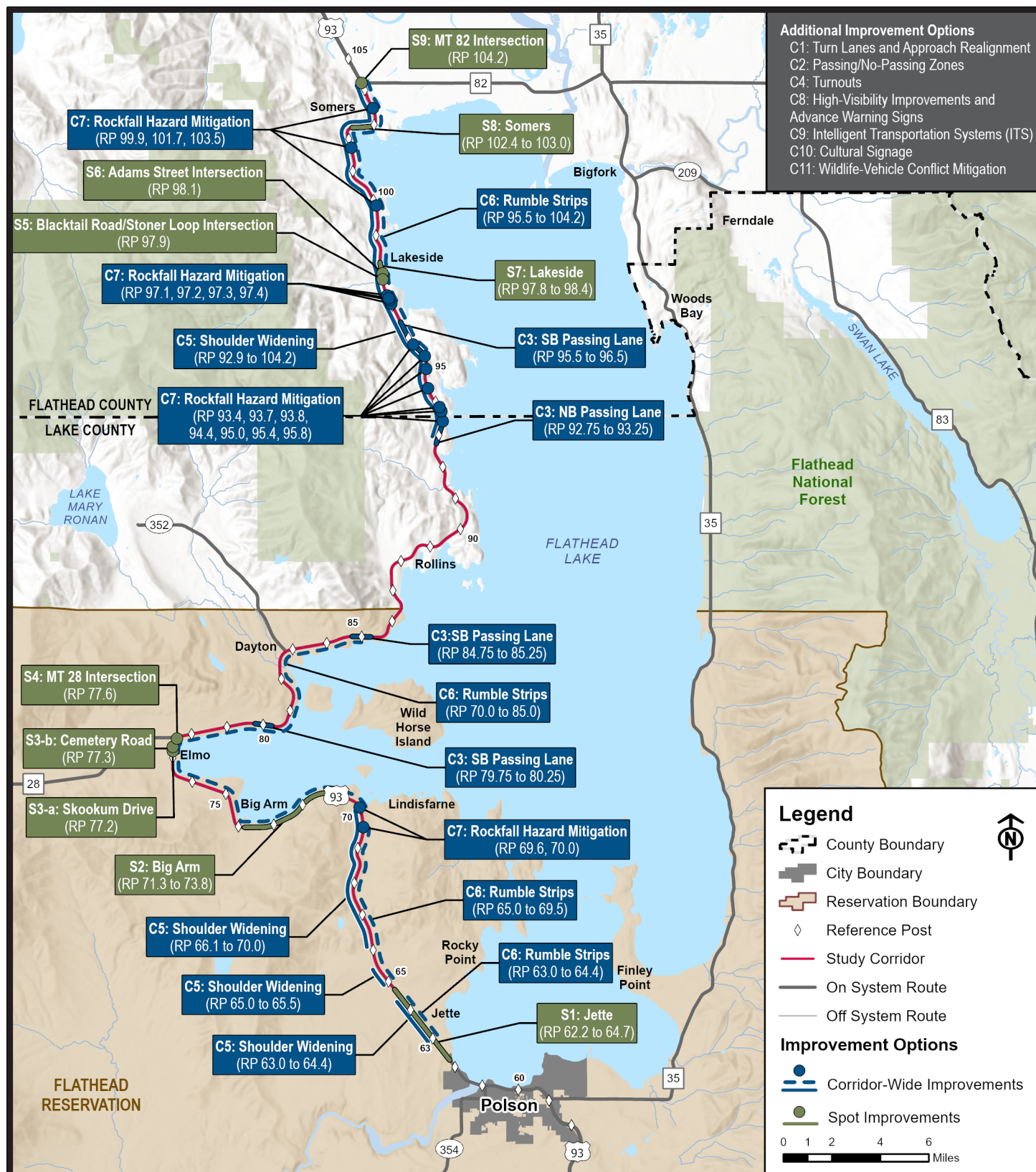


Figure 11: Improvement Options

6.0

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This study evaluated the segment of US 93 from north of Polson (RP 63.0) to north of Somers (RP 104.2) to assess the corridor's needs, objectives, constraints, and opportunities. The goal was to develop a comprehensive long-range plan for managing the corridor and identify feasible improvement options based on input from the public, study partners, and resource agencies.

Through a thorough review of environmental resources, existing infrastructure, and targeted outreach with stakeholders and agencies, the study identified a range of short- and long-term recommendations to address the corridor's needs over the next 20 years. These recommendations aim to guide implementing agencies in prioritizing critical needs and efficiently allocating resources. The identified improvement options and strategies can be considered for future implementation as funding becomes available.

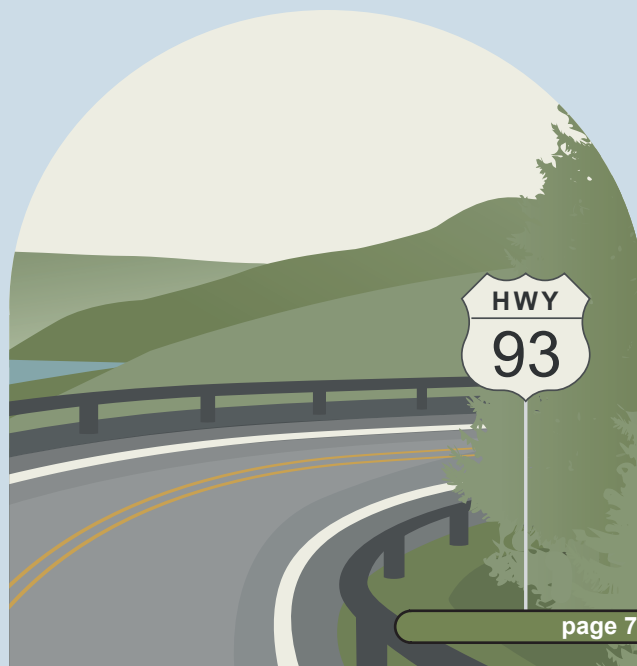
6.1. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Should projects proceed to future development phases, a range of additional considerations will need to be addressed, including land use influences, access to adjacent properties, and funding. Final decisions regarding these aspects will be made during subsequent design phases, should a single or multiple projects move forward.

6.1.1. Future Growth and Transportation Network Changes

Several factors can influence how traffic is distributed across the transportation system. Traffic growth assumptions for the US 93 corridor were based on historical trends and anticipated future growth patterns. The location, type, and design of future developments will ultimately affect the corridor's operational characteristics. If traffic grows at the rates projected in this report, it is expected that the study corridor will continue to face worsening operational conditions. However, if actual growth diverges from these assumptions, the traffic operational analysis may no longer accurately reflect the future conditions predicted in this report.

Furthermore, this report summarizes evaluations of traffic volumes during summer peak hours, which represent the periods of highest traffic demand. Given the corridor's proximity to Kalispell and countless recreational areas, the area surrounding Flathead Lake has become an increasingly popular tourist and recreational destination. Accordingly, during the peak summer season, traffic volumes are approximately 40 percent higher than an average day, and double that of the off-peak winter season. Seasonal variations in traffic conditions, driven by a variety of factors including tourism, school traffic, and commercial freight activity, should be considered when finalizing design-level details.



6.1.2. Landowner Coordination

Landowner coordination will be crucial in the future design phases of any project advanced from this study, particularly concerning right-of-way negotiations and access management improvements. As projects are advanced into the design phase, it may be determined that additional right-of-way is required to accommodate features such as turn bays or passing lanes. A detailed property record search and land survey will be necessary to accurately define the boundaries of the existing right-of-way, and negotiations with adjacent landowners may be needed to acquire additional right-of-way for the construction of improvements.

A supplemental component of this study is to develop an *Access Management Plan*. Applying access management principles, such as limiting full access maneuvers or promoting consolidated access points at appropriate distances from intersections can help improve both traffic flow and safety. A field review identified over 400 access points along the corridor, including public roadways, residential driveways, and commercial approaches. Areas with the high concentration of closely spaced access points contribute to congestion and pose an increased risk of crashes, particularly those involving vehicles turning on and off the highway. These driveways also pose hazards for pedestrians and bicyclists, who may need to cross multiple driveways along their routes.

To ensure improved traffic flow and safety within the corridor while maintaining reasonable access for adjacent properties, ongoing landowner coordination will be essential through implementation of the *Access Management Plan*, as development occurs, and during future design phases, if applicable. This process will help ensure that appropriate property access is provided in a way that balances safety and optimal traffic conditions for the traveling public throughout the corridor.

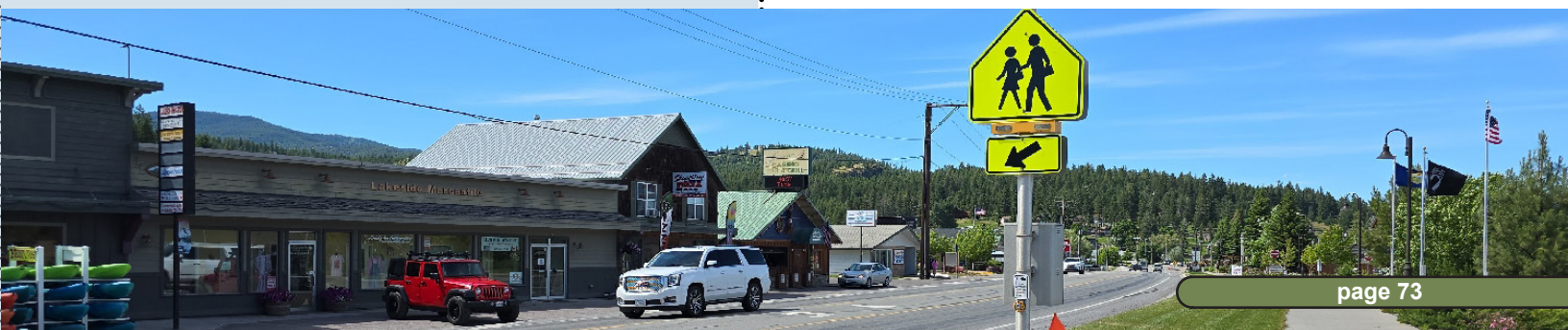
6.1.3. Multimodal Considerations

Designing the US 93 corridor requires careful consideration and a balanced approach to meet the needs of all road users, including drivers, large trucks, bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders. As the corridor serves a diverse range of transportation modes, the design must address the safety, mobility, and accessibility of each user group while also minimizing conflicts between them. This includes ensuring that truck traffic can operate efficiently and safely, providing safe and accessible facilities for non-motorized users, and promoting effective transit options to reduce congestion. Achieving this balance is essential for creating a corridor that supports economic vitality, enhances public safety, and accommodates future growth, while maintaining the quality of life for all who rely on the roadway.

6.1.4. Funding Considerations

Primary funding for US 93 highway improvements would likely come from Federal sources coupled with State matching funds as applicable. Projects eligible to receive funds from MDT's core funding programs for NHS routes must support progress toward the achievement of national performance goals including improving infrastructure condition, improving safety, reducing congestion, increasing system reliability, and facilitating freight movement. Smaller-scale enhancements such as intersection improvements and non-motorized accommodations may be eligible for other Federal funding sources.

If one or multiple projects are found eligible for Federal or State funds, the Montana Transportation Commission and MDT will decide how to distribute the State's limited funding to address highway improvement needs across the State. When funding has been identified, the project will be included in the annual Statewide Transportation Improvement Program which identifies proposed transportation projects programmed for the next five years. It may be several years before sufficient funds are identified for improvements. The following are potential funding sources for which projects in the Polson to Somers study corridor may be eligible.



NATIONAL HIGHWAY PERFORMANCE PROGRAM (NH)

The NH program provides funding for construction, reconstruction, resurfacing, restoration, and rehabilitation of segments of NHS roadways; construction, replacement, rehabilitation, preservation and protection of bridges on the NHS; and projects as part of a program supporting national goals for improving infrastructure condition, safety, mobility, or freight movements on the NHS.

HIGHWAY SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (HSIP)

HSIP is a funding category that helps States implement a data-driven and strategic approach to improving highway safety on all public roads. In accordance with *Montana's Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan*, the primary focus of the HSIP program involves identifying locations with fatal and serious injury crashes and prioritizing work according to benefit/cost ratios. However, MDT also advances systemic improvements to address network-wide safety issues.

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES (TA) PROGRAM

The TA program provides assistance to local governments, Tribal entities, transit providers, resource agencies and/or school districts for community improvements. Eligible projects include pedestrian and bicycle facilities; turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas; historic preservation and vegetation management; environmental mitigation related to stormwater and habitat connectivity; recreational trails; safe routes to school; and vulnerable road user safety assessments. MDT awards funds to eligible entities on a competitive basis.

CONGESTION MITIGATION AND AIR QUALITY (CMAQ) PROGRAM

Federal funds available under the CMAQ program are used to finance transportation projects and programs to help meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act. Eligible activities include transit improvements, traffic signal synchronization, bicycle/pedestrian projects, intersection improvements, travel demand management strategies, traffic flow improvements, and public fleet conversions to cleaner fuels. A portion of CMAQ funds goes to projects in Missoula, Montana's only designated and classified air quality non-attainment area. The remaining funds (approximately 90 percent) are primarily directed to areas of the State with emerging air quality issues through the Montana Air and Congestion Initiative Program (MACI). Under this program, projects are selected through a proposal process based on air quality benefits.





MONTANA WILDLIFE & TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIP

Projects may also proceed through the MWTP, involving collaboration with MDT, MFWP, and MSWP. The Partnership accepts applications for wildlife accommodations in May and November each year from members of the public, non-profit and non-governmental organizations, public agencies, local governments, community groups, and Tribal governments. MDT usually assumes responsibility for operations and maintenance of roadway structures, but other features such as fencing or modifications outside of MDT right-of-way and/or the roadway prism are the responsibility of the applicant and must be maintained in perpetuity through an agreement with a public entity (such as a County or conservation district). This option requires a champion external to MDT to coordinate with appropriate entities, determine available funding sources, and submit an application.



FEDERAL DISCRETIONARY PROGRAMS

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), contains significant new funding for roadways, bridges, and other major projects funded through both formula funds and discretionary grant programs administered by FHWA and the US Department of Transportation. Funding under the Law is authorized through 2026, and grant funds are awarded on a competitive basis. Additionally, discretionary funding offered under various infrastructure grant programs may be applicable for both spot improvements and/or full corridor reconstruction projects. Additional information about discretionary grant funding opportunities under the law is provided by FHWA.³³



TRANSIT PROGRAMS

Funding is available to support transit operations and public transportation projects, including specific programs for rural areas and mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities. Funds are allocated by MDT to local governments and private organizations.



OTHER PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to public funding, partnerships with private developers and non-profit organizations could significantly contribute to financing projects along the US 93 corridor. Private developers, especially those involved in projects near the corridor, may also help fund infrastructure improvements or mitigation measures to address transportation concerns related to their development(s). Non-profit organizations, on the other hand, may have access to specialized grants or direct donations aimed at conservation efforts, which could support projects like wildlife crossings. Improvements to US 93 could also be partially funded through various forms of private financing, such as right-of-way donations, cash contributions, cost-sharing for operating and/or capital costs, impact fees, and improvement districts.



6.2. NEXT STEPS

Figure 12 illustrates the next steps in the project implementation process. As funding is identified, projects may be advanced into the project development and eventual construction phases. Public involvement should occur throughout all phases. The general next steps for implementation are as follows:

- ✓ Identify and secure a funding source or sources.
- ✓ For MDT-led projects, follow MDT guidelines for project nomination and development, including a public involvement process and environmental documentation.
- ✓ For projects that are developed by others and may impact MDT routes, coordinate with MDT via the SIAP or other appropriate collaborative processes.

The purpose and need statement for any future project should be consistent with and address one or more of the needs and objectives contained in this study. Should this planning study lead to one or multiple projects, compliance with State and Federal environmental regulations will be required. This study may be used as reference for determining the impacts and subsequent mitigation for the improvement options in future environmental documentation. Any future project must comply with Code of Federal Regulations Title 23 Part 771 and Administrative Rules of Montana 18, Sub-chapter 2, which outline the requirements for documenting environmental impacts on highway projects.

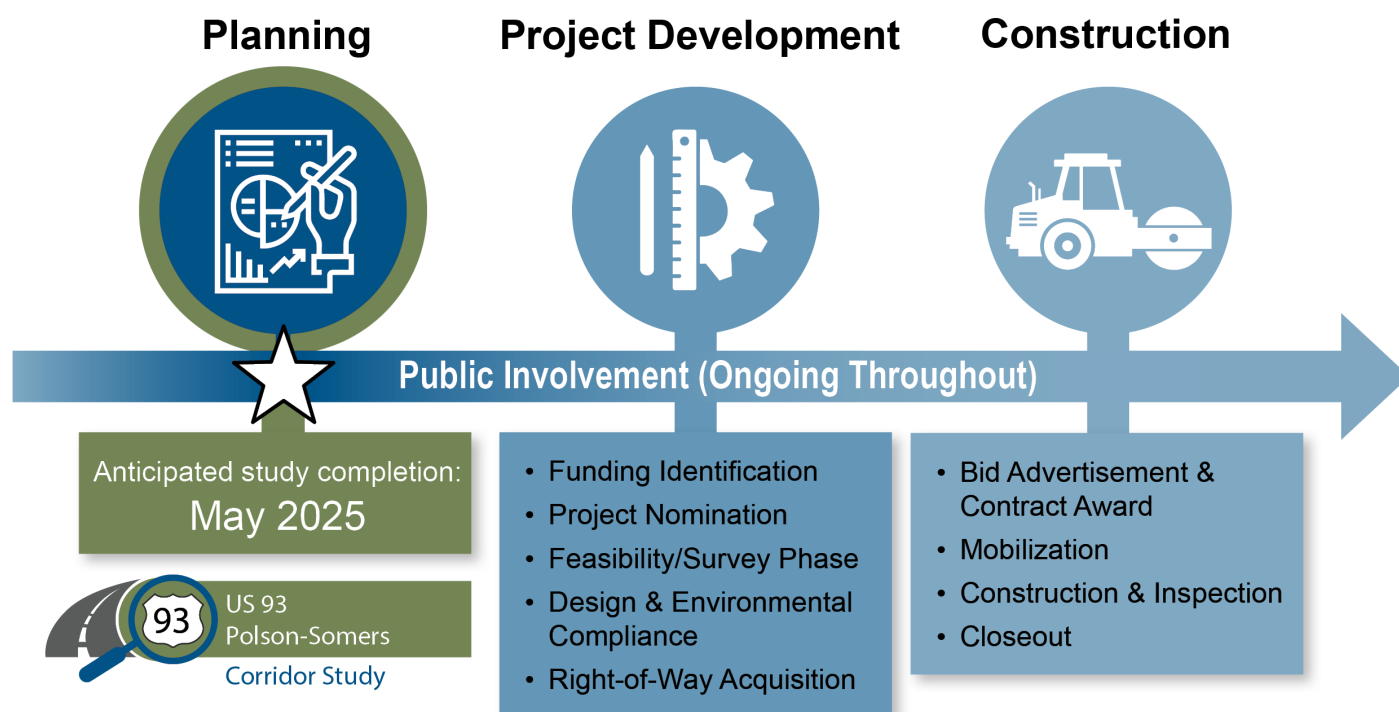


Figure 12: Project Development Process

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US 93 POLSON-SOMERS CORRIDOR STUDY



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