



NEWSLINE

Montana Department of Transportation
mdt.mt.gov



December 2023

MDT Launches Website for New Traffic Safety Campaign

Newsline readers were introduced to MDT's latest traffic safety advertising campaign efforts in the September 2023 issue (*Read the cover story here: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/newsletters/newsline/2023/newsep23.pdf>*). MDT's new safety mascot and crowd favorite, Andy the Australian Shepherd, has been joined by one national and two state athlete celebrities on the recently launched Engage Montana website. Engage is the culmination of MDT's work over the past few years to develop a new traffic safety campaign and related messaging to address issues like impaired driving, seat belt use, speeding, and distracted driving on Montana's roadways.

NFL Influencer: Troy Andersen

If you're an NFL fan, you may have recognized a familiar face in MDT's traffic safety messaging. Growing up in Dillon, Troy Andersen left Montana to become a professional linebacker, but hasn't lost his passion for his home state. One component of MDT's influencer partnership with Troy is a video series focused on safe driving behaviors like always wearing a seat belt and not speeding.

Cat vs. Griz: Student Athlete Influencers

MDT also tapped two of Montana's own student athletes as safety influencers. Tommy Mellott, a football player from Montana State University (MSU), and Dani Bartsch, a basketball player from University of Montana (UM). Together, Tommy and Dani enjoy some friendly competition with a purpose in their video series for the Engage campaign. Despite their differences and competitive nature, there's one thing these athletes always agree on: safety behind the wheel!

Engage and related campaign efforts continue to support the goal of Vision Zero—reaching zero deaths and zero serious injuries on Montana's roadways. For more information on MDT's Traffic Safety programs, visit <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/>.

Montana Wildlife Crossing Grant Applications Awarded Funding

On December 5, 2023, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) announced \$110 million in grants for 19 wildlife crossing projects across the country through the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2022-2023 grant selection process for the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program (WCPP). MDT was among the applicants selected for funding, with an award of \$424,242 for the I 90 Missoula to Garrison Wildlife Crossing Feasibility Study. This feasibility study will look at opportunities for installing wildlife crossings across 68 miles on I 90 between Missoula and Garrison. By identifying key wildlife migration corridors, the study will help MDT determine the need, type, and feasibility of constructing one or more wildlife crossings that will effectively accommodate both wildlife and motorists, and ultimately reduce the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs).

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) also submitted an application from Montana, with support from MDT, to fund the US 93: Ninepipe and Post Creek Program Wildlife Overcrossing Project. They were successfully awarded \$8.59 million for the project.

Congratulations to MDT's Discretionary Grants team for their hard work on behalf of Montana to submit this successful application! Learn more about WCPP and other discretionary grant programs, including opportunities for support from MDT, at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/discretionarygrants/>.



Are You Ready to "Engage" in Safety, Montana?

In order to increase safety on our roadways, we need every traveler to participate in "Engage." Learn more about MDT's new campaign and check out the safety videos from Andy the Aussie, Troy Andersen and Montana's own student athletes, Tommy Mellott and Dani Bartsch by visiting <https://www.engage-mt.org/>.

Which Engage series is your favorite—Andy, Troy or Tommy vs. Dani? MDT would love your feedback! Share your favorite safety messages with your friends and family on social media, and tag us (@mtdot on Instagram, @montanadot on Facebook) to show your commitment to "Engage" in safety on Montana's roadways.



Federal Surface Transportation Program Status

The federal budget is a proposal by the President outlining spending goals and priorities during a given year. This funding is presented to Congress for consideration before voting on whether to appropriate funding as proposed. Continuing resolutions are temporary spending bills that allow federal government operations to continue when final appropriations have not been approved by Congress and the President by the annual start of the federal fiscal year (FFY) on October 1st. Without final appropriations or a continuing resolution, there could be a lapse in funding that results in a federal government shutdown. Continuing resolutions generally continue the level of funding from the prior year's appropriations. A continuing resolution can include changes from the prior year's budget that could alter the rate at which funds are utilized, extend an expiring program's authority, or provide a specific dollar amount of funding to a program during the continuing resolution. There have been 48 continuing resolutions since October 2010; during which there have been three occasions when no continuing resolution was passed, resulting in a federal government shutdown.



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New Deputy Director

Bringing decades of experience in transportation and public service, Larry Flynn was named MDT's Deputy Director on October 27, 2023. Larry first worked for the department as a survey aide in Livingston during a summer break while attending Montana State University (MSU) to receive a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. He returned to MDT in 1994, where he has worked in a variety of roles and areas ever since, including Engineering, Planning, and even a stint as the acting Chief Information Officer (CIO) in MDT's Information Services Division (ISD). He has represented MDT at state legislative sessions and other activities since 1999. Since 2007, Larry served as MDT's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in the Administration Division, before becoming acting Deputy Director until he was formally named to the executive leadership role this past fall.



Larry Flynn, MDT's Deputy Director

Fun Fact: Larry's commitment to excellence spans beyond his work life at MDT, and is demonstrated through his achievements in martial arts. He is a grandmaster in Taekwondo, a master in Hapkido, and a black belt in Judo.

Join us in congratulating Larry and welcoming him to his new role!



Applications for Montana Trails Grants Due January 15, 2024

Recreational Trails Program (RTP): The RTP is a federally funded grant program that awards about \$1.5 million annually. Eligible activities include construction or maintenance of motorized and non-motorized trails or trail-related facilities, purchase of trail equipment, and development of trail education or ethics programs. Find more information and resources to assist with applying for this grant online:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/grant-programs/recreational-trails>

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) will accept applications for this grant through January 15, 2024, via the online system:

<https://funding.mt.gov/login.do>

Trails Stewardship Program (TSP): The TSP is a state funded grant program through the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 24 in 2019 and the collected tax revenue from recreational marijuana sales in Montana. The TSP has awarded about \$3.6 million since establishment, funding over 100 trail access and improvement projects across the state. Eligible activities fall under three project categories: new trail and shared-use path construction, rehabilitation and maintenance, and trailside and trailhead facilities construction. Find more information and resources to assist with applying for this grant online:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/grant-programs/trail-stewardship>

FWP will accept applications for this grant through January 15, 2024.

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Pictured above, left is a photo of slope and drainage improvements completed to-date on the Salmon Lake project. Learn more on page 4 of this issue.

Celebrating a Year of Success: A Message from Director Long

As 2023 winds down, it's a great opportunity to reflect on the work Team MDT has accomplished, thanks to both our internal talent and our external relationships. It is a privilege to continue to lead a department where we serve as stewards of Montana's transportation system. Safety is at the forefront of the work we do at MDT with our valued partners.

In October, Team MDT hosted the Annual Transportation Safety Meeting in Helena. If you've missed the opportunity to join us and are engaged in safety in your community or job, I highly recommend attending next year's gathering! The innovation, passion and dedication centered around statewide transportation safety is evident. I continue to be inspired by the work being done at all levels – federal, state, tribal, and local – to keep Montana moving forward. This year's meeting was especially exciting for Team MDT, as we were able to share new programs, funding opportunities, resources, and behavioral campaign efforts. Notably, MDT's new traffic safety campaign "Engage" was shared, and our statewide safety partners were introduced to the campaign mascot Andy the Aussie, as well as influencer advertising with some of Montana's renowned athletes. I encourage you to check out our newly launched Engage website, and share Andy and our athlete videos with your community: <https://www.engage-mt.org/> (You can read more about this year's meeting on page 8.)

Moving into a new year is also a great opportunity to share our gratitude for the valued relationships that have supported Team MDT and our important work. The 2023 legislative session kicked off many opportunities to support and improve Montana's transportation system and services. Examples of passed legislation we've put to work to support Montana's communities include funding from the SAFER Act and SB 536, as well as improved CDL training. Many thanks to our state legislature for the thoughtful bills and deliberations during the last session! We appreciate your service and look forward to continuing to work with you to move Montana forward.

While the idea of "building" tends to focus on holiday themes at this time of year, the lifelong construction professional in me can't help but be excited about the planning and preparations taking place in Team MDT's "workshop." We are looking forward to another productive bidding and construction season in 2024. (You can read some project highlights from 2023, courtesy of our five Districts, on pages 4 and 5.)

For Team MDT, we don't just serve the general traveling public. We're serving our families, friends, and neighbors, and we all take pride in bettering our communities. Just as I remind my family, please practice caution and remain committed to safety as you travel our great state this winter! You can prepare for current road conditions by using MDT's travel resources before venturing out. Once you're on the road, you can help our dedicated snowplow drivers by giving them the space and patience they need to do their jobs safely and efficiently. Remember: they're clearing the roads ahead to provide you and other travelers with safe passage. By always remaining vigilant about sober driving, seat belt use, safe speeds, and no distractions, we can look out for one another and do our part to ensure we all return home safe - this holiday season and beyond!

On behalf of the many exceptional people that make up Team MDT, I extend our best wishes to you and yours this holiday season. We look forward to continuing to serve you and will keep Montana moving forward in 2024 through innovation, communication, and collaboration.

Safe Travels and Happy New Year!

Malcolm D. Long



MDT's Wildlife Accommodations Process Awarded National Recognition

Each year, the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) asks state departments of transportation to identify and document recently completed "high-value" research projects. In May 2023, MDT nominated its 2018 research project, Wildlife Accommodations Process, as High Value Research. The research project investigated how to evaluate and determine the feasibility of including wildlife accommodations in project development and incorporate these features into construction projects through a consistent, predictable, and well-documented recommendation and decision-making process. Wildlife accommodations are features designed into a transportation facility to moderate the effects of the infrastructure on wildlife and their habitat. MDT implemented the Wildlife Accommodations Process following the completion of the research project.

AASHTO RAC voted to recognize MDT's Wildlife Accommodations Process as "High Value Research". Bill Semmens, Resource supervisor in MDT's Environmental Services Bureau, presented the project at a poster session at AASHTO RAC summer meeting in Chattanooga, Tennessee. As a High Value Research winner, it will again be presented in a poster session during the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Annual meeting held in Washington, D.C. in early January 2024.

Transit and Highway Traffic Safety Grant Applications Due March 1, 2024

Transit applications will only be accepted through the BlackCat Transit Data Management System: <https://secure.blackcattransit.com/Login.aspx?site=mtdot>

Register in the system and apply when the opportunity becomes available on January 1, 2024.

Highway Traffic Safety applications will only be accepted through the Montana Grant and Loans web-based system: <https://funding.mt.gov/index.do>

Register in the system and apply when the opportunity becomes available on January 1, 2024.

For information regarding:

Transit grants, contact Adam Kraft at 406-444-6120 or akraft@mt.gov.

Highway Traffic Safety grants, contact Kevin Dusko at 406-444-7411 or kedusko@mt.gov.

2023 Project Highlights and Progress

Each year, winter's arrival in Montana signals an end to construction and road work until spring and warmer temperatures arrive. While "construction season" can bring challenges to summer and fall travel, warm weather provides a limited opportunity for crews to advance or complete these much needed improvements to our roadways, improvements that will provide for safer, more efficient travel and Montana's economic vitality for years to come. MDT and our construction partners would like to extend sincere thanks to our customers—you, the traveling public of Montana. Thank you for your continued patience and support, and for helping make this another successful construction season. We look forward to 2024 and continuing to build better roadways for all of Montana. Learn more about the district projects featured in this issue, as well as other active and upcoming projects around the state, online: <https://mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/>

Missoula District

Project: Salmon Lake

Background: MDT began reconstruction of about four miles of Montana Highway 83 (MT 83) along the east side of Salmon Lake in 2023. Roadway safety improvements anticipated from the completion of the project include increased visibility, widening the highway to include paved shoulders, drainage improvements, installation of new signage and guardrail, and more. Once completed, the upgraded roadway will enhance safety for all users and will address issues like pavement condition along a route that is well-traveled by residents and visitors alike. MDT also used the Construction Manager/General Contractor (CM/GC) process to deliver this project. Learn more about this project at <https://mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/salmonlake/>.

Bid: \$35.9 million

Contractor: Kiewit Infrastructure Company

Status: Tree clearing in the project area was completed in August 2022, and construction started in 2023, with final construction activities expected to be complete in 2024.



Photos show construction activities on the project during the 2023 season.



MDT's Active Projects Map

Enjoy access to statewide project information at your fingertips with MDT's Active Projects Map. Scan the QR code to the right using your mobile device to access the mobile-friendly map, or visit <https://mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/active-projects.aspx>.



Butte District

Project: SF 139 - Racetrack Bridge Removal

Background: Located on Interstate 90 (I 90), the Racetrack Bridge Removal safety project was a total roadway reconstruction that included the removal of two 400-foot-long bridges that spanned the abandoned railroad tracks south of Deer Lodge. The elevation of the interstate lanes was lowered by approximately 20 feet and the steep slopes were flattened out to improve safety. In addition to the significant safety improvements that this project provides, the removal of the structures will reduce future bridge maintenance costs for the department. Learn more about this project at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/racetrackbridge/>.

Bid: \$8.4 million

Contractor: Schellinger Construction

Status: Construction on this project is substantially complete, as of November 2023. Crews will return in 2024 for seal and cover (chip seal) operations and to apply final striping.



Photos from the project camera show completed improvements that will enhance safety for all travelers, including commercial vehicle traffic, along this stretch of I 90.



2023 Project Highlights and Progress (cont.)

Great Falls District

Project: Wolf Creek North & South (N&S)

Background: The Wolf Creek N&S project will remove and replace the top 2 feet of roadway material on Interstate 15 (I 15). This stretch of I 15 through the canyon requires more MDT maintenance funds and resources because the harsh climate has degraded the foundation of the roadway over time. A new, modernized roadway design will improve drainage, which will diminish the seasonal damage and substantially reduce maintenance costs. New, up-to-date metal and concrete guardrail and signage will be included. This project provides a future commitment that Montana will continue to deliver public goods and services safely and seamlessly. Learn more about this project at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/i15wolfcreek/>.

Bid: \$39.2 million

Contractor: Riverside Contracting, Inc.

Status: This project is expected to be completed in 2025.



Photo shows traffic moving through the construction zone on I 15.

Glendive District

Project: US 2 - Culbertson

Background: This project reconstructed approximately one mile of US Highway 2 (US 2) through the town of Culbertson. Project features include Portland Cement Concrete Pavement, curb and gutter, storm drain, sidewalk, shared-use path, new signage, and an overlay of the Rest Area and Scale Site. This project aims to accommodate future traffic increases and heavy truck travel, manage runoff and improve storm drainage, enhance safety features, and extend the service life of the roadway.

Learn more about this project at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/us2culbertson/>.

Bid: \$18.7 million

Contractor: Knife River Corporation - North Central

Status: This project was substantially completed in 2023.

Remaining work will be completed in 2024.



Photos show construction progress from the beginning of the project (left) to its substantial completion (below) in late 2023.



Billings District

Project: I 90 Yellowstone River - Billings

Background: Located within the urban limits of Billings, this project will widen and reconstruct Interstate 90 (I 90) in Billings between the North 27th Street Interchange and the Lockwood Interchange from two lanes to three lanes. This project includes reconstruction of the 1,000-foot-long bridges over the Yellowstone River and the Talen Energy railroad spur line. The existing roadway and bridges were originally constructed in the 1960s. Other project improvements include fencing, curb and sidewalk, drainage, guardrail, rumble strips, and more. Learn more about this project at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/i90yellowstone/>.

Bid: \$72.2 million

Contractor: Sletten Construction

Status: This project is currently active. Work began in the fall of 2021. The westbound lanes and bridge were completed in 2022. The eastbound lanes and bridge were completed in 2023. The project is nearing completion. The seal & cover will be completed summer 2025.



Photos from the project camera show construction progress on improvements to the bridges and interstate.





Get Home Safe for the Holidays – Drive Sober and Buckle Up

The holidays are a time for many people to celebrate with family and friends, and whether it is just across town or the state, the months of November through December are a busy time for travel. The holiday season is also known for being a deadly season when it comes to impaired driving.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), during the December months from 2017-2021, there were more than 4,500 people killed in alcohol-impaired-driving crashes. In December 2021 alone, 1,013 people died in alcohol-impaired-driving crashes.

Over the last ten years in Montana (2011-2020), 28% of the crash fatalities during the winter holiday period (December 15 through January 3) involved a driver with a blood alcohol content (BAC) above 0.079.

As part of the statewide, year-round effort to curb impaired driving, MDT supports law enforcement with grants to increase patrols as part of the Safety Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP). The Montana Highway Patrol (MHP) and local law enforcement will be participating in mobilization patrols from Thanksgiving through Christmas and into the New Year to keep Montana's roads free of impaired drivers and to encourage all drivers to buckle up and to drive sober or find a sober ride as they celebrate the season. **(See call out box at the top of page 7...)**

You can do your part to ensure a safe and happy holiday. If you are hosting a celebration, serve alcohol responsibly and make sure your guests have safe, sober transportation home or a place to stay for the evening. As a party guest, it's also your responsibility to plan ahead if you'll be drinking. Whether it's a designated driver, calling a cab, using a ride service or staying with a friend for the night, be safe and remind your friends and family to do the same. If you see or suspect drunk driving on the road, call 911.

And remember, the best defense against a drunk driver is wearing a seat belt – everyone, every trip, every time; there is no good excuse not to.

MDT encourages drivers to drive sober, buckle up and avoid unsafe behaviors this holiday season and every day of the year and to make Vision Zero their goal. For more information, please visit: www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/.

Super Bowl 2024: Make a Sober Ride Your Game Plan!

Super Bowl weekend (Sunday February 11, 2024) is filled with food, fun and friends. If your celebration involves alcohol, remember even one drink can impair judgement. Make sure your pre-game plan includes arranging for sober transportation. If you're hosting a party, remind guests to have sober transportation arranged before they arrive or be prepared to take the keys from those who shouldn't be driving. We want to remind everyone that "Fans Don't Let Fans Drive Drunk."

If you see or suspect that someone is driving impaired, please assist law enforcement by calling 911 to report the driver and always buckle up.

You lose big time if you choose to get behind the wheel impaired, you risk your life and the lives of others on the road. Remember: If you drive drunk, you may lose money, your reputation, your car, and even your life. Enforcement for impaired driving is a focus area of Vision Zero, and increased patrols are funded by MDT.



Is Safe Driving Your Game Plan, Montana?

Professional linebacker Troy Andersen is stepping up his game to make Montana's roads safe for all. You can watch Troy's safety messages to Montanans on MDT's new Engage campaign website: <https://www.engage-mt.org/>



Montana Traffic Safety Dates

⇒ **December 16, 2023—January 1, 2024***

Winter Holiday Drive Sober Enforcement

⇒ **February 11, 2024**

Super Bowl LVIII—Fans Don't Let Fans Drive Drunk

⇒ **March 14-17, 2024***

St. Patrick's Day—Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over

⇒ **April 15-19, 2024**

National Work Zone Awareness Week (NWZAW)

⇒ **May 1-31, 2024**

Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month

⇒ **May 8, 2024**

National Bike & Roll to School Day:

www.walkbiketoschool.org/

⇒ **May 13-June 2, 2024***

Click It or Ticket Law Enforcement Seat Belt Mobilization

***Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP)**

Mobilization Periods: For more information, contact Spencer Harris at 406-444-0856 or sharris@mt.gov.

Safety Tips for Winter Walking in Montana

Montana's climate, large geographic area, and rugged terrain create unique challenges to getting around. Whether you choose to move by motor vehicle, bicycle, or on foot, safety should always be your top priority.

Walking during winter can be economical, sustainable, and environmentally friendly. Here are some essential walking tips to help you navigate Montana's winter landscape securely while enjoying the beauty of the season.

Before heading out, check the weather conditions as severe weather might mean changing plans. Local National Weather Service (NWS) weather radio stations or www.weather.gov can alert to conditions and possible storms.

Dressing in layers is key to staying warm and dry. Start with a light, moisture-wicking fabric close to your skin, add an insulating layer like fleece or wool, and top it off with a waterproof or water-resistant outer layer to shield yourself from wind, rain, and snow. Ensure your footwear is both waterproof and insulated to keep your feet warm and dry. Pull on ice grippers stretched over the sole can provide additional traction when needed.

Pedestrians can mitigate low-light conditions making themselves as visible to motorists as possible. Low visibility at dawn, dusk, or night can reduce a driver's ability to see pedestrians. Be prepared by carrying a flashlight and wearing reflective materials or high-visibility colors, such as fluorescents or bright white.

While walking, avoid distractions like mobile devices and stay focused on your surroundings. Keeping your hands out of your pockets allows you to restore balance if you start to slip. Take small, careful steps, and be aware of your environment to prevent accidents.

Walking is a healthy mode of transportation and a fantastic way to immerse yourself in Montana's winter wonderland. By preparing adequately and following these safety tips, you can enjoy the crisp winter air and the scenic beauty of Montana while reaching your destination comfortably and securely.

Pedestrian travel offers a unique opportunity to experience the charm of Montana all year round. Stay safe, stay prepared, and make the most of your winter journeys while exploring the beauty of our great state. For additional pedestrian safety resources, visit <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/>. Safe travels, Montana!



Winter is a breathtaking season to enjoy on foot in Montana. Stay safe with a little preparation—such as proper footwear—before you venture out.

Montana Completes First VRU Safety Assessment

The Infrastructure Investment and Job Act (IIJA) enacted on November 15, 2021, requires all states to complete a vulnerable road user safety assessment on the safety performance of the State with respect to vulnerable road users. Vulnerable road users (VRU) are defined as a non-motorist with a NHTSA Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) code attribute of a pedestrian, bicyclist, other cyclist, a person on a personal conveyance or an injured person. A VRU includes people walking, bicycling, or rolling; and a highway worker on foot in a work zone; but does not include a motorcyclist.

Per the guidance of the FHWA, MDT developed Montana's Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment (VRU SA). The purpose of the VRU SA is to identify and develop strategies to reduce VRU fatalities and serious injuries in areas identified as disadvantaged. Data analysis of VRU fatalities and serious injuries and contributing factors informed the identification of strategies and countermeasures to reduce risks. Addressing VRU safety issues through a coordinated and collaborative approach allows people that walk, bicycle, or roll full and safe access to the transportation system.

The Montana VRU SA will be included as an addendum to the State's strategic highway safety plan, known as the Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP). The final VRU SA can be found online: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/vrusa.aspx>

For more information, please contact Pam Langve-Davis, CHSP Manager, at 406-444-7646 or plangvedavis@mt.gov.



2023 Annual Transportation Safety Meeting



Nearly 115 people attended the 16th Annual Transportation Safety meeting on October 4 and 5, 2023, hosted by MDT in Helena. Attendees included representatives from safety planning and engineering, educators, enforcement, emergency and medical services, fire department, tow operators, behavior and injury specialist, Buckle Up MT coalitions, DUI task forces, and media consultants, among other safety partners and stakeholders.

Rob Stapley, MDT's Rail, Transit and Planning Division Administrator, facilitated the meeting focusing on the importance of Vision Zero safety effort collaboration, coordination, and communication among all safety partners.

The preliminary 2022 crash data reflects 218 fatalities and 716 serious injuries which is a decrease from the previous two years. We are making progress on the CHSP interim goal which is to halve fatalities and serious injuries from 1,704 in 2007 to 852 by 2030. In 2022, Montana experienced 934 fatalities and serious injuries on our roadways.



Montana's federal partners, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) acknowledged the work of Montana safety partners to implement proactive strategies, focusing on problem areas, implementing safety strategies and countermeasures, coordinating with local and tribal communities, positive messaging, education and awareness programs, and enforcement operating around large vehicles.

Montana Department of Justice staff with the Forensic Science Division and the Montana Highway Patrol (MHP) spoke on

the impacts of polysubstance use when driving. The percentage of total positive THC in DUI cases increased from 2017 to 2022 by 155%. The percent of total positive Fentanyl DUI cases increased from 2017 to 2022 by 4000%.

Emergency responder representatives shared improvements on post-crash care patient outcomes and data quality and linking EMS and other data registries like, law enforcement data, hospital, and fatality data. Traffic Incident Management trainer encouraged everyone to remind the traveling public to "Slow Down and Move Over" when they see flashing lights and end the deaths of responders on scene.

The MDT-managed NHTSA programs shared seat belt and impaired driving education and awareness activities conducted throughout the year. A reminder that occupant protection and law enforcement mini grants opportunities are available throughout the year was shared with attendees. More information can be found at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/grants/>. Additionally, the new traffic safety media campaign "Engage Montana" was introduced to attendees. **(Read more about Engage on page 1.)**

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) provided an overview of infrastructure related safety projects are data driven and a strategic approach of benefit cost analysis is used to prioritize projects as safety needs far exceed available funding. There is the traditional method of network screening and the proactive approach that reviews requests and systemic application of federally proven safety countermeasures (i.e. delineation, centerline rumble strips, flashing yellow arrows, etc.)

For more information on the CHSP or the emphasis area safety efforts please contact Pam Langve-Davis at 406-444-7646 or plangvedavis@mt.gov, or visit the Vision Zero CHSP website at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/chsp.aspx>.

Presentations from the 2023 meeting can be found at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/chsp-meetings.aspx>.



In Memory
of our friend
and coworker
Jeff Dyekman

Jeff Dyekman Honored by Glendive Community on 5th Anniversary of Fatal Work Zone Crash

On October 24, 2018, one of MDT's own, Jeff Dyekman, was tragically lost when a vehicle crashed into a construction zone on Interstate 90 (I 90) near Billings. To honor Jeff's life and remind travelers about the importance of work zone safety, MDT's Glendive District and Love Like Justice Company worked together to raise funds to light up the historic Bell Street Bridge in Glendive on October 24, 2023.

As you travel through Montana's work zones, please remember that loved ones, coworkers and members of our communities call the "cone zone" their work place. We can honor Jeff's life and service to Montana by slowing down, staying focused and alert, and watching for the dedicated Montanans working to keep travelers moving forward safely and efficiently in our work zones statewide.

Find more work zone safety information at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/people/workzones.aspx>. For photos from the bridge lighting and to learn more about this community organization, check out <https://www.facebook.com/lovelikejustice>.

Don't Crowd the Plow!

While driving, be on the lookout for snowplows and give the operators room to work. Many plows are hit by private vehicles each winter. This can cause serious harm to travelers and their vehicles, plus the plow truck and plow operator are taken out of service immediately following the incident. Drive safely this winter and keep these tips in mind:



Stay safe this winter—slow down and give snowplows plenty of space to clear Montana's roads for travel!

- **Don't crowd the plow.** Plow drivers have limited visibility, so never assume your vehicle is in their view. When approaching an oncoming plow, don't crowd the centerline of the road so they have space to safely pass in their travel lane.
- **Maintain a safe distance behind the snowplow.** Plows do more than just remove snow! They may also be spreading sand or deicer on the road, so give them plenty of space to do the work needed to clear roads for travel.
- **Be patient, and never pass a plow in a white out.** The plow driver will pull over when it is safe to do so, allowing vehicles to pass. When you do pass a plow, slow down and prepare for the road conditions ahead. The road in front of the plow is likely not as clear as the road behind it.
- **Slow down.** Plows are large vehicles—particularly MDT's TowPlow configurations—and move slower than highway speeds. Due to their size, speed and winter weather, it is often difficult to judge distance when approaching the plow, so motorists should slow down immediately when approaching a plow from the rear to stay back a safe distance.
- **Be aware that, where there is one plow working, others may be nearby.** The snow cloud created by one plow may obscure presence of additional plows in adjacent lanes.

Find more plow safety information and winter driving tips at <https://mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/people/winterdriving.aspx>.



Pictured above is a construction photo from the I 90 Yellowstone River - Billings project, and below is an aerial photo of the Wolf Creek N&S project area. Learn more about these and other MDT projects in the annual District highlights section on pages 4 and 5 of this issue.



Team MDT Honored with Governor's Awards for Excellence in Performance

On October 10, 2023, three groups of MDT staff were honored at the annual Governor's Awards for Excellence in Performance ceremony in Helena. Pictured below with Governor Gianforte, from left to right, are the Billings Airport team (Brian Wohlk, Eldon Sindelar), Jordan Flood team (Darrell Higgins, Ty Gibson, Kevin Murnion), and the Maintenance Review team (Matt Steveson, Jason Allen, Jeremy Ward, Mark Criner). Congratulations to these dedicated members of Team MDT for the well-deserved recognition!



New Leadership at Montana's Western Transportation Institute

Montana's Western Transportation Institute (WTI) has a new executive director. Dr. Kelvin Wang accepted the position effective August 1, 2023, and relocated to Montana from Oklahoma to live in Bozeman. WTI is affiliated with Montana State University (MSU).



WTI's new Executive Director Dr. Kelvin Wang (left) and David Kack (right) in Bozeman Montana.

Dr. Wang has been active in transportation research for over 30 years. His career began as a highway engineer

for the Arizona Department of Transportation where he worked for four years. From Arizona, he became a professor at the University of Arkansas. After 18 years, Dr. Wang moved to Oklahoma where he became an endowed professor at Oklahoma State University. In 2017 Wang received the prestigious Francis C. Turner Award from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), and he was named a distinguished member of ASCE in 2021.

Dr. Wang fills the position previously held by David Kack. David is still with WTI as the Program Manager for the Mobility & Public Transportation group and as the Director of the Small Urban, Rural and Tribal Center on Mobility (SURTCOM). MDT enjoyed working with David as the WTI Director from 2019 through 2023 and would like to thank him for his time and service in that capacity.

#KnowBeforeYouGo with MDT's Traveler Information Application

Winter has arrived in Montana, and MDT has tools to help plan for conditions so you can reach your destination safely – MDT's traveler information system (MDT 511) and mobile applications.



The website can be found at www.511mt.net.

Mobile apps for Android and iOS can be found in the respective app stores. By default, three information layers (Road Conditions, Incidents & Events, and Road Weather Information System (RWIS) Cameras/Weather Information) are enabled on the app for first-time users, but you can toggle them on or off using the setting toggles located at the upper right corner of the map. If you find you don't like the map-style navigation, you can use searchable lists at the top of the page.

Safety is a top priority for MDT, and these features and custom updates will allow all travelers to be better prepared for delays or incidents so they can plan their trip accordingly.

To access the MDT Traveler Information application—including the interactive map and information on downloading the mobile app—scan the QR Code to the right with your mobile device, or visit www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/. Travelers can also call 511 from anywhere in Montana.



Changes to MDT Travel Resources in 2023...

MDT Travel Alerts No Longer Available on X (Twitter): X has changed the way they do business. Our 511 vendor can no longer to automatically feed Montana's 511 updates through X. Because we have not been able to update our feed since July, and we have only been using X for our automated road conditions updates, we decided to stop using X for the time being. The traveling public can sign up for personalized email and text alerts for any routes they choose through the 511 application or webpage.

New Roadway Camera Application: MDT has a new Road Weather Information System (RWIS) replacing ScanWeb, which has reached end of life. The new application is enhanced for mobile users and provides current/historical data, image looping and higher resolution roadway images. Check it out at <https://app.mdt.mt.gov/atms>.

Find Contact Information for Montana's Transportation Commission and Aeronautics Board Online!

Each of the five Montana Transportation Commission Board Members and each of the nine Montana Aeronautics Board Members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. Board members remain in their position until a replacement is appointed and confirmed. (MCA 2-15-2502; 2-15-2506)

- **Transportation Commission:** For additional information and appointed board member contacts, visit <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/trans-comm/>.
- **Aeronautics Board:** For additional information and appointed board member contacts, visit <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/aeronautics-board/>.

Harding Way

By Jon Axline, MDT Historian

With the dawn of the automobile age, a good road over Pipestone Pass took on new significance to the people of Butte. A wagon road had existed over the pass since at least the 1870s, but it was barely passable for automobiles by the early twentieth century. The old road was a challenge to motorists. One observer described driving the road as feeling “akin to sliding off the roof of a high peaked building.” The treacherous road was the most dangerous section of the Yellowstone Trail. Motorists after crossing the pass from the east initially found the descent a relatively easy six percent. But it soon increased to twenty percent. A car’s speed swelled to the point where it didn’t allow stopping or changing gears – a driver was dependent on brakes alone and prayed they would hold. The curves, lack of guardrails and other dangers associated with the primitive mountain road made, what was called in Butte Eighteen-Mile Hill, perilous in all conditions. The county had little money available to improve the road.

The passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1921 made federal funds available to the state and Silver Bow County for road improvements on a 50/50 match basis. In April 1921, state highway commission chairman George Lanstrum announced a project to improve Eighteen-Mile Hill. He intended the project to reduce many of the road’s steep grades and install guardrails to prevent motorists from hurtling over the edge of the roadway. The Silver Bow County commissioners agreed to pay half the cost of the project.

After resolving a labor issue over wage rates, the county and highway commissioners awarded a contract to the Heiselt Construction Company of Salt Lake City in August 1921 to construct 2.43-miles of roadway on the Silver Bow County side of Pipestone Pass. The project included extensive blasting of Boulder batholith granite to make way for a modern highway. While the contractor used a steam shovel for the project, Heiselt relied mostly on pick and shovel work provided by Butte miners, who were on strike against the Anaconda Company. They built stone retaining walls and installed thirteen sections of heavy log guardrails between the edge of the road and the precipice. The contractor surfaced the new road in decomposed granite, a material found in abundance on the pass. Despite pushing his work crews hard, Heiselt didn’t complete the project by the commission’s deadline. He wouldn’t finish the project until July of 1922.

Even before the highway opened for traffic, the county commissioners and local civic groups made plans to name the newly improved scenic highway. Technically a part of the Yellowstone Trail, Butte and county leaders wanted to customize the highway to draw more traffic to it. “[After] what is alleged to have been a nerve-wrecking, sleep-banishing struggle with a long list of proposed designations,” they named the new highway Harding Way, after US President Warren G. Harding. The president pronounced himself pleased with the honor in a letter to the county commissioners.

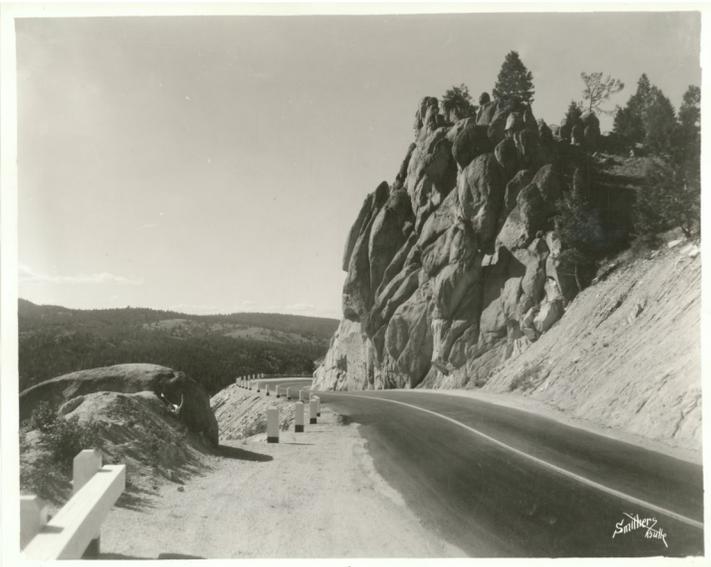
From the beginning, many in Butte perceived Harding Way as more than just a connection between the city and Whitehall. They envisioned the road as a scenic gateway to the Mining City. The highway bisected Thompson Park, a 3,300-acre municipal park dedicated to the city by mining engineer William Boyce Thompson in 1915 and expanded by the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in 1922. The park included hiking trails, scenic roads, and other facilities to provide Butte citizens with a pastoral escape from what some considered the ugliest city in the United States.

To enrich the motoring experience, the Butte Kiwanis Club built an architect-designed concrete spring-fed fountain on the switchback section of the highway in 1927. The fountain still stands next to the highway, but is no longer functional. The Columbine Division of the Rocky Mountain Garden Club later landscaped the site.

Traffic on Harding Way steadily increased in the late 1920s. In October 1929, the highway commission programmed a project to reconstruct dangerous curves on the roadway. In February 1930, the highway commission awarded a project to Butte contractor Leo Lawler to regrade, widen, and straighten 2.25 miles of Harding Way. The year following this project, the Bureau of Public Roads improved the road within the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. In the following years, the highway commission let contracts to improve the route from the Jefferson County line to Whitehall and from the Butte city limits to connect with the earlier projects in Silver Bow County. By 1935, Harding Way had reached its current 24-foot width and alignment.

Other than routine maintenance and guardrail replacement, there have been no substantial changes to the highway since the last construction project in 1935. When the highway department completed Interstate 90 (I 90) over Homestake Pass in 1966, the primary highway route over the continental divide east of Butte shifted from Pipestone to Homestake. The highway retained its title of US Highway 10-South until 1987, when the highway commission redesignated it Montana Highway 2. The highway today provides motorists with a taste of what highways were like in the early twentieth century. One constant between the highway in 1935 and today is the need to keep both eyes on the road and both hands on the steering wheel.

A feature unique to Harding Way is the presence of advertisements painted on granite boulders at the summit of the pass. There are seven rock-painted billboards next to the highway. An unknown Butte sign painter painted the signs sometime between 1931 and 1934. All advertise businesses in Butte at the time. One, however, has a connection to a dark chapter in Butte’s history. Taxi driver Alex Loiselle has two advertisements painted on granite boulders on the pass. He operated a taxi service in the Mining City from 1921 until his death in a tragic car accident in 1936. In 1917, Loiselle owned one of the few Cadillacs in Butte and hired himself out as a chauffeur. On August 1 of that year several men kidnapped radical labor organizer Frank Little from his boarding house in uptown Butte. The kidnapers severely beat Little before hanging him from a railroad trestle on the outskirts of the city. The kidnapers drove a Cadillac and, according to one oral history, Loiselle was the driver of the car.



This photo shows a granite landscape feature that the highway was built around, and it still stands as an impressive, scenic landmark for travelers today.

Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided on request. Persons who need an alternative format should contact the Office of Civil Rights, Montana Department of Transportation, 2701 Prospect Avenue, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620. Telephone 406-444-5416 or Montana Relay Service at 711.

MDT Wants Your Comments on New Projects

To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, please visit www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/planning/proposed_proj.pdf, www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.aspx, or call (800) 714-7296. You can mail comments on proposed projects to MDT Project Analysis Manager, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620-1001 or email them to mdtstip@mt.gov.

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MDT's mission is to plan, build, operate, and maintain a safe and resilient transportation infrastructure to move Montana forward.

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Transportation Assistance for Montana Communities - 2023

Montana's local governments face numerous challenges in improving and maintaining their transportation infrastructure and services. Transportation needs outpace available funding at all levels. MDT administers many funding and planning programs that help local governments address their local transportation needs. Following are some MDT-administered programs that support local projects:

Planning and Technical Assistance

Systems Impact Analysis Process (SIAP) - MDT's SIAP ensures a coordinated review of major developments and local projects initiated outside of MDT that may significantly and permanently impact the state transportation system. MDT coordinates development reviews with Montana's local governments to ensure their concerns are addressed and provides technical assistance to local governments interested in developing local processes similar to SIAP. For more information, phone 406-444-9233.

Multimodal Transportation Plans – Outside of Billings, Great Falls, and Missoula, there are no federal or state requirements for transportation plans. MDT provides financial and technical support for transportation planning in other Montana communities, including some of our fastest growing cities. These cooperative planning efforts ensure consistency with other community plans and processes. The plans help identify deficiencies, needs, and funding to ensure an efficient, safe, and modern transportation system. For more information, phone 406-444-9238.

Travel Demand Forecasting - MDT develops and maintains state-of-the-art computer models in Montana's larger communities to forecast future travel demand and analyze alternative transportation improvements to accommodate existing and future demand. MDT works with cities, counties, and other government agencies in the development of these models, which help inform decisions about future transportation network needs. For more information, phone 406-444-9193.

Corridor Planning Studies - MDT provides financial and technical support for the development of corridor planning studies. The goal of these studies is to better scope projects before moving into the project development process, achieve the lowest level environmental document while minimizing project delivery costs and time, and provide early opportunities for public and resource agency participation. For more information, phone 406-444-9238.

Safety Planning - This MDT program provides technical and financial assistance to local governments for the development of Community Transportation Safety Plans. Through a coordinated process, safety stakeholders and agencies identify the specific transportation safety issues in a community, develop strategies to address those issues, and determine the responsible agency/individual to monitor implementation of each strategy. Participating communities must demonstrate a commitment to implement and monitor progress. For more information, phone 406-444-7646.

Information and Education

Research Programs - MDT conducts research to discover, develop, and extend knowledge needed to operate, maintain, and improve Montana's multimodal transportation system. Interested parties can propose research topics by March 31 of each year through MDT's annual solicitation process. More information can be found at mdt.mt.gov/research/unique/solicit.aspx, or by phoning 406-444-7203.

State Highway Traffic Safety Programs - These programs provide funds to eligible applicants to promote the use of occupant restraints and prevent impaired driving. For more information, phone 406-444-7417 or visit mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/safetyprg.aspx.

Bicyclist and Pedestrian - MDT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator serves as MDT's liaison to internal and external bicycle and pedestrian interests. The coordinator provides input and technical support related to the development of bicycle and pedestrian facilities and plans. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Program is a clearinghouse for bicycle and pedestrian safety and educational resources. For more information, phone 406-444-9273.

Data Collection and Management/GIS

MDT collects and maintains information about Montana's transportation system. Available to government entities and the public, this information includes a comprehensive location inventory of roads in Montana, including basic physical attributes such as length, width, and surface type; traffic volume and classification data; and mapping and GIS services and products, including the official Montana State Highway map. For information, phone 406-444-6103.

Additional Support

Most federal-aid funding for projects and programs requires non-federal matching funds. Although not required to do so, the state provides matching funds for most infrastructure projects on the state highway system. Additionally, in times of federal program growth, the state has passed the growth in federal program funding on to programs of importance to local governments through the State-level Urban and Secondary Highway Programs.

Programs that benefit local governments are the result of cooperative state and local efforts to distribute limited funding as fairly as possible. MDT continues its commitment to support local transportation planning and projects to ensure a safe and reliable transportation system for Montana communities. For more information, visit MDT's Rail, Transit and Planning Division website at mdt.mt.gov/contact/organization/railtran.aspx.

Infrastructure and Capital Assistance

Fuel Tax - Counties and cities receive a portion of state fuel tax receipts based on statutory formulas for construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and repair of rural roads and city or town streets and alleys. For more information, phone 406-444-6103 or visit mdt.mt.gov/business/fueltax/allocations.aspx.

Bridge and Road Safety and Accountability (BaRSAA) Program - The 65th Montana Legislature passed a fuel tax increase that went into effect on July 1, 2017. A portion of the revenue generated by the increase is allocated to local governments for road construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of roads and bridges. Allocations are available monthly. For more information, phone 406-444-9131.

Surface Transportation Program-Urban – Federal and state matching funds are allocated to Montana’s urban areas (areas with a population greater than 5,000) for improvements to the Urban Highway System. Priorities are identified at the local level through established planning processes that include the public. Funds are primarily used for street reconstruction, rehabilitation, and traffic operation improvements. For more information, phone 406-444-9238.

Surface Transportation Program-Secondary - Federal funding with state and local matching funds is allocated based on a statutory formula for improvements on Montana’s Secondary Highway System. Capital construction priorities are identified at the local level and coordinated with MDT. Eligible activities include reconstruction, rehabilitation, and pavement preservation improvements. For more information, phone 406-444-9194.

Urban Highway Pavement Preservation – Federal and state matching funds are provided for cost-effective treatments to Urban Highway System routes. These improvements preserve the system, delay roadway deterioration, and improve roadway condition without adding capacity. Priorities are identified through MDT district and local government consultation and are based on pavement management systems developed and maintained at the local level. For more information, phone 406-444-7259.

Transportation Alternatives – Federal funding with state and local matching funds is provided for transportation alternative projects. Eligible projects include, but are not limited to, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas; lighting and safety-related infrastructure; projects to achieve ADA compliance; and environmental mitigation and wildlife connectivity. Projects are prioritized through a competitive process in accordance with federal eligibilities and requirements under 23 USC 213. For more information, phone 406-444-6118 or visit mdt.mt.gov/mdt/ta-application.aspx.

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) – Federal funds are available with state matching funds for infrastructure projects that improve highway safety. These

funds can be utilized for any public road projects such as signing, striping, guardrail installation, slope flattening, and intersection improvements. Projects are prioritized through a competitive process utilizing a benefit-cost analysis. For more information, phone 406-444-9420 or visit mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/plans/.

Off-System Bridge Program – Federal funding with state and local matching funds are allocated for replacement and repair of locally maintained bridges. Construction priorities are identified at the local level and coordinated with MDT. Eligible activities include reconstruction and rehabilitation. For more information, phone 406-444-6260.

Montana Air and Congestion Initiative (MACI) – Federal funding with state and local matching funds through this unique MDT program supports strategies to proactively address air quality issues related to carbon monoxide and particulate matter. Projects in eligible air quality nonattainment or at-risk areas are prioritized and selected based on air quality benefits. Eligible projects include the purchase of street sweepers and flush trucks necessary to reduce particulate matter and the funding of intersection improvements and signal synchronization projects to reduce carbon monoxide emissions. For more information, phone 406-444-9238.

EMS Grant Program State funds are available through a competitive process to volunteer emergency medical providers for acquiring or leasing ambulances or emergency response vehicles, training, communication equipment, and medical care equipment. For more information, phone 406-444-0856 or visit mdt.mt.gov/business/grants-ems.aspx.

Montana Essential Freight Rail Loan Program - MDT administers a state program that provides loans for railroad improvements including construction, reconstruction, or rehabilitation of rail lines and related facilities. Eligible parties include railroad owners and operators and certain port authorities. For more information, phone 406-444-9193.

Transit - Federal funding programs administered by MDT support community transit systems with operating, capital, and planning. A locally developed coordination plan is required and must include public services as well as services for the disabled and elderly. Federal Health and Human Services funds may be used to match federal transit funds. For more information, phone 406-444-6120 or visit mdt.mt.gov/business/grants-transit.aspx.

City Park Rest Areas - State funds are provided to support maintenance activities in communities with existing City Park Rest Area facilities. Proposals for assistance must directly benefit the traveling public. Expenditures must be reviewed and approved by MDT to be eligible for local government reimbursement. For more information, phone 406-444-7653.

Ferry Boat Program - Federal funds are available for Chouteau and Blaine Counties with some involvement with Fergus County for improvements to ferries and facilities. For more information, phone 406-444-9194.