MISSOULA CONNECT: APPROACH TO PROJECT IDENTIFICATION AND REFINEMENT

This memo documents the process the Missoula Connect team used to collect and screen potential transportation projects for the Missoula area (Steps 1 and 2 of the Missoula Connect Evaluation Framework). The projects on the attached spreadsheet have been scored using geographic criteria (Step 3) and will be further evaluated in a scenario planning process (Step 4) to establish recommended projects for the Missoula Connect 2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

Collection (Step 1)

The project team worked with the LRTP and MPO committees and solicited feedback from the public through a call for projects to generate a list of potential transportation projects and programs. Participants were asked to consider the following questions when submitting their project ideas:

- Which intersections or streets should feel safer or more comfortable?

- Where are crossings difficult for people walking and biking?

- Where would you like to see bicycle facilities added?

- Where are there needs to fill gaps or widen facilities in the sidewalk network?

- Where could transit stops be added, improved, or served by new/expanded routes?

- Where are complete streets and maintenance projects needed?

- How does your project idea address the draft goals of Missoula Connect?

Online Tools

The project team created two tools for people to share input on project ideas: an interactive map and a text form. People generated nearly 150 new project ideas during June and July 2020.

An interactive map offered the opportunity for people to identify locations throughout the Missoula area where they have specific ideas for new transportation projects. The map included projects in the Missoula area that are either underway or were identified in the previous LRTP. People were able to zoom in on an area of interest and draw a line (i.e., corridor) or drop a point (i.e., intersection or spot improvement) to show where a project is needed. They indicated the type of improvement as well, selecting from walking and biking projects, complete streets, transit service or amenities, safety, maintenance, and transportation options or programs. Project submittals required a brief description, including rationale for how the project could advance the LRTP goals. People were also invited to provide comments on existing projects or those recommended by others.

The second option for submitting projects was a simple Google Form that asked people to describe the elements of their desired improvements (e.g., signal, bike lanes, sidewalks) and the location they are needed. Images and descriptions were used to help people identify the most relevant project type. The form also asked for a description of how the project would help to achieve the Missoula Connect goals and provide community benefits.

Virtual Workshops

To comply with COVID-19 restrictions, the project team held virtual workshops to gather input from members of the LRTP Technical Advisory Committee and Citizens Advisory Committee. The team convened additional small group discussions with department and agency staff to review potential

projects in greater detail. These sessions focused on specific topic areas, including land use, parks and trails, transit, and parking. The staff discussions generated nearly 50 additional project ideas.

Screening (Step 2)

The project team screened the full list of committee and public project ideas list for suitability and separated capital project suggestions from program and policy suggestions. Submissions were removed from the list of projects to be scored if they fell into one of the following categories:

- The submission is a **policy or program** recommendation. Suggestions more suitable for consideration as LRTP non-infrastructure recommendations were categorized for future review outside the scoring process. These included ideas to address issues beyond a specific intersection or corridor, such as area-wide needs. Examples include:
  - E-bike policy signs on trails
  - Sidewalk maintenance
  - Bikeshare program
  - Posted speed limit adjustments and speed cameras
  - Passenger rail

- The submission is **not suitable** for the fiscally constrained list of projects to be included in the LRTP. Examples include:
  - Projects on the University campus
  - Projects that require significant right-of-way acquisition from private land owners or railroads
  - Projects with significant design feasibility concerns

- The submission is **duplicative** of other project suggestions or projects carried over from the previous LRTP.

This screening step also included a thorough review and update of unbuilt recommended and illustrative projects from the 2016 LRTP. MPO staff met with City and County, Mountain Line, and Montana Department of Transportation staff to update project descriptions and refine geographic extents of projects. In a few cases, staff removed projects from the list based on recent planning efforts, feasibility, and regional needs that have shifted since 2016. Some past project ideas, such as enhancements to the Complete Streets Policy and a wayfinding program, were removed from the capital list and will be evaluated with other policy and program recommendations.

In some cases, projects from both the 2016 LRTP and from the call for projects were consolidated or separated into individual projects. Smaller projects, such as intersection improvements, were typically combined with larger roadway projects. BUILD Grant projects included in the Wye/Mullan Plan were consolidated into to a single project. Some larger projects were split into multiple projects to support more accurate scoring and evaluation, such as the single Neighborhood Greenways Project from the 2016 LRTP. That project was divided into segments based on the prioritization used in the most recent City of Missoula Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and through consultation with City staff.

Scoring (Step 3)

The filtered and refined list of projects is shown in the attached spreadsheet. This list has been scored using the criteria described in Step 3 of the Missoula Connect Evaluation Framework. The Citizens Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Committee will review the list and the initial results and discuss next steps at their September 2020 meetings.