



Public Participation

How Public Comments Make a Difference

- Helps to ensure a broader range of perspectives and impacts are considered
- Provides insight into issues from locals and neighbors
- Is an initial gauge of public receptiveness to a project
- Helps to identify alternative approaches

How the Public is Involved in the E. Missoula-Highway 200 Corridor Project

Advisory Committee: Established for this project, the bi-monthly committee advises on process and approach, and reviews documents prior to public release. The Advisory Committee consists of approximately 14 individuals representing:

- East Missoula Community Council
- City and County Public Works
- Mountain Line Transit
- Missoula Redevelopment Authority
- Montana Rail Link
- City and County Parks/ Recreation/Trails
- Montana Department of Transportation
- Associated Students- University of Montana - Transportation
- County Planning

Updates with East Missoula and Bonner Community Councils: Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMPO) staff and WGM consultants provide updates to community councils via email news or attendance at council meetings.

Open Houses: Three open houses over the course of this project.

Online Information: Information on the project, interactive maps, and comment platforms are on the MMPO website.

General Outreach:

- Postcard notices to more than 1,000 area landowners (prior to Open House #2)
- News releases
- Flyers prior to Open Houses – intended to reach renters and others
- Outreach to businesses and recreationists – phone calls and surveys to sample groups
- Notices via MMPO newsletter

COVID-19 effect on public engagement: The first Open House was held in February, when there was little statewide awareness of COVID and prior to any COVID restrictions. All subsequent public meetings will comply with local and state requirements for social distancing and other measures to prevent spread of COVID. Some meetings may be held online.

Public Involvement Process

Phase 1: Project Initiation and Issue Identification (Winter 2020)

- Open House #1
- How Comments Make a Difference: Use in refining issues and developing design alternatives

Phase 2: Design Alternatives (Spring 2020)

- Open House #2:
- How Comments Make a Difference: Use in selecting preferred alternative, including suggested modifications

Phase 3: Preferred Alternative (Fall/Winter 2020-2021)

- Open House #3
- How Comments Make a Difference: Use in refining the preferred alternative and development as final alternative

Phase 4: Final Plan (early 2021)

- Review Draft available for comment
- How Comments Make a Difference: Will be considered before finalizing plan

Phase 1: Public Comment Overview

Step 1: Learn from Previous Public Involvement

The Highway 200 Corridor Plan builds on public engagement from previous plans. Most of those plans address a much broader area than the East Missoula-Highway 200 Corridor. The most locally-specific public engagement was the 2015 East Missoula Vision document.

To get a sense of whether issues identified in earlier plans had changed over time, Open House #1 and the interactive online map were designed with open-ended questions to allow folks to bring up new issues, not just react to previous concepts.

Step 2: Open House #1, Interactive Online Map, Facebook, Email

Starting in February, comments on the project were received from the general public. More than 100 written comments were received.

- Online Interactive Map (Feb. 6 through April 24): 1,184 visits, 94 written comments
- Facebook (March): 17 persons submitted comments
- Other Comments (Feb.-April): 8
- Open House #1 (Feb. 6): 25-30 persons attended to discuss the project

Phase 1 Comment Summary

Safety



Public comment on this Highway 200 Corridor project makes it clear the main concerns are safety related. East Missoula is a high priority area, as is the Railroad Tunnel-I-90 underpass area, ShaRon, and Van Buren-East Broadway intersection. Bicyclists and pedestrians also need safer ways to travel along the highway.

East Missoula



In East Missoula, there is still general support for many basic components of the 2015 East Missoula Vision. East Missoulians are more than ready to see improvements on the ground and a bit disappointed to realize the current plan is needed before major changes can occur. Comments also made it clear that some components, such as the “triangle” parcel near Ole’s, may need a different approach from the 2015 East Missoula Vision. Public involvement also indicated need for a flashing signal on the highway for East Missoula Fire/Emergency vehicles.

ShaRon Fishing Access



Sha-Ron river access is a traffic congestion and safety issue during the river floating season. Comments addressed needs and suggestions for parking, speed limits, and intersection control.



Railroad Tunnel/I-90

The Railroad Tunnel and I-90 underpass area generated many comments about safety concerns and suggestions for making it better. These included widening the tunnel, a separate tunnel for bikers/walkers, roundabout approaches to/from I-90. There was also opposition to roundabouts.



Van Buren Intersection

Public comments about the Van Buren-East Broadway intersection suggested needed fixes for bike/pedestrian safety. The median to the east makes it difficult to make left turns from east-bound lanes to businesses on north side of the highway. The merging lanes are confusing. Traffic congestion in this area is a problem.

Bike-Pedestrian



Bicyclists and walkers are very much interested in bike lanes, sidewalks, or shared use paths from the Van Buren-Broadway intersection to the Bonner trail system. They also recognize that bike/walk facilities may differ in the three corridor segments – East Broadway, East Missoula, and Sha-Ron. City-style sidewalks, for example, do not fit with the rural feel of the Sha-Ron area. Public comment indicated specific locations for pedestrian crossings and suggestions for striping and signage.

Phases 2, 3, and 4: We will update this section with more information as Phases 2, 3, and 4 progress.