



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: Issue Identification

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.

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

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

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

- 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.

Phase 2: Design Alternatives

Step 1: Prepare Design Alternatives

The project team developed alternative designs based on project goals and objectives, conformance with existing plans, and issues identified by the public in phase 1. A separate team of local state and federal agencies reviewed initial designs for potential environmental impacts. The alternatives covered a broad range of options intended to address the spectrum of issues and differing public opinions on such items as roundabouts.

The design alternatives included three corridor wide alternatives and more detailed options for four focus areas – Van Buren intersection, Railroad Crossing and I-90 interchange, East Missoula, and Sha-Ron fishing access.

Step 2: Open House #2, Interactive Maps, and Design Preference Survey

In the last week of June, the project team sent more than 1,000 postcards to nearby landowners, providing notice of the design alternatives and Open House #2. The project team posted the design alternatives and an interactive preference survey on the website on July 1. Approximately 30 people attended Open House #2 on July 14. By the comment deadline on July 31, 1,276 visits had been made to the interactive survey, and a total of 196 responses and comments. The project received a few additional comments via email and phone calls.

Phase 2: Survey Summary

Corridor Wide Alternatives

Three alternative designs provided options for the length of the corridor.

Alternative A, “Complete Streets,” provided in-street bike lanes and sidewalks separated from the street by landscaped boulevards for the western portion of the corridor. The more rural portion to the east included a shared use path, separated from the highway, and extending the length of the corridor.

Alternative B, “Shared Use Path,” provided a shared use path along Mt Jumbo in the East Broadway segment, separated sidewalk and shared use path on different sides of the highway in the East Missoula segment, and a shared use path in the Sha-Ron segment. The mix of sidewalks and path extended the length of the corridor.

Alternative C, “Sidewalks and Parking,” had on-street parking and sidewalks in the East Broadway and East Missoula segments, but only East Broadway had the sidewalk separated from the street. The Sha-Ron segment had a shared-use path that extended only to Marshall Grade.

The public preferred Alternative B, “Shared Use Path.” Pedestrian and bicyclist safety was the apparent reason it scored so much higher than the other alternatives. Other favored aspects included the continuous path for the length of the corridor, and the greenery in the buffer separating vehicles from the path. Although the proposed Mt. Jumbo path would provide a safer route across the highway and railroad, people were concerned that some bikers and walkers would still use the highway. Other concerns included the preference to keep the path all on one side of the highway to reduce crossings.

	Responses	Percent
Alternative A: Complete Streets	17	28%
Alternative B: Shared-Use Path	40	66%
Alternative C: Sidewalks & Parking	4	7%

Van Buren Focus Area

The Van Buren focus area is the area just east of the Van Buren intersection, extending to the far edge of the Eastgate shopping center. The three options in this area centered on bike/pedestrian movement and included boulevard/sidewalk, shared use path, and curbside sidewalk. Respondents overwhelmingly favored a shared use path to an on-street bike lane. Although it was also the preference for pedestrian use, some comments indicated a separate sidewalk should be included.

	Responses	Percent
Bicycle Amenity		
Option 1: On-Street Bike Lane	2	9%
Option 2: Shared-Use Path	20	91%
Pedestrian Amenity		
Option 1: Boulevard Sidewalk	7	32%
Option 2: Curbside Sidewalk	1	5%
Option 3: Shared-Use Path	14	64%
Total # of Responses	22	

Railroad and I-90 Interchange Focus Area

The three options for this focus area included: 1) two roundabouts and improved railroad underpass, 2) a shared-use path on Mt. Jumbo connecting from Van Buren to East Helena (and no other improvements to Hwy 200), and 3) a single roundabout between I-90 and the railroad.

The majority of respondents favored option 1 with two roundabouts and improved railroad underpass. Some respondents who selected the other two options also wanted to see the underpass widened in those options. Safety at the underpass has been a consistent public concern from the start of this project. Many people who selected option 1 favored roundabouts generally, but there was a split on which one was most necessary. Respondents who selected option 2 indicated the shared path was safest for bike/ped and did not like roundabouts. Some persons selected option 2 because it was the only option without roundabouts. Persons who selected option 3 indicated this was the biggest problem interchange and the highway will need bike lanes.

	Responses	Percent
Option 1: Two Roundabouts & Improved Railroad Underpass	24	57%
Option 2: Mount Jumbo Shared-Use Path	15	36%
Option 3: One Roundabout	3	7%
Total # of Responses	42	

East Missoula Focus Area

The East Missoula focus area includes the main business portion of East Missoula. The survey for this area centered on bicycles, pedestrians and on-street parking, with multiple options for each.

The preferred bicycle amenity was the shared use path. Comments indicated differing opinions of the value and safety of raised cycle track.

On the pedestrian question, there was a near-tie for the top two preferences – shared-use path and boulevard sidewalk (separated by one vote). Comments included putting the sidewalk on one side only, a shared use path on the south side, and concern about potential congestion and conflicts of use on the shared use path.

Regarding on-street parking, the preference was for parallel parking, but many questioned the need for any on-street parking at all.

	Responses	Percent
Bicycle Amenity		
Option 1: Raised Cycle Track	9	29%
Option 2: Curbside Sidewalk	6	19%
Option 3: Shared-Use Path	16	52%
Pedestrian Amenity		
Option 1: Boulevard Sidewalk	14	45%
Option 2: Curbside Sidewalk	2	6%
Option 3: Shared-Use Path	15	52%
On-Street Parking Type		
Option 1: Parallel Parking	17	59%
Option 2: Angle Parking	8	28%
Option 3: Back-in Angle Parking	4	14%
Total # of Responses	31	

Sha-Ron Focus Area

The Sha-Ron focus area includes highway corridor on either side of Speedway Avenue. The survey included two options. Option 1, “On-Street Protected Parking,” provided parking spaces on the south side of the highway, west of Speedway. The parking would be in the existing right-of-way, but separated from traffic lanes by a buffer strip. This option also provided a bus pull-out in the right-of-way east of Speedway and adjacent to the fishing access site. Option 2, “East Parking Lot,” was an approximate 80-space parking lot in the right-of-way, within walking distance east of the fishing access.

The majority of respondents favored option 2, “East Parking Lot. Several persons did not like either option but had to select one or the other in order to make that statement. These respondents often indicated a preference to limit use at Sha-Ron or move the access for floaters to an entirely different location on the river. Others indicated they would like to see some combination of options 1 and 2 and many of these really liked the bus-shuttle pull through in option 1. There were also some concerns about the need for a marked pedestrian crossing to access the north side of the highway to accommodate high volume of bike traffic in Marshall Canyon.

	Responses	Percent
Option 1: On-Street Protected Parking	15	41%
Option 2: East Parking Lot	22	60%
Total # of Responses	37	