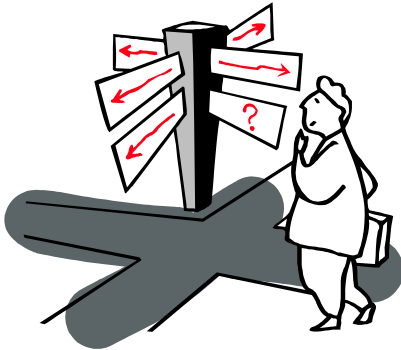


## Project Description

The MDT proposes to reconstruct Highway 212 between Rockvale and Laurel. Increasing the capacity along this route is expected to reduce congestion and reduce the incidence and severity of accidents. The proposed project begins at Rockvale, Carbon County, and proceeds approximately 11.2 miles (18 km) to just south of Laurel, Yellowstone County. The study, public involvement and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are expected to take two years. The planning process will determine the most appropriate location, design and alternatives for the future reconstruction. Following is an update of work now in process.

### IS THERE A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE YET?

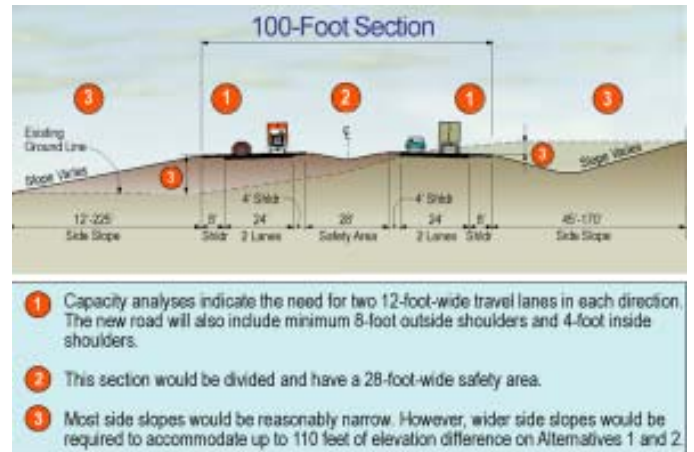


Not yet! A fifth Alternative has been identified in response to public comment, technical studies and review by MDT administration and staff. This alternative combines portions of three previously identified alternatives. Alternative 5 is illustrated on the Revised Alternative Alignment Map. (See map opposite page) The new alternative begins at the intersection of US 310 and US 212 and proceeds easterly and then north along the existing alignment. A new connection, located approximately 1/2 mile south of the Near West Bench Alternative (Alternative 2) connects this alternative to the Far West Bench Alternative (Alternative 1) line. The alternative follows the Far West Bench Alternative to Farewell Creek where it then joins the Near West Bench Alternative. Alternative 5 then follows the Near West Bench Alternative to Section 1, where it again joins the Far West Bench Alternative via another new connection. The alternative then follows the Far West Bench Alternative to Laurel.

Alternative 5 then follows the Near West Bench Alternative to Section 1, where it again joins the Far West Bench Alternative via another new connection. The alternative then follows the Far West Bench Alternative to Laurel.

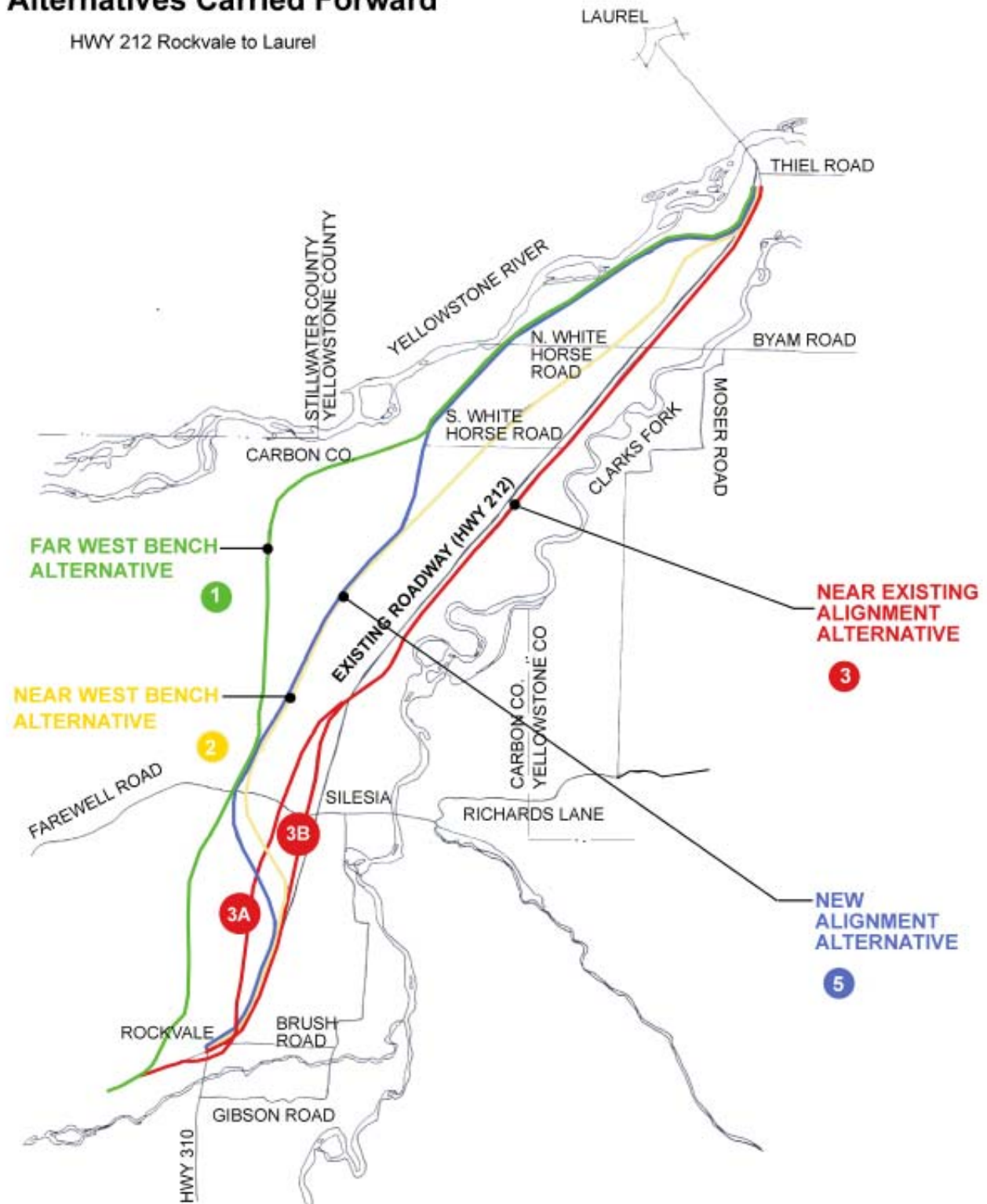
### RECOMMENDED ROAD WIDTH

Several alternative cross sections have been developed and were reviewed by the public at the third meeting. Based on public comment and technical analysis by the consulting engineers and MDT staff and administration, two typical sections for the new road corridor are recommended. A four-lane highway with a 28 foot depressed median is recommended for most of the highway corridor. This section was presented as the 100 Foot Section at Public Meeting #3. A five-lane highway section is recommended in the built up areas such as Rockvale and Laurel. This section was presented as the 80 foot section at Public Meeting #3. The right-of-way required to construct the recommended road sections, accommodate changes in elevation, construct access roads and include roadside amenities is under evaluation.



# Alternatives Carried Forward

HWY 212 Rockvale to Laurel

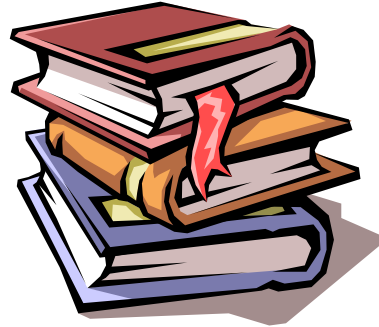


This map illustrates routes currently being considered and evaluated. Note that a new Alternative has been added - Alternative #5 and that Alternative #4 was previously dropped after the Second Public Meeting. Updated information can also be found on the Project Website at: <http://projects.ch2m.com/rockvale>.

## TECHNICAL STUDIES UPDATE

All fieldwork has been completed along Alternatives 1, 2 and 3. These studies address potential impacts on resources of a reconstructed road within a 260 foot planning band. These Technical Studies will be updated to address Alternative 5. The following Technical Memos are available for Alternatives 1, 2 and 3.

- Air Quality
- Cultural Resources
- Economics
- Energy
- Farmland
- Geology and Soils
- Hazardous Substances
- Joint Development
- Land Use
- Noise
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities
- Relocation Irreversible and Irrecoverable Commitments of Resources
- Short-Term vs. Long-Term Productivity
- Social Resources
- Visual Resources Report
- Water Quality
- Wild and Scenic Rivers



---

## PUBLIC MEETING UPDATE



The third of a series of public meetings to discuss the proposed reconstruction of Highway 212 between Rockvale and Laurel was held on December 12, 2001 at the Graff Elementary School in Laurel from 4:30 PM to 8:30 PM. The purpose of the meeting, hosted by the

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), was to update the public, solicit additional comments on preliminary alternative road locations and design sections.

Attendees were presented background information, updated alignment alternatives and a preliminary matrix summarizing impacts of technical studies. Attendees were asked to comment on alignment refinements, the summary of impacts for each alternative and three alternative road design cross sections.

The meeting format was an open house with informational

displays from 4:30 PM to 8:30 PM and a presentation at 5:30 PM and 7:30 PM. Meeting advertisements were developed by the consultant and forwarded to MDT for placement. Press releases were sent to local newspapers as well as television and radio stations.

Public Meeting #3 followed the November 13, 2000 Public Meeting whose purpose was to update the public and solicit comments on preliminary alternative road locations. Attendees were asked to review displays and comment on three alternative alignments.

The next opportunity for the public to comment in a public forum will be at the official Public Hearing on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). There will also be a Public Hearing on the Final EIS. The Public Hearings have not been scheduled yet. The hearing on the DEIS is anticipated to occur in the late fall of 2002. Notification of the Public Hearings will be advertised in local newsletters and the date published on the project web-site. A postcard will notify interested persons who are on our mailing list.

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE 3RD PUBLIC MEETING

## **When will the “Preferred Alternative” be decided upon?**

NEPA, National Environmental Policy Act (see related article) does not require selection of a preferred alternative prior to issuing the DEIS. In the third public meeting, MDT and the consultant team anticipated a tentative decision would be made in February or March of 2002. The consultant and MDT met in February to conduct a comprehensive review of the alternatives. After detailed consideration of public comment, preliminary engineering studies, and technical studies, a 5th alternative was identified. The new sections of Alternative 5 will require the same level of review as the previous alternatives. The evaluation is underway and is anticipated to be completed in June of 2002.

Public comment will be considered in selection of a preferred alternative. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be available in the summer of 2002. A 45-day public comment period will follow. A public hearing will be held after the comment period prior to writing the final EIS. The final EIS will be written in the spring of 2003, with a record of decision in the summer of 2003.

## **Will there be one more public meeting when the alternative is selected? Who selects it?**

Public Meeting #3 was the last public informational meeting. There will be a 45-day public comment period following publication of the DEIS. If the document identifies a preferred alternative, the DEIS will describe how the preferred alternative was determined. The comment period will conclude with a formal public hearing.

## **Why does the process take so long? Who makes the final decision?**

Planning for new highways is a time consuming process that is subject to requirements of NEPA (See related article) The final decision is made by MDT considering appropriate environmental factors and comments by affected and interested public. The analysis process is documented in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

## **When will MDT start acquiring right-of-way? When will the road be built?**

The project is funded through planning, right-of-way studies and preliminary engineering. No construction funds have been programmed. Construction of the project could begin in 2007 if we assume the new Federal Transportation Bill (2003) maintains the current level of funding and MDT has a Record of Decision (ROD) by 2003. The alignment needs to be selected before final design, including right-of-way plans, can commence. The final design will take two or more years.

## **Will the bike path be included for the length of the project? Could a path similar to the separate bike path associated with Highway 93 south of Missoula be included in this project?**

A separate bike path is not being planned. The new roadway section would be designed with 8-foot wide paved shoulders. This meets all present MDT requirements for pedestrians and bicyclists in this corridor.



## **If the near west alternative were constructed, what will happen to the existing roadway? Will the same amount of accesses be available?**

The existing roadway would remain for local access. It will be maintained by the state. For safety reasons, MDT strives to consolidate and minimize the number of accesses on the new route.

## **How much access will be allowed to the new road?**

Generally, the level of access that currently exists would be provided. The amount of access required will vary, depending on which alternative is chosen. All three county roads will have access. MDT will work with landowners on a final access plan.

## **Has an underpass versus an overpass been decided?**

Bruce Barrett, MDT District Administrator has expressed a preference for an overpass. Overpasses over the railroad are planned for the new roadway for all the alternatives. If Alternative #3 were chosen, the existing railroad underpass would have to remain in use for local access and a new underpass is planned under the new roadway.

## **Will underpasses be considered? How will we cross four lanes of traffic in a tractor safely?**

The wide medians will help. Farm field underpasses may be used depending on the relationship of the road to the terrain. Access issues will be dealt with on an individual basis with each landowner.

## **What will happen to the irrigation ditches running through Alternative 2 (near west)?**

We would look at shifting the centerline if needed but this would not be looked at until the preferred alternative is established. MDT's policy is to perpetuate irrigation and utility services with anything we construct. Please keep in mind these are planning lines within a 260-foot band, not actual centerlines. It is sometimes possible to shift lines to minimize impacts to improvements.

## **Will you take pieces of the alternatives and make one road?**

It is a possibility. MDT will weigh all impacts along with all public comment when making the decision and will choose the best possible project with the least impact and one that is the most cost effective.

# STILL CONFUSED ABOUT THE PLANNING PROCESS AND NEPA?

## WHAT IS NEPA?

NEPA is the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The goal being to “*encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment.*” NEPA encourages good planning by defining an analysis process for sound decision-making considering the technical, economic and environmental factors.

## WHAT DOES NEPA REQUIRE OF AGENCIES?

- **Consider appropriate environmental factors** when making decision, not basing decisions solely on technical and economic factors.
- **Involve the affected and interested public** early in its environmental analysis process.
- **Document the environmental analysis process** in plain language for the decision-maker and the public. On the Rockvale to Laurel Road Reconstruction Project, the environmental documentation will be an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

## WHAT PROCEDURE DOES NEPA REQUIRE?

NEPA has three Principal Procedural Requirements:

- Give **appropriate consideration** to unqualified environmental amenities in decision making, along with economic and technical considerations.
- Make **diligent efforts** to invite and solicit comments for the affected and interested public.
- Write **detailed statements** (EA or EIS) that clearly describe the potential environmental impacts of the proposed actions and other environmental documents that clearly present the rationale for the decision.

## WHAT IS THE EIS USED FOR?

*The EIS is a historical record of the environmental analysis.* It functions in the following ways:

- Is used by the decision maker to make sound decisions
- Informs the public of the results of analysis
- Serves as a springboard for public comment
- Proves that the NEPA procedural requirements have been followed

## WHAT WILL THE FINALEIS INCLUDE?

The EIS is a disclosure summary with legally important supporting information in appendixes and the analysis file. It includes:

- **Purpose & Need...What are the issues?**  
*Who* wants to do *what*; *where* and *when* they want to do it; and *why* (objectives)
- **Alternatives... Proposed actions will be described**  
Alternatives and the environmental consequences will be described. Discussion will focus on potential actions, outputs and mitigation. All alternatives must meet project objectives (fulfill the need) and be environmentally acceptable.
- **Affected Environment**  
The existing environment is described including physical, biological, social, and economic features of the environment.
- **Environmental Consequences**  
Technical and scientific support used by the decision-maker (Montana Department of Transportation), information to select the alternative that best fulfills objectives and meets minimal environmental guidelines.

## NEPA PROCESS





The third of a series of public meetings to discuss the proposed reconstruction of Highway 212 between Rockvale and Laurel was held on December 12, 2001 at the Graff Elementary School in Laurel from 4:30 PM to 8:30 PM. The purpose of the meeting, hosted by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), was to update the public, solicit additional comments on preliminary alternative road locations and review the Technical Reports. The meeting followed up on the November 13, 2000 meeting whose purpose was to update the public and solicit comments on preliminary alternative road locations. Attendees were asked to review displays and comment on three alternative alignments. The meeting format was an open house with informational displays from 4:30 to 8:30 and a

presentation at 5:30 and 7:30 PM. Meeting advertisements were developed by the consultant and forwarded to MDT for placement. Press releases were sent to local newspapers as well as television and radio stations.

## THERE ARE STILL SEVERAL METHODS OF GETTING YOUR COMMENTS AND CONCERNS HEARD

- Attend Public Hearings - Public Hearings will be held on the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (DEIS and EIS). Watch the Web-Site and Newspapers for dates.
- Comment through email at [Hwystudy@mcn.net](mailto:Hwystudy@mcn.net)
- Fax Attn: Rockvale to Laurel Road Study - (406) 259-4963
- Letter Send to: Project Team @ Fischer & Associates  
2815 Montana Avenue • Billings MT 59101  
  
MDT District Office • P.O. Box 20437  
Billings, MT 59104-4138
- Phone Project Team (406) 294-9142 or ☐MDT District (406) 252-4138
- Visit the Website: <http://projects.ch2m.com/rockvale>



### ROCKVALE TO LAUREL

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Hwy. 212 Study  
c/o Fischer & Associates  
2815 Montana Ave.  
Billings, MT 59101