

## Slides Close Beartooth Highway



On May 20, mudslides from heavy rain and snow runoff damaged the Beartooth Highway at 13 sites along approximately 12 miles of roadway. As a result, the Beartooth Highway is closed from the Park Side Campground, approximately 10 miles south of Red Lodge, to Line Lake trailhead, two miles north of the Montana/Wyoming border.

The area remains unstable and dangerous. MDT urges people not to travel beyond the road closure points—even by foot.

Repairing this important roadway is a high priority, and MDT is devoting all available resources to developing a repair plan and timeline. The Department issued a request for proposals on June 3 with the requirement that they be returned by June 13. MDT Director Jim Lynch said the Department hopes to award a bid on June 15, and “we’d expect them to be working by June 22.”

Dates for completion of the project range from October 15, 2005, to Memorial Day 2006; however, the Director said that the highway “will not be open this summer.”

Motorists can still travel between Red Lodge and Cooke City by way of the Chief Joseph Scenic Highway (Wyoming Highway 296). This route, also known as the Sunlight Basin Road, is easily accessible from Red Lodge via Montana Highway 308. The Chief Joseph Highway is noted for its rich history and unique beauty. Travel time is approximately the same as over the Beartooth Highway.

The Beartooth Highway, which is part of U.S. Highway 212, opened in 1936. It begins at Red Lodge and winds 68 miles through the rugged and scenic Beartooth Mountains ending at the Northeast Entrance to Yellowstone National Park. At its highest point, the road reaches 10,947 feet. In 2002, it was designated an All-American Road. Charles Kuralt called the Beartooth “America’s most beautiful road.”

To view images of the slide, visit the MDT Web site at [www.mdt.state.mt.us](http://www.mdt.state.mt.us). For additional information, contact Charity Watt Levis at 444-7205 or [cwattlevis@mt.gov](mailto:cwattlevis@mt.gov).





While Governor Brian Schweitzer and MDT Director Jim Lynch spoke at the official unveiling of the Lewis and Clark Commemorative Highway Map on May 20, the Governor's dog, Jag, relaxed on the Capitol lawn. The new map highlights the state's two Lewis and Clark national signature events. If you would like a copy, call 444-6119 or 800-714-7296 (toll-free). To order online, visit [www.mdt.state.mt.us/travinfo/maps](http://www.mdt.state.mt.us/travinfo/maps).

## Highway Program Reauthorization



As this edition of *Newsline* goes to print, U.S. House and Senate conferees are meeting to work out differences on bills to reauthorize the Federal-aid highway and transit programs. TEA-21, which expired in September 2003, has been extended for months at a time since then. Keeping the highway construction programs moving forward without disruption over the last 18 months has been a challenge for MDT. In this Congress, Senator Baucus moved to take the Senate Democratic lead on reauthorization, and he is committed to concluding the debates and bringing a good bill back to Montana for both the highway and transit programs. Significant differences remain between the House and the Senate including overall funding levels, the structure of the programs, and the funding distribution formulas. Montana's congressional delegation is working hard to bring back the best bill for Montana. Their strong efforts combined with Senator Baucus' role on the Environment and Public Works Committee and the Finance Committee gives us reason to be hopeful of a positive outcome in the near future.

## Safety Legislation Update

Montana is two steps closer to safer highways thanks to bills passed during the 2005 Legislative Session. In late April, Governor Brian Schweitzer signed two pieces of safety legislation into law creating a graduated drivers licensing system and prohibiting drinking while driving. Safety proponents had hoped for a third measure that would make not wearing a seat belt a primary offense; however, the bill failed in the House of Representatives.

### **Graduated Drivers Licensing**

Senator Kim Gillan from Billings successfully sponsored Senate Bill 104, which requires graduated drivers licensing for anyone under 18 years old. The law goes into effect July 1, 2006. The new licensing system is designed to help teenagers gradually develop the skills they need to be safer drivers. It specifies a six-month learning period during which the new driver must be accompanied by a licensed driver over age 18 in the front seat. The law also requires everyone in the vehicle to wear seat belts, limits the number of passengers under age 18, and restricts nighttime driving.

Graduated drivers licensing systems have been shown to reduce crashes and fatalities involving teenage drivers. Montana is the 50th state in the nation to enact graduated drivers licensing.

### **Open Container Law**

With the support of a number of proponents, open container legislation easily passed in both the House and Senate. Senator Gary Perry of Manhattan sponsored the bill, which becomes law on October 1, 2005. It provides for a fine of up to \$100 for possession of an open alcoholic beverage container within the passenger area of a motor vehicle on a highway. Violations will not affect a driver's record, and insurance companies are not allowed to hold a violation against the insured or use it to raise their rates.

### **Primary Seat Belt Law**

Senate Bill 43 providing for a primary seat belt law passed the Senate but died on the House floor. Senator Mike Cooney of Helena sponsored the measure which was defeated by a 42 to 58 vote. Although the bill failed, this was an improvement over 2003 when the same legislation received only one "yes" vote in the Senate Judiciary Committee. With the combined support of citizens and state, local, and private agencies, this legislation made it much further than in the past. Look for a primary seat belt law to be reintroduced in the 2007 session.

# Montana Generates New Power Facilities



*Power facilities and power distribution almost always impact roadways and consequently involve MDT in the permitting and approval process.*

In recent years, many communities have experienced increased power costs and occasional power outages. This has led to new interest in increasing the output of existing power plants and in building new facilities. Montana has not been isolated from this trend.

On the surface, one wouldn't think the Department of Transportation would be involved in reviewing and permitting power facilities. However, the considerable resources required to generate and distribute power almost always impact highways and highway right-of-way. Sometimes a proposed power project will have minimal impacts to the roadway, perhaps no more than an overhead power line crossing. In other cases, the impact can be much more significant, up to and including the need to develop grade-separated rail crossings or to realign roadways.

The potentially dangerous and large-scale nature of these impacts generally require companies to prepare an environmental document before a state or federal agency can issue permits.

Recognizing that an abundant power supply is important to Montana's economy and to the state's ability to attract industry, the Governor's office has created an Interagency Energy Development Taskforce to streamline and expedite the review of these developments. The System Impact Action Process Section of the Rail, Transit and Planning Division is MDT's point of contact for this taskforce.

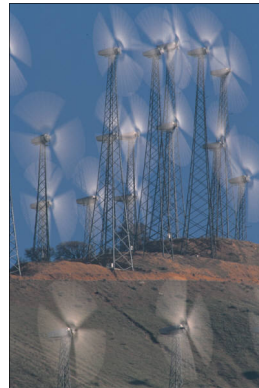
Currently, MDT is reviewing nine power generation facilities: one natural-gas-fired and four coal-fired electricity generation plants, two hydroelectric river projects, and two wind energy facilities. Of these nine facilities, two (the Rocky Mountain Power coal-fired plant near Hardin and the Judith Gap wind generating facility) have made it through the approval process and are currently under construction.

A brief description of the projects and a location map follow:

- **Bull Mountain Mine and Roundup Power Project:** DEQ has approved a proposal to build a coal-fired power plant south of Roundup near the Bull Mountain Coal Mine.
- **Rocky Mountain Power, Inc.:** Centennial Energy Resources is building a coal-fired power plant near Hardin.
- **Southwestern Montana Electric Generation and Transmission Cooperative:** This organization would like to build a coal-fired power plant near Salem. Applications have not yet been filed for this plant.
- **Nelson Creek Power Project:** Great Northern Power Development and Kiewit Mining Group are proposing one or more

coal-fired power generating facilities in conjunction with a lignite mine 15 miles northwest of Circle.

- **Basin Creek Power Services:** Mile High Energy Solutions and MSE Infrastructure Services have proposed a natural-gas-powered generating facility south of Butte in the MSE complex.
- **Hebgen Dam Hydroelectric Project:** Fall River Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc., has proposed a river type hydroelectric project just below the Hebgen Dam.

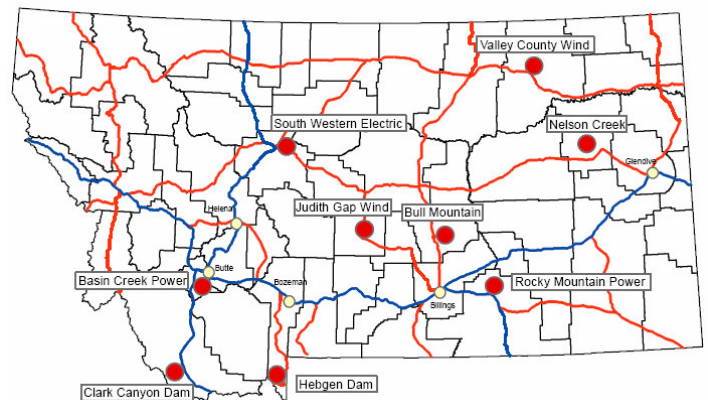


*MDT is currently reviewing two proposals for wind energy facilities.*

- **Clark Canyon Dam Hydroelectric Project:** Clark Canyon Hydro, LLC, has filed a first-stage consultation document with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to license a run-of-the-river type hydroelectric project just below the Clark Canyon Dam southwest of Dillon.
- **Valley County Wind Energy Park:** Wind Hunter, LLC, proposes to construct, operate, and maintain a wind energy development northwest of Glasgow along with a 30-mile transmission line.

- **Judith Gap Wind Generating Facility:** A wind generating facility is proposed on both sides of US 191/MT 3 approximately 6 miles south of Judith Gap. Construction is scheduled to begin in May 2005.

If you have any questions about these projects, please contact Jim Skinner at 444-9233 or [jkskinner@mt.gov](mailto:jkskinner@mt.gov).





# Are Mileposts Really a Mile Apart?

The answer is “not always.” To understand why, it’s important to know why we use mileposts: They are designed to help government highway, road, and safety departments find infrastructure features, locate incidents, and manage road data. Because mileposts are highly visible, the traveling public also uses them to determine locations and calculate distances.

MDT stores road information in large data files and management systems. This information includes road widths, surface types, traffic volumes, bridges, construction projects, accidents, and a great deal more. The files and systems make it possible for road managers to quickly access and analyze information.

When mileposts are initially installed along a route, they are placed as close to one mile apart as possible. A mile is a reasonable distance as well as a common standard of measurement. However, an exact mile from a previous milepost might be in the center of an intersection, a bridge, or some other location that may prohibit physically locating a milepost at that point. In these instances crews must install the milepost just before or after the one-mile point from the previous milepost.

Additionally, when roads are reconstructed, they are often realigned resulting in shorter (or longer) routes. Readjusting all the mileposts beyond the completed project to the end of the route would not only be prohibitively expensive but would require adjusting data to line up with the new milepost locations. In these situations, the affected mileposts are placed within the new road segments as close to one mile apart as possible.

Because mileposts are used as reference points and are not necessarily one mile apart, the correct term for them is “reference markers.”

## The Newslines List

Although we make every effort to update our mailing list, we realize that some people are receiving multiple copies of *Newslines*, and some are receiving it who would prefer not to. If you would like to cut down on your mail, please give us a call at 444-3423 or (800)714-7296, and we will adjust our database.

One caveat is that we often use the Newslines list for other purposes such as surveys and notifications. Deleting your name may mean, for example, that you will not be notified when the State-wide Transportation Improvement Plan is available or receive TranPlan 21 updates. If you want to be included in these notifications, please let us know when you call, and we will place your name on a separate list.

## Transit Tales

### MDT Chooses New Section 5310 Manager



Steven Potuzak

Steven Potuzak is MDT's new manager for the Section 5310 capital assistance grant program for the elderly and persons with disabilities. Steven is a graduate of Montana State University and brings over nine years of transit-related experience to his new position. Most recently, he was

the program director for the Human Resource Development Council in Bozeman.

In his new position, Steven will manage the capital assistance program, which provides transportation services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities, and will be the main point of contact for this statewide program. To contact Steven, call 444-4265 or send an e-mail to [spotuzak@mt.gov](mailto:spotuzak@mt.gov).

### BitterRoot Bus & Ravalli COA Open New Complex



The new Ravalli COA office building also houses offices for BitterRoot Bus.



The new bus barn has six bays with room for washing and light maintenance.

Supporters, customers, and staff gathered March 30 to celebrate the opening of new offices and facilities for the Ravalli County Council on Aging and BitterRoot Bus. The festivities marked the culmination of a three-year effort to replace the old office, a cramped trailer on West Main in Hamilton. The new 1,000-square-foot building on Corvallis Road includes office space, meeting rooms, and a conference room. The new bus barn has six drive-through bays with room for washing and light maintenance.

The project was funded with a grant from the Federal Transit Administration. Longtime area resident, 94-year-old Susie Wilkinson, donated 20 acres for the facility, which was named the Wilkinson Complex in honor of her late parents.

# Before & After

## Dillon–North Montana Street



*Before:* Increased traffic, difficulties with traffic flow, and the need for infrastructure improvements were among the problems that led to the Dillon–North Montana Street Project. This photo was taken September 2003 near the intersection with Interstate 15.



*After:* This is the same intersection following improvements that included grading and surfacing, sidewalks, water and sewer work, signals, and landscaping. Construction started in April 2004. Blahnik Construction was the primary contractor.

## Dickie Bridge–Wise River



*Before:* This was Montana Highway 43 in July 2002. The scope of work for the project included reconstructing about 6 miles of roadway and 1.5 miles of overlay.



*After:* This photo was taken in May 2005. A. M. Welles of Norris, Montana, is the primary contractor for the project, which should be completed in July.

## Ferry Terminal Facilities



*Before:* County-owned facilities such as this trailer at McClelland were replaced as part of the upgrade of Montana’s three Missouri River ferries.



*After:* This is the new 1,200-square-foot facility at Carter. The buildings at McClelland and Virgelle are similar. All are of modular construction.



# The Frenchwoman and MacDonald Pass

by Jon Axline, MDT Historian

Helena's history has been closely tied to the road systems that served the Queen City. When gold was discovered on Last Chance Gulch in July 1864, the Prickly Pear Valley was part of an ancient transportation corridor that was already familiar to Montana's pioneers, who, like most people, were always looking for quicker ways to get from here to there. In Helena's case, it meant finding better routes over the continental divide west of the mining camp. The best route is now called MacDonald Pass, and for nearly 150 years, it has played a critical role in the development and economic prosperity of the area.

Of the three mountain passes west of Helena that provide connections to the Deer Lodge and Missoula Valleys, MacDonald Pass is the best known. Initially, however, Mullan Pass was the preferred way over the divide for Montana's pioneers. The Indians knew the pass well before it was "discovered" by Lieutenant John Mullan in 1854. By the early 1860s it was frequently used by prospectors and others traveling between Fort Benton and the gold camps on Grasshopper and Gold Creeks. While the pass itself was located at a relatively low elevation, the road leading to it was daunting for freighters because of the steep grades and tight curves. Nearby Priest Pass was constructed as a toll road by a local entrepreneur looking for a way to finance his gold prospecting trips. Built by Chinese laborers in 1880, Priest Pass had become the main route over the divide by the mid-1880s. It was even a state highway for a time in the early 20th century.

MacDonald Pass originated as a toll road in 1867. When Montana Territory was formed in 1864, its legislators had no money to build roads. Consequently, they licensed toll companies to build and maintain the territory's roads and bridges. The first incarnation of a road over the pass was popularly known as the Frenchwoman's Road area. Built by a French-Canadian named Constant Guyot, the new road provided a more direct route to the Deer Lodge Valley from Helena. Governor Green Clay Smith grudgingly approved the license for the road after complaining about the fact that Guyot wanted to charge travelers for its use before the road had been completed. An advertisement in a November 1867 issue of the *Deer Lodge Weekly Independent* advertised it as "The most direct route from Deer Lodge City. . . . The road is thoroughly STAKED OUT, so that it will be impossible to go astray while the snow is on. Travelers can be accommodated with meals and lodgings at the French Woman's." The "French Woman" was Guyot's wife, one of only a few female toll road operators in Montana.

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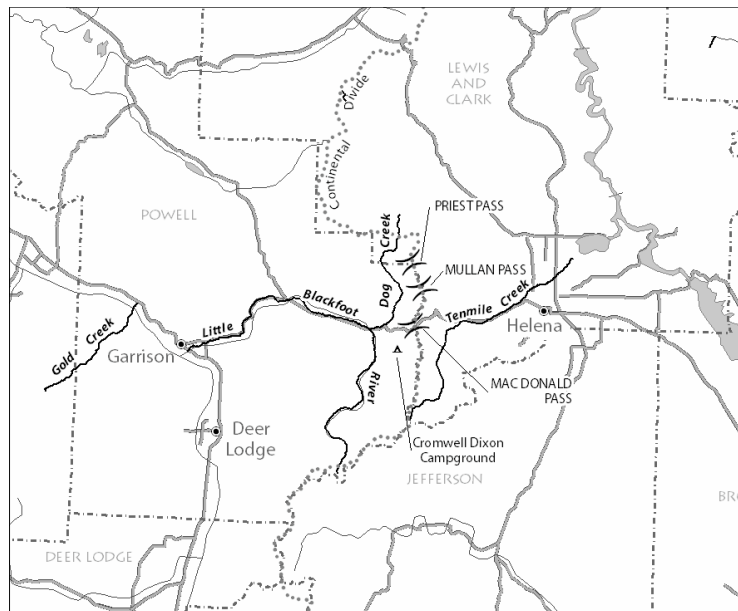
Details about Madame Guyot are vague. She is referred to in the historical record simply as the "Frenchwoman" or the "Old Frenchwoman." No photographs of her have been found. Only one physical description of her has surfaced, and it is fanciful at best. In 1881, a newspaper described her as a "neat looking critter – black-haired, black-eyed, and sharp, and cute lookin', maybe thirty years old, an' a good housekeeper." While accounts praise Mrs. Guyot, the reports of her husband are less than flattering: He was a hard-drinking worthless boor—and likely a murderer. The Guyots arrived in Montana in late 1864 and purchased a ranch in the Ruby Valley. By early 1866 they had relocated to Little Blackfoot River Valley and built a ranch just east of present Elliston.

The Frenchwoman maintained a hotel in a log cabin near Dog Creek at the west end of the toll road, near its junction with the Mullan Pass road. The woman's hospitality was celebrated by the many travelers between Deer Lodge and Helena. As

many as thirty men could be found sleeping on the floor of her two-room "hotel" at any one time. All the meals were served in the same room where the people slept. Lodging at Madame Guyot's was \$2 a night and meals one dollar. In addition to the cabin, the site included a barn, corrals, and the toll gate. Constant Guyot spent most of his time working a hay ranch about two miles away and had little to do with the toll road. In early August 1868, the Frenchwoman was found murdered, her cabin ransacked, and around \$6,000 in gold dust missing. Details of the crime are unclear, but sus-

picion immediately fell upon her husband and his hired hand. Deer Lodge County offered a reward of \$500 for the apprehension and trial of the murderers, but the *Montana Post* was much more true to its vigilante heritage—it recommended that the killers be strung up as soon as they were caught. No one was ever brought to justice for the murder of Madame Guyot. Many suspected her husband had committed the crime. The couple did not get along well, especially when Constant was in his cups. He could not account for the time between when he said he left the cabin and when the crime was committed. Constant left the area soon after his wife's death. According to local folklore, he later confessed to the crime after murdering his second wife for her money. Many believed that the Frenchwoman's spirit remained behind in her cabin, terrifying travelers who stopped there for years afterward.

General William Tecumseh Sherman and his entourage used the Frenchwoman's Road while on a fact-finding tour through the northern Rockies and Pacific Northwest in 1877. His aide, Colonel Orlando Poe, described the "road [as] dusty but not otherwise bad. . . . A very good [toll] road has been made over



the mountain range, the highest point of the pass being at an elevation of about 6,000 feet. . . . At 2 p.m. we attained the crest and began the descent, making good progress until we reached Frenchwoman's Ranch, where we were detained for about an hour by a hot box on the general's ambulance."

By the time Sherman and his companions traveled the road, it was owned by Alexander MacDonald, who purchased the road from "Lige" Dunphy in 1876. MacDonald, like Dunphy, operated it as a county-licensed toll road. During Dunphy's tenure, he corduroyed low sections of the road and built a tollhouse (which still stands) and gate on the Helena side of the pass. Shortly after taking control of the road in 1868, Dunphy hired Canadian emigrant and sometime prospector MacDonald to manage it while he concentrated on his sawmill business. MacDonald contracted with the stagecoach firm of Gilmer, Salisbury & Company for use of the road. The tollhouse provided meals to the stagecoach passengers and hay for the horses from a meadow located near today's Cromwell Dixon Campground. As many as three stages daily traversed the road between Deer Lodge and Helena.

Sometime between 1876 and 1878, MacDonald turned over management of the road to Valentine Priest. Priest left the day-to-day operation of the toll road to his daughters while he prospected for gold. Probably in 1879, Priest rediscovered a pass that had originally been used by prospectors traveling to the Kootenai country in the early 1860s. Because of the relatively low elevation of the pass and the somewhat easier grade, Priest terminated his employment with MacDonald in 1879 and built a toll road over what would become known as Priest's Pass, a short distance to the north of MacDonald's operation. MacDonald resumed management of his toll road after Priest's defection.

As Priest's road neared completion, he was able to induce the Gilmer, Salisbury & Company to use his road rather than MacDonald's. The company's division agent praised Priest's nearly finished thoroughfare as a "good road with the exception of a few rocks and a mudhole or two." The road was so good, in fact, that usage of the MacDonald Pass road dropped sharply, eventually forcing MacDonald to sell his property in 1885.

Shortly after Montana achieved statehood in 1889, Lewis and Clark and Deer Lodge Counties took over the MacDonald and Priest Pass roads and made them public thoroughfares. The counties, however, only actively maintained the Mullan Pass road and MacDonald and Priest Passes fell into decay and were seldom used.

In 1912, Lewis and Clark County and newly created Powell County contracted with the Montana State Prison for the use of convict labor to improve the MacDonald Pass route. Convict crews specialized in the construction of roads through difficult terrain, such as MacDonald Pass. In return for their on-the-job training, the prisoners had a measure of freedom that was not possible behind bars and could earn a reduction in their sentences—as long as they didn't try to escape. The counties paid for the construction equipment and the maintenance of the pris-

oners. During the early Twenties, there were additional improvements made by the counties to MacDonald Pass.

In 1927, MacDonald Pass became part of Montana's federal highway system and was designated a component of U.S. Highway 10-North. That year, the Montana Highway Department began planning for the construction of a road westward from Helena over the continental divide to Garrison. Even with the preference for MacDonald Pass over Priest and Mullan Passes,

the department's engineers debated the relative merits of all three routes. They concluded that the heavy work involved in improving either Priest or Mullan Passes ruled out their designation as the primary route over the divide. They also, wrongfully, concluded that "It is a significant fact that the old freight road built and used by the pioneers used MacDonald Pass in spite of its higher elevation." (Priest Pass and Mullan Pass were used just as frequently.)

The Highway Department and the federal Bureau of Public Roads programmed a project to improve the grade and curves of MacDonald Pass and place a graveled sur-

face on it. Within months, the department had their surveyors on the route mapping the grades and curves. The Nolan Brothers Company of Minneapolis won the contract to upgrade the road in early 1931, and construction began on May 18th. Because of the Great Depression, the federal government funded nearly all of the \$89,000 project. Federal and state regulations also encouraged the use of local labor with only a minimum of heavy equipment used on the project. My grandfather, a civil engineer working for the Highway Department at that time, met his future wife while working on the project. She was the

daughter of a local rancher whom Nolan Brothers hired to operate a horse-drawn fresno [similar to a scraper or leveler] on MacDonald Pass. The contractors employed many farmers and ranchers from the Little Blackfoot and Ten Mile Creek Valleys to help build the road. Construction of the road was completed in 1932, and it was paved by 1935. Traces of the old Frenchwoman's/MacDonald Pass Road can still be seen along U.S. Highway 12 west of the MDT's maintenance section house to the base of the pass near Elliston.

In 1935, the Montana Highway Department constructed a section house just below the continental divide. The building, which still stands, was the first section house built by the department. The rustic building provides shelter to men and equipment "stationed in storm areas" to keep the pass open in the winter. The water fountains on the pass were installed at about the same time and were not intended to provide drinking water to thirsty motorists, but to supply water to their overheated automobiles. By 1939, the MacDonald Pass road was described as "highly developed, smooth-surfaced, regularly graded and widely curved . . . [fitting] into the scenery and also the economic scheme of things." By 1963, the Highway Department planned the eventual reconstruction of the highway to a four-lane facility, a plan that eventually came to pass in 1979.



*The Montana Highway Department's first maintenance section house still stands just below the continental divide on the east side of the pass.*



*This fountain on the east side of MacDonald Pass is original—the one on the west side is a reconstruction.*

## ***MDT Wants Your Comments***

To view the list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, go to [www.mdt.state.mt.us](http://www.mdt.state.mt.us) and click on the Rail, Transit & Planning link under *Departments*. From there, click on *2005 Proposed Highway Projects*. If you prefer to receive the list by mail, call us at 1-800-714-7298.

Mail your comments on proposed projects to MDT at the following address or e-mail them to [mdt2005pe@state.mt.us](mailto:mdt2005pe@state.mt.us).

MDT Project Analysis Chief  
PO Box 201001  
Helena, MT 59620-1001

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## ***Contact Information***

Only the most frequently requested numbers are listed here. For an area or person not listed, call 800-714-7296 (in Montana only) or 406-444-3423. The TTY number is 406-444-7696 or 800-335-7592.

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MDT's mission is to serve the public by providing a transportation system and services that emphasize quality, safety, cost effectiveness, economic vitality and sensitivity to the environment.

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