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THOMAS L. JUDGE
GOVERNOR



STATE OF MONTANA
DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

H. J. ANDERSON
DIRECTOR OF HIGHWAYS

March 27, 1975

IN REPLY REFER TO:

RF - 64 (15)
Great Falls - East

RECEIVED

MAR 28 1975

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
COUNCIL

Environmental Quality Council
Capitol Station
Helena, Montana 59601

Gentlemen:

Attached, for your information, are two (2) copies of the Agency Impact Determination for the above project, as approved by the Federal Highway Administration.

Very truly yours,

H. J. ANDERSON
DIRECTOR OF HIGHWAYS

By *Stephen C. Kologi*
Stephen C. Kologi, P. E., Chief
Preconstruction Bureau

32-SCK:mg
Enclosures

cc: K. F. Skoog

GEORGE VUCANOVIĆ, CHAIRMAN
HELENA

WILLIAM HESSNER, VICE CHAIRMAN
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STATE OF MONTANA
DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS

February 27, 1975

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MAR 28 1975

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
COUNCIL

DIRECTOR OF HIGHWAYS

IN REPLY REFER TO:

RF - 64 (15)
Great Falls - East

U. S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
501 North Fee Street
Helena, Montana 59601

08 30.22 A3

Gentlemen:

This is to request your concurrence that the following Agency Impact Determination is appropriate for the subject project.

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

The proposed project is located in Cascade County on U. S. Highway 87 and 89 and Montana 200 east of Great Falls. The attached maps show the location of the project with respect to both the entire State and the City of Great Falls.

The project will begin on the east edge of Great Falls at the intersection of 57th Street and U. S. 87, 89, and Montana 200 and proceed easterly towards Belt for approximately 8.9 miles. The alignment of the project will essentially follow the existing highway.

The basic purpose of this project is to provide a safer and more efficient highway facility to serve the traveling public. The existing roadway has a 24-26 foot surfaced top and has been in continuous service for many years. Short portions of it were built as early as 1921 with the majority being constructed in 1939 and 1942. Some improvements were made in 1952.

Traffic volumes on the existing roadway have increased considerably since the original highway was built and they are continuing to increase. Average current traffic volumes and estimated future volumes for the entire project area are as follows:

1974 ADT	=	2889
1978 ADT	=	3380
1998 ADT	=	7250
DIV	=	940
D	=	55 - 45 %
T	=	15 %
All Trucks	=	38.7 %

Between 57th Street and the FAS 227-228 intersection located about 5 miles east of Great Falls, the 1998 estimated traffic volume ranges from about 8500 to 7300 vehicles per day. East of the intersection, estimated traffic volumes for 1998 amount to about 5400 vehicles per day. The portion of primary highway covered by this project is one of the highest traveled primary highways in the state.

Due to the heavy traffic volumes, it is expected that the first 3+ miles of the project out to the FAS 227-228 intersection will be built as a 4-lane highway. Whether or not it will be 4-lane east of the intersection is still being studied. It has not yet been determined how the 4 lanes will be provided as the following possibilities are still under consideration:

- 1) Build an entirely new 4-lane roadway
- 2) Build 2 new lanes and upgrade the existing 2 lanes.
- 3) Build 2 new lanes and use the existing 2 lanes as they now exist.

If only two lanes are to be provided east of the FAS 227-228 intersection, this will be accomplished by either complete reconstruction or upgrading of the existing roadway. The existing BN underpass and the bridge over Box Elder Creek will be replaced with new structures.

Some type of limited or controlled access may be provided to prevent strip development along the new highway.

The first 6+ miles of the project pass through relatively flat to rolling terrain that is devoted almost exclusively to dryland farming. The last 3+ miles of the project drop into and climb out of the small valley formed by Box Elder Creek. The vegetation in the project area consist mainly of short, native grasses with some scattered trees and brush near Box Elder Creek.

2) PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The major impact of this project will be to provide a safe and efficient highway facility that will adequately serve the traveling public. Recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, and skiing will be enhanced by a better access route. Tourists will have a safer highway on which to travel and school bus and mail routes will be improved. Access into Great Falls for people living in the surrounding area will be improved. The primary social and economic impact of the project will be the provision of a better link between Great Falls and points east.

New right-of-way will have to be purchased to construct the project. Depending on how much 4-lane roadway is built, the amount needed could range from about 90 acres to 150 acres. Approximately two-thirds of these amounts would be farmland that would be taken out of production.

The only building near the project is a saloon which is situated just east of the railroad overpass about 5 miles east of Great Falls. It does not appear that relocation of this building will be necessary as it is located far enough away from the proposed roadway.

Strip development has already occurred on 10th Avenue South all the way out to the beginning of this project and due to the new roadway and 4 lanes that will be provided, the possibility exists that it may extend on out along this project. However, if the limited access that is being considered were provided, it would restrict this type of development.

No wildlife or waterfowl areas, historic sites, natural landmarks, parks, or recreation areas will be affected by this project. Access to religious, cultural, educational, recreational, and employment opportunities will be improved.

The attached letter from the Department of Fish and Game indicates that the impact on fish and game will be insignificant.

The only area of the project where any water pollution could occur is in the vicinity of Box Elder Creek. While working in this area, the contractor will be required to adhere to all applicable national, state, and local laws which pertain to minimizing this type of pollution. Also, the Montana Department of Highways Standard Specifications contain certain provisions that the contractor will have to follow.

Some slight, temporary, air pollution will occur during the construction process, however, this will be short-lived and the contractor will have to follow all laws and specifications pertaining to this matter.

Future air pollution levels are not expected to be significantly affected by this project. The Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences is the designated State Air Pollution Control Agency and they have previously informed us that the State Implementation Plan does not contain a section on transportation control strategy since Montana does not have a serious pollution problem caused by highway vehicles. Also, the project does not meet the requirements for review of projects as established by the Environmental Protection Agency. Their concern for air quality generally begins when the 10 year projected traffic increases 10,000 vehicles per day or when the 10 year projected traffic is 20,000 vehicles per day. The 20 year projected traffic for this project is about 7300 vehicles per day which is considerably less than those figures mentioned above.

All of the land along this project can be considered to be undeveloped in regard to noise pollution except for the area of the saloon just east of the railroad underpass. This land would be classified under land use category C which pertains to commercial and industrial properties and has an allowable noise level of 75 dBA. Using the nomograph method of noise prediction and assuming a speed of 55 miles per hour, it was determined that a building would have to be within 125 feet of the roadway to exceed this level. Since the saloon is farther away than this no type of noise abatement measure are required.

3) PROBABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS WHICH CANNOT BE AVOIDED.

New right-of-way will be required which will take approximately 60-100 acres of farmland out of production. Approximately 30-50 acres of land other than farmland will also be needed for right-of-way.

A small amount of air and water pollution will occur during the construction process.

Some short time disruption may be necessary while moving any conflicting utilities.

There will be some disruption of the traffic flow during construction, however, this will be short-lived and the traffic flow will be improved when the project is complete.

It is estimated that construction of the project will require the consumption of about 265,000 gallons of diesel fuel and 35,000 gallons of gasoline.

4) ALTERNATES

It has been determined that it would not be feasible to study any alternate lines, due to the fact that we can make use of the existing roadway and right-of-way by following the present alignment. Also, changing the alignment would severely disrupt many farms in the area, require the taking of much more farmland for right-of-way, and still would not provide any better service.

The "no-build" alternate was given some consideration, however, the large traffic volumes on the existing highway indicate a need for a new, up-to-date highway. The existing highway is much too narrow and has areas of poor vertical sight distance. Also, the BN underpass is very narrow and present a hazardous situation. For these reasons, the "no-build" alternate had to be eliminated.

The possibility does exist that the proposed Great Falls South Bypass could affect a portion of this project. However, due to the fact that the South Bypass is many years in the future and no matter where the Bypass ends up being built, U. S. 89 is still going to have to connect into 10th Avenue South. Therefore, it appears that the Bypass should not affect any of this project to such an extent that it would preclude proceeding on the proposed alignment.

5) THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL SHORT-TERM USES OF MAN'S ENVIRONMENT AND MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

There will be some short-term uses of the environment during the construction of this project, however, we expect them to be insignificant. The flow of traffic will be greatly improved but the overall traffic patterns will not change. No manmade features will be taken to build this project, except for some of the existing highway facilities. The natural features that will be affected are insignificant. The construction process will disrupt the area and cause some traffic delay, however, this will be short-lived and last only as long as it takes to complete the necessary work. The farmland that will be taken out of production will not be available for agricultural use unless a demand greater than the highway causes a change back to its present use.

The long-term effect will be the provision of a safe and efficient transportation facility for the traveling public.

6) IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES

No resources other than money, labor, and road building materials will be irretrievably committed to this project. The land that will be required for right-of-way will not be available for other use unless a demand greater than the roadway requires a change in land use. The commitment of social and cultural resources will be insignificant. There does not appear to be any major irreversible commitment of resources that would significantly affect the environment in the area of the project. Therefore, the use of money, labor, and materials is considered to be justified as it will provide a much needed highway facility to serve the traveling public.

The estimated cost of providing the new highway could be as much as \$5,000,000 depending on how much 4-lane roadway is provided.

7) COORDINATION WITH OTHERS -

The attached letter of intent was sent to all persons and agencies that were considered to have a vital interest in the project. The mailing list is included in the letter. Following the letter of intent are all the comments that were received.

Other pertinent correspondence is also attached.

BASIS FOR AGENCY IMPACT DETERMINATION

Based on the foregoing, it is felt that the proposed action is not a major action and will not significantly affect the environment, therefore an agency impact determination is appropriate.

Your early return of one signed copy of this statement will be appreciated.

Very truly yours,

H. J. ANDERSON
DIRECTOR OF HIGHWAYS

By Stephen C. Kologi
Stephen C. Kologi, P. E., Chief
Preconstruction Bureau

32-SCK:KFS:GLL:mg
Attachments

cc: J. R. Beckert
R. E. Champion
K. F. Skoog
J. T. Sullivan

Concurred in by

W. S. Stewart
Federal Highway Administration

Date

MAR 21 1975

