

62nd Legislature Jobs Listening Session

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Engineering company with offices throughout Montana. Founded in Helena, two people in 1945, firm steadily grew and employed 265 people in MT in 2007. Today, at 220 employees in MT, a drop of about 15%. Offices outside of MT have suffered much more than this. Example: in Arizona went from 100 employees in 2007 to only 25 today. So have kept core MT staff pretty well intact throughout this recession. However, still a difficult struggle and worry about being able to retain co-workers every day.

Firm no different than probably 100 other architectural and engineering firms in MT. Almost every company struggling to find work and retain employees. In addition, work architects/engineers do ultimately means work for construction companies. Construction companies in MT employed 33,000 in 2007. That number has been reduced by 11,500, or about 35% today. All these jobs are high paying jobs that definitely impact economy. All people who live, work, and spend money here in MT.

Speaking in support of continuing investment in infrastructure. While it may reasonably appear that this is self-serving, trust you are able to consider comments in the spirit they are offered – for the good of all the people of MT.

Because of the way our state infrastructure investment is often matched with federal funds, there is very significant multiplier effect. Example: in terms of dollars received for transportation projects, in very broad terms MT has to match each federal dollar received with as little as 15 to 20 cents. MT has long been a state that receives more Federal tax dollars to invest in our infrastructure than we pay into the system. Even at that, needs have historically outpaced our means. Aging infrastructure, along with new standards and new regulations, has created far more demand for construction dollars than we have been able to do over the last few decades. There are a lot of needs and no funds to do them.

Not as obvious as the money going to architects, engineers, and construction companies is that infrastructure is a commodity supporting economic growth not only in this time, but for MT's future. Investments made in bridges, highways and treatment plants in every decade since the 1930's are still being used today, 80 years later.

Know that highways and airports support tourism and are vital to that component of MT's economy. Less apparent: items such as up-to-date wastewater plants keep our rivers clean, and we can claim the best fishing in the country! Just one of the natural resource attractions MT has to offer, and needs to protect.

Another aspect not so obvious: good airports and other infrastructure systems are critical to attracting/holding high paid workers. Recent example: Boeing acquired Summit Aeronautics Group and plans major expansion in Helena. May not have happened if it not for first rate airport and other systems already in place to support it.

Firm's work also involves infrastructure outside of urban areas. Assist rural irrigation districts to deliver water to their crops, has tremendous economic impacts to rural areas. Also assisting rural areas with no good sources of drinking water, not only helping these areas provide safe/adequate supply of good water, also provides base for future economic growth. These areas cannot grow economically again without good water.

In summary: We get terrific multiplier effect from investment in essential public infrastructure systems. Commitment to that investment now will support economic growth both today and far into the future. All areas in MT have significant needs, often requiring one-time solutions, but large majority of these areas have insufficient tax bases or other means to fund important projects. **Respectfully request that our legislators explore ways to maximize our funding mechanisms for infrastructure projects similar to other states in our region (good examples are Wyoming and North Dakota).**