

2014 LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE

Background: The Great Falls Area Long Range Transportation Plan is required to be updated, at a minimum, every four years. In early 2013, the firm of Robert Peccia & Associates was hired to assist in the preparation of a full update, which included both extensive data-gathering/analysis and public outreach. The Draft Plan was finalized in January of 2014.

Overview: Three formal public presentations were held over the past year, to inform the public and to provide opportunity for direct public input. The consultant maintained a Facebook page for disseminating information, as well as a project website at www.greatfallslrtp.com. The website made drafts and technical memoranda available to the public, and included notification of outreach and comment opportunities. For further information on the opportunities provided for public input and comment, the full Public Involvement Plan can be found here:

http://www.greatfallslrtp.com/files/Download/GreatFalls_PIP_FINAL.pdf

The consultant has worked closely with the MPO, MDT and Federal staff to ensure the Plan Update meets Federal requirements and guidance. Specifically, the fiscal constraint and air quality conformance elements of the Update have been reviewed and determined to be in compliance with Federal regulations.

The Draft Update was made available for a 30-day public review and comment period, ending February 21, 2014. TAC has also had opportunity to review the Update, with a specific request to review the Major and Short-Range Project recommendations. The Update has incorporated TAC members' comments.

Summary of Major Recommendations: The analysis and modeling phase of the Update identified transportation facilities at the highest risk of deterioration in service over the 20-year life of the Plan. The public involvement process also pointed to the same top-priority areas, which are as follows (in no particular order):

- Highway 87/15th St NE/Old Havre Highway, and various associated roadway segments and connections – including Bootlegger Trail;
- 36th Avenue NE reconstruction (eastern segment);
- All four major interchanges, with priorities in descending order at: the Airport Interchange; Emerson Junction (NW Bypass); I-315; and Central Avenue West. Public comment focused on the Airport (congestion and safety) and Emerson Junction (limited access), while some operational deficiencies were noted at the other two interchanges; and,
- River Drive North from 15th Street N to 38th Street N (2-lane segment), including the intersection at 25th Street N.

While other areas of concern were noted and a number of projects identified, recommended projects are few due to the need to keep the plan fiscally balanced. However, to make the Plan viable, other needs are listed as “illustrative projects”, with no funding source identified.

Other Plan Elements of Note: The Plan Update also includes a robust Non-Motorized element, to provide the Urban Area with guidance and suggestions for building a connected pedestrian and bicycle network. While not all of the recommendations may be feasible, it does provide a “blueprint” for working toward a connected system for the segment of the community that, by choice or by necessity, uses transportation methods other than the personal automobile.

Other important elements include Safety, Transit, Security, Freight, Fiscal Constraint, and Air Quality Conformity.

A full overview and report on the Plan Update, and the update process, will be provided at the TAC meeting by the consultant.

Plan Adoption: The various boards involved in adoption of the Plan Update will be considering doing so on the following dates:

- Great Falls Planning Advisory Board (as MPO) – March 25
- Great Falls City Commission – April 1
- Cascade County Commission – April 8
- Policy Coordinating Committee (Final Adoption) – April 9

In addition, the City and the County Commissions have scheduled a joint meeting on March 24 at 1 PM in the County Commission Chambers to hear a presentation by the consultant on the Plan Update. No action will be taken – rather, it is an informational session to hear about the plan and allow individual Commissioners to ask questions, before their respective bodies consider action upon the Plan Update.

After local approvals, the Plan will be sent to FHWA/FTA and EPA for final consideration and concurrence, which is expected by April 23, 2014.

Recommendation: Staff recommends TAC approve the 2014 LRTP Update and recommend approval by the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC).

Suggested Motion: “I move TAC approve the 2014 Update to the Great Falls Urban Area Long Range Transportation Plan, and recommend approval by PCC.