

5.0 NFFR Corridor Study Conclusion

This pre-NEPA/MEPA corridor study was undertaken at the request of Flathead County. Over the years, the county has received numerous requests from residents seeking a mechanism to make improvements along the gravel section of the roadway. This 13-mile section between Camas Road and Blankenship Road is currently under the county's jurisdiction and was previously evaluated for full reconstruction and pavement by Western Federal Lands in the 1980s. However, due to public opposition, the project was dropped and the funds were used on Big Mountain Road. The intent of this study was to gather information from the public to identify possible improvement options and consensus, if any, to improve driving conditions and the surrounding environment.

A screening matrix compared costs along with social and environmental outcomes and was used to limit the total number of improvement options that were forwarded into the Draft Corridor Study for public review. Members of the public were very unequivocal and resolved about improvement options they preferred.

The public perspective gained through public involvement efforts found no consensus based on the conflicting comments received. This resulted in no single option or group of improvement options emerging as a recommended priority for this corridor. Based on engineering and environmental perspective, several of the improvement options presented in Section 4 of the corridor study are viable and have been implemented in similar sensitive areas in other parts of the country and in Montana. Dust and maintenance issues continue to be a serious problem along this roadway and over the years, incremental development and tourism may have led to higher traffic volumes. Regardless of the public's division concerning improvement options, some form of dust abatement measures appear to be necessary.

During the course of the study, many members of the public stated that if they could not have their preferred option (for instance either "pave" or "no-pave"), their preference would be to have better maintenance and, if at all possible, one of the dust abatement treatments identified in the corridor study. Property owners along the corridor and other area residents using the corridor will need to continue to work with Flathead County officials to identify and prioritize funding sources for dust abatement or any of the other identified improvement options.

The next steps for management and/or improvements to this segment of roadway will be determined by Flathead County. This study provides a diverse list of improvement options and management strategies that may be considered. If any option demonstrates public buy-in, is selected and funding is prioritized for that option, a project implementation process would begin, including any required environmental process.

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