

Chapter 8 Concept Plans to Existing US 93

8.1 Introduction

US 93 through Polson is the major transportation route in the community. Earlier it was noted that the community partners, in conjunction with the MDT and FHWA, prepared a pre-NEPA/MEPA Corridor Study that examined the feasibility of an alternate route to US 93. The conclusion of the corridor study was that two alternate routes are likely feasible if and when the community decides to address traffic issues on the existing US 93. This study follows up on the US 93 Evaro to Polson EIS further reducing the number of alternate alignments from eight as identified in the EIS down to two. This study will be used as a basis for determining the impacts and subsequent mitigation for the selected alignment in any future NEPA/MEPA document. It should be noted that although a reconstructed US 93 through Polson was screened out during the Corridor Study process, the TOC felt strongly that consideration be given to including the existing US 93 as part of any future environmental process. Therefore, as part of any US 93 discussion through or around Polson, improving the existing US 93 corridor will need to be considered as one of the improvement options.

This chapter of the Transportation Plan will present various conceptual options that may be considered during a future NEPA/MEPA process. The environmental document could cover the existing US 93, between the intersection of US 93 with MT 35 (on the south end of the corridor), and the east end of the existing bridge over the Flathead River (on the north end of the corridor). This is the segment of US 93 that traverses both along the lakefront and also through the downtown core of Polson. Four conceptual options are presented. Two of the concept plans assume an alternate route would be in place for the community someday. The other two concept plans assume that an alternate route would not be realized. These concept plans are identified as noted below, and are further expanded in this chapter.

With Alternate Route in Place

- Three-Lane Section Without Urban Amenities
- Three-Lane Section With Urban Amenities

Without Alternate Route in Place

- Five-Lane Section Without Urban Amenities
- Five-Lane Section With Urban Amenities

Any project (or projects) developed will need to be in compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 23 Part 771 and the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 18, sub-chapter 2 which sets forth the requirements for documenting environmental impacts on highway projects.

The suggested roadway section through the corridor, pending community dialogue and acceptance, is a combination of sections that minimize impacts to adjacent properties and that provide for an acceptable multi-modal corridor. As US 93 is a NHS route on the urban aid system, any improvements must be reviewed and approved by MDT.

8.2 Three-Lane Section Without Urban Amenities

The section between MT 35 and the east end of the Flathead River Bridge is already a three-lane section at most locations; however, it does not include “urban” features. A three-lane section can be described as having a single travel lane in each direction, with a two-way center turn lane (TWCTL) or left turn (TWLTL) lane in the middle lane. This type of configuration is seen in many urban areas where there are private approaches directly adjacent to the roadway. In some locations along the existing US 93, on-street parking is available (such as downtown Polson), and in other areas (near the lakefront) it is not available.

This concept would build upon what is currently in place by formalizing the “minimum” three-lane section with curb and gutter/storm drainage, new asphalt surfacing, and the perpetuation of the three-lane configuration. A consistent treatment between MT 35 and the east of the Bridge would be desirable, such that lane merges and drop-offs are removed. In the downtown area, parking would remain as is currently in place. This concept does not provide for any non-motorized amenities such as on-street bicycle lanes, sidewalks, or raised medians. Crosswalks on the appropriate legs of US 93 would be provided. The three-lane section lends to the usage of traffic signal control or modern roundabouts at the busier intersections. This section would consist of the following:

- One 12 foot driving lane (in each direction);
- A single 14 foot flush median;
- Two foot curb and gutter (each side); and
- Six foot sidewalk (each side directly adjacent to the back of the curb).

This type of standard section could accommodate between 18,000 and 22,000 vehicles per day, depending on many factors unknown at the present time. An example would be the density of approaches. If approaches can be removed and/or combined, the “minimum” three-lane facility could carry more capacity and potentially reach the 22,000 vpd volumes. However, as documented in the *US 93 Polson Corridor Study* report, traffic volumes elevate during the summer months, and if the desire is to design to peak summer conditions, then the minimum three-lane capacity may result in a LOS less than acceptable standards out to the 20-year planning horizon.

8.3 Three-Lane Section With Urban Amenities

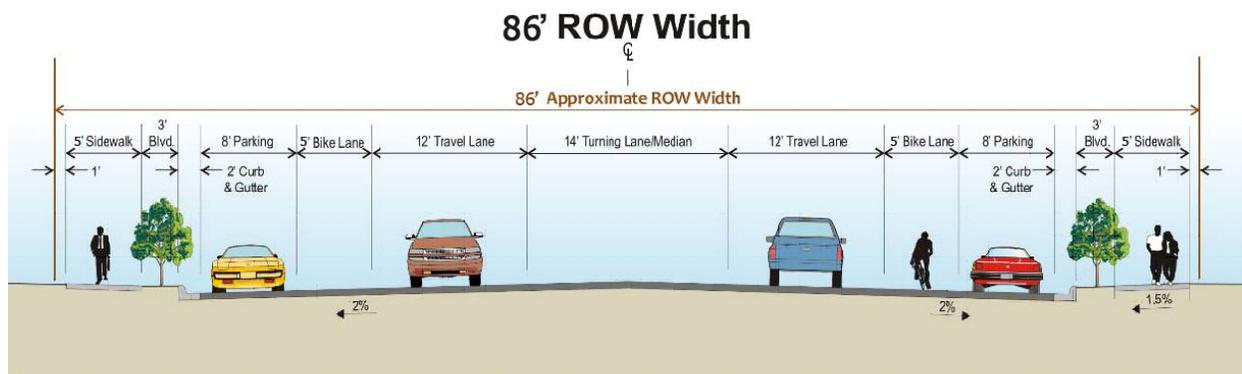
A modification to the three-lane section described above in section 8.2 is the three-lane section with urban amenities. This section consists of the three-lanes as previously described, but also includes urban amenities such as on-street bicycle lanes, on-street parking, a narrow landscaped boulevard behind the

curb, and a sidewalk on both sides. This section would require a consistent eighty-six (86) foot right-of-way width for its application the entire length of the corridor.

This section provides several benefits that include on-street bicycle facilities, on-street parking, sidewalk facilities, landscaped boulevard, and curb and gutter to control storm water runoff. The middle lane could either be a flush median lane, or in some cases could be raised median to provide pedestrian refuge areas and control access. This section would consist of the following:

- One 12 foot driving lane (in each direction);
- A single 14 foot flush (or raised) median;
- One 5 foot on-street bicycle lane (in each direction);
- An 8 foot on-street parking lane (each side);
- Two foot curb and gutter (each side);
- A 3 foot landscaped boulevard (each side); and
- Five foot sidewalk.

Figure 8-1 below shows a representative section of this configuration, noting that in this representation the median is a flush median.



Not To Scale - For Discussion Purposes Only

US 93 (MT-35 TO FLATHEAD RIVER)

Figure 8-1 Urban 3-Lane Section with Amenities

8.4 Five-Lane Section Without Urban Amenities

If an alternate route to the existing US 93 is not pursued, it is highly likely that near the 20-year planning horizon additional lanes will be warranted along the existing US 93. Although traffic modeling associated with the US 93 Corridor Study suggests that AADT volumes may be able to be accommodated with a

three-lane section, peak summer volumes will exceed the capacity of the facility. Because of this, without an alternate route in place, the facility will need to be expanded to a five-lane roadway section. As is the case with the three-lane sections described above, a “minimum” five-lane section is a consideration that will not provide the “urban amenities” such as on-street bicycle lanes, parking, and landscaped boulevards. This section would consist of the following:

- Two 12 foot driving lanes (in each direction)
- A single 16 foot raised median/turning lane
- Two foot “shy distance” on either side of the raised median
- Two foot curb and gutter (each side)
- Six foot sidewalk (each side directly adjacent to the back of curb)

The total width of this “minimum” typical section equals 84 feet, which would lend itself to a recommended 86 foot right-of-way width throughout the corridor. Again, this section would not provide for on-street bicycle lanes, on-street parking, or for a landscaped boulevard between the roadway and the sidewalk.

8.5 Five-Lane Section With Urban Amenities

The “Five-Lane Section With Urban Amenities” builds upon the section described in section 8.4; however, it includes various urban amenities such as on-street bicycle lanes, on-street parking, landscaped boulevards, and pedestrian sidewalks. This section would require the largest right-of-way width – on the order of 116 feet – for consistent application of this section. This right-of-way width would require removal of buildings and parking in some areas along the corridor. This section would consist of the following:

- Two 12 foot driving lanes (in each direction);
- A single 16 foot raised median/turning lane;
- Two foot “shy distance” on either side of the raised median;
- One 5 foot on-street bicycle lane (in each direction);
- An 8 foot on-street parking lane (each side);
- Two foot curb and gutter (each side);
- A 3 foot landscaped boulevard (each side); and
- Five foot sidewalk.

The total width of this typical section equals 114 feet, which would lend itself to a recommended 116 foot right-of-way width throughout the corridor. If this typical section were to be implemented and

centered on the existing centerline, the corridor section would potentially impact 25 structures. Figure 8-2 shows a representative section of this configuration, noting that in this representation the median is a raised median.

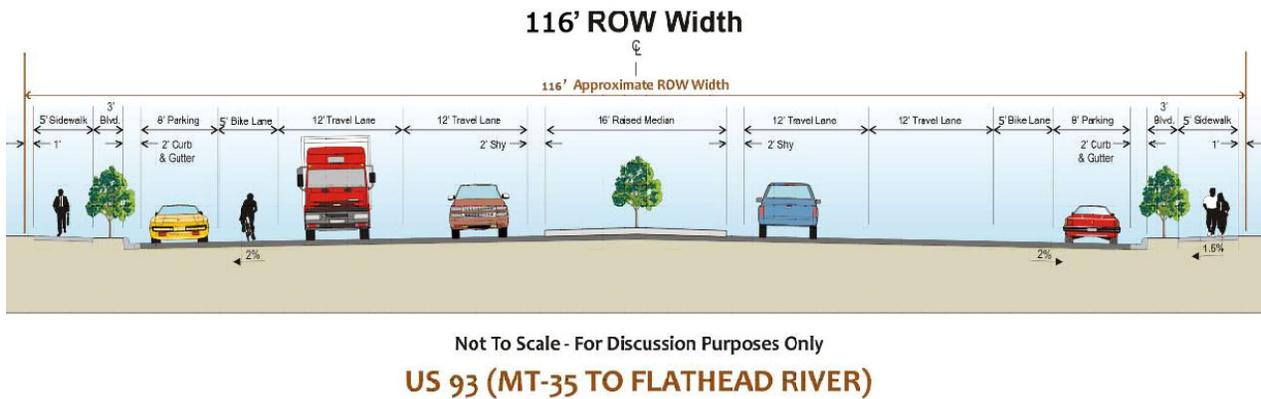


Figure 8-2 Urban 5-Lane Section with Amenities

8.6 Suggested Corridor Concept

The suggested concept for corridor improvements for the existing US 93 is a combination of many of the sections described earlier. Local representatives on the TOC made it clear that improvements to the existing US 93 are their priority. Whether or not an alternate route is pursued further by the local community is a decision that the local partners will have to make over time, and it is realistic to expect an alternate route will be needed farther out than 20-years. The suggested corridor concept is one that is responsive to a variety of travel patterns, improves the aesthetics of the current roadway environment, and one that provides for acceptable traffic flow and travel conditions. The suggested corridor concept is broken out into sections along the corridor, beginning at the intersection of US 93 and MT 35.

8.6.1 Concept Between MT 35 and 4th Avenue East

The suggested corridor concept between MT 35 and 4th Avenue East is reconstruction to the “Five-Lane With Urban Amenities” (see Figure 8-2) typical section. This section will alleviate several issues identified through the planning process. The issues with the vehicle merge off of MT 35 onto US 93 northbound will be eliminated with the creation of a designated through lane on US 93. The 120 foot right-of-way can be realized within this segment of the corridor with no impacts to structures, although right-of-way acquisition would be likely. This section of roadway is generally not in the commercial district, and the additional lanes will allow for traffic to better distribute itself when coming from the west (i.e. downtown) or coming from the east (i.e. MT 35 and US 93 South).

It is debatable whether on-street parking is needed in this location. As there are not any major roadside attractions in this area, it is likely that on-street parking could be removed. In this case, the needed 120 foot right-of-way could be reduced to something on the order of 104 feet.

The suggested concept for this section allows for additional capacity between MT 35 and the grocery store location at the intersection of 4th Avenue East and also provides non-motorized amenities in this area. A raised landscaped median can be provided to improve aesthetics and to create a gateway. At the intersection of 4th Avenue East, either conventional traffic signal control, or a modern roundabout, could be considered for implementation. With this concept, a lane “drop” will occur at 4th Avenue East (in the westbound direction), and a lane “pick-up” will occur at the same location in the eastbound direction. Additionally, the intersection of 7th Avenue East should be considered for traffic signalization as volumes develop and warrants are met because that roadway will realize increased usage over time. Intersection concepts in this segment include:

- MT 35 – Traffic signalization to remain as-is
- 7th Avenue East – Traffic signalization when and if warrants are met
- 4th Avenue East – Traffic signalization **or** modern roundabout

8.6.2 Concept Between 4th Avenue East and 5th Street East

This segment of the corridor travels along the lake front and provides high scenic value and needs for multi-modal travel. There are significant constraints to implementing a “five-lane” section in this area, and it is desirable to slow traffic down and provide alternative travel mode opportunities. The suggested corridor concept in this area is the “Three Lane Section With Urban Amenities” (see Figure 8-1) typical section that consists of a travel lane in each direction, a raised median (or flush median) in the center, on-street bicycle lanes each side, on-street parking lanes on each side, and a narrow boulevard and concrete sidewalk. This section can fit within a 90 foot right-of-way and still provides all of the amenities that the community originally discussed during the development of the *US 93 Polson Corridor Study*.

The potential would exist to remove on-street parking on at least one side of the road prism to reduce the necessary right-of-way needed; however, one of the main complaints heard from the community was a lack of on-street parking along the lakefront. This section would provide pedestrian refuges when crossing the road (via the raised median); and in areas where access is needed, a flush median could be utilized.

At the intersection of 5th Street East, an improved “gateway” intersection is envisioned that could remain a traffic signal, or be a modern roundabout. This gateway intersection could tie into the main access to the KwaTaqNuk facility, and would serve to demarcate the transition from the vibrant downtown area to the scenic lake front.

This section, especially with roundabouts on the ends (i.e. 5th Street East and 4th Avenue East), would serve the community many years until traffic volumes elevate such that an alternate route is pursued again by the local community. Intersection concepts in this segment include:

- 4th Avenue East – Traffic signalization **or** modern roundabout
- 5th Street East – Traffic signalization **or** modern roundabout

8.6.3 Concept Between 5th Street East and Main Street

This segment of the corridor is located in the downtown core. It already provides urban features such as curb and gutter, left turn lanes, on-street parking, and sidewalks. It is recommended that the “Three Lane With Urban Amenities” (see Figure 8-1) typical section be extend to Main Street, with the exception of removing on-street parking to provide room for the on-street bicycle lanes. The on-street parking appears to be minimally used during most times (except for major events), and the necessary 90 foot right-of-way width may not be attainable near Main Street, 1st Street East, and 2nd Street East. Accordingly, the section east of the KwaTaqNuk should be explored without the on-street parking.

Again, either conventional traffic signal control, or modern roundabouts, should be considered at both Main Street and 1st Street East. Intersection concepts in this segment include:

- 5th Street East – Traffic signalization **or** modern roundabout
- 1st Street East – Traffic signalization **or** modern roundabout
- Main Street – Traffic signalization **or** modern roundabout