



Progress is being made on the I-90 East Belgrade Interchange Environmental Assessment – Your input still requested

Gallatin County, the City of Belgrade, and the Gallatin Airport Authority are progressing with the proposal to build a new interchange access on I-90 in East Belgrade. The primary purpose of the project is to provide an additional interstate access in Belgrade to facilitate greater intermodal connectivity with Gallatin Field Airport.

Pursuant to policies of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the City of Belgrade, Gallatin County, and the Gallatin Airport Authority initiated the Request for Access process to explore the feasibility of constructing a new interchange on I-90 in proximity to Gallatin Field. The first step in this process was the demonstration of operational and engineering acceptability of the proposed interchange. The Federal Highway Administration gave preliminary approval to the findings of acceptability, thus the project is progressing through the environmental review phase in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) requirements.

Where are we in the NEPA/MEPA Process?

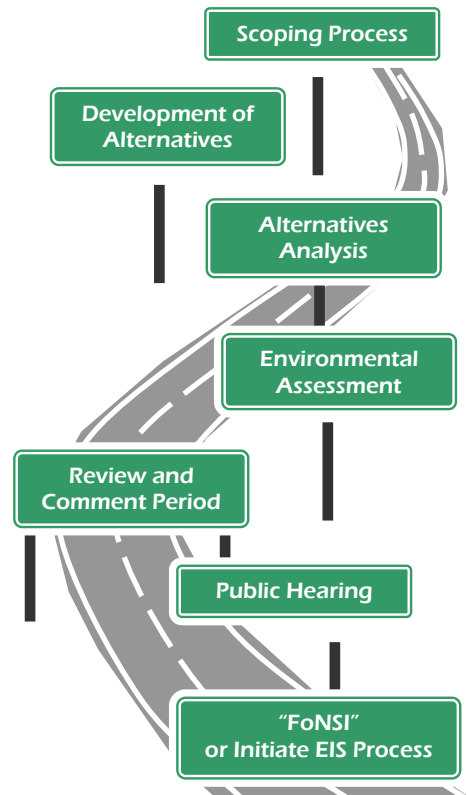
The NEPA/MEPA Process has several distinct phases that are illustrated as mileposts in the graphic at right. There are two key aspects to this Study: a proactive public participation program to ensure that we understand your concerns, and a rigorous exploration of alternatives to ensure that we are being responsive to the needs of area residents and users of the area’s transportation facilities. We are now nearing the end of the Scoping phase of the Study and are developing and analyzing a variety of alternatives.

Scoping

The Public Scoping Meeting for this project was held on Wednesday, November 15 at 7 p.m. at the Belgrade Middle School. We listened to your comments and had a useful discussion about the proposed project. Some of the issues raised at the public Scoping meeting (in no order of priority) were:

- ▶ Project cost
- ▶ Residential noise impacts
- ▶ Safety concerns
- ▶ Design considerations
- ▶ Aesthetic impacts
- ▶ Future infrastructure needs
- ▶ Connectivity to existing roadway network
- ▶ Pedestrian and bicycle facilities
- ▶ Traffic control and traffic volume

- ▶ Effect of project on local economic development
- ▶ Effect of project on existing roads, cultural resources (including irrigation ditches), and neighboring properties



Overview of the Study Area and the existing conditions:

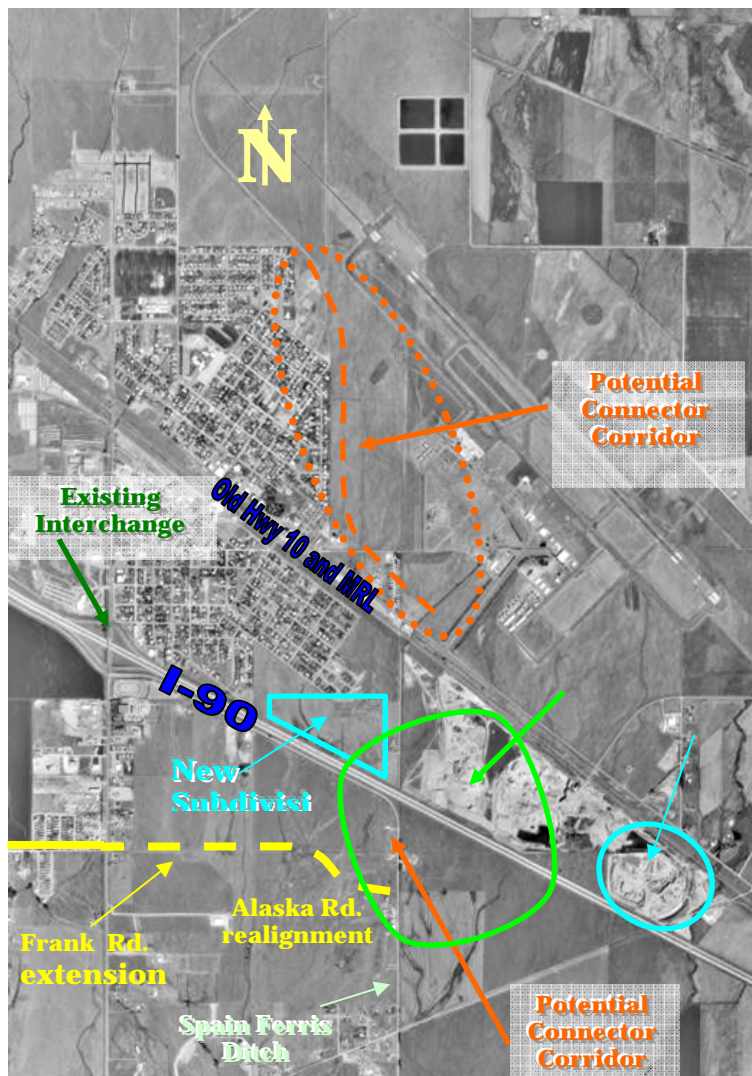
Previous efforts conducted by Gallatin County have identified the general location of the proposed interchange in East Belgrade. As illustrated in the graphic below, there are a number of existing conditions in the area that present opportunities and/or constraints on the location and eventual design of an interchange in this area. A few key opportunities and constraints are listed below.

Opportunities:

- Improved traffic and safety conditions
- Improved connectivity
- Provides grade-separated rail crossing

Constraints:

- Existing and planned residential subdivisions
- Active portion of JTL gravel pit
- Historic resources along Alaska Road



Proposed Project Elements:

- A new interchange in East Belgrade
- A connector road to the Frontage Road (Highway 10) intersecting at the existing entrance to Gallatin Field Airport to the north
- A connector road linking the existing Alaska Road to the south.
- Extension of Frank Road to Alaska Road
- Realignment of Alaska Road south of the Interstate
- A grade-separated railroad crossing, and potentially elimination of one or two existing at-grade crossings
- A new roadway connection from Hwy 10 to Dry Creek Road northwest of the Airport

Anticipated Benefits:

- Improved regional access to the airport
- Improved traffic flow on Jackrabbit Lane
- Extended service life of existing interchange
- Improved connectivity to the south

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions:

How will a Preferred Alternative be selected, and who makes the decision?

Alternatives proposed during the Scoping process will be screened to determine how well each meets the Purpose and Need for this project. A range of “reasonable” alternatives will be developed and analyzed. “Reasonable” is defined as an alternative that is consistent with the stated objective to provide a critical intermodal link between I-90 and East Belgrade, while minimizing impacts to the built and natural environments. Your input is welcome throughout this process. You may provide comments to the Project Consultant (HKM Engineering) or to Gallatin County by contacting anyone from the Project Team at the phone numbers or addresses listed on the back of this newsletter.

Why is the proposed interchange being sited in its current location?

The proposed interchange would provide a critical intermodal link between the interstate system and East Belgrade, particularly the Gallatin Field Airport. Gallatin Field is the second busiest airport in Montana based on passenger boardings and tower operations. Nearly 309,000 passengers boarded airline flights at Gallatin Field in 2004, constituting a 9.9 percent increase over the previous year and marking 10 consecutive years of growth. The proposed interchange project would provide a direct link between the interstate system and the main entrance of Gallatin Field, eliminating unnecessary traffic through the downtown area and thereby reducing congestion problems on Jackrabbit Lane.

When will the design of the proposed interchange be completed?

We are currently developing an initial range of conceptual alternatives, taking into consideration comments from the last Scoping meeting. No detailed design will be conducted during the NEPA/MEPA process. Detailed design will begin once the Preferred Alternative is identified and approved by FHWA.

What is the schedule of the proposed project?

The Environmental Assessment is schedule to be completed within a twelve (12) month timeframe. This is an aggressive schedule, but every effort will be made to keep the project moving forward for the community.

The Next Step...

We are currently taking into account the comments provided at the Scoping Meeting and are **developing alternatives**. *It's not too late to send in your comments!* In the near future, we will be providing another opportunity to review our progress, present some of the more promising alternatives, and take additional comments from the public. We will be looking for your comments regarding these alternatives and will then be narrowing down the alternatives to pinpoint a Preferred Alternative.

A more detailed Alternatives Analysis will be conducted through the process outlined in the NEPA/MEPA guidelines. This process will identify a Preferred Alternative that is physically feasible, environmentally sound, and compatible with local planning.





How Can I Stay Involved?

Please mail or e-mail your name and address to receive further newsletters. We encourage you to continue to participate in further public involvement activities, and hope you will make sure your friends and neighbors are also aware of the project. You can also contact the Project Team at the phone numbers and addresses listed to the right.

Next Public Meeting . . .

We are currently developing a range of project alternatives. We will be coming back out to the community to discuss the most promising alternatives and request further input to select a Preferred Alternative that fully meets the Purpose and Need for the project, is environmentally sound, and physically and financially feasible. We anticipate this meeting to occur in late January or early February, so watch your mail and the newspaper for an announcement.

For more information, please contact:

Larry W. Watson
Gallatin County
311 W. Main, Room 304
Bozeman, MT 59715
(406) 582-3192
(406) 582-3003 (FAX)
lwatson@co.gallatin.mt.us

Darryl L. James
Project Manager
HKM Engineering
7 West 6th Avenue, Suite 3W
P.O. Box 1009
Helena, MT 59624
(406) 442-0370
(406) 442-0377 (FAX)
djames@hkminc.com



The Power Block West
7 West 6th Avenue, 3W
P.O. Box 1009
Helena, MT 59624-1009
