



CSS National Dialog– Boise, ID Workshop Russell Street Project, Missoula MT

Project Overview

For several decades, local, state, and federal governments as well as local residents in Missoula Montana recognized Russell Street from Broadway to Mount Avenue was in need of street reconstruction. In 2000 a project was nominated and the level of NEPA documentation was determined to be an EIS due to potential significant impacts along the project. The NEPA process involved extensive outreach to the public, advocacy groups, neighborhood councils, resource agencies, businesses, emergency services, and others as appropriate. During the NEPA process concerns about the final street's appearance were expressed along with various viewpoints and opinions on what should be built, and how multiple forms of transportation would be accommodated.

This process involved extensive outreach to the general public, advocacy groups, neighborhood councils, resource agencies, businesses, and emergency services to name a few. After years of study, research, and public involvement, a Record of Decision was signed in the fall of 2011 advancing the preferred alternative. Thus, a \$50 million project is underway to reconstruct a 21-block section of Russell Street which was built in 1945 (Mount Ave to 3rd St) and in 1965 (3rd St to Broadway).

Existing Conditions

The existing facility is mainly a two-lane roadway with some turning lanes and is classified as having a poor pavement condition. The Clark Fork River Bridge near the Broadway Intersection is narrow, in poor condition, and is one of Montana's highest priorities for bridge replacement. In addition, this corridor contains very limited pedestrian facilities and provides no pedestrian connectivity. The existing corridor does not provide designated bike lanes or connectivity with other bicycle facilities located near this project. Landscaping throughout this 21-block corridor is non-existent leaving the aesthetic look of the corridor unattractive.

Challenges

Throughout the EIS process, various groups and governmental agencies expressed a strong desire to design and construct a new facility which would provide for all modes of transportation, encourage slower vehicle speeds, provide pedestrian and bicycle connectivity within the city, and incorporate aesthetic features into the street's design. The challenge to providing these requests is in balancing them with the need for the street to function as an effective and safe principle arterial for current day traffic volumes of 25,000 AADT and projected future volumes of 35,000 AADT.

Project Scope

The preferred alternative selected in the Record of Decision (ROD) meets the desires for incorporation of context sensitive solutions into the street's design while maintaining the street's function as a principle arterial. It consists of a five-lane facility with signalized intersections, a new Clark Fork River Bridge, bike lanes and pedestrian facilities with connectivity, and landscaped medians and boulevards. The ROD further allows the design phase of this project to gather continued public and stakeholder input to define and refine the specific features to be incorporated in the design phase.



Context Sensitive Solutions

The Russell Street improvement project included CSS early on in the NEPA process. In late 2000, an Advisory Committee was formed to provide citizen input to the City of Missoula, MDT, and FHWA. The committee met 12 times over the course of two years and provided valuable input on critical project issues. Over a period of eight years, the team held 8 public or informational meetings gathering valuable input on issues such as capacity, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit, emergency services, environmental concerns, and the cost of construction. The ROD was signed in 2011 solidifying a project direction. At that point, the CSS aspect of the project became even more important.





The City of Missoula, MDT, and FHWA signed an agreement early on in the design phase outlining a process for gathering public input and making design decisions. The agreement created a Technical Design Committee (TDC) where all three governments are represented with consensus required on project related decisions. If consensus was not reached by TDC on a decision, that decision was elevated to a Decision Team (DT), which also represented all three governments for resolution. With this process, the design has moved forward on schedule with many important design decisions being made in an efficient manner. The design has also garnered support from those groups that in the past have opposed the project.



Results of the CSS Process

As a result of the TDC and DT the following are CSS elements that have been included in the design:

- Raised Bike Lanes
- Wider Sidewalks
- Boulevards with a mix of landscaping and usable space
- Narrower (11') travel lanes
- Inclusion of bus pullouts
- Potential for transit priority with new signal system
- Wider pedestrian and bicycle facilities on the Clark Fork River bridge
- Four separated grade crossing structures for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Wider landscaped median islands
- Texture variance between pedestrian and bicycle facilities
- Discussion of maintenance included in all CSS items

Other positive results from CSS include:

- Support from advocates that previously opposed the project
- Improved cooperation between the City, State, and FHWA
- Support from local property owners
- Phase I is on time and on budget, and has increased in project length due to support

This project is currently in the design phase and is split into segments for schedule and funding purposes. The section between Broadway and 3rd St is scheduled to be built first and it consists mainly of commercial zoning and has active redevelopment. The section between 3rd St and Mount Ave will be built last and is predominately a residential area. The interface of each area with the newly constructed street will provide for unique challenges and solutions.

