



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

**WESTERN FEDERAL LANDS HIGHWAY DIVISION
610 EAST FIFTH STREET
VANCOUVER, WA 98661-3801**

Memorandum

Subject: MT PFH 98-1(1)
Rimini Road Improvement Project
Re: Changes to Project Design-NEPA Re-evaluation- memo to file

Date: August 23, 2012

From: Erin Chipps *EC*
Environmental Protection Specialist
Western Federal Lands Highway Division

In Reply Refer To:
HFL-17

To: David K. Kennedy *DKK*
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Introduction

On May 20, 2011, the Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), which determined that the selected course of action for the improvement of the 6.1-mile segment of Rimini Road will have no significant impact on the human environment. The selected course of action is described as the *Preferred Alternative* in the *Rimini Road Improvement Project, MT PFH 98-1(1), Environmental Assessment* (FHWA, October 2010) (EA).

This project is being developed as part of the Forest Highways category of the FHWA Public Lands Highway Program, which is financed by the Federal Highway Trust Fund. FHWA is the lead agency for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance for this road reconstruction project. In addition to NEPA compliance, FHWA will design the project, issue a construction contract, and administer the actual construction. FHWA is developing this project in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), and Lewis and Clark County, Montana (County).

The selected alternative is shown as the *Preferred Alternative* in the EA and was developed to best address the project's purpose and need. As discussed in the EA, this alternative will introduce a uniform paved width of 28 feet with 12 ft lanes and 2 ft shoulders from the junction of Rimini Road with Highway 12 to Bridge #1 at milepost (MP) 1.1, and a uniform paved width of 24 feet with 10 ft lanes and 2 ft shoulders from Bridge #1 to the end of the project. The *Preferred Alternative* will soften the two sharp corners on the road, upgrade existing roadside features, and replace the first three bridges. This alternative will also enlarge and pave the parking areas at the Tenmile Environmental Education Trail and Tenmile Picnic Area. Finally, the *Preferred Alternative* will reduce sedimentation to Tenmile Creek by improving the

substandard road including paving the surface of the road and, where feasible, moving the road away from the creek and improving roadside drainage features.

Changes to the Project

Updated Bridge Design

As stated in the EA, the first two bridges would be replaced with new bridges, while the third bridge at MP 3.3 would most likely be replaced with a large box culvert with a natural bottom to allow passage of aquatic species. However, FHWA has since determined that even a very large box culvert at MP 3.3 is not sufficiently sized to pass high storm flows and debris on Tenmile Creek. FHWA subsequently decided to replace the bridge at MP 3.3 with a new bridge. All three bridges will therefore be replaced with new bridges. Each of the three new bridges will provide equal or greater freeboard and longer spans than the existing bridges.

Stream Relocation

One of the major benefits of paving Rimini Road is the reduction in sedimentation to Tenmile Creek. As stated in the EA, the road will be moved away from the creek to minimize areas where the stream may cut into the road bank and further decrease sedimentation to the creek. In several locations, however, Rimini Road is flanked by Tenmile Creek on one side and steep talus slopes on the other. Moving the road in these locations is not feasible. Original design concepts included creek-side retaining walls and riprap toe protection.

In a 70% design field review, the WFLHD Project Manager, Environmental Specialist, and Hydraulics Engineer met with representatives from the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE), Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) on the project site. One of the first areas reviewed was the proposed gabion-faced MSE wall beginning at Sta. 83+50 and ending at Sta. 88+60 (510 feet long). The wall runs along the west side of the road, and in most places would be in the water of Tenmile Creek.

The agencies asked if anything could be done to soften the hard wall or move the road to keep some of the vegetation that currently exists along the stream. Because the roadway is pinched between a steep and high talus slope on the east side and the stream on the west side, widening to even a minimal standard results in the need for the wall. The agencies agreed that this location would be an excellent candidate for relocating the stream farther from the road.

Several other sites where proposed walls would impact Tenmile Creek include Sta. 174+30 to Sta. 175+80 (150 feet long) associated with bridge #3, Sta. 271+90 to Sta. 276+40 (450 feet long), and Sta. 284+00 to Sta. 285+65 (165 feet long) and they are also good candidates for stream relocation.

NEPA Re-evaluation

FHWA evaluated whether replacing the bridge at MP 3.3 with a new bridge rather than a box culvert would have impacts other than those identified in the EA. The new bridge design at MP 3.3 will have no additional impacts to wetlands, threatened or endangered species, or cultural

resources as compared with the impacts identified in the EA. The new bridge will, however, will have a longer span than the existing bridge, which will allow the passage of larger storm and debris flows and allow the stream channel to meander slightly more than allowed by the existing bridge.

FHWA evaluated whether the proposed stream relocations would impact environmental resources. The proposed relocations all are within the existing resource survey areas for wetlands, threatened and endangered species, and cultural resources. The relocation sites are not within identified wetlands and will not impact cultural resources. Construction of the new stream channels will not result in impacts to threatened or endangered species outside of those impacts already identified in the EA.

Relocating the stream farther from the roadway will reduce sedimentation and future maintenance issues as well as avoid the long term impacts of placing walls within the stream, which could lead to a more restricted or channelized stream and faster flow and bank incision opposite and/or downstream of the walls.

Conclusion

The impacts associated with the project design changes discussed above are consistent with FHWA's original determination that the Rimini Road Improvement Project will have no significant impact on the environment.