



CHAPTER I

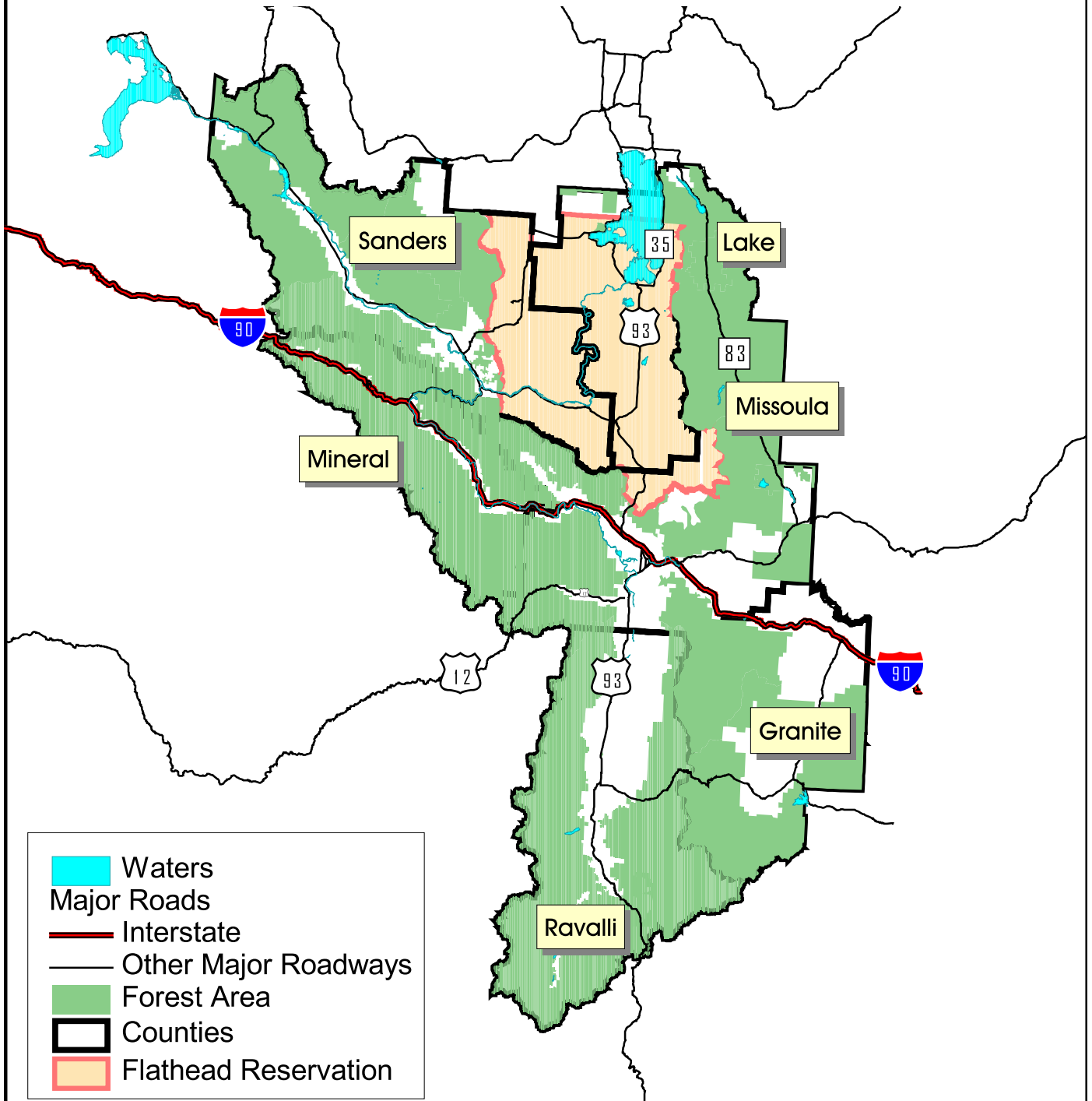
Introduction

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) contracted with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to provide a transit needs assessment and study for the Five Valleys Region. This study assesses existing and future intercity bus transit needs for the Five Valleys area including the rural portions of Missoula, Granite, Lake, Mineral, Ravalli, and Sanders counties that have significant transportation interactions with the Missoula metropolitan area. The study area is shown in Figure I-1. The focus of this study was to identify the intercity transportation needs in the area and to develop a service plan for meeting the needs.



Missoula serves as a regional hub for the Five Valleys Region. There is much interaction between the surrounding region and the Missoula urban area. Much of the regional employment, commercial activity, and health care facilities are located in Missoula. There is a growing recognition of the need for transportation linkages between the communities in the region. Although this includes the Missoula urban area, there are also recognized needs for transportation between some of the smaller communities which have employment, commercial services, and health care facilities. There are also needs for local transportation services within the rural areas of these counties, but those needs are beyond the scope of this project as the focus is on the regional connections.

Figure I-1
Study Area



PROJECT BACKGROUND

This project has grown out of the recognized need for regional transit connections throughout the Five Valleys Region. MDT has taken a lead role because of the regional issues involved in this study. Some of the key study points are:

- The Five Valleys study was conceived to provide good solid baseline information about transit needs in this area, especially as they relate to bus transportation.
- The Missoula area is unique as it has a number of providers that work together to provide services. The study can provide key information for future planning concerning the needs of the traveling public and available resources.
- MDT wanted to include information concerning the interaction among communities in the area. While Missoula is the economic and health care center, not all travel is into Missoula.
- The anticipated outcome of this study is to provide the information needed for long-term planning. That information includes data on travel demands, public input, and potential scenarios for bus services in the area.
- Once this project is completed, it could be replicated in other areas to determine planning alternatives.

STUDY PROCESS

Two Technical Memoranda were prepared as part of this study. This first Technical Memorandum presented the results of several survey and community outreach efforts with an emphasis on identifying regional transit needs. The second Technical Memorandum presented service options that may be considered for regional transit service. The service options were reviewed and recommendations were developed. The recommendations include immediate services to implement and future extensions of the service.

Although MDT took a lead role in undertaking this project, the emphasis was on local input and decision-making. Two groups were organized to provide direction for this study. The first was the Stakeholder Group which was made up of transportation providers, human services agencies, and local citizens. This group provided ongoing public input throughout the study. The second was the Policy

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Group which was made up of elected officials from the counties and local governments within the study area. This group was formed to set policy direction and select the preferred service plan for the region. Meetings were held with both groups in January 2007 to identify the study issues and to discuss the role of each group in the study process. Meetings of the groups were held again in February, June, August, and December 2007.

In addition to the two groups, opportunities were provided for public input. Public open houses were held during February in Hamilton, Plains, Polson, and Lolo. An additional meeting was scheduled in Clinton, but had no attendance. Opportunities were provided again to present the service options in August in Hamilton and Frenchtown. A final public meeting was held in Missoula in December to present the Draft Report.

MDT is conducting a separate study of the US 93 corridor between Florence and Missoula. That project looks at multimodal improvements to be considered for long-range transportation needs in the corridor. The scope of the project is limited to the US 93 corridor, but addresses road improvement options as well as public transit service options.

STUDY ISSUES

As part of the initial outreach, participants in the Policy Group, Stakeholder Group, and public open houses were asked to identify issues that should be addressed as part of this study. These issues are presented in Chapter II.

REPORT CONTENTS

This report includes an assessment of the regional transportation needs. These needs are based on input from the local communities, a regionwide telephone survey, and demographic analysis. Chapter II summarizes the public input through the two groups and the public meetings.

Chapter III is a summary of input from a survey conducted of commuters and transit users in the region. Questionnaires were distributed to commuters and

users of the existing services. Recipients included users of the MR TMA vanpools and employees at major businesses in Missoula.

Chapter IV describes the telephone survey of random households in the region. Households were selected randomly from outside the Missoula urban area and contacted by telephone. Questions were asked regarding current travel patterns, transportation needs, demographics, and attitudes regarding transit services. A total of 1,188 responses were collected. General locations of the respondents are identified so that information may be analyzed by commute corridor in the region.

Chapter V presents an analysis of the transit demand in the region. A variety of approaches are used to assess the demand including demographics, model split, and the local survey analysis. The results show there is demand for transit in each of the corridors, but the level of demand is limited. The corridor with sufficient demand to consider daily transit service is US 93 south of Missoula.

Chapter VI provides the analysis of service options for the region. These options include enhanced ridesharing and vanpools, commuter bus service, and all-day bus service. Potential funding sources for each of the options are also described.

Chapter VII presents the recommended services for the region. Specific recommendations are provided for each corridor. The recommendations include enhanced ridesharing service, new vanpools, and commuter transit service from Lolo to Missoula.