

Executive Summary



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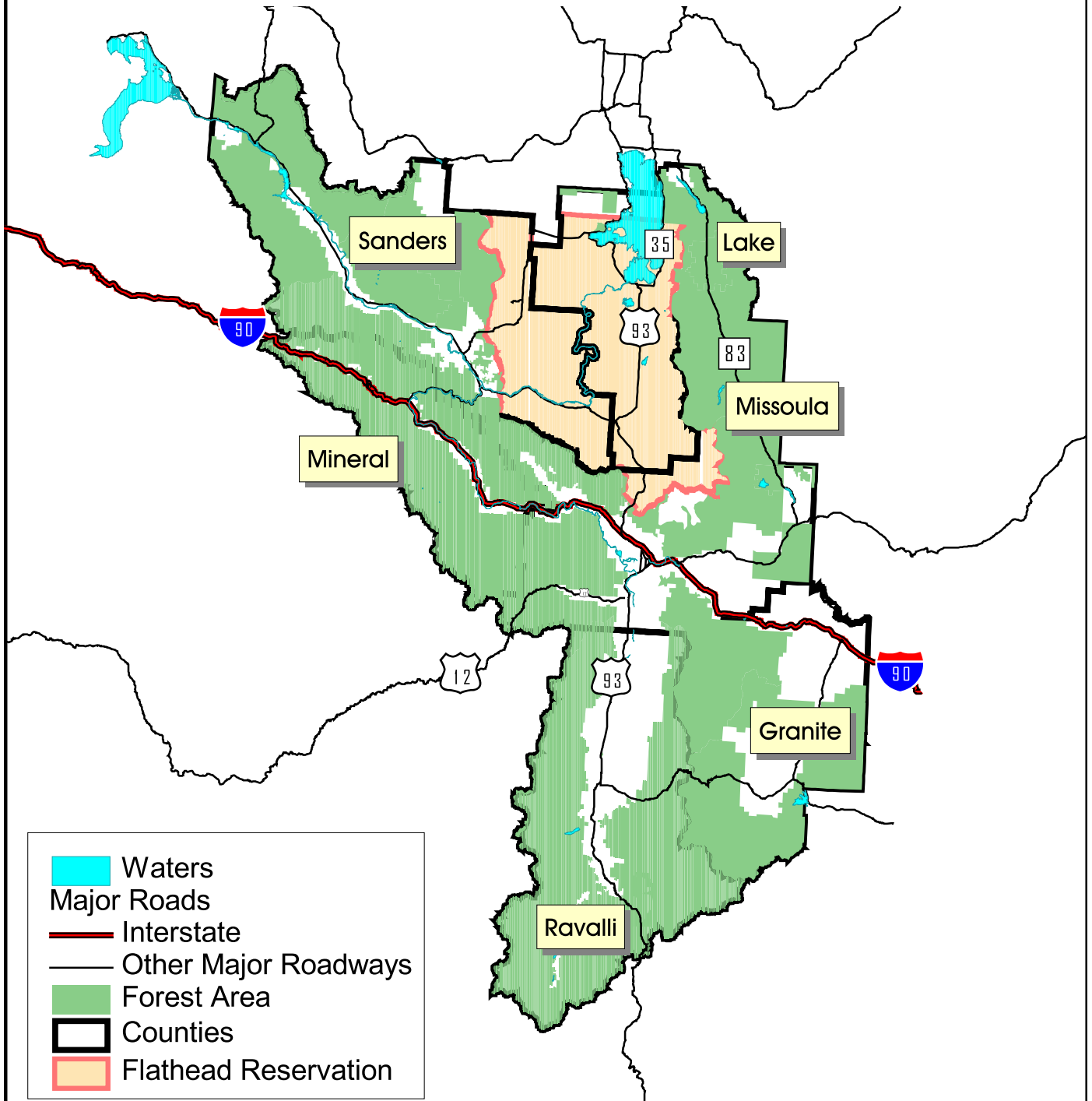
The Missoula area in western Montana continues to grow with corresponding demands on the transportation system. Mountain Line runs an effective transit system in Missoula, and the Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Association (MRTMA) operates vanpools in the region around Missoula. There are rural



transit systems operated in the surrounding counties. There has been growing interest in providing additional public transit service in major corridors in the region. 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 ES-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 ES-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 Group which was made up of elected officials from the counties and local govern-

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ments 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.

COMMUTER SURVEY

Two survey efforts were completed as part of this study. The first was an effort to obtain information about passenger demographics, travel mode, trip purpose, and perceptions on characteristics which would influence decisions to use bus service into Missoula. This survey was conducted February through March 2007 through both online and hard copy distributions. LSC worked with the University of Montana, Missoula in Motion, MR TMA, and other agencies to distribute and make known the survey effort. Local employers were notified both through Missoula in Motion and an LSC mailing. While this does not provide a statistical sampling of commuters, the information is used to complement the community survey and public involvement program as described in this document. The survey findings are described in Chapter III, and the actual survey instrument is provided in Appendix C. A total of 605 responses were received.

As this survey effort was focused on commuters, the results show the majority are employed and the primary trip purpose to Missoula is for work. The majority of respondents drive alone, but there is a significant percentage (36 percent) who carpool, ride with family or friends, or are in a vanpool.

A series of questions were asked to determine the potential users of transit service among these commuters. The results indicated that 28 percent of the respondents would be potential users of transit service if it was available from their home to place of work. The actual number of users would be influenced by other factors such as the time of service, frequency of service, and cost.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

During February through March 2007, the University of Montana, in association with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc., administered a community telephone survey for the Five Valleys Region. The purpose of the survey was to gather input from residents about their need for public transportation services and the feasibility of providing transit services in the Five Valleys area. During February through March 2007, the University of Montana, in association with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc., administered a community telephone survey for the Five Valleys Region. The purpose of the survey was to gather input from residents about their need for public transportation services and the feasibility of providing transit services in the Five Valleys area. The survey was administered to a random sample of 1,188 residents who live in the Five Valleys Region. The survey was based on a representative sample in each corridor that represents the Five Valleys Region.

The results of this survey effort are presented in Chapter IV and detailed responses are provided in the appendices. A majority of these respondents are employed, although the percentage is less than the commuter survey because this effort was a representative of all households in the region. The most common purpose for traveling to Missoula was for shopping (49 percent) with work trips being the primary purpose for 20 percent of the respondents and medical trips the primary purpose for 15 percent of the respondents. Approximately 14 percent of the respondents travel to Missoula at least five times a week while 60 percent

travel to Missoula less than once a week. Approximately 55 percent of respondents drive with a friend or family followed by driving alone reported by 40 percent of respondents. There is a small percentage of respondents who carpool (two percent) and less than one percent of respondents either vanpool, use the bus, or use other modes of transportation. Respondents were also asked about travel to another community in the region to determine the needs for transportation to communities other than Missoula. Approximately half of the respondents indicated there was another community to which they traveled frequently with Kalispell being mentioned most often.

A series of questions were asked to determine the potential users of transit service among these commuters. The results indicated that five percent of the population would be potential users of transit service if it was available from their home to Missoula. The actual number of users would be influenced by other factors such as the time of service, frequency of service, and cost. A more detailed analysis was completed for each of the corridors as part of the transit demand analysis.

TRANSIT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A key step in developing and evaluating a transit plan is a careful analysis of the mobility needs of various segments of the population and the potential ridership of transit services. Transit demand analysis is the basic determination of demand for public transportation in a given area. There are several factors that affect demand, not all of which can be forecasted. However, as demand estimation is an important task in developing any transportation plan, several methods of estimation have been developed in the transit field. The analysis makes intensive use of the demographic data and trends discussed previously.

Chapter V presents an analysis of the *demand* for transit services in the Five Valleys Region based upon standard estimation techniques. The transit demand identified in this section was used in the identification of transit service alternatives. Seven methods are used to estimate the maximum transit trip demand in the Five Valleys Region.



- Mobility Gap
- Modal Split Demand Estimates
- Employee Transit Use Estimates
- Commuter Demand based on the Community Survey results.
- Modal Split Analysis
- County-to-County Worker Flow
- Greatest Transit Needs

Each of these methods is described in detail and gives an indication of the transit demand in the region. Specific analyses were completed for each of the corridors to develop and evaluate transit service options for each corridor. The needs assessment and demand estimates give an indication of the potential demand, but actual demand is a function of the specific service provided.

TRANSIT SERVICE OPTIONS

Chapter VI provides an analysis of different service options for each of the corridors. The options range from increased ridesharing services to all-day transit service in the corridors. The costs of each option are estimated based on current transit service costs in the region. Demand for each option was estimated based on the demand relationships developed in Chapter V. The service options are compared using a variety of performance measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on discussion and feedback regarding the alternatives presented in Chapter VI, LSC has prepared a recommended plan for service in the Five Valleys region. The service recommendations are based on the identified level of demand in each corridor. Implementation of the recommended services may be phased as funding becomes available and demand is verified. The recommended phasing and costs are shown in Table ES-1.

Table ES-1 Summary of Recommendations			
Recommended Service	Annual Cost	Annual Passengers	Cost per Passenger
Ridematching	\$5,000		N/A
Vanpools			
Missoula to Hamilton	\$10,328	5,000	\$2.07
Polson to Missoula	\$16,065	5,000	\$3.21
Polson to Kalispell	\$11,934	5,000	\$2.39
Bus Service			
Plains to Missoula	\$74,880	3,100	\$24.15
Commuter Lolo to Missoula	\$38,000	8,200	\$4.63
Commuter Hamilton to Missoula	\$172,000	20,100	\$8.56
Polson to Kalispell	\$68,640	6,000	\$11.44
All-Day Lolo to Missoula	\$260,100	14,000	\$18.58
All-Day Hamilton to Missoula	\$425,000	34,000	\$12.50

Recommendations include enhanced rideshare services, additional vanpools, and regional transit service in selected corridors. Recommendations are provided for phased implementation of the service. The initial components of the service should be the enhanced rideshare services, increased vanpools, and coordination of transit service from Sanders



County and Mineral County to Missoula. Subsequent phases include commuter transit service and all-day transit service in the US 93 South corridor between Lolo and Missoula and between Hamilton and Missoula. Transit service is also recommended between Polson and Kalispell.

Funding options are described in Chapter VI. No funding sources have been identified as available for any of these services. Key steps to implementation of the recommendations will be prioritization by local officials, identification of local funding sources, and pursuit of additional grant funding. Implementation is anticipated to require up to five years because of the need to identify funding sources and obtain funding commitments.