ASHTON TO MONTANA STATE LINE

US 20 CORRIDOR PLAN

US 20 FROM THE ASHTON HILL BRIDGE TO THE MONTANA STATE LINE AND AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SH 87 LOW VOLUME CORRIODR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

The US 20 Corridor Plan is a long-range planning effort conducted by and for the Idaho Transportation Department. The purpose of the Plan is to assess the condition of the US 20 Corridor and identify the necessary improvements to meet the corridor's system and user needs for the next 20 years. This plan reviews US 20 from the Ashton Hill Bridge to the Montana State Line, and is the second phase of a corridor analysis (the first phase, a review of the facility from Idaho Falls to Ashton, was completed in 1999) commissioned to ensure that improvements to the entire corridor between Idaho Falls and the Montana State Line are guided by a long range plan.

1.2 Planning Steps

The US 20 Corridor Plan was developed over an 18 month period according to the steps outlined in the ITD Corridor Planning Guidelines. The process integrated technical assessment and public input as shown in Table 1. The planning process used in the development of the US 20 Corridor Study is outside of but parallel to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Future project development efforts could invoke NEPA, depending upon the funding source used and level of anticipated environmental impacts.

Planning Steps
Stakeholder Interviews
Public Workshop #1 ***Project Kick Off—Identify Issues***
Research Existing Conditions
Document Existing/Projected Environment/Land Use
Analyze Future Travel Demand and Performance
Develop Corridor Purpose & Need Statement
Public Workshop #2 ***Corridor Goals and Alternatives***
Generate Alternatives
Evaluate to identify Feasible Alternatives
Public Workshop #3 ***Review Draft Feasible Alternatives***
Analysis to determine Recommended Alternatives
Public Workshop #4 ***Present Draft Corridor Plan Recommendations***
Prepare Draft Corridor Plan
Prepare Final Corridor Plan

1.3 Corridor Study Area/Land Use

The US 20 Corridor Plan study area extends from the Ashton Hill Bridge to the Montana state line and includes the SH 87 corridor from its junction with US 20 at milepost 0, north to the Montana state line at milepost 9.15, as shown in the Project Map (page 3). For the purposes of this study, the corridor was divided into four segments;

Segment 1

Extending from the Ashton Hill Bridge (milepost 363.37) to Island Park (milepost 382.28), this segment consists of mountainous to rolling terrain, with high mountain forests. Much of the land immediately adjacent to the corridor is in State or Federal ownership, with few private property holdings. In the northern portion of this segment there are campgrounds, access to Harriman State Park, and the Mesa Falls Scenic Byway. Access to the highway in this segment consists primarily of forest road access, or Jeep trails, a subdivision (Pinehaven), and a resort (Henry's Fork Lodge).

Segment 2

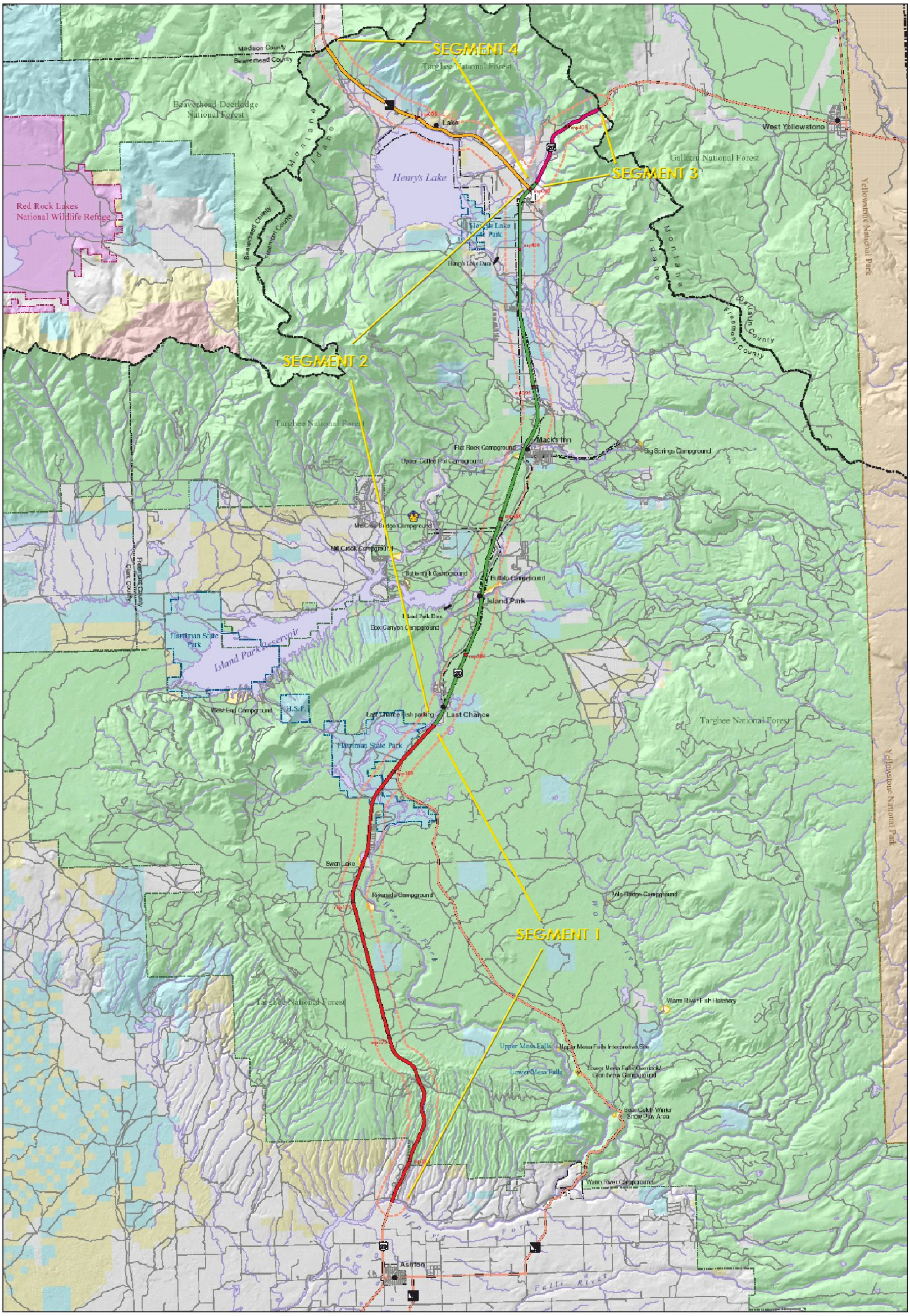
Crossing the Henry's Fork of the Snake River twice and the Buffalo River once, Segment 2 traverses the main part of the Island Park community and continues North through the Henry's Lake Flats to the intersection of SH 87. While incorporated Island Park proper is approximately 32 miles long, the most developed portion extends from Last Chance (north of Harriman State Park) to Sawtell Road (just south of the Henry's Lake Flats). The majority of the commercial services are located along this portion of the corridor and include gas stations, restaurants, outfitters and guides, real estate offices, and other specialty retail shops, many of which access US 20 directly. This area is characterized by campgrounds, lodges, and "second-home" communities. While much of the land north of Sawtell Road is privately held, development has not been as intense as in the remainder of this segment.

Segment 3

The shortest segment in the analysis area is only 3.7 miles in length and traverses the Continental Divide separating Idaho from Montana. This area is largely wooded and has very few destination locations, although a parking area for a trail along the top of the divide is located a few hundred yards west of the Montana state line. This part of the corridor is mountainous and has large portions of the highway covered in shade for most of the winter months resulting in snow and ice buildup. The greatest horizontal curvature is found in this portion of the study area.

Segment 4

Encompassing that portion of SH 87 as it lies in the state of Idaho, Segment 4 travels around the north side of Henry's Lake, where there is significant second-home ownership. SH 87 is a low volume corridor with approximately 600 vehicles per day during the summer months, tapering off to approximately 120 vehicles per day during the winter months.



Project Map

N
W E
S

0 1 2 3 4 Miles

- Places
- City Limits
- State Park Boundary
- National Forest Boundary
- National Park Boundary
- National Wildlife Refuge Boundary
- State Boundary
- County Boundary
- Streams
- Waterbodies

Roads

- Highways
- Local Roads
- Mileposts
- Study Area

Project Areas

- Ashton Hill Bridge to Island Park
- Island Park Community
- Island Park to the Montana State Line
- State Highway 87
- Recreation Sites

Public Land Ownership

- B.L.M.
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Department of Energy
- Forest Service
- Military Reservations
- National Parks & Monuments
- Open water

Private

- State of Idaho
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

1.3.1 Corridor Communities

Island Park, with a population of approximately 225 year-round residents, is the only incorporated community in the Corridor. Island Park touts itself as the community with the "longest main street in America". Main Street in this case is US 20, including approximately 29 miles of right-of-way though the Island Park city limits. Island Park is primarily a tourist and recreation area with opportunities for fishing, hunting, hiking, boating, camping, and winter snowmobiling. The community also includes a substantial and growing number of vacation homes. Unincorporated community areas within Island Park providing visitor services, accommodations, food, and fuel include Last Chance, Mack's Inn and Island Park Resort.

1.3.2 Existing System Conditions

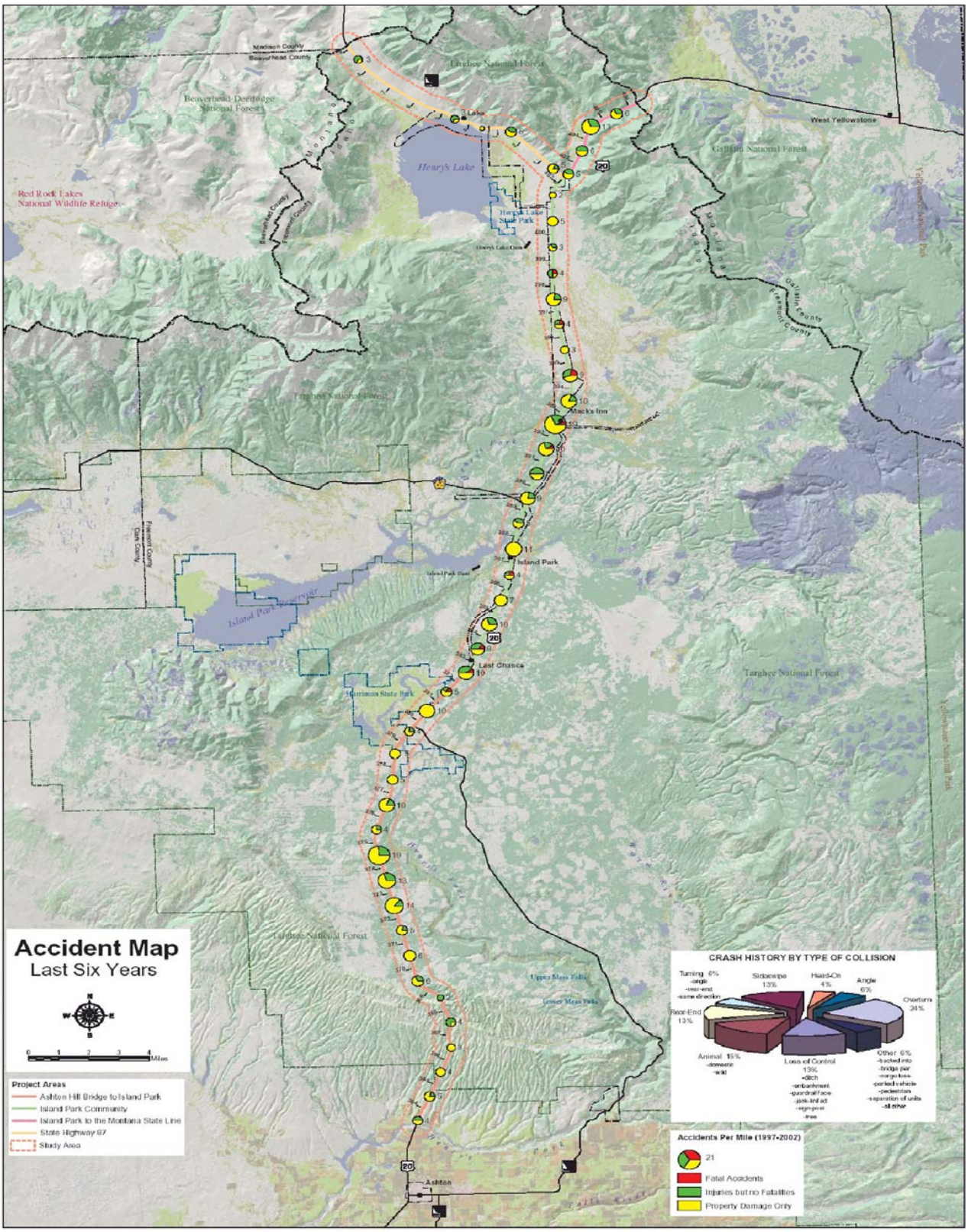
US 20 is predominantly a two-lane rural highway and is classified as a National Highway System (NHS) roadway. Both US 20 and SH 87 are classified as arterial roadways. The two-lane configuration is augmented with occasional passing lanes on hill grades such as near Mack's Inn, center turn lanes in developed areas through Last Chance and intermittent left and right turn lanes at Island Park and Mack's Inn. Due in part to recent widening to add passing lanes in some areas, much of US 20 has shoulder widths of only four to six feet or less which does not adequately accommodate emergency stopping or shared use with the growing number of bicyclists. Access on the corridor exceeds ITD's goal of three approaches per mile for rural sections and four approaches per mile for urban sections in many areas. This is especially evident through the Last Chance area of Island Park, which has approximately 30 approaches within 0.6 miles. As a result, many of the improvement strategies focus on this highly developed area. It is important to note that shoulder widths of four to six feet on SH 87 are not viewed as substandard due to its low traffic volume (600 annual average daily traffic (AADT)).

1.4 Traffic Volumes

Perhaps the most challenging issue confronted during the US 20 corridor planning process is the widely fluctuating traffic volumes. This fluctuation results from a higher than average seasonal variation in use, which reflects the primary summer recreation-related uses on and through the corridor. Traffic volumes reach an annual high in July and a low in January. Permanent traffic counters recorded traffic volumes in July as approximately 98% higher than the annual average daily traffic, and in January, traffic volumes drop 52% below the annual ADT. This puts summer volume highs at approximately five times greater than winter volume lows. In addition, truck volumes on SH 87 have increased sharply from 2001 to present. Historically, volumes were approximately 70 trucks per day and have jumped to over 300 per day in 2002, remaining at that level since. These increasing volumes present safety concerns to area residents and the corridor's wildlife.

1.5 Corridor Accidents

Accidents on the corridor were analyzed from data provided by ITD, Idaho State Police and the Fremont County Sheriff's department. Accident data is helpful in determining the locations of possible roadway design deficiencies, the need for safety improvements, maintenance issues, and the needs and sites of high-number animal collisions. The accident data, including location by milepost and type of accidents, is shown in the map below.



1.6 Public Involvement

The public involvement effort for the US 20 corridor plan was structured in accordance with ITD Public Involvement Guidelines and fully integrated into the overall planning process. The public involvement plan

included a blend of activities designed to support the needs of corridor residents, while meeting the needs of the planning process to provide information and gather input at key decision points. Input from the public, including stakeholders and agencies, was critical in the development of the corridor purpose and need, and the goals and objectives, which were used to build project understanding and support and to guide the determination of improvement alternatives. The public involvement activities conducted are shown in the table below.

US 20 Corridor Plan Public Involvement Plan Summary	
ACTIVITY	**SCHEDULE**
Stakeholder Interviews	**April/May 2003**
Public Workshop #1 • Introduce the project and identify issues & concerns	**(June 3, 4, 5, 2003) Island Park, Idaho Falls, Ashton**
Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting #1 • Introduce the planning process • Confirm roles and responsibilities • Identify initial issues and concerns	**June 4, 2003**
Stakeholder Workshop • Refine issues • Present existing conditions • Identify preliminary corridor purpose and goals	**July 16, 2003** *Note: Stakeholder Workshop includes the TAC and key corridor representation*
Project Team / ITD Work Session • Refine purpose, draft goals and objectives	**Mid July 2003**
Public Workshop #2 • Confirm draft purpose and goals • Brainstorm initial alternatives	**October 1 and 2, 2003 – Ashton and Last Chance**
Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting #2 • Present purpose, goals, and objectives • Refine initial alternatives	**October 2, 2003**
NEPA Agency Workshop • Present draft purpose, goals, and alternatives • Review screening criteria • Discuss alternatives relative to NEPA guidelines	**December 16, 2003**
Public Workshop #3 • Review screening criteria • Present preliminary feasible alternatives	**April 14 and 15, 2004 – Ashton and Island Park**
Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting #3 • Present results of public workshop #3 • Refine feasible alternatives	**April 15, 2004**
Public Workshop #4 (TAC Invited) • Present most feasible alternatives • Present draft plan recommendations	**July 27 and 28, 2004 – Ashton and Last Chance**
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLS	
• Media coverage (newspaper, radio and TV)	As needed to support the Public Involvement Plan and meet public needs
• Surveys and comment forms	Coordinate with public events and project needs
• Study brochure and newsletters	At introduction and prior to each public workshop
• Study mailing list	Ongoing use and upcoming event notification
• E mail tree	To support and augment study mailing list
• Plan web site and E-mail address	To provide information and gather input
• Presentations	To present study information and gather input

1.6.1 Public Input Highlights

Public input was important to the planning process, by assisting the planning team in identifying key issues and refining improvement alternatives into plan recommendations. Although public events were held at Last Chance, Ashton and Idaho Falls (first session only), participation was greatest at the Last Chance sessions, due to its proximity to the greatest number of corridor residents. In addition to on-corridor opportunities, there were a high number of written comments received via mail, in comment forms, and the plan's web page.

Highlights of initial public input identified the following key issues:

- *Collisions with wildlife*
- *Narrow shoulders*
- *Excessive speeds and speed limits too high*
- *High volume and speed of truck traffic*
- *Dangerous access points at Last Chance, Elk Creek, Mack's Inn, and Island Park Resort*
- *Lack of passing lanes*
- *Desire for additional left turn lanes at key access points*
- *Protect adjacent wetlands*
- *Dysfunctional culverts and stream crossings at Targhee, Tighe, and Howard Creek that prevent fish migration*

Public input regarding alternatives provided the following key comments:

- *Minimize impacts to businesses when reducing accesses*
- *Recognized need to reduce the number of accesses through Last Chance*
- *Strong support for new left turn lanes at key corridor intersections such as Red Rocks*
- *Reduce speed on SH 87 along Henry's Lake residential area*
- *Reduce speed to 45 in advance of Last Chance and to 35 through Last Chance*
- *Lack of support for bypass around Last Chance*
- *Widening of US 20 to four lanes (plus center turn lane) through Last Chance must include "urban section" improvements to enhance pedestrian movements and community function on both sides and across US 20*
- *Pursue culvert and stream crossing improvements at Tighe, Targhee, and Howard Creeks as soon as possible*
- *Continue research to determine the most effective methods to reduce wildlife collisions*
- *Strong support for additional passing lanes*
- *Very little support to widen US 20 throughout the corridor*
- *Lack of support for traffic signal or interchange at Big Springs intersection*
- *Strong desire for additional public involvement opportunities during project development to work out specific access and design issues.*

The draft report, which detailed corridor findings and suggested improvement alternatives, was distributed to local libraries in the area for the public to be afforded the opportunity to review and comment on the report. Very few comments were received and are addressed in full in the corridor plan document.

1.7 Purpose and Need

The Purpose and Need for the corridor plan is derived from a combination of technical assessments and the public input outlined above. It served as the general guide to the identification and evaluation of alternatives to meet the long-term needs of the corridor and its users.

Purpose: The purpose of the US 20 corridor is to provide a safe multi-use facility that is context sensitive and serves local, regional, and through-traffic demands.

Need: Highly fluctuating seasonal demand places a greater volume of traffic on the corridor in the summer peak season. The corridor serves many recreational sites, and several of the Forest Service road approaches are substandard. Other present geometric deficiencies that are present include substandard shoulders, and some advisory speeds below 50 miles per hour. As the area has grown in popularity, growth of businesses along the corridor has created an abundance of driveway approaches. As traffic volumes have increased, congestion and safety concerns have developed. There is a lack of adequate turn lanes at major intersections. As volumes have increased, so have collisions with wild animals, which are the second highest recorded reason for crashes on the corridor. Finally, when the highway was built, and as it has been improved over the years, it has bisected wetlands as well as restricted stream flows and spawning areas for fish passage.

1.8 Corridor Goals

A series of goals were developed to more specifically outline the needs of the Corridor and the issues that are to be addressed through improvements to the system. The goals are based on technical assessment of corridor conditions and needs, but are also driven substantially by public input. Each goal is also supported by more specific objectives, which are listed in full in the corridor plan document.

1. **CORRIDOR SAFETY –** To accommodate the safe use of various traffic modes:
    a. Provide safe access on and off US 20.
    b. Decrease animal/vehicle accidents.

2. **LOCAL CONTEXT DESIGN** – Provide roadway improvements that are context sensitive (a collaborative approach to develop a transportation facility that complements its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic and environmental resources while maintaining safety and mobility).

3. **CONGESTION –** Provide improvements to decrease congestion.

4. **ENVIRONMENT** – Minimize adverse impacts to the environment resulting from roadway use, maintenance, and improvements.

5. **RECREATION FACILITY ACCESS** – To enhance recreation support facilities.
    a. Provide for bike/pedestrian/ATV facilities.

6. **TRAVELER INFORMATION**
    a. Provide adequate and visible signage.
    b. Provide the traveler with improved roadway condition information.

7. **ROADWAY DEFICIENCIES** – Correct deficiencies in roadway design, curvature, speeds, facilities.

8. **MAINTENANCE** – Provide adequate, cost effective, low impact winter maintenance.

1.9 Plan Recommendations: Build Alternatives

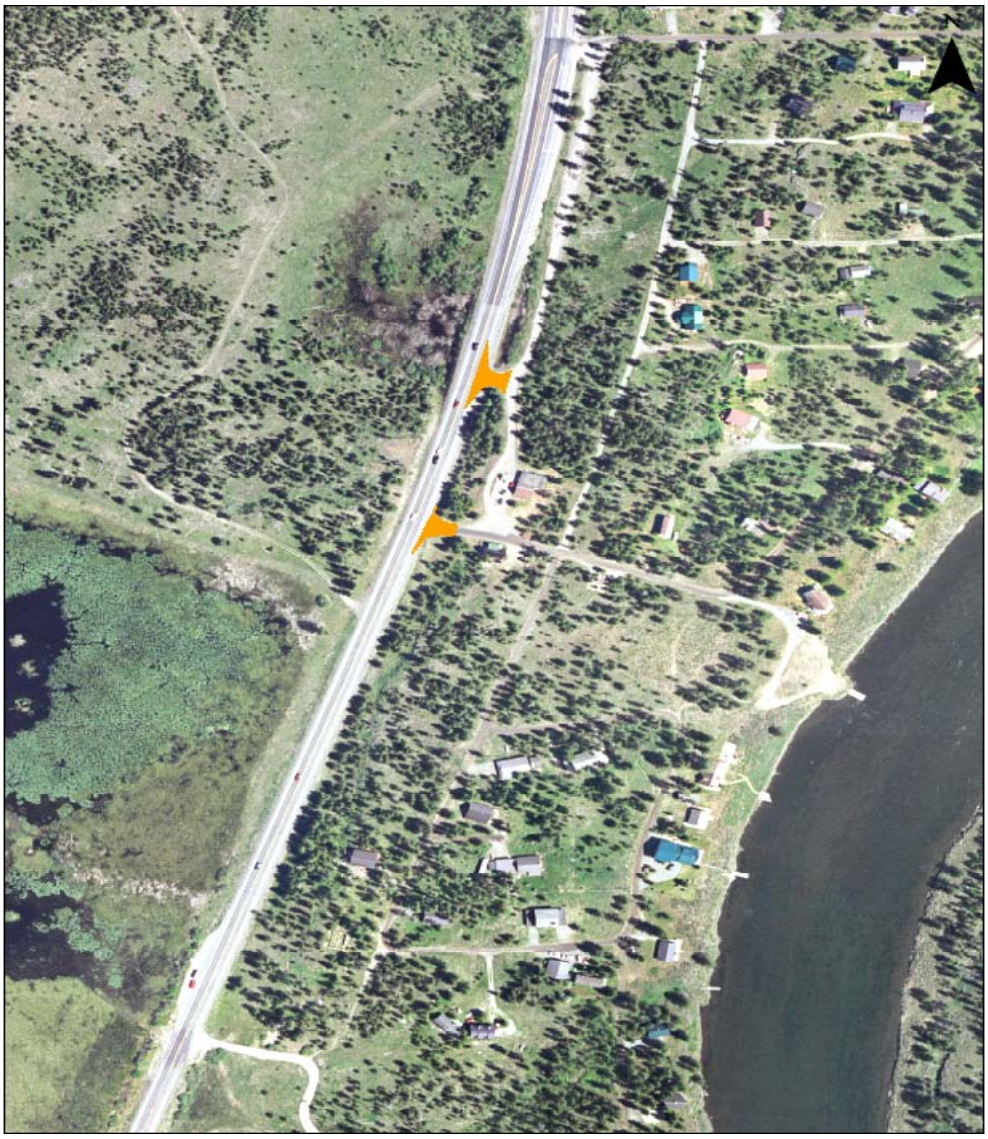
Improvement alternatives to address corridor deficiencies satisfy the purpose, need, and goals and meet long-term needs were developed at three levels; possible alternatives, feasible alternatives and most feasible alternatives. Concept illustrations of the most feasible alternatives are included as part of the final plan recommendations. ITD recognizes the need for additional detailed planning and discussion with affected business and property owners and corridor residents during project development to determine the specific and most appropriate improvements.

1.9.1 Pinehaven

- Reduce the number of access points into the south Pinehaven community by closing the two southern access points to the residential area and allowing access through the central Pinehaven entrance where turn lanes on US 20 currently exist.

- Allow the southern access to Henry's Fork Lodge to remain intact. Consider the installation of turn lanes on US 20 at this intersection.

PINEHAVEN AREA



1.9.2 Last Chance

- Reduce the number of access points to the roadway to a maximum of 8 to 12 main points through the area.

- Consider the enhancement of internal vehicle circulation by improving frontage or backage roads (shown in yellow below) to the east of the present highway.

- Widen US 20 to four through-lanes with left-turn bays at major intersections to reduce traffic congestion.

LAST CHANCE

1.9.3 Yale Kilgore

- Reduce the number of access points to the roadway and incorporate acceleration and deceleration lanes (shown in orange below).

- Minor realignment of the Yale-Kilgore Road to intersect with Big Elk Creek Road to create a four-legged intersection and improve safety.

OR

- Realign the present roadway (shown in yellow below) to the west of the existing intersection to eliminate the many driveways and roadway access points in the area to reduce conflicts with high-speed traffic.

YALE - KILGORE

1.9.4 Mack's Inn

- Reduce the number of access points to the roadway (shown in yellow) and add acceleration and deceleration lanes where possible (shown in orange).

  OR

- Realign the South Big Springs Loop Road (shown in red) to the top of the grade, reduce the number of access points to the roadway, and add acceleration and deceleration lanes where possible.

MACK'S INN

1.9.5 Sawtell/Big Springs

- Add right turn acceleration and deceleration lanes (shown in orange), and limit access to major intersections only.

  OR

- Add "Jug Handle" type improvements (shown in yellow) to the intersection to decrease the amount of left turning traffic and limit access to the major intersection only.

SAWTELL/BIG SPRINGS

1.9.6 State Highway 87

- Improve the roadway surface to match that of the Montana section, including shoulder width, clear zones, and pavement condition.

- Reduce the speed limit between mileposts 3 and 5 to 45 miles per hour, along with signage improvements associated with the speed limit change.

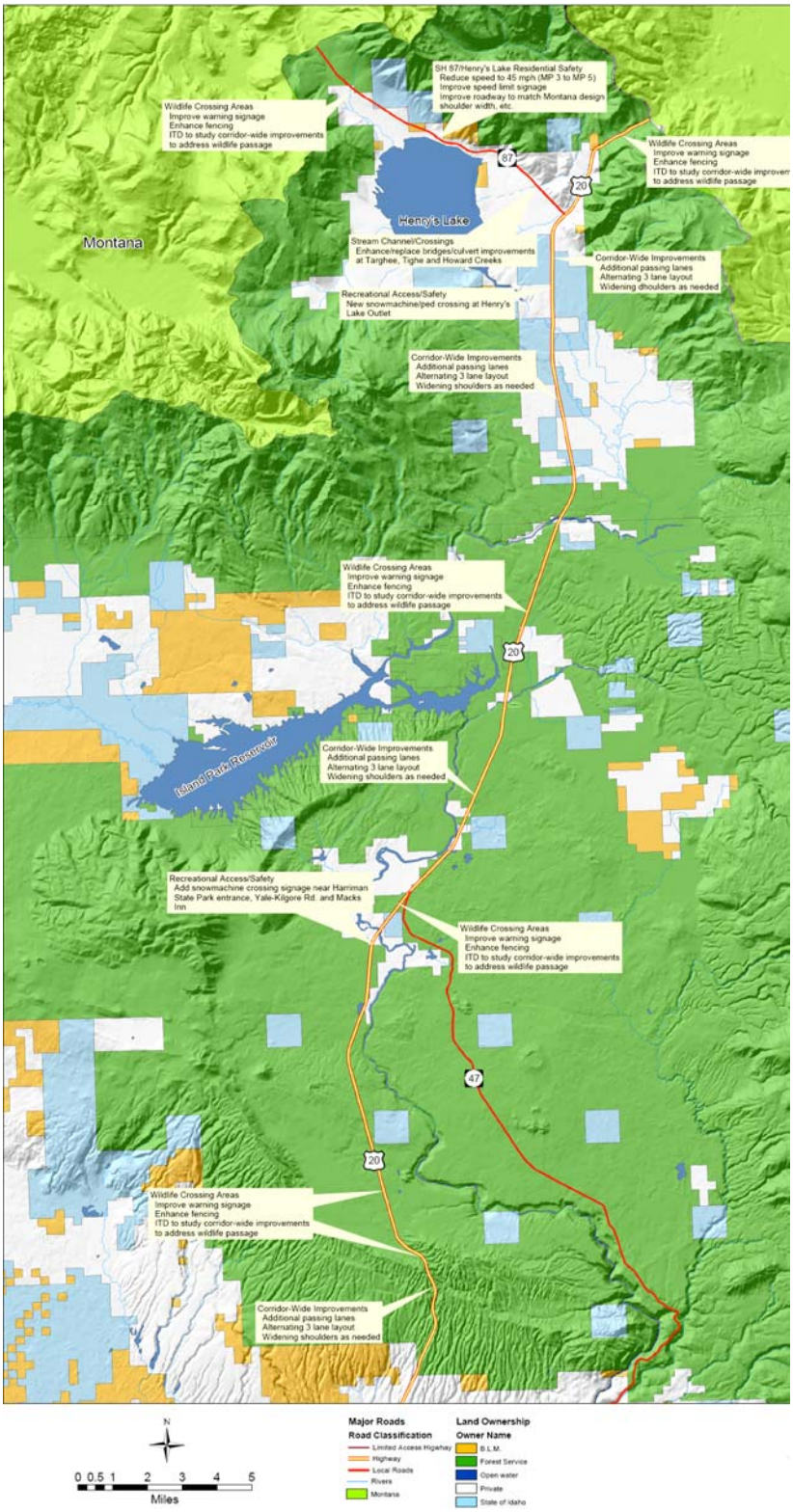
1.9.7 Corridor-Wide Improvement Alternatives

Corridor-wide improvement alternatives include measures to:

- address safety concerns
- increase capacity
- improve level of service
- reduce wildlife collisions
- improve fish migration
- enhance roadway information for corridor users.

Specific improvements include:

- the addition of passing lanes and alternating three lane layouts
- additional left turns at major intersections such as Red Rocks
- enhanced informational and directional signage
- widened shoulders
- continuation of studies to determine the most effective method to reduce wildlife collisions.



Note: ITD believes that it is best to not commit to one or a few alternatives at this time in order to keep a wide range of options open. Final decisions will be made with input from corridor residents as part of project design and development.

1.10 Plan Recommendations: Policy Changes

The following recommended policy changes are designed to support the safe and efficient function of US 20, the implementation of the US 20 Corridor Plan, and the management of growth along the corridor. These policy recommendations are intended to be implemented in a manner that is in conformance with local land use policies and that are not detrimental to facility operation.

Access Control

- No new accesses to US 20 will be allowed without prior review and approval by the Idaho Transportation Department and either the City of Island Park or Fremont County, whichever is the regulatory jurisdiction.

- The Idaho Transportation Department will be a requisite reviewer of all Island Park and Fremont County development proposals that have impacts of 100 or more vehicle trips per day during peak season.

Environmental Impacts

- All improvements to US 20 will be planned and implemented with sensitivity to the natural and man made environment; with preference to solutions that minimize impacts to the environment.

Improvements Design

- New improvements to US 20 from Ashton Hill to the Montana state line will be done in a manner that is context sensitive to the function, aesthetics, and safety of the communities, residences, businesses, and resources along US 20.

- New improvements to US 20 will include the accommodation of bicycle and pedestrian facilities and for safe mobility across and along the corridor

Coordination of Efforts

- The planning and implementation of any new development and improvements to US 20 will be done in a collaborative manner, involving the Idaho Transportation Department, all affected local governments, related agencies, interested user groups, property owners, and business operators. In addition, the Montana Department of Transportation will be invited to participate as may be appropriate in order to enhance the compatibility of US 20 and SH 87 facilities with the continuation of US 20 and SH 87 into Montana.

Developer Impacts and Responsibility for US 20 Improvements

- In concert with both the City of Island Park and Fremont County ordinances, developers will be responsible for improvements to mitigate impacts to US 20 resulting from their development, including, but not limited, to intersection improvements such as turning lanes and shoulder widening.

- Developers may be required to conduct an impact study to determine the necessary improvements or modifications to be implemented on US 20 resulting from the development of adjacent lands. The threshold for conducting such an impact study will be determined by the regulatory entity, as outlined in the Island Park and Fremont County comprehensive plans and ordinances, with input from the Idaho Transportation Department.

    - Traffic impact studies should be used to determine the impacts and any necessary mitigation on US 20, SH 87, adjacent roadway systems, other nearby developments and neighborhoods resulting from development in the vicinity.