



Meeting Minutes

Project: Whitefish Rail Corridor Study

Subject: SME Meeting #1

Date: Tuesday, November 04, 2025

Attendees: Spender Dodge (HDR)
Craig Workman (Public Works Director)
Mary Ann Monaldi (BNSF)
Gary Whitman (area Homeowner)
Cole Hadley (Fire/EMS)
Bridger Kelch (Whitefish PD)
Casey Malmquist (Whitefish Yards)
Brittany Cremer (HDR) virtual

1. Agenda

- a. Welcome and Introductions (all)
- b. Project Overview (Craig and Spencer)
- c. Explanation of SME Role/Why They are Here
 - i. We are tapping key stakeholders/members of the community to convene and offer insight and feedback to the project team throughout this process.
 - ii. They serve as a great community touchpoint. We aren't asking for a huge time commitment; SRC will likely meet two additional times throughout the course of the study.
 - iii. This group will NOT have official governing/approval authority but serves as an important advisory board.
- d. Project Presentation (Spencer)
 - i. Whitefish Rail Corridor Crossing Study
 - ii. Areas of Focus
 1. The Whitefish Rail Crossing Study examines safety and accessibility at four key locations:
 - a. State Park Road
 - b. Birch Point Drive
 - c. Viaduct/Baker Avenue
 - d. East Second Street
 2. These crossings were identified as competitive for discretionary funding made available through the Federal Railroads Association (FRA) and BNSF.
 - a. The City and BNSF provided the required matching funds for an application to the Railroad Crossing Elimination Program.
 - iii. Study Components
 1. The components of the study will include:
 - a. Safety and access analysis for each of the existing crossings for businesses, housing, education, recreation and health services.
 - b. Identification of barriers to EMS with analysis of how the crossings contribute to emergency service delays.



- i. This is really a space where this group can offer valuable real-life experience and insight. We're hoping to identify potential impediments to EMS response.
 - c. Analysis of wildfire evacuation routes constrained by current crossings.
 - d. Public outreach and involvement to promote equity in project planning and produce workable recommendations for the affected community.
- iv. Study Goals
 1. Improve public safety, multimodal mobility and connectivity, and access.
 2. Remove barriers to equity, community development, and economic opportunity.
 3. Support potential elimination/replacement of at-grade crossings with accident and incident history located in close proximity to BNSF.
 4. Provide for reliable passenger rail service to the Whitefish Amtrack station.
 5. Improve railroad corridor safety, security, hardening and related reduction in the potential for trespassing on BNSF property.
 6. Enhance freight and passenger railroad operating safety, efficiency, and velocity.
- v. Tentative Project Timeline
 1. In June 2024, the team signed a grant agreement to advance the study
 2. In June 2025, the project management plan was created outlining the study goals, process, etc.
 3. In September 2025, the Existing Conditions Report was submitted to FRA for review.
 4. In October 2025, the stakeholder coordination plan was reviewed and approved.
 5. In November 2025, stakeholder outreach began (City Council and SME)
 6. In early 2026, the project team will deploy a survey to gather feedback from the public.
 7. In early 2026, the SME will reconvene to discuss survey and feedback findings.
 8. In the spring of 2026, the project team will host a public meeting to share study findings and continue gathering information and feedback from the public.
 9. In May/June 2026, the project team will share complete Corridor Crossing Study Report.
- vi. Comments and Questions from the Group
 1. Near Birch Point, it might be valuable to review response time data if/when EMS has to wait for a train during patient transport.
 2. Wildfire concerns—access gets brought up every year. When will we look at getting an overpass vs. what we currently have to improve response times?
 3. The community doesn't currently have a formalized evacuation plan; our work/findings in this study should work to complement those efforts.
 4. BNSF/Mary Anne wants to continue working with the public to share this information and keep the conversation going.
 - a. She'd also like to see some improvements to reduce the number of rail riders. Is there a way to partner with law enforcement to limit the amount of time the transient population spends in Whitefish.
 5. Is the project team considering under rail or underpasses as potential design options? This is of particular interest at the Birch Point location.
 - a. We are considering all potential design options at this time. However, it's easier and cheaper to move road grade vs. rail. We're examining design options/potential improvements for all four of the targeted rail locations.



6. Gary's Insights (Birch Point Resident)
 - a. Lived in subdivision for decades
 - b. Been sleeping next to/along the railroad for years.
 - c. Shared an experience where he had to wait an hour and 45 minutes at the Birch Point crossing—consistently long wait times.
 - i. Spencer/Craig encouraged the entire SME to begin informally tracking/noting wait times for this crossing and others.
 - d. Wonders if there's any private capital interest in/around Birch Point to fund an undercrossing.
 - e. Concern that the majority of the population living there is elderly, in need of routine medical care and attention.
7. Trail under the railroad bridge on the west side of the Birch Point crossing.
 - a. Discussion around that potentially being expanded to allow for temporary EMS access. It sounds like there might be a grade issue along the path. It also has several switchbacks.
 - b. Discussion that likely, we'd need to build a \$30M bridge/underpass at this area that effectively only serves 50 people. This seems like a hard sell.
8. 2nd Street Crossing
 - a. This one seems to impact the largest number of people in a more serious way.
 - b. Craig and Spencer acknowledge that 2nd Street and Birch Point seem to show the greatest potential for improvement. Those are the two crossings that seem to generate the most complaints from the public.

2. Next Steps

- a. Alternatives Analysis will begin (project team evaluating various options/opportunities/priorities for improving the four targeted crossings). This includes:
 - i. Conceptual Engineering
 - ii. Transportation Analysis
 - iii. Preliminary Environmental Impact Analysis
 - iv. Conceptual Cost Estimates
 - v. Recommendations
 - vi. FRA Review
- b. Spencer and Britt begin initiating stakeholder coordination.
- c. The project team will begin developing web content for the project to "live" on the City's website
- d. The project team will begin developing survey content (questions and graphics).
- e. The project team will develop a promotional plan/strategy to drive survey engagement.
- f. Spencer and the consultant team to identify current and future grant funding opportunities to continue project design, development and construction.
- g. Britt/Spencer/Craig to reconvene SME Meeting #2 following compilation of online survey results.

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