

Economic Impact Of Reconfiguring Montana Two-lane Highways



Client

Facts

Period 2005

Project Country

By Cambridge Systematics, Economic Development Research Group, ICF Consulting and SEH for Montana Department of Transportation, 2005

Economic development boosters in rural areas sometimes point to the lack of four-lane highways as a factor holding back their ability to attract business. In sparsely populated states such as Montana, it is also the case that many of the trunk highways are two-lane roads since that is all that can be justified by current traffic levels, according to traditional highway engineering standards. This situation naturally raises concerns about how a state should evaluate economic development and traffic requirements in its investment planning.

To address these concerns, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) hired the team of Cambridge Systematics (prime contractor) and Economic Development Research EDR Group (subcontractor) to examine the issue of highway expansion and economic development, and then develop a tool that can be used to evaluate when there is a sufficient justification for widening a two-lane highway.

The work by EDR Group focused on identifying conditions in which highway widening could actually make a difference in economic development, which in turn depends on the extent to which highway widening makes a difference in business accessibility, cost or reliability for connecting with labor, suppliers and customer markets. Staff of EDR Group compiled business information and conducted business interviews for selected industry sectors, and evaluated economic development attraction and expansion opportunities associated with highway system expansion and reconfiguration.

In accomplishing these tasks, EDR Group developed a Montana-specific application of its Long range Energy Alternatives Planning (LEAP) tool to predict the business attraction opportunities associated with alternative scenarios for highway improvements. This was used as a component of the larger Highway Economic Analysis Tool (HEAT) completed by Cambridge Systematics.

Contact Persons