## Project Updates Continued

**What is the purpose of the proposed project?**

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods. Specifically, the purpose of the proposed project is to:

- Improve the transport of goods and services within the study area;
- Provide the public with a centrally accessible, safe, efficient, and reliable link between ND Highway 16 and US Highway 85 within the study area (system linkage);
- Connect the transportation network on the east side of the Little Missouri River to the transportation network on the west side of the Little Missouri River (internal linkage);
- Accommodate a variety of vehicles ranging from a two-wheel drive passenger vehicle to agricultural, commercial, and industrial vehicles and equipment.

The safe and efficient movement of people and goods would be accomplished by improving connectivity through construction of a reliable crossing of the Little Missouri River, and upgrading and/or creating new roadways to best meet roadway design standards.

**Why is the proposed project needed?**

Billings County is leading a planning effort to improve internal linkage and system linkage from ND Highway 16 to US Highway 85, between the north and south units of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park, to meet a variety of socioeconomic demands. These include fire management and industry (agriculture, oil and gas, and recreation/tourism). Currently, no reliable crossings exist over the Little Missouri River between US Highway 85 south of Watford City (Long X Bridge) and the city of Medora (Bridges on I-94), a distance of nearly 50 aerial miles and 70 highway miles. Approximately 18 private fords and one public ford exist; however, they are unreliable because of seasonal conditions and are inaccessible to many types of vehicles. In addition, the majority of the existing fords are located on private land; requiring landowner permission to cross the river.

**Has the Little Missouri State Scenic River Commission been contacted?**

Yes. Coordination with the Little Missouri State Scenic River Commission has been ongoing since April 2007 in the form of written correspondence and meetings.

The Commission has reviewed the preliminary range of reasonable alternatives and found them to not violate the Little Missouri State Scenic River Act (NDCC 61-29).

However, coordination with the Commission will be ongoing throughout the environmental process. Once alternatives have been defined and are carried forward for impact analysis, they will be presented to the Commission again. At that time, the Commission will determine if the proposed project is in compliance with the Little Missouri State Scenic River Act.

**Where are we in the EIS process right now?**

Currently, we are developing and defining a range of reasonable alternatives.

**What is the next step in the process?**

After a range of reasonable alternatives have been developed and selected to be carried forward, an alternatives public workshop will be held to present these alternatives to the public for discussion and comments.

**Why has the schedule been changed?**

The project schedule, presented in the Coordination Plan, has recently been updated to reflect the current project schedule. This schedule was updated because the time allotted to gather relevant data and finalize the purpose and need took longer than anticipated.

**When will my comments be addressed?**

Your participation in this process is important, and we hope that this newsletter has been able to answer some of your basic questions. Formal responses to all substantive comments will be provided in the Draft EIS. We thank you for your comments and hope you continue to be an active participant in the environmental process.

## Comments/Concerns

**Where can I find additional information about the proposed project?**

For more information and updates between newsletters, please visit the Little Missouri River Crossing project website at www.billingscountynd.gov.

**Who can I direct my concerns to?**

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Jennifer Turnbow, Project Manager
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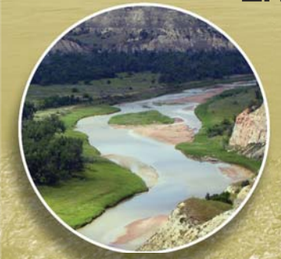

# LITTLE MISSOURI River Crossing EIS Newsletter

Project # FHO-02-04(001) PCN #16970

## Introduction

**What is the purpose of this newsletter?**

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide general project information, project updates, describe what is the next step in the process, and where to find additional information.

This newsletter is the first in a series of newsletters that will be developed and distributed throughout the environmental process of the proposed Little Missouri River Crossing project.

Project # FHO-02-04(001) PCN #16970

## General Project Information

**Where is the proposed project located?**

The proposed project is located within a study area between the southern border of the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, the northern border of the South Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, the eastern border of US Highway 85, and the western border of ND Highway 16.

**Has the study area been expanded?**

In order to ensure a full range of reasonable alternatives are considered, the northern border of the study area has been expanded from the Billings County/McKenzie County line to the southern border of the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

**Is the Elkhorn Ranch Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park included in the study area?**

No. Due to the historical significance of this site, the Elkhorn Ranch Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park is excluded from the project study area. The exclusion of the property means construction is not, and would not be, proposed on the Elkhorn Ranch Unit property.

**What is the proposed project?**

An EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) has been initiated for a proposed crossing of the Little Missouri River in conjunction with upgrading existing roadways and/or creating new roadways to connect the transportation network on the east side of the Little Missouri River to the transportation network on the west side of the Little Missouri River, from ND Highway 16 to US Highway 85, within the study area.

**What is an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement)?**

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, requires the analysis of "major federal actions significantly affecting the human environment." An EIS is the highest level of National Environmental Policy Act documentation and is an informational document intended for use by both decision-makers and the public. It discloses relevant environmental information concerning the proposed action and the no-action alternative.

**What does an EIS entail?**

Generally, an EIS document includes the following chapters: Purpose and Need; Alternatives; Affected Environment; Environmental Impacts and Mitigation; and Comments and Coordination. Throughout the development of an EIS, the process is a collaborative effort, offering opportunities for public involvement in the development of the purpose and need and range of reasonable alternatives.

Once a range of reasonable alternatives is developed, environmental impacts are analyzed with respect to both the natural and human environment. Data used in the impacts analysis may be gathered from agency solicitation; field studies, such as, but not limited to, cultural resources inventories, wetland delineations, noise studies, and hydraulic studies; and the use of geographical information systems to quantify potential impacts. An assessment of potential cumulative impacts is included in this analysis, as is potential mitigation measures to avoid and/or minimize impacts to the environment.

Once a Draft EIS is completed, it is made available for public comment for 45 to 60 days.

**Who is leading the proposed project?**

The lead agencies of the proposed project are the Federal Highway Administration, North Dakota Department of Transportation, and Billings County.

**What is the difference between the current project and previous efforts by Billings County to construct a crossing over the Little Missouri River?**

The current EIS is different than previous environmental studies because it uses an expanded study area, considers a greater range of alternatives, and follows procedures contained in SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users).

**What is SAFETEA-LU?**

SAFETEA-LU is the current Federal Highway Administration bill which directs federal transportation spending. It was approved by the President on August 10, 2005 and will expire in 2010.

SAFETEA-LU requires early and frequent coordination with agencies and the public. Requirements include the development of a Coordination Plan to outline the environmental process and an opportunity for involvement for agencies and the public in the development of the purpose and need and range of reasonable alternatives.

**When was the current EIS process initiated?**

The EIS was initiated when the Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on October 12, 2006, Volume 71, No. 197.

## Project Updates

**What has been completed as part of the current EIS process?**

In accordance with Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU, a Coordination Plan was developed and a notice of availability of the plan was published in the Federal Register on February 19, 2007. That same day, solicitation-of-views letters were distributed to federal, state, local, and private agencies with a 30-day comment period. On March 5, 2007, agency and public scoping meetings were held in Bismarck, and, on March 12, 2007, a public scoping meeting was held in Medora. Since then, field reviews were conducted with resource agencies in July of 2007. The following month, a range of reasonable alternatives meeting was held with lead, cooperating[1] , and participating agencies[2] . During this time, the purpose and need was developed. It was approved by the lead agencies in March of 2008. (Note: the purpose and need is a living document and will evolve throughout the environmental process).

**Why was a purpose and need not presented at the scoping meetings?**

SAFETEA-LU requires an "opportunity for involvement" for participating agencies and the public in defining the project purpose and need. The lead agencies must give participating agencies and the public the chance to become involved in the development of the project purpose and need statement. At the time of the agency and public scoping meetings, a purpose and need had not yet been drafted. One of the purposes of these meetings was to gather the public's comments for use in the development of the purpose and need. Bulleted points were presented at the scoping meetings in an effort to get involvement in defining the purpose and need. A purpose and need has been written that takes into account the comments received during the scoping meetings and the solicitation-of-views responses. The draft purpose and need statement may, and should, evolve during the EIS process due to new or changing information.

*Project Updates Continued on Back.*

[1] A cooperating agency participates in the actions of the lead agencies throughout the EIS process. Also, a cooperating agency may provide other approvals needed for a project, such as permit approvals, land acquisition approvals, or other approvals required for a project to move forward.

[2] A participating agency is involved in the project planning efforts at the same level as a cooperating agency; however, a participating agency is not required to provide any project approvals.