Central Montana Transportation Study

Involvement Plan





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MONTANA
Department of Transportation

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is developing the *Central Montana Transportation Study* to create a comprehensive long-term management plan in response to anticipated impacts from planned development and military activities impacting the region. The pre-MEPA/NEPA regional study will be a collaborative process with MDT, FHWA, military, local jurisdictions, resource agencies, and the public to identify transportation needs and potential solutions.

Following MDT's Montana Business Process to Link Planning Studies and NEPA/MEPA Reviews, the study will include an environmental scan, existing and projected conditions evaluations, needs assessments, short-, mid-, and long-term recommendations for transportation improvements, a prioritized implementation plan, and military, agency, and public engagement.

An initial step in the transportation planning process is to develop an *Involvement Plan* (IP) to guide involvement opportunities throughout the planning process. The planning process encourages early communication with interested parties to help identify needs, constraints, and opportunities and determine reasonable improvements given available resources and local support. The IP identifies multiple strategies to encourage meaningful participation and engagement and aligns with MDT's established processes as outlined in its *Public Involvement Plan.*[1]

1.1 Purpose of the Involvement Plan

The purpose of this IP is to guide the implementation of strategies providing ongoing opportunities for involvement by the public, stakeholders, and agency representatives. Education and outreach are essential elements in the study process. Providing complete information, timely notices, and ample opportunities to comment, as well as ensuring full access to key decisions, will help achieve MDT's public involvement goals. The methods described in this IP are not intended to restrict consideration or use of other methods to encourage agency and public participation. Early and continuous involvement in all major actions and decisions is paramount to the success of the planning process.

1.2 Study Area

The study covers a broad area within Central Montana, with specific focus on the Great Falls and Lewistown areas as well as MDT's on-system routes providing access to United States Air Force (USAF) facilities. Study routes are located within nine counties, including Cascade, Chouteau, Fergus, Judith Basin, Lewis and Clark, Pondera, Teton, Toole, and Wheatland Counties. The study area boundary is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

[1] Montana Department of Transportation, *Public Involvement Plan*, available at: https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/manuals/pubinvhb.pdf

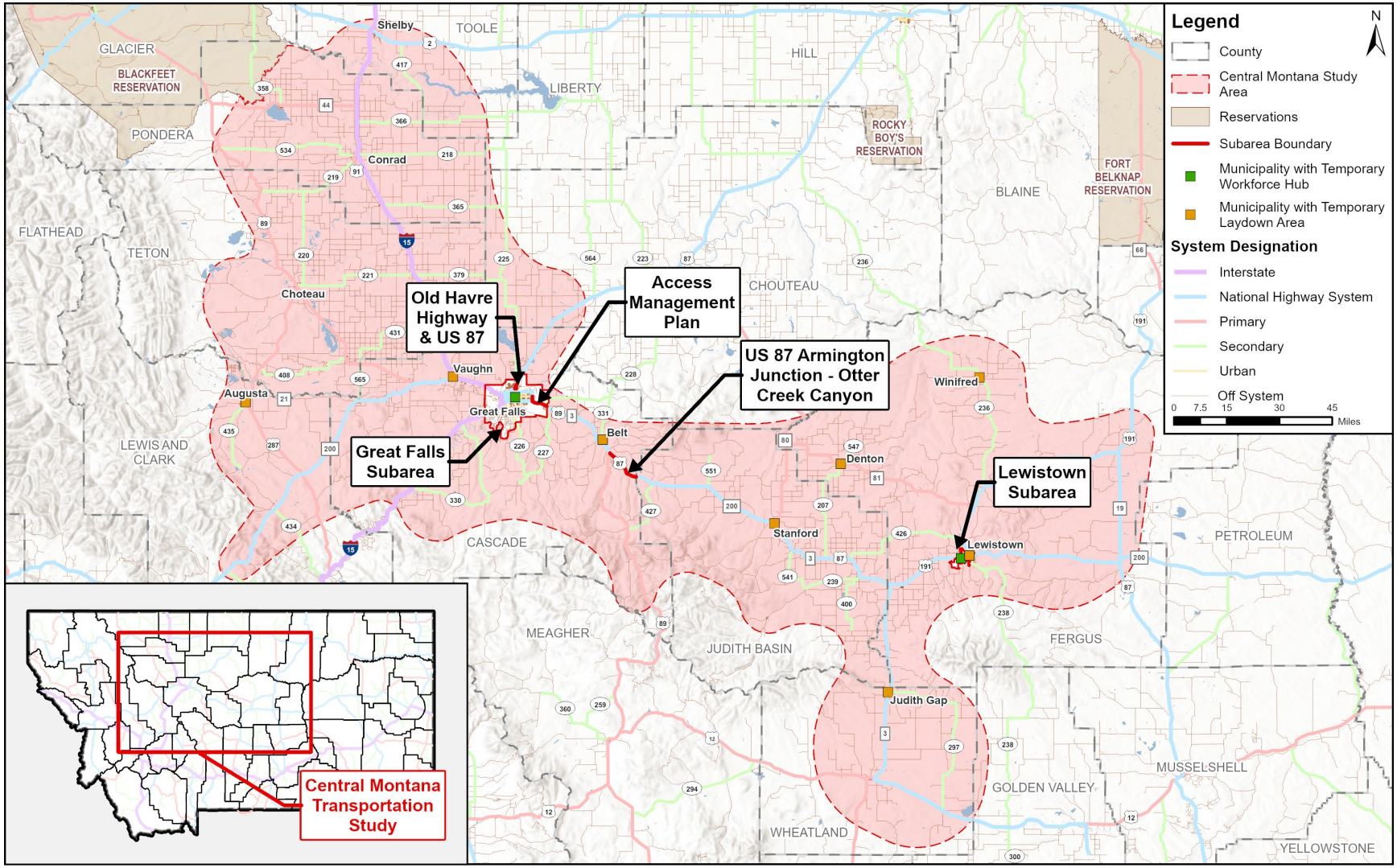


Figure 1: Study Area

In addition to evaluations encompassing the entire study area, multiple subcomponents will focus on subareas of study. These include:

- **Access Management Plan:** 57th Street S from 2nd Avenue N to US 87/89 (RP 7.5 to RP 8.4) and US 87/89 from 57th Street S to Secondary 227/228 (RP 87.4 to RP 90.4)
- **Lewistown Subarea Analysis**: MDT on-system routes and local routes within the urban boundary
- **Great Falls Subarea Analysis:** MDT on-system routes within the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) planning area
- **Old Havre Highway & US 87 Analysis:** Old Havre Highway from 25th Avenue NE to 15th Street and US 87 from 25th Avenue NE to Great Bear Avenue
- **US 87 Armington Junction – Otter Creek Canyon Analysis:** US 87 corridor between Armington Junction and Otter Creek Canyon (RP 0.0 and 7.2)

2.0 AUDIENCES

Active participation and input will be encouraged at every stage of the planning process. Key audiences that will be involved in this process include both internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders will assist in guiding the planning process and will be tasked with making decisions relating to the regional study as well as future project development. External stakeholders include all others with interest, jurisdiction, or expertise related to the regional study area.

2.1 Plan Contacts

The following contact information for the MDT and consultant project managers will be provided in all published information for the study.

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2.2 Project Management Team

A Project Management Team (PMT) consisting of a core group of MDT staff will guide the study and provide direction to the consultant team. Virtual PMT meetings will occur approximately every two weeks, for a total of up to 60 meetings over the study period. Meetings will be informal, with discussion items and follow-up action items communicated before and after the meetings. These meetings will be important to

ensure the consultant team stays on track with the overall study schedule and provides services in alignment with MDT goals and expectations for the study.

2.3 Advisory Committee

An Advisory Committee (AC) consisting of key MDT, FHWA, military, and local representatives will meet approximately every three to four months throughout the study duration, for a total of approximately eight virtual AC meetings over the study period. To maintain a manageable committee size, participation will be limited to the most directly affected parties, with other potentially affected parties to be included in less frequent stakeholder communications.

AC meetings are intended to be informational to report on consultant progress, identify issues and questions regarding the study development process, gain information from partner agencies, and solicit feedback on study deliverables. The consultant will prepare meeting agendas, attend the AC meetings to present updates on the current work effort, and prepare meeting summaries following each meeting. Topics will address the status of ongoing tasks associated with individual study components, data requests for partner agencies, summaries of key findings and recommendations from study components, and upcoming or recent public/stakeholder outreach activities. The meetings will be important for the exchange of technical information and ideas during the development of the study and will provide the consultant team with essential information, feedback, and guidance.

2.4 Military Officials

Subject to confidentiality considerations, it will be important to request available information and feedback from the USAF regarding plans to renovate, construct, and expand military infrastructure and capabilities under the Sentinel Project. The study team will contact Montana-based personnel from Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Defense Access Road (DAR) Program as well as regional and national military program leads to identify potential points of contact that may be interested in participating in the study.

2.5 Resource Agencies

The consultant team will coordinate with the AC to develop a list of key resource agency contacts for this study. We anticipate involvement from state, federal, and local agencies with permitting or other regulatory authority such as the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP), Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Additionally, land management agencies such as the United States Bureau of Land Management (USBLM), United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBOR), and United States Forest Service (USFS) will have a vested interest due to property holdings in the study area. We will ask these agencies to help us confirm resources and permitting/authorization requirements within the study area, define anticipated mitigation needs, and identify opportunities to avoid or offset potential impacts.

2.6 Other Stakeholders

Input from a diverse range of stakeholders is important to the planning process, and multiple parties will benefit from informational study updates. Specific stakeholder representatives will be identified in coordination with the consultant team and the AC. Stakeholders may include local government officials, residents, current and future business owners and private companies including VACOM Manufacturing, adjacent landowners, law enforcement and emergency service providers, schools, wildlife and conservation organizations, trucking and freight representatives, utilities, recreational groups, and other interested and knowledgeable individuals.

2.7 Public

Members of the public have a vested interest in safe and efficient travel on Montana's public roadways. To address public concerns, comments and input will be collected and considered throughout the planning process. An official comment period will be provided after the release of the draft *Central Montana Transportation Study* report. Additionally, all comments and concerns received at meetings and through individual discussions will be considered by the AC throughout the planning process and will help establish critical areas of concern and consideration.

3.0 STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

Engagement strategies are intended to share information about the planning process, identify known barriers and constraints within the study area, understand planned development that may impact the transportation system, and obtain meaningful input by reaching a diverse cross-section of interested parties. Proposed strategies and outreach tools are discussed below.

3.1 Study Branding

Cohesive branding can be an effective communication tool to visually associate multiple study components. For this study, a branding guide and set of logos will be developed using a consistent set of colors, fonts, and branded elements in accordance with *MDT Communication Guidelines.*[2] Additionally, all mapping and reporting developed for the study will conform to a unified style guide. Although each study component will have its own identity and standalone deliverable, unified branding will help tie all pieces together into the compiled *Central Montana Transportation Study*.

3.2 Study Website

A study website will be used to encourage public interaction and to provide study information. The website will be hosted by MDT at https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/centralmt/ and updated as needed throughout the study process. The consultant will provide informational

[2] Montana Department of Transportation, *MDT Communication Guidelines*, available at: https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/manuals/brandguide.pdf

material to be posted to the website including contact information, meeting announcements, frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the study process, a description of the study, and study documents. Given the expansive regional study area and the large number of potentially interested and affected parties, the study landing page will be a critical communication platform to share information and provide study updates.

3.2.1 Online Updates

For individuals unable to attend scheduled events, study updates will be published on the study website. These could take the form of informal, text-only status briefings or short presentations with visual components. These updates will provide an opportunity to stay in touch and provide fresh, relevant content throughout the study process.

3.2.2 Commenting Platform

To supplement the MDT study landing page, an interactive commenting platform using the ArcGIS Online Reporter application will allow the public to provide feedback on the performance of the existing transportation system in many of the same ways as a paper map would serve during a public meeting. This platform is a convenient way to gather feedback from a large portion of the population, separate from in-person and virtual events.

3.3 Public Informational Meetings

Multiple public informational meetings will take place during the study process. The first will occur after initial existing and projected conditions have been evaluated for the broad study area. The purpose will be to explain the study process and discuss preliminary issues and concerns within the study area. Members of the public will be invited to provide information about existing conditions and share input for developing the needs and objectives for the regional transportation network.

Additional informational meetings will coincide with study subcomponents to provide updates on ongoing work efforts. Presentations and exhibits will focus on subarea findings, options under consideration, and preliminary recommendations. Members of the public will be invited to provide feedback on recommendations before they are finalized.

For each set of informational meetings, in-person open houses will be hosted at a community gathering location within the respective subareas (anticipated in Great Falls and Lewistown). Extended hours will be offered for the open houses to allow convenient attendance; formal presentations will not be provided. In addition to the in-person meetings, the study team will host virtual participation opportunities using either MDT's preferred online platform for live events (such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams) or the MDT website for on-demand participation. The virtual participation opportunities will include the same information presented at in-person meetings for those unable to attend the live events.

Meeting announcements will be developed and advertised before the informational meetings in accordance with MDT notification requirements. The ads will announce meeting locations, times, and dates; the format and purpose of the meetings; and the locations where

documents may be reviewed (if applicable). The *Great Falls Tribune*, *Lewistown News-Argus*, and other media outlets may carry display ads announcing meeting details. Meetings may also be announced on local radio and/or television stations, on MDT's social media accounts, by email to the study contact list, and by mail to adjacent landowners for smaller defined locations within the broader study area, as appropriate.

A newsletter/flyer will be developed before each set of informational meetings. The newsletters will describe work in progress, preliminary findings and recommendations, and other relevant topics. The newsletter will be posted to the study website, emailed to the study contact list, and provided to AC members and select stakeholders for distribution to their constituents and posting to their respective websites. Printed copies of newsletters will be available at the informational meetings.

3.4 Military Meetings

An initial meeting will be scheduled with military personnel to explain the study purpose and process, identify appropriate points of contact, and determine what level of information can be shared with MDT and study partners in light of confidentiality considerations. This initial meeting will be important to build trust, promote a mutually beneficial relationship, and facilitate study communication. Subsequent check-in meetings will be scheduled as appropriate to share study progress and request updates or additional information available from USAF. Meetings may occur either in person or virtually, depending on the preference and availability of military personnel.

3.5 Resource Agency Coordination

Resource agency coordination will be conducted to present the findings of the draft *Environmental Scan* as well as the initial findings of the *Existing and Projected Conditions Reports*. Resource agencies will be asked to help identify initial avoidance areas, mitigation needs, and opportunities.

3.6 Stakeholder Outreach

To improve engagement and gain valuable information, the study team will target key stakeholder groups that are familiar with transportation conditions and needs, land uses, and resources in the study area. In concert with public informational meetings, the consultant team will offer drop-in hours for informal conversations about the study in addition to scheduled, in-person meeting opportunities. The purpose of these meetings will be collaborative and interactive to identify issues and concerns associated with impacts to the transportation system.

VACOM Manufacturing will specifically be contacted to learn more about its proposed facility in Lewistown. A virtual meeting will be requested to better understand the scope and timeframe of the proposed development and potential effects on the regional transportation network.

Information gathered from stakeholder conversations will help the study team fill potential data gaps and identify areas for special consideration throughout the planning process. Additionally, the study team will send electronic study updates and announcements to the full stakeholder list identified in coordination with the AC to encourage broad stakeholder participation in the planning process.

3.7 Public Review Period

At the conclusion of the study, the consultant team will facilitate a public review period for the draft *Central Montana Transportation Study* to obtain input and feedback. This will be an important opportunity to demonstrate how the study incorporates background research and considers military, resource agency, stakeholder, and public input received to arrive at the study findings and determinations. Targeted emails will announce the availability of the draft study, with specific focus on partner agencies, stakeholders, and resource agencies to request their review and comment on the draft study.

4.0 ACCESS AND VISIBILITY

MDT is committed to ensuring equal opportunity and nondiscrimination in programs, services, and activities offered to the public. The study team will employ the following strategies to ensure all beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of MDT programs are offered an equal participation opportunity.

4.1 Information Availability

Technical and planning-level information related to the data used in the development of the study will be available in memoranda, mapping, graphics, and other formats. The materials will be made available on the study website.

4.2 Consideration of Public Input

Input and comments from stakeholders and the public will be considered by the AC throughout the planning process. Public comments received on the draft study report will be documented and included as an appendix.

The consultant team will be available to all interested parties to receive comments and answer questions. All information published regarding the study will provide contact information for the project managers and public involvement contacts. Comments can be submitted throughout the planning process via the website, in writing, by phone, or by email.

4.3 Community Accessibility Considerations

Targeted efforts are necessary to involve the entire community affected within the study area. The following steps will help with these efforts:

- **Provide appropriate accommodations:** Appropriate non-discrimination statements and alternative accommodation contacts will be provided on all printed materials. Accessibility accommodations will be offered for all public outreach activities, including virtual meetings. Multiple event formats and communication methods will be used to ensure rural residents and other individuals without internet access can participate in the study process. Upon request, alternative participation methods and materials will be made available.

- **Seek help from community leaders and organizations:** To facilitate meaningful involvement with communities, consultation with appropriate local leaders will be conducted to determine the most effective times, methods, and locations to reach the local populations.
- **Be sensitive to diverse audiences:** At meetings and in printed materials, the study team will attempt to communicate clearly and understandably. Printed materials will be developed using easy-to-understand language.

5.0 OUTREACH SUMMARY AND SCHEDULE

This plan establishes guidelines and procedures for encouraging participation in the *Central Montana Transportation Study*. The following strategies will be used to share information and seek input.

- Study branding will be developed to enhance communication and consistency of study materials.
- A study website will be developed to share information about the planning process and to publish study materials.
- A mailing list will be developed to contact interested stakeholders and members of the public.
- Newsletters and media announcements will be developed in advance of public informational meetings.

Four sets of public informational meetings will be held to learn about issues and concerns and to share study findings.

- Targeted outreach will occur with the military officials, VACOM Manufacturing, resource agencies, and other stakeholders.
- Public comments and input will be collected and considered throughout the study.
- Published materials will be available in alternative formats and be sensitive to diverse audiences.

The anticipated schedule follows a 28-month time frame. A public draft of the *Central Montana Transportation Study* is anticipated by August 2026. All work is anticipated to be completed by September 2026. **Figure 2** illustrates the anticipated schedule. The schedule is subject to modifications to accommodate changed conditions as the study progresses.

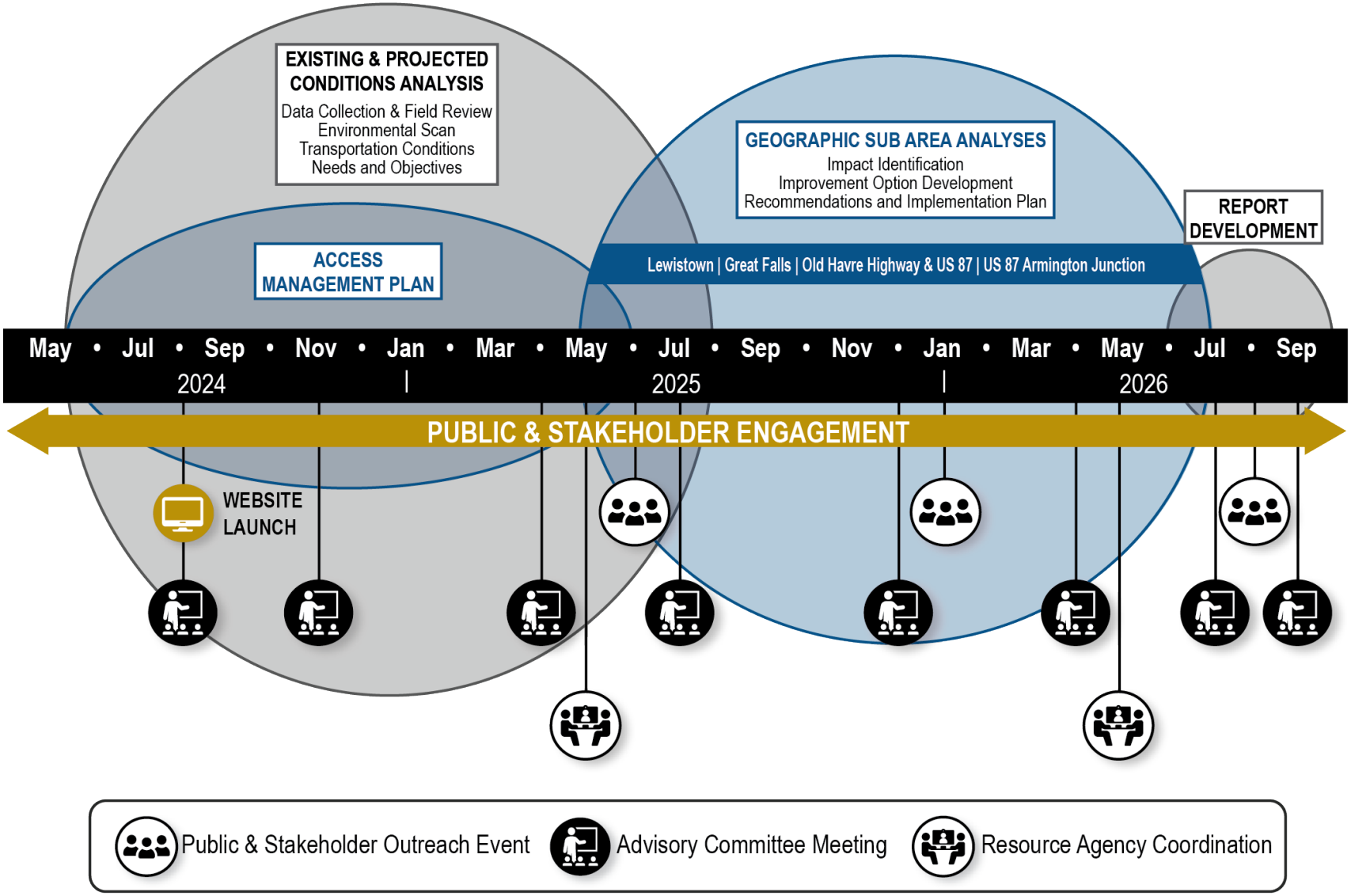


Figure 2: Preliminary Study Schedule

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