

March 12, 2020

Barb Skelton
Transportation Commission
7256 Highway 3
Billings, MT 59106

Dear Ms. Skelton,

My name is Elta Ayre and I am a 63 year resident of Roberts, Montana. I am sure you have heard the public discontent with the current DOT project on Highway 212 through Roberts. I attended a well attended community meeting last night regarding this project and was directed to write you specifically regarding the speed limit issue.

Historically, I have been in communication with the DOT since 2000 when, as chairman of the Roberts Community Foundation, we wrote a letter to the DOT requesting curbs, gutters, pathways and that they address public safety. I wrote again in 2008 asking for a speed reduction among other requests regarding the highway project. I personally met with several DOT & highway planning persons from 2012-2014 as I worked on the Roberts Master Plan project with the Foundation imploring them to skip the turn lane, reduce the speed and addressing safety concerns. All these efforts were ignored.

At this time, with the project incomplete, we are again, in a more organized manner, trying to address these issues with the DOT. Since the original planning of this project, there has been a new element added to the community. We now have an active Amish community who has moved in with their horse drawn buggies and increased bicycle use of Highway 212. The safety of this community as they traverse the highway, as well as our children and other pedestrians is of utmost importance to us.

So, regarding the speed limit. Currently, without construction zones, the speed limit through Roberts is 45 mph with double yellow lines on each end of town. I can tell you from my observations and experiences living here, people don't adhere to the 45 mph limit. Often they don't pay attention to the double yellow lines. We have had several accidents and one death on this thorough-fare over the past years. One included a school bus of kids. Even during construction with the 35 mph speed limit I observed persons passing the slowed traffic lead by the pilot car! The DOT says they have to do a speed study and they say that speed study can't occur until AFTER the project is completed. We would like to ask the Transportation Commission to reconsider this rule. Red Lodge, Joliet, Fromberg, Bridger, all within our county have 35mph limits through their communities. Why does Roberts have to go through all the trauma and angst to obtain the same results? Just because we are an unincorporated town? Could you intervene?

Another aspect to this project is the 'turn lane' the DOT is insisting we need to have to keep the flow of traffic at 45 mph through town. When they did their construction this past fall, Roberts ended up with 4 ft. deep, steep sided canyons on each side of the road through town. Right now there are 11 ft. shoulders with the 2 lanes on the 'incomplete' project. This spring they are planning to come in, put their top layers on the highway (making the canyons even steeper and deeper) and put in the turn lane. In doing that, those shoulders will be reduces to 4 and 6 ft. widths respectively. Our Amish community's buggies are 5 1/2 ft. wide. They travel about 5-8 mph. If they were pushed or forced off the side of the road by speeding motorists, can you imagine the resulting injuries to them and their horses? And our bicyclists and pedestrians. This is a safety issue above all. I would hate to have to some someone grievously injured or killed because of this in order to get something movement by the DOT to fix this.

To do as we are asking, eliminate the turn lane and lower the speed limit there is minimal if any cost to change this project.....less paint painting lanes, and the signage needs to be done anyway. This is a no - brainer as far as the community of Roberts is concerned. We have had minimal input into this project and limited information. Please, Ms. Skelton, please take this issue to the Transportation Commission. I encourage you to take a little drive to Roberts, look at what we are talking about.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Elta Ayre, resident
Former Chairman of the Roberts Community Foundation (1996-2014)