

2.3. Evaluate and pursue essential local wayfinding solutions

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism product.

Recommended Tactics

MTOT, Regions, CVBs

- » Serve as a facilitator for communities and a liaison with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) in addressing wayfinding and highway signage needs.
- » Explore the possibility of creating a coordinated highway signage program for communities around the state that would use economies of scale to reduce costs, improve consistency, and strengthen the Montana Brand. Communicate closely with CVBs and communities.
- » Provide guidance on signage solutions that (i) meet well-justified needs; (ii) avoid clutter; and (iii) meet MDT regulations.
- » Include success stories in the Resource Library, and encourage their submission.

CVBs, Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

- » Assess the need for local wayfinding solutions or highway signage. Evaluate the expected benefits critically (e.g., by developing a business case) to determine how significant they could be and how likely the benefits are to materialize. Prioritize needs and seek out affordable, creative solutions.
- » Understand all city, county, state, or federal (highway) codes that regulate the use of signage. Work with the Montana Department of Transportation and MTOT to ensure understanding of state and federal regulations.
- » Work closely with MTOT and other communities to support and adopt a coordinated approach to signage.
- » Share successful approaches to local wayfinding with other communities through MTOT and media coverage.

Indicators of Success

- » Increased visitation to towns, attractions, and amenities due to increased visitor awareness or ability to locate them.
- » Effective and affordable approaches to local wayfinding are devised and shared among communities, including a business case to pursue such efforts.
- » Stakeholders have clear guidance on highway signage regulations and a clear process for pursuing signage.
- » A collective approach to implementing highway signage improvements eliminates frustration, improves the quality and consistency of signage, and reduces signage clutter.

Background & Rationale

Community input sessions during the strategic planning process consistently identified stakeholder desire for improved wayfinding, concern that the cost of local wayfinding is prohibitive, and frustration in regard to regulatory restrictions on highway signage.

A collective approach to highway signage could reduce the time, effort, frustration, and expense for communities. Approaching highway signage as a state-wide effort rather than individually eliminates the need for each community to work its way through unfamiliar MDT regulations. Approaching MDT collectively, with MTOT as a facilitator, will also focus MDT's assistance, will add weight to the request, and will foster ongoing inter-agency collaboration.

Because signs are expensive to design, construct, and install, potential cost savings through coordinated design and production of signs should be fully explored. The collective approach also eliminates the need for each community to “re-invent the wheel” in designing its signs, saving time and effort.

Collective highway signage also provides consistency, which offers benefits for the visitor and for Montana tourism. Firstly, like signage for historic sites or “logo signs”, having community entry signs with a consistent look helps visitors to identify the information provided. Secondly, wayfinding is part of the visitor experience and, as such, should reflect the destination brand (Denton, 2009). Developing a consistent base design for town entry signs can reinforce the Montana Brand, while encouraging a level of customization will allow communities to reflect their own unique character.

Resources

The Project for Public Spaces offers one simple guide for developing and designing a signage system at http://www.pps.org/reference/signage_guide/.

Texas-based wayfinding firm fd2s offers a thoughtful commentary on wayfinding as a part of the visitor experience in its blog at <http://www.fd2s.com/2009/04/municipal-wayfinding-and-the-visitor-experience/>. Florida based communications firm, Axia Creative, provides a comprehensive look at the elements of a wayfinding system, discusses maintenance of the system, and covers other topics in its blog at <http://axiac.com/axiablog/>.

Examples of communities that have used existing surfaces to improve wayfinding without adding clutter:

- » Victoria, British Columbia, wrapped city maps on utility boxes <http://www.canadiandesignresource.ca/officialgallery/graphics/city-maps/>
- » The town of Matthews, NC, plans to use outdoor wall murals as part of an integrated wayfinding system (see http://matthewsnc.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=RclfJyX4_xc%3D&tabid=301) as well as a public art element. For some technical information on the durability of exterior murals see <http://www.findamuralist.com/blog/exterior-mural-paints-how-to-cope-with-fading-colors>.