

4.7. Address communication and transportation infrastructure needs to support tourism and recreation

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana’s marketing efforts and product development.

Recommended Tactics: Highways & Roads

TAC, MTOT, Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

- » Work closely with tourism partners to identify transportation infrastructure needs and pursue infrastructure funding under tribal, state, and federal transportation programs.
 - Tourism partners include Montana Department of Transportation, public land management agencies, tribal governments, innovative programs like LINX in the Greater Yellowstone Region.
 - Current funding programs include those under MAP-21, P.L. 112-14, www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/summaryinfo.cfm.
- » Develop the full potential of the Montana Scenic-Historic Byways Program, working closely with the Montana Department of Transportation and the Scenic Historic Byways Advisory Council (see www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/scenic/).
- » Fully explore the eligibility of Montana’s scenic-historic byways for federal support under the new Transportation Alternatives program. (see ASLA issue brief at <http://www.asla.org/FederalGovernmentAffairs.aspx?id=34517>)

Recommended Tactics: Visitor Information Centers, Rest Areas, and Other In-State Information Dissemination Points

MTOT, Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes

- » Implement redesigned Visitor Information Center (VIC) system.
- » Establish a rigorous process to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the VIC program and its value to stakeholders and visitors.
- » Continue benefit-cost analysis of possible distribution methods, such as kiosks, Wi-Fi access, and alternative locations for stocking printed visitor information.

Recommended Tactics: Internet Access

Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

- » Where visitors do not have access to Wi-Fi or cell service, evaluate the need, value, and possibilities for expanding these services in the short term or over time.
- » Where visitors do not have access to Wi-Fi or cell service, explore creative ways to meet visitor information needs (e.g., local wayfinding, widely available print maps or information). Collaborate with other stakeholders to devise a coordinated approach to providing information between “hot spots”.

Indicators of Success

- » Tourism stakeholders and partners collaborate effectively to access available transportation infrastructure funding.
- » Existing programs for scenic and historic byways are fully utilized to support tourism.
- » Visitor information is made available at physical locations throughout the state in a way that offers value to visitors and stakeholders and is cost effective.
- » Visitor information is effectively provided even where Wi-Fi and cell service are not available.
- » Stakeholders work to support increased Wi-Fi and cell service, where the need, value, and viability are firmly established.

Background & Rationale

Meeting visitors' infrastructure needs and expectations is important in conversion of visitors and in the delivery of a good visitor experience.

Visitors often perceive cellular and Wi-Fi access as necessities not luxuries. Even for those wishing to be "off the grid", there is often a desire to have access to cell and Wi-Fi to obtain visitor information on the ground. Lack of access to these communications tools can significantly increase the perception of Montana as remote and poses an increased risk that the visitor experience might not be good. Montana's tourism stakeholders should work with cell and Wi-Fi service providers to offer access in as many places as possible. Where access cannot be offered, a creative approach should be devised to ensure that visitors can still obtain all of the information and support that they need and want.

Similarly, Montana's tourism community must work together to ensure that the physical availability of visitor information and support on the ground – e.g. through Visitor Information Centers, rest areas – continue to meet the evolving needs of the visitor in a cost-effective manner.

Public lands lose their value as a tourism asset if they cannot be adequately accessed, and may lose their appeal if other visitor infrastructure is absent. Working closely with public land management agencies can improve the availability of public infrastructure.