

5. PUBLIC FACILITIES and INFRASTRUCTURE

5.1 Executive Summary – Key Findings

This section discusses the public facilities and infrastructure in Pondera County and its municipalities. These infrastructure include transportation facilities, public water supply systems, public wastewater/sewerage systems, stormwater facilities, solid waste facilities, publicly-owned buildings, public parks, and telecommunication and other utility facilities. Public schools and emergency services are discussed in the public services section of this Growth Policy.

This section presents a basic inventory of public facilities and infrastructure in the county. In addition, this section reviews the capability of infrastructure to support future growth. Often in community planning, water supply and wastewater treatment are the most important factors constraining growth and development. Particular attention is focused on these aspects of public facilities and infrastructure.

Key findings of this section include the following:

- Most of the water supply and wastewater treatment systems in the county and municipalities are actively improving their systems.
- Generally, these systems are designed with the premise that little or no growth is expected in the future. Performance of these systems will improve.
- Local streets and roads at the county and municipal level face chronic funding issues.

5.2 Key Issues/Perspectives/Preferences

Within the last few years, there have been numerous outreach efforts with regard to planning in the County and the municipalities. These efforts include surveys and meetings of growth policy committees held in 2009. These efforts have produced expressions of the issues, perspectives, and preferences of regarding many topics including that of public facilities and infrastructure. Below is a synopsis of these by location.

Pondera County and Conrad: From a 2009 survey in which about 120 households in the county participated, the following were noted: most households were not satisfied with telecommunication services; most households were satisfied with water, sewer, and solid waste services; most thought the library was excellent. From Growth Policy Committee meetings, preliminary issues identified included telecommunications, Conrad I-5 North interchange, and water for future development.

Brady: From Growth Policy Committee meetings in Brady, the following preliminary issues were identified: water and sewer projects, water quality, water hauling, and issues related to the treatment process at the water plant.

Dupuyer: From Growth Policy Committee meetings held in Dupuyer, preliminary issues identified included: telecommunications, highway improvements, creating a water district, water and sewer systems, a new fire hall, and recycling. In 2006, a survey was conducted for Dupuyer in which 60 residents participated. Needs identified through the survey included water and sewer development and road improvements. Lack of an adequate water supply was the greatest problem reported.

Valier: Valier's 2007 survey had 155 residents participating. Most people were satisfied with sewer service but not water service. Streets were overwhelmingly considered inadequate while the airport was considered adequate.

5.3 Existing Conditions

5.3.1 Capital Improvements Plans

The City of Conrad has a Capital Improvements Plan dated February 2002 prepared by Morrison Maierle, Inc. Information from the plan is cited in this section as "Conrad CIP". The Town of Valier has a Capital Improvements Plan dated March 2008 prepared by Beard Environmental and Technical Assistance. It is cited as "Valier CIP". Both of these plans contain detailed information about municipal infrastructure as well as strategies and programs for improving the infrastructure.

5.3.2 Transportation

Public transportation facilities in Pondera County consist of highways, county roads and city and town streets, sidewalks, rail facilities, and airports.

1. Streets, Roads, Sidewalks

- A. US and State Highways: There are several US and Montana highways in Pondera County, which are maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT, 2008):
- National Highway System Interstates: I-15
 - Primary Highways: (Principal or minor arterials designated by the Montana Transportation Commission): U.S. 89, Montana Highway 44 (Valier Highway), Interstate 15 Business, Montana Highway 91
 - Secondary Highways (Minor arterials or major collectors designated by the Montana Highway Commission in consultation with boards of county commissioners): Montana Highways 219 (Conrad-Pendroy Road), 534 (Conrad-Dupuyer Road), 218 (Sollid Road), 365 (Brady Road), 366 (Ledger Road), 417 (F Bridge Road), 358 (Cut Bank Highway).

Conrad I-15 North Interchange: Construction of the redesigned interchange is underway with completion in 2010. The project consists of reconfiguring the existing northbound ramps from the current partial cloverleaf style to a diamond configuration. This project includes a county road to be built connecting the overpass with the east frontage road. The construction of the

county road will help alleviate the current safety concerns of emergency response access to the east side of the city of Conrad when there is a train at the railroad crossing. A MDOT rest area and City of Conrad's industrial park are planned for the areas that will be made accessible by the project. (Independent Observer, 2010)

- B. Pondera County: Pondera County maintains about 800 miles of county roads, 40 mile of which are paved roads including Price Oil Road, Old Shelby Road, Manson Road, Dupuyer-Valier Road, East Lake Road, Railroad Street in Valier, and Front Street in Conrad. All the paved roads are in bad condition due to deferred maintenance. (Stokes, 2010) The majority of improved county roads are gravel roadways that serve rural residents. These roads are generally in good condition. (Stokes, 2010) Most of the graveled county roads have 21- to 24-foot-wide graveled driving surfaces (Stokes, 2010). Many bridges in the County's systems are older and will eventually require replacement. The County Road Department is replacing smaller bridges with culverts whenever possible.
- C. City of Conrad: The majority of streets in Conrad were constructed in the late 1970s and funded through special improvement districts. Over ten miles of asphalt pavement, storm drains, curb and gutter, and sidewalks were installed. In 1998, these streets were extensively resurfaced. (Conrad CIP) The streets are now chip sealed from time to time and will likely need more extensive resurfacing in the next decade (Anderson, 2010). East of the railroad, streets are surfaced with oiled gravel. Cross streets between Main Street and Front Street were not included in the City's various special improvement districts and are consequently in poor condition. (Conrad CIP; and Anderson, 2010). The Montana Department of Transportation maintains Main Street (Highway 91), 4th Avenue SW (Highway 534), and Sollid Road (Highway 218) in Conrad.

Conrad has a fairly extensive sidewalks. However, there are numerous areas where sidewalks are lacking or in need of repair. (Anderson)

- D. Town of Valier: The town is located at the junction of State Highways 44 (Teton Ave.) and 358 (Montana St.) and the State maintains these roads in the town. The remaining streets in Valier are maintained by the Town. Most of these are gravel streets and those that are paved are deteriorating; sidewalks in town are also in poor condition or are absent. (Valier CIP) The Town's recent Capital Improvements Plan contains an inventory of street inadequacies and "Preliminary Street Improvements Priorities" which should assist the Town in maintaining and improving street conditions.

The Town has a limited amount of sidewalks and most areas of town do not have sidewalks. Sections of sidewalks are located on 4th St. leading to the school, in residential areas such as on Dupuyer Ave., and in commercial areas on Montana St. and Teton Ave.

2. Railroads

The BNSF (Burlington Northern and Santa Fe) Railway north-south line runs from Great Falls through Conrad and on to the Canadian border at Sweet Grass (MDOT Factbook). The BNSF is a class 1 railway, meaning it is the largest class of railway in terms of company operating revenues (Surface Transportation Board, 2010). A branch line to Valier serves the agricultural producers in the area (MATL FEIS, 2008). Amtrak runs north of Pondera County, with a stop in Shelby.

3. Airports

There are no passenger service airports in Pondera County (MDOT, 2008). The nearest airport with passenger service is Great Falls International Airport located about 63 miles from Conrad. Small unmanned airports are located near the towns of Conrad and Valier.

Pondera County owns and operates the Conrad Airport which is located one mile west of the city. The airport has a 4,601 foot-long asphalt runway in good condition. There is also a 2,800 foot turf runway in poor condition. There are no fixed-base operators at the Conrad Airport. (Global Air, 2010)

Pondera County also owns the Valier Airport which consists of three turf landing strips in the Town of Valier. The strips are 3,375, 2,280, and 2,140 feet long and are all in good condition. There are no fixed-base operators at the Valier Airport. (Global Air, 2010)

Private airstrips are located throughout the county serving owners and aerial applicators that serve the agricultural producers. (MATL FEIS, 2008)

4. Major Oil and Gas Pipelines

Major pipelines in Pondera County include the Conoco-Phillips and Front Range crude oil pipelines and the NorthWestern Energy gas line. (PMHSA, 2010) Many small pipelines serve the oil and gas producers traversing the project area. (MATL FEIS, 2008)

5. National Energy Corridors

No part of Pondera County is involved in West-wide Energy Corridor, an energy corridor planning effort that was required by the 2005 federal Energy Policy Act. The planning effort primarily concerned plotting the course of new electric power lines and fossil fuel pipelines across federal land. West-wide energy corridors in Montana are all located in the southwest part of the state. (US DOE, 2008)

6. Major Electric Transmission Lines

Montana-Alberta Tie Line: This transmission line is a new, high capacity, high voltage, interstate line. The line is a 300-megawatt, 230-kilovolt electrical transmission line allowing the movement of power between Alberta and Montana. The 214-mile line will tie into the Alberta grid near the city of Lethbridge and will terminate at NorthWestern Energy's Great Falls substation just north of Great Falls. (MATL FEIS, 2008)

An additional substation will be built at approximately the half-way point of the transmission line, just north of the Marias River near Cut Bank, Montana. This substation will provide a mid-point disconnect to the line and power factor support as well as a convenient interconnection point for wind farms in the area. (MALT FEIS, 2008)

The line is under construction and is expected to be in service in 2011. (Montana Alberta Tie Line, Ltd., 2010)

The line will be supported by two types of structures: steel mono-poles and H-frames made principally of wood. H-frame construction provides the best balance between structural integrity and physical and visual intrusion. Where it is desirable to minimize the footprint of the transmission line, for example to avoid excessive impact on farming operations, mono-poles are employed. Dimensions vary along the line depending on surrounding features and topography. Mono-poles in irrigated areas average 459 feet (140 meters) apart. H-frames and monopoles in non-irrigated areas average 787 feet (240 meters) apart. (MATL FEIS, 2008)

Wind Collector Lines: The proposed NorthWestern Energy Collector Project will be up to five generator lead lines (i.e. collector lines) that originate in the high wind areas of Montana and move renewable wind energy south to a new 500 kV substation at Townsend, Montana. (State of Montana, 2010)

The Collector Project consists of up to five new transmission lines in Montana that would connect new generation, primarily wind farms, to the existing NorthWestern Energy transmission system and to the proposed Mountain States Transmission Intertie (MSTI). Most of the new proposed wind generation that would be served by the collector system would be located in north central, central, south central and eastern Montana. MSTI is a proposed 500kV transmission line that would run near Townsend, Montana to near Midpoint, Idaho. (NorthWestern Energy, 2009)

5.3.3 Public Water Supply Systems

1. City of Conrad

The Conrad water system has Lake Frances as its source. Water is treated near the source by conventional filtration (Anderson, 2010) and chlorination. Storage is provided at the treatment plant by a pair of one-million gallon storage reservoirs. Treated water is piped to Conrad where it is distributed by gravity to 1,283 services (about 2,500 people). (MDEQ, 2002b)

The treatment plant operates at about half its capacity. Water shares on Lake Frances more than exceed the capability of the plant. In all, Conrad has an ample water system in terms of quantity available for future growth. (Anderson, 2010)

The distribution system is comprised mainly of 30- to 35-year old asbestos-concrete pipe. In general, the water distribution system is in good shape and no major upgrade or replacement program is anticipated. The City has no separate irrigation system so lawn and landscaping watering is done with treated water. (Anderson, 2010) The City provides limited water service outside the city limits and presently has 76 services outside the city. (Conrad City Clerk, 2010)

In the future, Conrad's water supply may be replaced or supplemented by water provided by the North Central Montana Regional Water Authority. The Authority is the non-tribal part of a larger project that will also provide water to the Chippewa-Cree tribe's Rocky Boy's Reservation. The system is under construction and will use the Tiber Reservoir (Lake Elwell) south of Chester as its source. (MDNRC, 2010)

The municipal and rural water systems involved in the project include: Town of Big Sandy, Town of Dutton, Hill County Water District, Loma County Water & Sewer District, North Havre County Water District, Oilmont County Water District, City of Cut Bank, City of Havre, City of Shelby, Town of Sunburst, Sweetgrass Community Water & Sewer District, and Tiber County Water District. Three other community water supply systems - Brady County Water & Sewer, Town of Chester, and the City of Conrad – are currently approved as provisional members, and will be supplied with regional water provided that the project sponsors can receive authorization for a higher project ceiling from Congress. The Authority will also contract for the delivery of water with private individuals and other entities such as water users association and several Hutterite colonies. (MDNRC, 2010)

Construction of the project, which began in August 2006, is expected to take 10 years, at a minimum, depending on federal funding levels. (Chippewa Cree Construction Corporation, 2010)

2. Town of Valier

The Town's water system consists of four groundwater wells that are all located within the town. The wells range from 37 to 65 feet in depth. The water system includes a 60,000 gallon elevated storage tank. The distribution system consists of asbestos-cement, cast iron, and PVC piping. There are 275 active service connections serving 479 residents, the school, and local businesses. (MDEQ, 2003; Valier

CIP). The treated water is also used for lawn and garden irrigation and water restrictions have been instituted in summer months. (Valier CIP)

The Valier CIP has identified several system needs including installation of water meters, back-up power supplies, water main and valve improvements/replacements, a new water tank, and implementation of source water protection practices. The Town is presently undertaking a \$2.7 million water project to add meters, construct a 250,000 elevated storage tank, drill a new well, rehabilitate one of the current wells, and add telemetry controls to the system. This work should be completed in 2011. (Malinak, 2010) These improvements will greatly enhance system operations which are currently limited by inadequate storage and potentially overused by unmetered services. (Malinak, 2010)

3. Brady County Water/Sewer District

The unincorporated town of Brady has water service provided by the Brady County Water and Sewer District. The district's water system has 114 service connections serving a population of about 225 people. (O'Brien, 2010). The source is water from Bynum Reservoir and Arod Lake. The distribution system is mostly 1940s-era asbestos-cement pipe that presently leaks 45% of the water delivered to the system. That coupled with inoperable fire hydrants indicates the need for major improvements. The district uses a 40,000 gallon elevated storage tank which also needs replacement. (O'Brien, 2010)

Water quality is a problem and the system has not been able to meet federal Safe Drinking Water Act standards. Engineers for the district have recommended additional treatment processes to solve the problem (O'Brien, 2010).

4. Tiber County Water District

The Tiber County Water District serves most of Pondera County east of I-15 with treated water. The District also serves parts of Choteau, Liberty, Teton, and Toole Counties. The entire District serves about 750 people through 300 service connections. The water system includes intakes at the Tiber Reservoir (Lake Elwell), a treatment plant near the reservoir, distribution system consists of approximately 680 miles of steel and PVC pipe, and several storage reservoirs. In addition, each customer is required to have a cistern with a 500-gallon minimum capacity in the event of a main break. (MDEQ, 2002a)

5. Rural Residential Cisterns

Water wells in much of the county are not suitable for domestic use. Consequently, most rural residents west of Interstate 15 from Conrad to Brady have cisterns filled from a municipal water supply fill site (most residences east of I-15 are on the Tiber system). (MDEQ, 2002a) The City of Conrad sells an average of 367,000 gallons per month at its fill station. (Conrad City Clerk) In rural areas around Valier, well are better dependence on cisterns is less common and in the Dupuyer area, shallow wells predominate. (Rose, 2010)

6. Other Water Systems

A number of other water systems exist in the county and are regulated as public water supply systems because they serve a significant number of people. These systems include those of the Birch Creek, Kingsbury, Midway, New Miami, and Pondera Colonies. These systems serve an average of 102 people each. (MDEQ, 2010)

5.3.4 Public Waste Water/Sewage Facilities

1. City of Conrad

Conrad's sewage collection system was originally constructed in 1913 and was expanded in the 1960s to areas east of the railroad. The system was expanded again in the 1970s with the Northeast Interceptor and most recently to areas north of Avenue C. (Conrad CIP) In 2002, the piping for about 14 blocks was upgraded to larger-diameter plastic pipe. The collection system consists of clay-tile pipe west of Main Street and asbestos-concrete pipe to the east.

The collection system uses two lift stations to overcome gravity and pump sewage through the collection system and ultimately on to the treatment plant. One lift station is in Central Avenue between the cross streets of Maryland and Delaware. The other is on second Avenue between Montana and Washington Streets. (Conrad CIP)

The treatment plant, located 1.5 mile north of the city was originally constructed in 1958. Over the years, the plant has undergone a series of significant upgrades. Presently, a \$5.5 million upgrade project is underway to allow the plant to comply with current discharge requirements and with anticipated ammonia limits in 2011. (Independent Observer, 2009)

The current treatment plant upgrade project was designed with an allowance for future growth in Conrad. The present population of Conrad is about 2,700 people. The upgraded plant is designed to accommodate the equivalent of 4,000 people. This would allow for substantial growth, should it occur, without penalizing current residents with costly facilities that may never be used. (Meyer, 2010)

The City does not provide any sewer collection service to areas outside the city limits. In general, the collection system is in fair shape and no extensive upgrades are anticipated. (Anderson, 2010)

2. Town of Valier

Valier's wastewater treatment system, originally constructed in 1908-1910, has recently undergone significant improvements that addressed outstanding needs. The 2007 sewer rehabilitation project improved about 5,000 feet of sewer lines, several manholes, and 75 connections and added ultraviolet disinfection to the treatment plant. (Valier CIP). Prior to this effort, the Town has made substantial upgrades to the treatment plant, adding a new lagoon-based facility in 1999. The Town has also consistently made incremental improvements to the collection system since 1999. (Valier CIP) The

system has designed capacity for a small amount of growth--to serve about 110 more people than current usage. However, there is some difficulty operating the plant so that it meets discharge standards and therefore actual capacity for additional services is probably much less. (Malinak, 2010)

3. Brady County Water/Sewer District

The district is currently completing three major improvements to its wastewater treatment system. First, the collection system is being replaced; secondly, the treatment lagoons are receiving liners; and lastly, a solar-powered spray irrigation system is being constructed to dispose of effluent on a 2.5 acre hay field. These improvements should address outstanding needs with the wastewater system. The rehabilitated system was not sized to accommodate future growth and there is not much excess capacity in the system. (Brien, 2010)

5.3.5 Storm Water Facilities

1. City of Conrad

The City maintains storm water facilities consisting mainly of reinforced concrete pipe, most installed when with original street paving project of the 1970s. (Conrad CIP) There are no storm drains on the east side of the city. The storm water collected in the pipe system is discharged to natural drainages at the north and south ends of the city (Anderson, 2010).

2. Town of Valier

Storm water facilities are general lacking in Valier as most streets and roads do not have curb and gutter installed. (Malinak, 2010)

5.3.6 Solid Waste Facilities

There is one general purpose, solid waste landfill in Pondera County. The North Montana Joint Refuse Disposal District landfill near I-15 on Highway 44 handles municipal solid waste from the member jurisdictions (Glacier, Pondera, and Teton Counties and Conrad, Choteau, Cut Bank, Valier). (Broesder, 2010) The District also operates a construction and demolition debris landfill at Conrad. The landfill is an unlined, class 2 facility with expansion potential for as much as 45 years of service. The landfill site includes seven disposal areas, two of which are full and capped, a third which is in use, and four more that are reserved for future expansion. (Collyer, 2010)

In Conrad, the City collects solid waste for disposal at the main landfill. In Valier, the Town contracts with a private business for collection of its solid waste. Outside Conrad and Valier, Pondera County residents can use roll-off sites at Brady, Conrad, Dupuyer, and Valier. (Collyer, 2010)

Recycling of a variety of goods and waste presently occurs at a variety of locations in the county. Recycling efforts are increasing in popularity in Pondera County. It is likely that through recycling more

waste will be diverted from the landfill in the future and thereby extending the life of the facility.
(Collyer, 2010)

5.3.7 City and County-Owned Buildings

Pondera County (Broesder, 2010)

- The County Courthouse in Conrad
- Road shops in Conrad, Valier, and Dupuyer
- Airport buildings at Conrad and Valier
- Hospital building and grounds in Conrad
- Fire halls in Brady, Dupuyer, and Valier
- Community Center in Conrad

The City of Conrad owns and maintains the following facilities (Anderson, 2010):

- Conrad Public Library
- Public Works Building and City Shop
- City Office
- Conrad Fire & Ambulance Station

The Town of Valier owns and maintains the following facilities (Valier CIP):

- Town Hall/Civic Center
- Town Shop

5.3.8 Public Parks

Pondera County (Broesder, 2010)

- City park in Dupuyer
- City park in Brady
- Swift Dam Park

City of Conrad (Anderson, 2010)

- Lion's Club Park and swimming pool
- Legion Park
- Ball fields complex
- Jaycee Park
- Keil Park

Town of Valier (Valier CIP)

- Miller Park
- A recreation area on Lake Frances leased from Pondera County Canal and Reservoir Company
- Town Park on Main

5.3.9 Telecommunications and Other Utilities

Telecommunications: There are two telecommunications providers in Pondera County. (Broesder, 2010) 3 Rivers Communications offers long distance, local dial-up Internet, High Speed Internet, combined wireless broadband and local phone, digital TV, satellite high speed Internet, and competitive local telephone service in addition to traditional local telephone service. (3 Rivers, 2010) Qwest provides broadband internet, digital TV, digital long distance and local telephone, and wireless telephone service. (Qwest, 2010)

Other Utilities: NorthWestern Energy provides electric power and natural gas service to locations in Pondera County. Glacier Electric Coop provides power in location at the western end of the county. (Curry, 2010) Sun River Electric also provides power in the county (Hermance).

5.4 Projected Future Trends for Public Facilities and Infrastructure

Brady County Water District System: The Brady water system requires substantial improvements to meet drinking water standards. Remedial improvements are being planned. In addition, within the next ten to twenty years, the North Central Montana Regional Water Authority may provide a better source for the District. Pending these changes, development of the area will be impaired by lack of an adequate drinking water source.

Dupuyer water and sewer: The unincorporated Dupuyer area has no centralized or public water system. Concerns about water quality in Dupuyer should be further investigated along with the feasibility of providing a public water supply to the area.

North Central Montana Water Regional Water Authority: The eventual arrival of the water service from the Authority has the potential of easing source water problems for many locations in Pondera County. It is possible that provision of a new water source to rural areas of the county may have a growth-inducing affect outside of built-up places.

Roads and Streets: In the county and in the municipalities, deteriorating road, bridges, and street conditions are a common concern. Disrepair, substandard conditions, and funding shortages may together act as a significant constraint on growth and development of the county and its towns.

Expansion potential: Public water and wastewater treatment systems in the county typically do not have large amounts of excess capacity. This lack of capacity would certainly constrict any substantial amounts of growth, particularly in the near future. Rapid growth is not expected either. But if the area starts begin to experience more rapid growth than has occurred in recent history, planning for expansion of these facilities will be important.

Telecommunications: Telecommunications are growing ever more important to economic development. Small independent entrepreneurs as well as larger communications-based businesses

such as back offices and call centers are locating to rural regions with excellent telecommunications services. Improvement of telecommunications services could be a tool for economic development in the county.

Wind farms: Wind farms for electric power generation will be more feasible in the county as new transmission capacity is brought to the area. Localities experiencing extensive wind power projects have had to address worker housing shortages, road system impacts, and changes to scenic landscapes among other issues. In the future, Pondera County may have more need to address such issues.

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