



February 23, 2023

To: Malcolm Long, Director Montana Department of Transportation mlong@mt.gov
Mayor Hess, City of Missoula HessJ@ci.missoula.mt.us
City Council of Missoula council@ci.missoula.mt.us

From: Kim Latrielle, President/CEO Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce
kim@missoulachamber.com

RE: The Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce requests to officially go on record stating that our organization and membership **were not included in the process and did not receive adequate outreach from the City of Missoula** regarding the Beartracks Bridge Reduction.

As the largest business organization in Missoula and a viable partner in the past with the City/County in obtaining grants, we were astonished when we learned of this proposed reduction plan. With less than 24 hours' notification of the hearing, the lack of knowledge or inclusion in the process, we did not have adequate time to inform nor to engage our Chamber membership.

This letter and statement are a formal follow up to our survey results process. On 2.14.2023 the Missoula Chamber sent to MDT and the City of Missoula, the final Chamber membership survey results. These results demonstrates that our membership was not included or aware of the process - see Q1. **Q1: As a business owner in and around Downtown Missoula, do you feel you have been included in the conversations about the Higgins Street Road-Diet? 76.85% voted No** out of 169 businesses responding.

Additionally, the City's leadership including the mayor and staff directly involved, admitted in statements to the Chamber's Chair of the Board and Chamber CEO - *"we apologize, we dropped the ball by not including Chamber!"* This is especially difficult for our organization to understand since we worked collaboratively with the City and County and won a successful Build Grant for \$13 Million in 2021. The results of our survey process show that as a continued partner the Chamber can reach a large number of Business Leaders in a noticeably short amount of time. While we support the city and other partners who had done previous surveys and outreach to the downtown business area, the information we have received shows that most of the local business's **do not** support the Beartracks reduction and the Chamber is always willing to collaborate to distribute the correct information out to our members.

The Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce at this point is hesitant to take a position of support or opposition due to not being part of the public process on the Beartracks Bridge Reduction. We would request, due to lack of adequate outreach and involvement from the city, that a pause be considered for the Beartracks Bridge portion of the grant funding. During Jeremy's opening remarks at the committee meeting, he stated that the city could remove this portion from the RAISE grant request and reapply the following year, when the process could be vetted further. This would allow more time for our organization's membership, Missoula residents, and the local business community and specifically, all the downtown business's that could potentially be impacted if this moves forward. If there were to be a pause and collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, we can as a group distribute the information to our members allowing them the opportunity to get educated on the reduction plan and feel like they are part of the process. Thank you for your time and consideration.