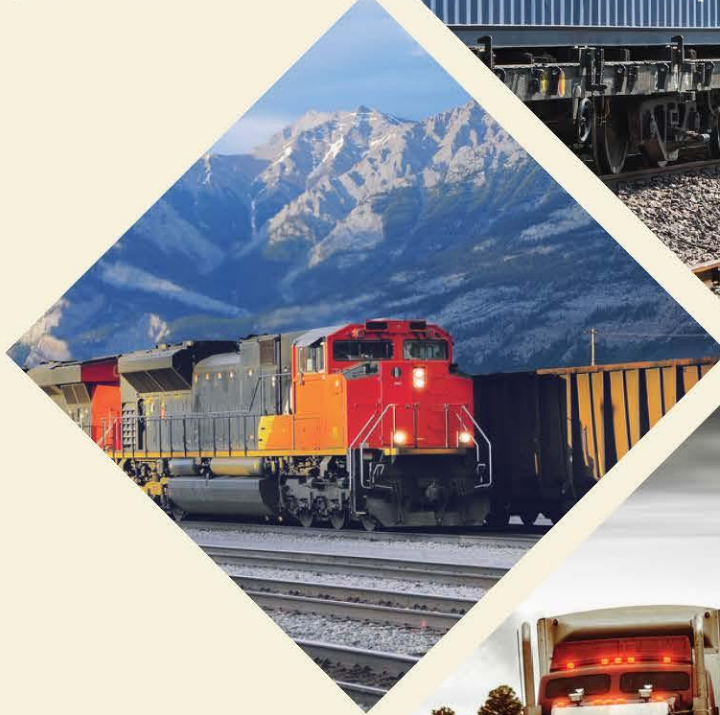




**MONTANA**

Department of Transportation



# 2025 MONTANA STATE FREIGHT PLAN

## STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY



**January 6, 2026**

Prepared for:



**MONTANA**  
Department of  
Transportation

**MDT**

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## Purpose

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is updating the 2022 Montana State Freight Plan (Plan) to meet federal requirements under 49 U.S.C. 70202. The Freight Plan update is required to occur every four years and ensures Montana remains eligible for National Highway Freight Program (NHFP) funding.

The Freight Plan describes freight's role in the state's economy, identifies key freight infrastructure and system issues, and recommends strategies. It guides freight-related transportation investment decisions and highlights projects to improve system performance and to support Montana's long-term economic vitality. MDT is leading this effort with support from a team of planning and engineering professionals.

The Freight Plan update provides engagement opportunities with freight stakeholders to better understand freight-related concerns and challenges. The planning process for the Freight Plan is illustrated in the figure below.



This memo outlines four key engagement activities completed in conjunction with the Freight Plan update from July 2025 through November 2025:

- Targeted outreach to freight-related associations;
- MDT Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting with internal MDT subject matter experts;
- A virtual Freight Plan Stakeholder workshop with external industry partners; and
- An online Stakeholder Freight Survey open to external industry partners

Robust engagement with stakeholders is essential to the Freight Plan's update. The input and perspectives provided by Montana's freight community will help the project team identify critical issues and challenges and strategies to help address them.

## Targeted Outreach

Targeted outreach was conducted as part of a deliberate effort to strengthen relationships with associations, representing a broad range of freight-related sectors. The intent was to broaden the project's reach by engaging association memberships and creating additional opportunities for stakeholders to complete the survey and contribute valuable data to the Freight Plan. These relationships will remain beneficial for future MDT outreach efforts, including the next Freight Plan update. Identified associations should be engaged early in the planning process to support meaningful and informed stakeholder input.

As part of this effort, sixteen statewide freight-related associations were contacted in which the project team received responses from over half. Working relationships were established with nine industry and trade associations representing critical freight stakeholders across coal, agriculture, trucking, and pipeline sectors.

In addition to the 121 external stakeholders on the distribution list, this targeted outreach extended stakeholder engagement to more than 3,220 additional members who received an invitation to participate in the survey.



## MDT TAC Meeting

On September 4, 2025, MDT hosted a hybrid meeting to gather input from MDT and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) subject matter experts that form the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC plays a critical role in developing the Freight Plan, providing expertise and guidance throughout the process. Areas of MDT and FHWA represented at the meeting included:

- Geotech & Pavement Bureau
- Maintenance Division
- Statewide Planning & Modal Operations
- FHWA
- Bridge Bureau
- Motor Carrier Services
- Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program

- Traffic & Safety Bureau
- MDT Districts

The TAC meeting began with a presentation outlining the purpose of the Freight Plan, its connection to federal funding, and its current goals. The group discussion guided participants in identifying key issues related to each major Freight Plan goal: infrastructure condition, safety, funding, and environmental stewardship. TAC members were asked to highlight their primary areas of concern and offer examples or strategies to address them. The following summarizes the TAC's feedback.

### *Identified Infrastructure Challenges:*

- Outdated bridges were identified as a top concern, noting that weight-restricted structures often force trucks to reroute.
- Lack of adequate truck parking in certain parts of the state, particularly in mountain passes during winter closures.
- Persistent need to address deteriorating infrastructure, including pavement, culverts, retaining walls, and rock slopes, which are reaching the end of their design life.

### *Identified Safety Challenges:*

- Safety concerns associated with commercial driver qualifications, including licensing requirements, driver training, and language barriers were identified.
- Enforcement challenges and the need for increased highway patrol presence in certain parts of the state whereas recent successes of enhanced enforcement efforts along Highways 2 and 12 were noted.
- Seasonal traffic surges, impaired driving, and weather-related crashes were identified as ongoing issues affecting safety.

### *Identified Funding Challenges:*

- Significant funding constraints, including uncertainty in federal funding, challenges in meeting state match requirements for competitive grants, and steep increases in project costs.
- Rising and often unsustainable costs are associated with maintaining technology systems, such as weigh station screening technologies.

### *Identified Environmental Stewardship Challenges:*

- Wildlife collisions, noting these incidents are likely underreported by commercial truck drivers.
- Improved management of weather-related events which can disrupt freight movement and pose ongoing challenges to system reliability were noted.

### *Identified Technology and Innovation Challenges:*

- The importance of continued investment in freight-related technologies, including weigh station pre-screening systems, tire anomaly detection, and driver compliance monitoring tools were highlighted.
- Tools such as the “Free Pass” system, an electronic weigh station bypass program, help streamline operations but require consistent funding to maintain and further advance these capabilities.

## MDT Virtual Freight Plan Stakeholder Workshop

On September 24, 2025, MDT hosted a virtual Freight Plan Stakeholder Workshop to share information about the Freight Plan update and gather input from agency and modal partners involved in freight across Montana. The Workshop provided a focused opportunity for external stakeholders to share their perspectives on current and future freight needs, ensuring the plan reflects on-the-ground challenges and opportunities. Seven attendees from various freight-related sectors and industries participated in the workshop, representing the following areas:

- Metropolitan planning organizations;
- Neighboring state departments of transportation;
- Trucking industry; and
- Aviation industry

The Workshop opened with a presentation that introduced the purpose and goals of the Freight Plan and reviewed the national and state policies that shape its direction.

The group discussion focused on an Areas of Concern matrix that helped participants identify key issues related to infrastructure condition, safety, funding, coordination, and other emerging concerns. Attendees were asked to share their primary issues and provide examples or strategies for addressing them. The following summarizes their feedback.

### *Identified Infrastructure Challenges:*

- Insufficient camera coverage for real-time condition monitoring.
- Challenges with intersection design for freight movements, in some urban areas, may necessitate updated intersection and lane design standards.
- Rapid population growth has increased congestion on roads in some urban areas which may be further impacted by geographic constraints.

### *Identified Safety Challenges:*

- Conflicts between commercial motor vehicles and passenger vehicles.

- Wildlife collisions and seasonal traffic spikes.
- Lack of passing lanes on key corridors, such as Highway 212.
- Shortages of rest areas and truck parking in some parts of the state.

### *Identified Funding Challenges:*

- Limited eligible maintenance funding.
- Rapidly rising equipment and construction costs, such as snowplows doubling in price over the past five years.
- Persistent difficulty in retaining skilled labor, particularly snowplow operators.
- Funding challenges within the aviation sector following the loss of key United States Postal Service contracts.

### *Identified Coordination and Communication Challenges:*

- Limited coordination among states, particularly Montana, South Dakota, and Idaho, for oversize load notifications and interstate closures.
- Delayed road and weather updates within the 511MT system (Montana's traveler information system which provides real-time road conditions to the public).
- Inconsistent information in the 511MT system.
- Lack of regional data sharing.
- Fragmented truck parking data between public and private sources.

### *Identified Future Challenges:*

- New technologies such as truck platooning, automation, and artificial intelligence applications will require consistent legislation and economic incentives.
- The effects of population growth on urban congestion in places like Missoula are outpacing infrastructure capacity.

## Identified Strategic Themes:

Across all discussion areas, several themes emerged:

- Real-time data is foundational to both safety and freight efficiency.
- Multi-state collaboration particularly around closures, data sharing, and oversize-load coordination remains a major gap.
- Safety improvements and truck parking continue to be high priorities.
- Funding limitations and workforce shortages threaten the implementation of needed solutions.
- Proactive planning to prepare for automation, urban growth, and evolving freight logistics.

## Stakeholder Freight Survey

An online opinion survey was distributed to a curated list of external stakeholders from September 9, 2025, through December 12, 2025. The survey initially reached 121 freight stakeholders across military, aviation, local governments, freight associations, shippers/carriers, railroads, and ports. A total of 18 responses were received, representing a 15% response rate. The following section highlights key findings from the survey.

- Respondents represent a variety of roles in Montana's freight-related industries, with the largest groups being transportation planning (33%) and truck driving operators (28%).
- Primary industry respondents include agriculture (39%), energy production (33%), and construction (33%)<sup>1</sup>.
- The most significant factors impacting safe and efficient freight movement are infrastructure condition and extreme weather, each cited by 67% of respondents.
- 39% believe there are sufficient truck parking and rest areas, while 28% do not.
- 50% of respondents gave MDT a rating of 3 out of 5 for their coordination with local agencies.
- Satisfaction with MDT's efforts to maintain highways is generally positive, with 55% of ratings being a 4 or better.
- The most common roadways used for freight include I-90 (67%), I-15 (50%), and I-94 (44%).

Appendix A includes a complete summary of survey responses.

## Next Steps

Interested parties are able to follow progress of the Freight Plan update by visiting MDT's website at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/freightplan/2026-update.aspx>.

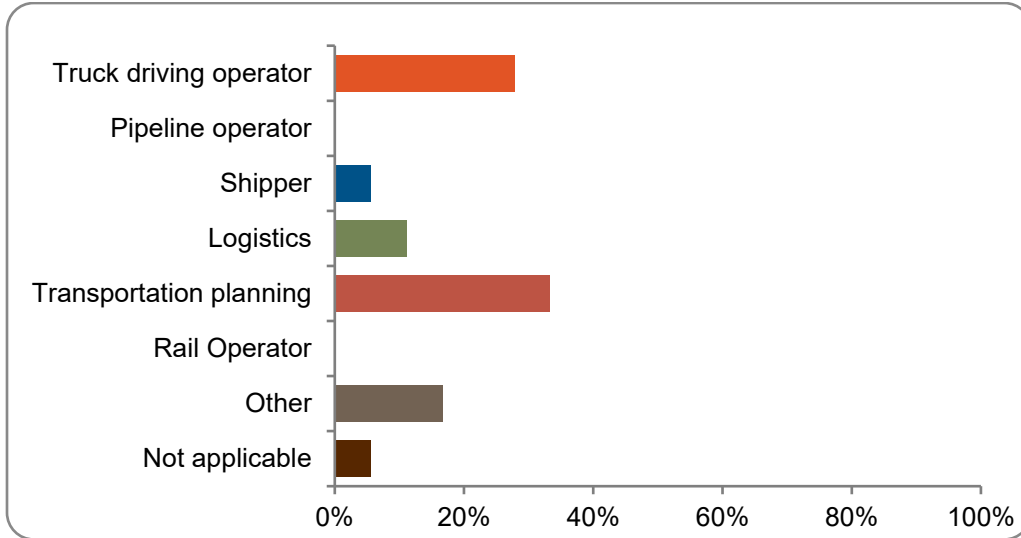
Public comments can also be made on the Plan's webpage at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/contact/comment-form.aspx> or by emailing Heather Kuklo, Transportation Planner, at [hkuklo@mt.gov](mailto:hkuklo@mt.gov). Comments are currently being accepted with a draft Plan anticipated to be available for public review and comment in Fall 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of industry respondents adds up to over 100% because some respondents represent more than one industry and marked more than one box in their response.

## Appendix A: Survey Responses

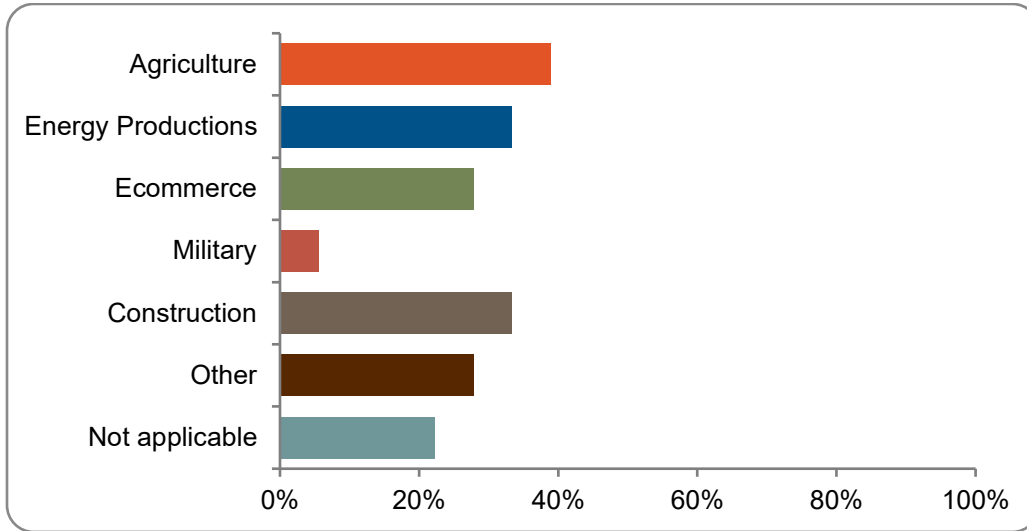
### Q1: What is your agency's role in the movement of freight in Montana?



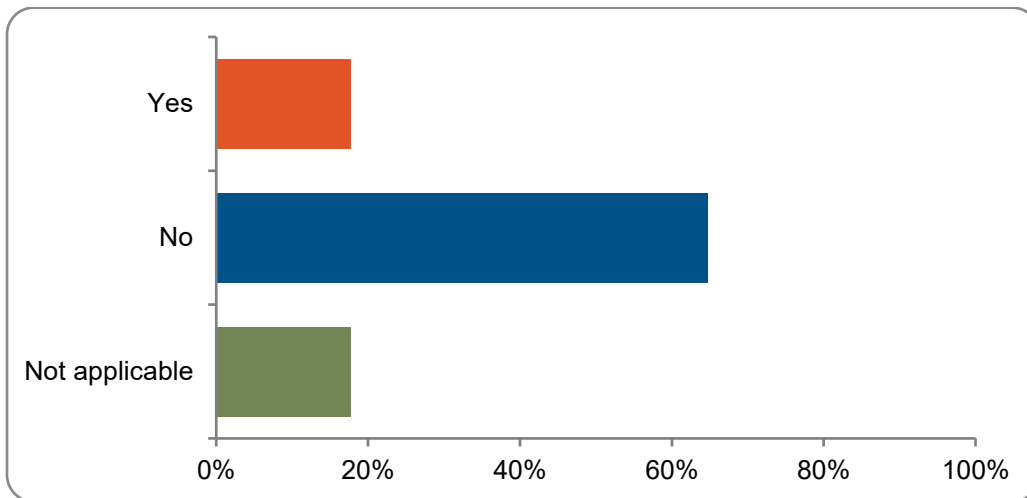
#### ***If Other (Please Specify):***

- The Montana Petroleum Association is a member-based advocacy organization that represents aspects of the oil and gas industry in Montana from development and production, transportation, and associated service providers. Our members use the Montana transportation system. We are pleased to offer our thoughts on freight policy.
- Rail and truck transportation, and rail service within our industrial park.
- As a member of the South Dakota Department of Transportation, my agency's role lies in partnerships with adjacent states in moving freight during winter storm or flood events that impact interstate routes and disrupt freight flows, thereby minimizing impacts.

**Q2: What primary industries benefit from your services? Select all that apply.**



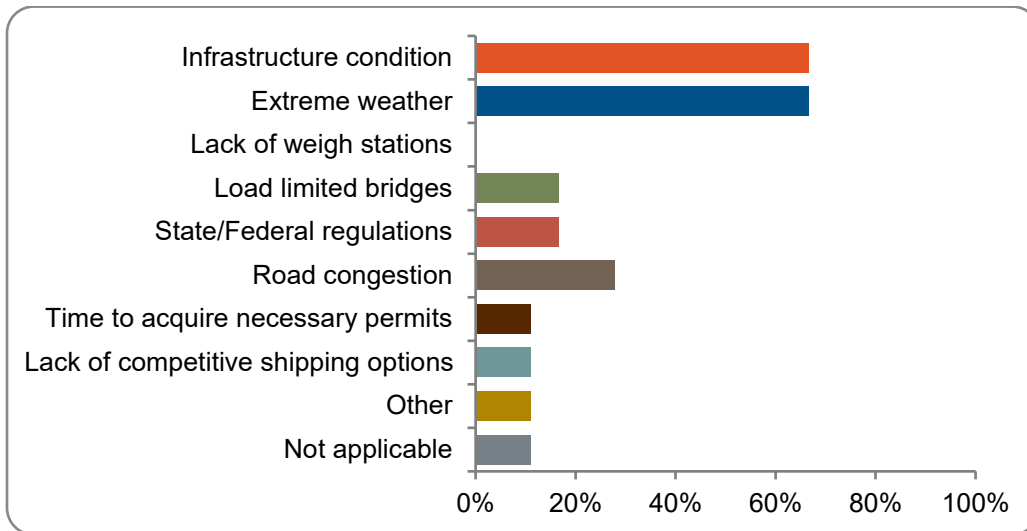
**Q3: Does your agency participate in transloading or intermodal shipping activities?**



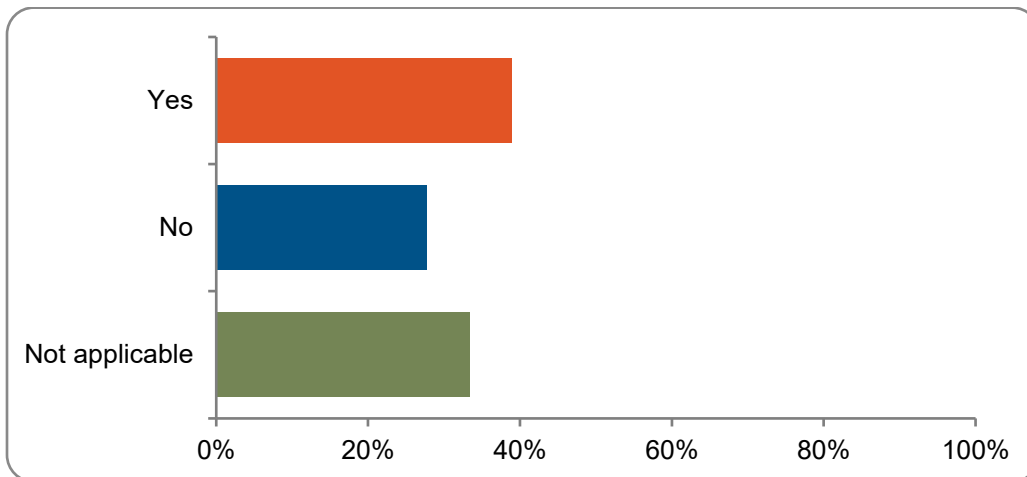
***If yes, what are some major challenges that you might experience:***

- We have members who have used transload facilities in the past. The facility in Shelby has worked well for them.
- Additional rail capacity is always a challenge for us.

**Q4: What do you feel most impacts the safe and efficient movement of freight in Montana? (Select up to three)**



**Q5: Do you feel that there are sufficient truck parking and rest areas in Montana?**



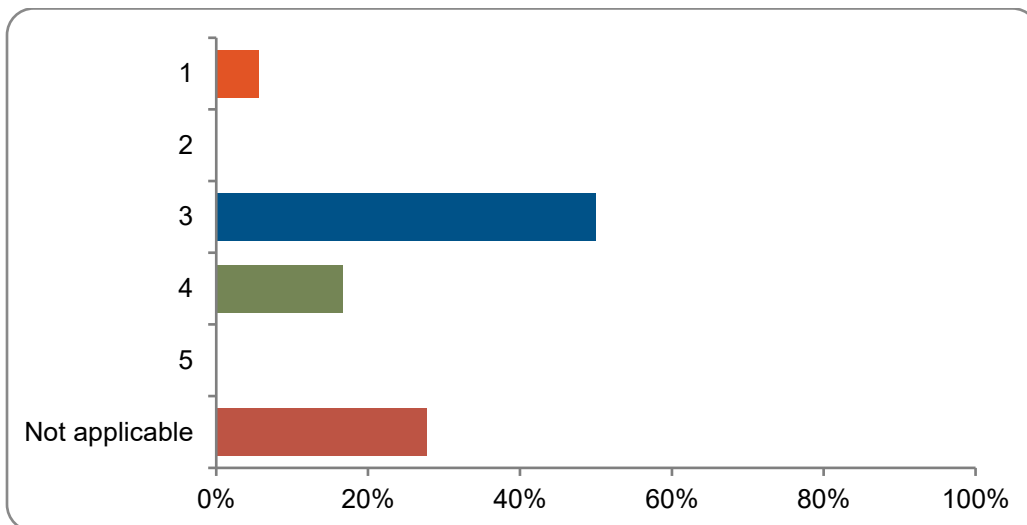
**If no, please share specific recommendations on where you feel additional truck parking and parking and rest areas are needed:**

- Not sure. Based on hearsay only, they need more according to drivers in Montana.
- Need more truck parking across the state. Limited truck parking when roads are closed. The 2-lane roads see a lot of truck traffic and there is no truck parking available.
- Over-the-road drivers have to use electronic logging devices and when they are out of time, they are done. They need clean and safe parking to get their breaks.

Keep all rest areas open year-around. Keep parking areas plowed and write citations to individuals that litter.

- Truck parking in the Bozeman area is limited. Since the 19th Avenue rest area has shifted to private control, no public rest stops exist directly before Bozeman Pass. Current options are Three Forks and the Pilot in Belgrade; the next designated stop is in Columbus, with only informal parking between. This is a safety risk. Please consider assessing barriers to adding capacity.
- The interstate system is well supplied. However, the secondary highway system needs improvement.

**Q6: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you rate Montana Department of Transportation's (MDT's) coordination efforts with local transportation agencies? (Please rate on 1-5 scale. 1 is the worst and 5 is the best)**

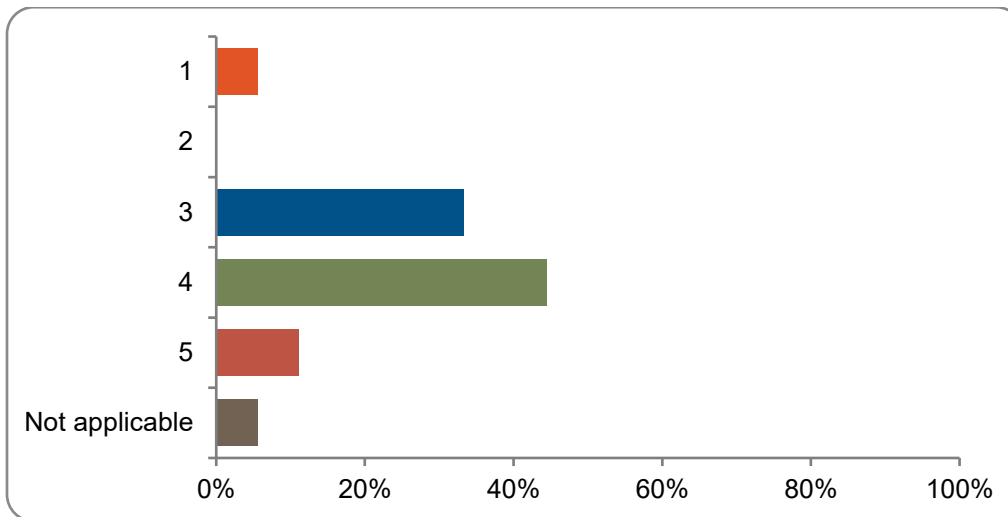


**Q7: What major policy changes at the state or federal level do you feel need to occur to improve the safe and efficient movement of goods in Montana?**

- Additional free training on safety for drivers and loads.
- Enforcement of state and federal laws.
- More 3- or 4-lane spots for passing on 2-lanes as well as minimizing construction zones (If contractors are doing work in an area why have it down to 35 mph on an interstate for 20 miles?).
- The state needs a well-maintained safe highway network. If you have to raise fuel taxes, then do it. As long as the increase benefits the roadway and not added staff in the Manning Building.
- Review the bridge analysis that is required for some oversize and overweight loads in Montana. Maintain the existing level of height restricted highways in Montana.

- Investment in rural intermodal capacity, cold storage, and middle-mile infrastructure for food and agriculture supply chains.
- English proficiency should be a requirement to drive commercial vehicles in Montana.
- In South Dakota, I've heard from the trucking industry that varying load limits can cause issues for shippers, though the complaints are aimed at Minnesota and not Montana. It was suggested that neighboring states should mirror one another.
- Need to better coordinate size of freight vehicles on local/regional streets, particularly in urban areas. We are increasingly facing challenges between safe street design and truck access, so reducing the size of freight trucks within urban areas would be very helpful. Change standards for how trucks are accommodated.
- Better communication with the public on winter road conditions and accidents. More road crews for snowplows and sanders. Fine drivers for not following chain up laws.
- Work on aging bridges.
- MDT needs to provide better access to CDL testing. Federal enforcement of CDL and operational safety needs to be improved.

**Q8: How satisfied are you with MDT's efforts to maintain a safe and efficient highway network? Please rate on 1-5 scale. 1 is the worst and 5 is the best.**

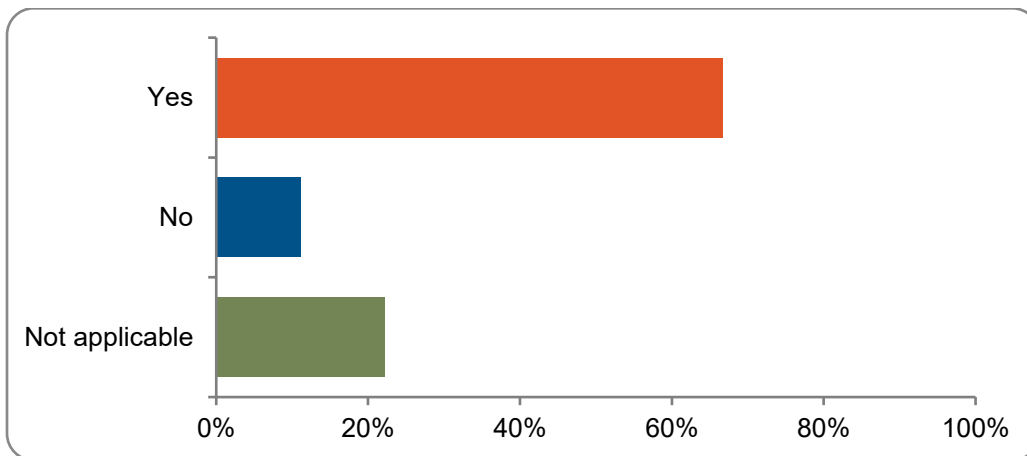


**Q9: What types of infrastructure or technology improvements would most benefit your agency's operations?**

- Better quality of the roads and enforcement of speed limits.
- More passing lanes, better winter road maintenance.
- Continued improvement of 511MT app and real-time conditions.

- The oversize and overweight permit process is very good and works well for most permitting needs. However, there are times when the bridge analysis process is cumbersome and results in delays. There have been instances where delay is measured in days, which is difficult for some members. For the most part this issue applies to what are referred to as super loads. There are times when certain machinery is reduced as much as possible but still has problems. Also, we know that many of Montana's highways include those parts of the Interstate system that have height restrictions which require routing that is often circuitous. We know there is interest in providing crossings for various wildlife and urge the department to avoid height restrictions on existing routes that are without or with only very limited height restrictions.
- I think a common technology for 511MT would be a great service. Improved real-time communications across state lines.
- Not sure.
- More pre-pass scales.
- Any information on improvements to move freight through our state, establishment of intermodal facilities, significant improvements to road infrastructure, addition of high & wide corridors is of interest. This helps with business attraction efforts.
- Highway maintenance.

**Q10: Are there seasonal or weather-related challenges that impact your agency's freight operations?**

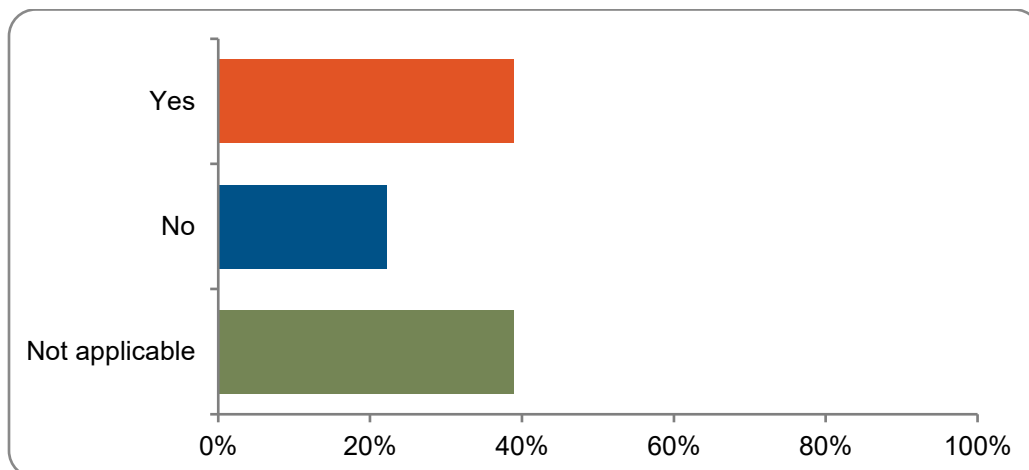


**If yes (Please Specify):**

- Snow and Wind.
- Extreme weather events, including high winds and below zero cold.
- Just the usual roads in Montana, some rest areas close during the winter season.
- Weather and more snow plowing operations.

- Winter road closures or severe driving conditions.
- We need the highways open in order for us to service our customers and keep the shelves stocked. MDT may need to pay more for plow drivers and if the union barks about higher pay in areas such as Bozeman, take them to task. Let the public know why we don't have enough drivers.
- Weather can always impact operations, but MDT does a great job dealing with weather, keeping routes open and as safe as possible. Sometimes routes are incumbered with weight restrictions necessary to protect the roadway. We understand that and appreciate the effort you make to limit those applications as much as possible. Finally, we know that there has been considerable effort to replace older bridges on many highways across the state over the last several years. This effort will improve transportation efficiency and safety. MPA appreciates those efforts.
- Road and pass closures due to snow and ice.
- There has been a decline in the prompt response of snowplows. MDT does not spend the amount of time snow plowing (or perhaps a lack of manpower, or maybe it's the lack of knowledgeable manpower). In our area, the plows were always out prior to working hours for both plowing and sanding and on stormy days they would be out multiple times a day. Now, there are times when they have not cleared the highways by the time the workday starts.
- Responding to and preparing for winter weather events are a top state agency priority.
- Adverse driving conditions, and tourists are not prepared for mountain driving.
- Winter weather will always present challenges to truck transportation.

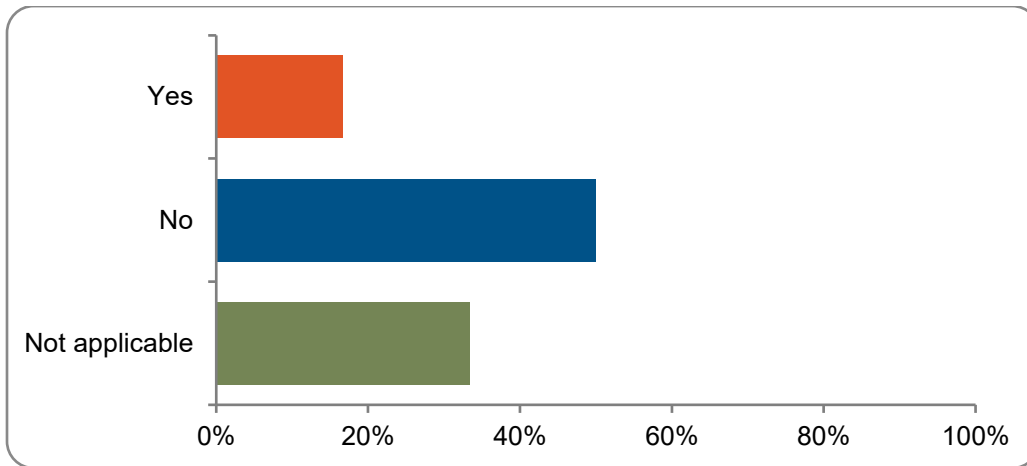
**Q11: Do you operate or coordinate freight activities across Montana state lines?**



***If yes, please explain:***

- Just knowing different regulations by State.
- Winter roads, states are not working with each other on road construction areas and are scheduling them at different times. Sixty-plus miles of road construction at very reduced speeds.
- Varying weight limits and road conditions.
- We do, but other than items previously mentioned we have no further comments.
- Weight differences and permit differences between the states. Idaho and Utah are both 129,000-pound max states. Montana is 132,000 pounds. Wyoming is 117,000 pounds.
- There is a lack of resources to inform us about hauling overweight loads across state lines. Each state has their own bridge law limits for loads over 80,000 pounds.
- Shortage of Montana based goods to support transportation.

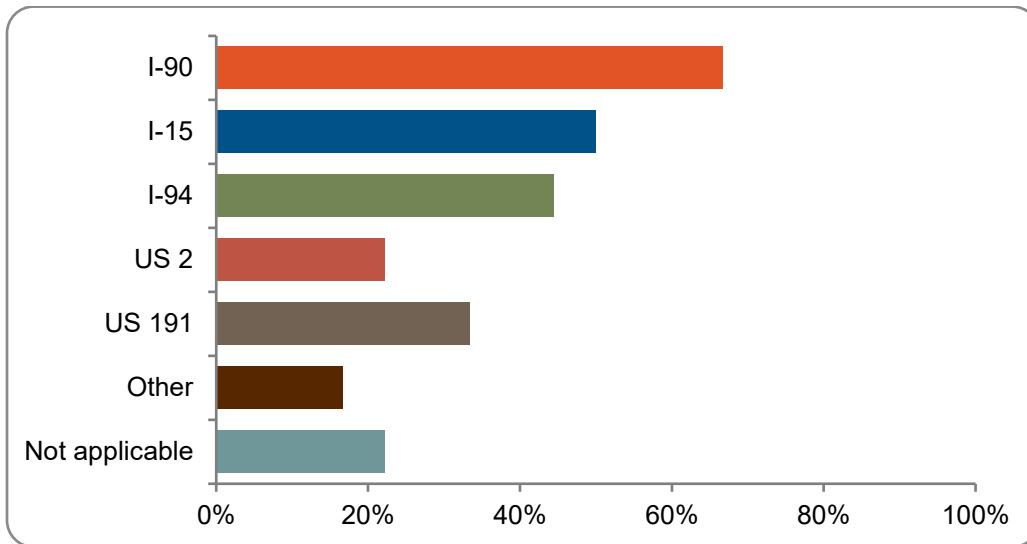
***Q12: Do you support initiatives that promote truck platooning and autonomous commercial vehicles?***



***If yes, please explain:***

- Montana doesn't have the right conditions during the winter months for this to be viable.
- Reduced labor costs and fuel consumption, and enhanced safety.
- Anything that makes it safer.
- I believe there was an industry and legislative effort pushed back in 2017-2019, but do not have any information to share on best practices or success.
- New technologies are an opportunity for our industry to become more efficient and safer.

**Q13: What roadways does your agency use the most when transporting freight?  
(Select all that apply)**



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