To the Revenue and Transportation Interim Committee
May 6, 2014

From: Nancy Thornton, P.O. Box 1482, Choteau MT 59422, nancetho@montana.com
I work part-time as a weekly newspaper reporter and have written numerous articles about oversized hauls traveling through town.

Subject: Public comment on the following questions: Should oversize load corridors be established and, if so, who should establish them, where should they be located, and how should they be financed?

Question: Should oversize load corridors be established?

Answer: Yes, but conditioned on the premise that public safety and not corporate convenience is the priority. This means at the very least building turnouts at proper intervals to maintain Montana's 10-minute maximum delay rule.

Background: In 2010 MDT approved Imperial Oil's detailed Kearl Module Transport Project plan to transport 207 oversized loads through Missoula, over Rogers Pass and along the Rocky Mountain Front through Augusta, Choteau, Bynum and Valier. Our county commissioners endorsed the project. Imperial paid for extensive utility fixes to bury overhead lines or raise them on taller poles. Then the Kearl plan ended up in court and the proposed turnouts designed to make a safe passage for all travelers were never built.

Other transport companies learned of the Kearl plan that identified the half-finished heavy haul corridor along U.S. Highways 287 and 89. The first one came in October 2011. It was 25 feet high, 24 feet wide and 182 feet long and it weighed 515,000 pounds. Since then, Augusta and Choteau have regularly witnessed massive loads traveling through their towns taking up both lanes and disrupting traffic. Each megaload negotiates the roundabout at our historic Teton County Courthouse. The bottom line is that the community already is part of an oversized load corridor by default.

Question: Who should establish the corridors, where should they be located, and how should they be financed?

Answer: It must be a matter of public safety balanced with the transports' destinations. MDT already has this data. The agency knows where it issues 32-J permits. Tap into that data, but be very concerned that two-lane highways with no shoulders are risky routes. The state must take responsibility to finish what was started. Please build turnouts along U.S. Highways 287 and 89 along the Rocky Mountain Front.

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Exhibit 21

Background: In October 2011 a private vehicle carrying a passenger with a medical emergency was delayed 30 minutes behind one of those new transport companies, Nickel Bros. Shortly after midnight in the early hours of Oct. 6, an Augusta couple set out on U.S. Highway 287 taking the wife's mother to Teton Medical Center in Choteau. They came up behind a caravan of flashing yellow lights that blocked both lanes. They remained behind the caravan until the big rig moved off the pavement near Seven Mile Hill so that vehicles could pass. What should have been a 25-minute ride turned into an hour's ride that, thankfully, had a good outcome in that the ill woman received the proper medical treatment in the emergency room and was admitted to the hospital. That same oversized transport stopped the Fairfield volleyball team for an hour coming back from an away game in Browning.

Nickel Bros. and MDT beefed up the public safety plan after that disastrous heavy haul.

In conclusion, the state already has the tools, as listed in Megan Moore's April report noting no statutory impediments to private funding of oversize routes. If it does not have it already, MDT should be granted the authority to spend funds on turnouts where public safety issues have been identified on highways.

After that 2011 incident an Augusta resident lead the push for changes to dealing with heavy hauls. She said, "When MDT balances the public welfare and safety against corporate profits and convenience, the safety and welfare of its citizens must come first. The roads were built for all to share equally, not for the systematic, exclusive use of one interest to the exclusion of all others."

Thank you.

June 20, 2013 Chatham NY
N Thurston, photographer