



A feasibility case study of Automated Highway Systems in the Greater Yellowstone priority corridor
by Russell Scott Gomke

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Civil
Engineering

Montana State University

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Abstract:

The use of Automated Highway Systems (AHS) technology has been proposed as a mitigating application to vehicle collisions in rural areas. The application of AHS in the urban environment is being tested and evaluated to reduce traffic congestion with secondary consideration to safety. Typically, recurring congestion is not a problem in the rural environment, while increasing traveler safety is a primary concern. Automated Highway Systems have the potential to address safety issues in the rural environment by providing the driver with critical collision warning and avoidance information.

The purpose of this study was to address the feasibility, applicability and institutional issues of deploying AHS components in the Greater Yellowstone Corridor. To accomplish the project objectives a systematic research approach was developed to assess the safety challenges and infrastructure deficiencies of the Greater Yellowstone Corridor. The primary tasks consisted of a transportation system inventory, an accident analysis, an AHS countermeasure assessment and a benefit-cost evaluation.

The research yielded several spot location applications with the potential to positively affect the safety challenges of the Greater Yellowstone Corridor. Potential technologies are friction/ice detection warning system, animal-vehicle collision warning, intersection collision warning and advanced horizontal curve warning. These are all near-term applications. Benefit-cost evaluations have indicated several multi-mile sections of highway in the Greater Yellowstone corridor where far-term countermeasures are applicable and feasible. Far-term applications include longitudinal and lateral warning and guidance. However, these applications require appropriate vehicle fleet penetration before any true benefits can be quantified. Market penetration may be facilitated by fleet vehicle deployment.

The work performed for this project is only the first phase. Funding will be pursued to develop some of the near-term applications into field operational tests. The sites identified in this thesis are estimated to have the greatest potential for improving safety in the Greater Yellowstone corridor.

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- Jim Richard, District Engineer - Idaho Department of Transportation;
- Dennis Hult, ITS Program Coordinator - Montana Department of Transportation; and
- Bill Cottrill, Traffic Engineer - National Park Service, Denver Office.

These agencies provided the researcher with relevant information on the Greater Yellowstone Priority Corridor to allow an accurate evaluation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
1. AUTOMATED HIGHWAY SYSTEMS.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	4
Methodology.....	7
Data Collection and Assimilation	7
Data Processing and Analysis	8
AHS Countermeasure Assessment	8
Benefit-Cost Analysis	9
Project Goals and Objectives.....	9
Corridor Description.....	10
Roadways.....	11
Meteorological Conditions.....	12
Communications Infrastructure	14
Geometric Characteristics.....	14
Project Partners.....	15
2. RURAL AHS VISION	16
Introduction.....	16
The System	18
Longitudinal Collision Warning/Guidance.....	19
Lateral Collision Warning/Guidance	20
Intersection Collision Warning	20
Deployment Vision.....	21
5-year Vision.....	22
10-year Vision.....	23
20-year Vision.....	24
AHS Benefits.....	24
3. INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES.....	26
Introduction.....	26
General Issues	27
Legal Issues.....	29

Liability.....	29
Public Acceptance.....	31
Procurement Procedures	32
Funding	32
Operation and Maintenance Responsibility	33
Privacy Issues.....	33
Environmental Impacts	34
Societal Issues	34
Jurisdictional Coordination.....	34
 Project Partner Concerns	 35
Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)	36
Idaho Department of Transportation (IDT)	36
Planning and Outreach.....	36
Demonstrating, Deployment and Operation	36
Financial and Legal Issues	37
 Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT)	 37
Planning and Outreach.....	37
Demonstrating, Deployment and Operation	38
Financial and Legal Issues	38
 Yellowstone National Park (YNP).....	 38
Planning and Outreach.....	39
Demonstrating, Deployment and Operation	39
Financial and Legal Issues	40
 4. ACCIDENT ANALYSIS.....	 41
Introduction.....	41
Micro Accident Analysis	42
Accident Rate.....	43
Severity Rate.....	43
Accident Trends	44
 Macro Accident Analysis	 45
Stratified Accident Analysis	47
Commercial Vehicles.....	47
Microanalysis.....	48
Macroanalysis	48
 Traveler Origin.....	 51
Macroanalysis	52
Wyoming U.S. Highway 89.....	52
Idaho U.S. Highway 20.....	53

Idaho U.S. Highway 26.....	54
Montana U.S. Highway 20.....	54
Montana U.S. Highway 89.....	54
Montana U.S. Highway 191.....	54
5. POTENTIAL AHS COUNTERMEASURES	56
Introduction.....	56
Spot Location Countermeasures	56
Road Surface Condition Monitoring.....	56
New Technology: Friction/Ice Detection and Warning.....	56
Traditional Countermeasure: Static Ice Warning	58
Intersection Warnings.....	59
New Technology: Crossing Detection.....	59
Animal-vehicle Collision Avoidance.....	61
New Technology: Radar Detection Activation.....	61
Traditional Countermeasure: Fences, Reflectors, Repellent Etc.....	62
Horizontal Curve Speed Advisory.....	63
New Technology: Dynamic Variable Message Sign.....	63
Traditional Countermeasure: Static Curve Warning Sign	64
Regional Countermeasures	64
Longitudinal Sensing	65
Lateral Sensing.....	66
New Technology: Magnetic Nail.....	68
New Technology: Magnetic Tape.....	69
6. BENEFIT-COST ANALYSIS.....	70
Introduction.....	70
Assumptions	71
Spot Location Analysis.....	74
Benefits	74
Costs.....	76
Benefit-cost Ratios.....	77
Regional Analysis.....	79
Benefits	79
Costs.....	81
Benefit-cost Ratios.....	81
Deployment Vision Analysis.....	83

Benefits	83
Costs.....	84
Benefit-cost Ratios.....	84
7. FINAL RESULTS	87
Candidate Field Operational Tests.....	87
Measures of Effectiveness	88
8. SUMMARY	91
Introduction.....	91
Rural AHS Vision.....	92
Institutional Issues	92
Accident Analysis.....	93
Benefit-cost Analysis.....	95
Results.....	96
REFERENCES	98
APPENDICES	101
Appendix A: Corridor Map	102
Appendix B: Meteorological Data.....	104
Appendix C: Geometric Data	107
Appendix D: Roadway Divisions	116
Appendix E: Spot Location Accident Trends.....	118
Appendix F: Regional Accident Trends	125
Appendix G: FHWA Motor Vehicle Accident Costs	129
Appendix H: CVO Regional Accident Rates	132
Appendix I: Regional Infrastructure Costs.....	139
Appendix J: Regional Benefits	143
Appendix K: Institutional Issues Survey	165

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Rural and Urban Institutional Issue Focus.....	28
2. Concerns From Project Partners	35
3. Atypical Spot Locations.....	44
4. Atypical Regional Segments.....	46
5. Heavy Vehicle Accident Rates	48
6. CVO Accident: First Harmful Event	49
7. CVO Accident: Contributing Circumstances.....	50
8. Origin of Vehicle Causing Accidents	52
9. Origin of Vehicle Involved in Accidents	52
10. Longitudinal Sensing Technology	65
11. Lateral Sensing Technology	66
12. Regional Accident Reduction Factors	73
13. Spot Location Accident Reduction Factors	73
14. Annual Benefits with Friction/Ice Detection	74
15. Annual Benefits with Static Ice Warning Sign.....	75
16. Annual Benefits with Intersection Crossing Detection.....	75
17. Annual Benefits with Animal-vehicle Collision Warning.....	75
18. Annual Benefits with Dynamic Variable Message Sign.....	76
19. Annual Benefits with Chevrons	76
20. Estimated Spot Location System Costs	76

Table	Page
21. Benefit-cost with Friction/Ice Detection System	77
22. Benefit-cost with Static Ice Warning Sign.....	78
23. Benefit-cost with Intersection Crossing Detection	78
24. Benefit-cost with Animal-vehicle Collision Warning	78
25. Benefit-cost with Dynamic Variable Message Sign	79
26. Benefit-cost with Chevrons.....	79
27. Annual Regional Benefits with AHS	80
28. Infrastructure Costs for Lateral Guidance.....	81
29. Benefit-cost with Regional Deployment.....	81
30. AHS Benefits with Deployment Vision.....	83
31. Benefit-cost Based on Deployment Vision.....	85
32. U.S. Highway 191/20.....	105
33. U.S. Highway 89/26.....	106
34. Idaho R-20 Geometric Data	108
35. Idaho R-26 Geometric Data	108
36. Idaho R-20 Ramp Geometric Data	109
37. Montana R-20 Geometric Data.....	110
38. Montana R-89 Geometric Data.....	110
39. Montana R-191 Geometric Data.....	111
40. Wyoming R-26 Geometric Data	111
41. Wyoming R-89 Geometric Data	112
42. Wyoming R-89 Geometric Data	113

Table	Page
43. Wyoming R-89 Geometric Data	114
44. Roadway Divisions	117
45. Spot Location Accidents	120
46. Spot Location Accident Trends	121
47. Spot Location Costs	123
48. Regional Accidents	127
49. Regional Accident Trends.....	128
50. CVO Accident Economic Costs.....	134
51. CVO Property Damage Costs	134
52. CVO Injury Costs	135
53. CVO Fatality Costs	135
54. CVO Property Damage Sorted by Road Type.....	136
55. CVO Injury Accidents Sorted by Road Type	136
56. CVO Fatality Accidents Sorted by Road Type.....	137
57. CVO Property Damage Accidents Sorted by State.....	137
58. CVO Injury Accidents Sorted by State.....	138
59. CVO Fatality Accidents Sorted by State	138
60. 3M Magnetic Tape Infrastructure Costs	141
61. All Magnetics Incorporated Infrastructure Cost	142
62. Montana Regional Benefit Data.....	145
63. Idaho Regional Benefit Data.....	152
64. Wyoming Regional Benefit Data.....	158

Table	Page
65. Yellowstone Regional Benefit Data.....	162
66. Regional Benefit-costs	164

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Typical AHS Environment	1
2. Typical Corridor Snowfall	3
3. Potential Animal-vehicle Conflict	3
4. ITS Areas of Focus	5
5. Incremental AHS Deployment.....	21
6. Ice Detection Schematic	57
7. Slippery Warning Sign.....	58
8. Crossing - Path Detection Schematic.....	60
9. Variable Message Sign	63
10. Magnetic Nail.....	68
11. Corridor Map	103

ABSTRACT

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The work performed for this project is only the first phase. Funding will be pursued to develop some of the near-term applications into field operational tests. The sites identified in this thesis are estimated to have the greatest potential for improving safety in the Greater Yellowstone corridor.

CHAPTER 1

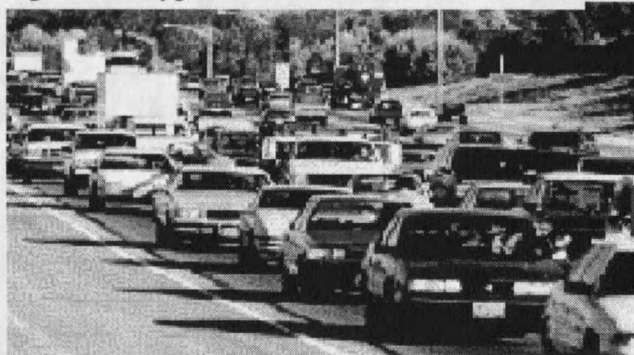
AUTOMATED HIGHWAY SYSTEMS

Introduction

The intent of this study was to recommend applications and consider implications of Automated Highway Systems (AHS) in a rural environment. This study focused on developing an applicable AHS for the Greater Yellowstone Rural Intelligent Transportation Systems (GYRITS) corridor (see Appendix A) that would ultimately increase safety and improve operation of the GYRITS corridor.

Initial activities by the National Automated Highway System Consortium (NAHSC) have focused on urbanized areas (see Figure 1). However, a need exists to

Figure 1 – Typical AHS Environment



investigate the applicability of advanced transportation technology and AHS in rural settings. AHS applications have primarily focused on problems associated with urban traffic congestion; secondary considerations have related to safety, air quality and energy

conservation. These areas are also of concern to the rural transportation provider; however, the primary focus of the rural transportation provider is improved safety.

There are many safety benefits potentially realized through the application of AHS technologies to the existing transportation infrastructure, particularly through advanced driver warnings. It is estimated that if a driver were warned of an impending collision one half second earlier, 50 percent of rear-end and cross-road crashes and 30 percent of head-on crashes could be avoided. If an additional second is provided to the driver, 90 percent of all crashes could be avoided. Experts estimate that advanced transportation technologies will potentially save 11,500 lives, 442,000 injuries, and \$22 billion in property damage nationally by 2010. [2]

The selected corridor represents a vital transportation link for the trucking industry, connecting the Northwest and Canada with Intermountain and Southwest markets. Approximately 20 percent of the traffic traversing the GYRITS corridor is commercial. [3] Commercial vehicles use this route to transport goods between the aforementioned markets and markets within the corridor (e.g., mining, forestry, and agricultural industries). Because much of the corridor is two-lane highway, many dangerous passing situations result involving large trucks, recreational vehicles, tourists and slow-moving farm machinery. Poor sight distance, limited by the winding road and canyon walls, exacerbates the danger.

The corridor presents an environment filled with unique challenges that must be confronted when developing a viable transportation system. The corridor receives about 80 to 90 inches of snow in a typical winter (see Figure 2). Temperatures can reach 65

degrees below zero (Fahrenheit) and a 40 to 50 degree temperature shift from day to

Figure 2 – Typical Corridor Snowfall



night is not unusual. Winter conditions typically last about eight months. However, it has been known to snow in the higher elevations in the summer months.

The corridor encompasses migration routes and habitat for deer, elk, bison and moose. Periodically, these animals can be found on the roadway, presenting a potential animal-vehicle conflict (see Figure 3). Over a recent three-year period, 367 animal-

Figure 3 – Potential Animal-vehicle Conflict



vehicle collisions were reported. Non-reported animal-vehicle collisions likely increase this number substantially.

Because much of the corridor abuts mountain ranges, many sections of the corridor are not covered by cellular phone service. The canyon walls also preclude the reception of AM or FM radio band signals throughout much of the corridor.

The combination of varied, often undesirable driving conditions with wildlife, unfamiliar drivers, a diverse traffic stream and a lack of communication infrastructure indicates an immediate and growing need for increased focus on safety. The problems experienced in the GYRITS corridor are common to many rural environments. Hence, it is an ideal location to showcase field operational demonstrations of advanced technologies.

Background

In the last couple of decades, the transportation community has seen the emergence of new transportation technologies. Many agencies across the country have implemented and demonstrated the use of advanced transportation technologies but with little or no national coordination, standards or strategic direction. The congressional enactment of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) restructured the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) and made provisions for the development of an advanced technology program titled "Intelligent Vehicle-Highway Systems" (IVHS). The USDOT was required to develop a national strategic plan and a grant program for the research, development and deployment of advanced transportation technologies. Later IVHS evolved into Intelligent

