

U.S. Highway 85 From Wyoming to Cheyenne Crossing - Comments

December 12, 2023

Email #1

I'm inquiring about an email I sent to you on 8 December 2023 with questions about the proposed project for US Hwy 85, Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming line. What with the up coming meeting at Spearfish Canyon Lodge on 18 December I'd really appreciate a response before too long.

Email #2

No, this is not the email Jennica,

Don't know what happened here. It is not showing up in my sent file or any other records so I don't even have it at the moment.. I'll get back to you ASAP. Thanks much for your fast reply.

Email #3

This is a shortened (rushed)version of the original email regarding US Hwy 85, Cheyenne Crossing to Wyoming Line.. I do understand that this information can be pulled off the DOT website but for many of us the DOT's website language and arrangements offer a confusing and time consuming process. We need a simple narrative description of the proposed changes in US 85, Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming line.

Specifically,

- present right of way widths of U.S. 85 and, separately, those widths if DOT goes ahead with proposed plans.
- present total widths of existing highway, shoulders included and same information on those widths if DOT follows new plans.
- present widths of actual running surface, and same if DOT follows new plans.
- any changes in present alignment and, if so, description of same. (I found this information on your website and I am well acquainted with this highway. You do describe at least major departure from the existing road but not in a way that clearly locates it, even for someone who knows the road in detail, and I do. It was good that you ran it in the Journal but the Pioneer is the go to paper in the northern Hills.

SD DOT ran a public notice in the Rapid City Journal on 4 December 2023 but I did not see the same in the Black Hills Pioneer, the go to paper in the northern Black Hills. Did DOT run that notice in the Pioneer?

I really appreciated your prompt reply and I am sorry for any inconvenience in correspondence to date. I'm getting some odd error messages in my computer and I suspect that is the original source of the confusion.

Your help on this will be much appreciated.

██████████
In case you need it, my phone is ██████████

Email #4

This is very helpful and I appreciate the information. I do understand that DOT will be making changes as the project progresses. But time passes quickly, and SD DOT language is engineering language and thus fails to adequately inform Black Hills people about this project. Many if not most of us really have to work at SD DOT jargon to understand it. It's that way with a lot of Forest Service and EPA language as well. It's unfortunate. It really discourages genuine public participation. I will forward remaining questions after I interpret the information you provided. I suspect that information will answer many of my remaining questions.

Meanwhile, for the moment:

- Did the SD DOT also send the public notice that ran in the 4 December 2023 Rapid City Journal to the Black Hills Pioneer?
- I might have overlooked the answer to this one. Did SD DOT offer a no action alternative for this project?
- And who do I contact to ask detailed questions about the format of meetings such as and including the 18 December Open House Meeting at the Spearfish Canyon Lodge?

I cannot but wonder if SD DOT people have any idea what kind of hornets nest they might be poking by suggesting changes of any kind in US 85, Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming Line. We care about both that road and that country because *they are what they are*. I doubt that branch of the Spearfish Canyon has any equal in the northern Plains. You can further fragment the landscapes adjacent to the existing highways, but you cannot improve them.

Thanks again for the information.

Email #5

December 24, 2023

Mark Malone, Jennica Wilcox and staff,

I have a long history of complaining about "Open House" meetings that have so often served to 'disperse the crowd' and limit open exchange of ideas, an exchange that is the most important part of the public information process. But your recent "Open House" on 18 December at Spearfish Canyon Lodge was not that way at all.

The meeting was exceptionally well chaired. We remained in one group in which participants could hear comments from everyone in the group. The result was a spirited and open exchange of ideas. D.O.T. people were listening intently, too, listening and encouraging all in attendance to express their views. I do not like DOTs plans for U.S. 85, Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming line, but that was beside the point. I appreciated your open and honest handling of the meeting on the 18 December. That was a tough meeting to moderate and you, *all of you*, in speaking or supportive roles, did an excellent job.

Email #6

January 8, 2024

Hi Jennica,

My understanding of the public meeting that DOT held on 18 December 2023 was an *informal* meeting and that DOT will be holding more of these. Am I correct? What kind of record does DOT keep on these:

-list of participants?

-transcripts?

-simply notes on participants comments?

-other?

Are there any formal public meetings planned at this time?

I appreciated the 18 December meeting and the open exchange of ideas that took place.

Email #7

January 10, 2024

Hi Jennica,

The Black Hills Context Sensitive Corridors Study, March 2023 includes three corridor studies including a Commuter/Commercial Corridor Study that provides the design standards for the Highway U.S. 85 project that DOT presented information on at Spearfish Canyon Lodge on 18 December, and another such study, the Destination Corridor study that DOT decided not to adopt. I'm one of several people who want to see the highway design standards that would have been taken from the Destination Corridor study. Your help on this is appreciated.

Email #8

January 23, 2024

Hi Jennica,

My inquiries to date on the Commuter/Commercial and Destination Corridor studies have been too long, too wordy.

You tell me in your 19 January email that Destination Corridor standards would not apply to US 85 because it is defined as a Commuter/Commercial highway. But I know that, and I was not and am not now asking about that. My question is: *Did DOT at some point create design standards for US 85, Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming line, based on a Destination Corridor study?*

Email #9

January 26, 2024

Hi Mark,

Two emails, below as background,

-one to me from Jennica in which she did not answer my question but sent it on to you: *"Did DOT at some point create design standards for US 85, Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming line, based on a Destination Corridor study?"*

-And a second email in which you responded to my email to Jennica but still did not answer my question. You have since explained your thinking on that in a phone call, but I broke a rule of my own when I talked with you on the phone about that. My rule, which I learned the hard way from another State agency, is **to avoid conducting this kind of correspondence by phone--to use email only**. And the short of this, (my error since I made the call), is that for all of the words so far spent on this neither you or Jennica has answered my question: *"Did DOT at some point create design standards for US 85, Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming line, based on a Destination Corridor study?"* It's a simple and reasonable yes or no question Mark, and a growing number of people expect and deserve DOT's yes or no response.

December 19, 2023 |

Email #1

Can I just email you our thoughts through an email or do I have to write it on the comment sheet, scan it and email it to you?

Email #2

It was great to meet you as well and we greatly appreciate you for giving us the opportunity to give you our thoughts and input on this project. We greatly appreciate all of you that took the time to put this public meeting together, to educate us on this project. I apologize if any of us come across crabby or angry about the options and we understand that nothing is written in stone and you are willing to listen to our suggestions and comments.

We agree that the road needs to be improved. We agree that shoulders need to be added where they can be along with more pull outs and widening some curves to help the visibility, decreasing the speed in and out of the Cheyenne Crossing/Wikup Cabin area is a must and the 55 mph is ok for the west end, but the 65 mph is an absolute NO. All of us that live out here know that you can safely drive this highway at a speed of 35-42 mph at night and not much faster. Where you want to increase the speed limit is part of the biggest area where elk and deer cross. That will never change. There are about 10-12 spots between the WY border and the Flandreau Indian Tribal ground on Highway 85 that the elk cross morning and night. We have cattle out often in the summer and fall due to the elk knocking the fence down from crossing from one side of the highway to the other. It is open range out here, so you can't sue a Rancher if his cattle are out. If a new traveler passes through here going 65 mph (or most likely faster) at night and feel that it should be safe to drive that speed since it is suggested and come across a herd of elk at the top of O'Neill Pass (which happens more often than not) or at any of the other spots, have a bad collision and no cell service to call for help, they life could be in jeopardy. Our only cell service hot spots are at the top of O'Neill Pass and if you lower the road from the current road, you may not get service there either. The other spot is the hill just past Buckhorn, WY. Otherwise you don't get cell service until you are closer to Cheyenne Crossing.

Our area is a huge outdoor recreation area. We have a lot of elk, deer, and turkey hunters out here that drive slow. We have UTV/ATV's out here that can't do the speed limit, even at 55 mph. We have many people that drive out here to enjoy the scenery. We have snowmobilers that need to cross the highway in 2 areas, one is trail 6 and the other is Trail 1. There are many people that have driveways that have a difficult time with visibility and will need to pick up their speed quickly once they get on the highway to be at the speed of traffic. I know you are looking to improve the hidden driveways, but the ones that can't be improved have to be taken into consideration. Right now the signs for snowmobile crossing for trail 6 are not visible enough for traffic to know that they are approaching that area. The signs are right before the crossing. I think that there should probably be another sign further back with flashing lights to bring their attention to be aware of the crossing coming up. It would be pretty hard to stop on a dime going 55 or 65 mph. We also need flashing signs for trail 1 by our business as well, since it is a race track already at 55 mph. The people know that they can pass in front of our business, so they start to crank up their speed as they come down O'Neill Pass or the other curve just west of us and so they are screaming over the speed limit, by the time they get to the front of our property and that's with the speed limit being at 55 mph.

You can advertise this as a scenic byway and if they want to go fast, then they can take 585 to the Interstate or highway 85 out of Deadwood to the Interstate. They can choose to go 55 here or 80 on the interstate. They have a choice. The road can still be improved and not moved and still make it safer.

A lot of the motorcycle accidents that occurred on the other side of O'Neill Pass is from the gravel that gets drug off of the graveled O'Neill Pass road and drug on highway 85 and when the motorcyclists get to the top of O'Neill Pass and as they come down, they come upon the gravel that was drug on the road, lose control and fly into the trees. That has happened right by South Rapid Creek Road (231) as well.

The other motorcycle accidents west of us are mostly from avoiding deer and elk or hitting them.

We think by increasing the speed to 65 mph, you are going to cause more future fatalities and accidents due to the speed and the multiple obstacles, such as the animal crossings, cattle being out (open range out here), slow UTV/ATV traffic, slower tourism traffic, and snowmobile crossings. It makes sense to improve the road, add in a good amount of shoulders, widening some curves for better visibility, slowing the speed limit in and out of Cheyenne Crossing area, adding more pull outs, but not increasing the speed any faster than 55 mph. Remember again, there is no cell service out here for people to call for help. That is a hazard as well.

We also feel that you are really going to destroy our business, so if you want to change the highway and put it at 65 mph, you might as well give us an offer for the business or it will be up for sale. You are taking away half our lot or more for snowmobile parking, which will take away business from us, you are taking away trail 2A, which is on our property. You are making the speed way too high for anyone to notice us and stop in and be able to slow down in time to stop in. When we bought the place 9 years ago, several people stopped in and said that we needed signs before drivers would approach us, so they knew there was gas, food, and lodging ahead, otherwise, they would be going too fast and have to turn around, which can become a traffic accident as well. We had the DOT come out here and see if we qualified for signs like they put everywhere else on this highway for other businesses, informing drivers what was ahead or how to find the business. Supposedly with the formula that the DOT has for the center of the road and a certain amount of feet of visibility to see the business, our business was visible enough for drivers to see us and no signs were needed. Now if you push us further back from the road, maybe we would qualify, but I doubt it. It seems like we can't win with the DOT or the county. We tried putting signs up on our own property, one on the far east end and the far west end for people to see that they were approaching our business. The county made us take them down.

We are the only business out here. I feel we do make a good amount of sales tax for the state. We are the local information stop. People constantly stop to tell us that there are cows out and we are supposed to take care of it. Even though it is free range and not our job to find the owners of the cattle, we do and then we contact them and let them know how many and where they are at. I think our business would be a huge loss to the state if we folded up. We are the center hub of the snowmobile trail system. The State snowmobile trail system generates a lot of tourism tax for the state. If we aren't here, the lot wouldn't be plowed or available to park for snowmobilers to park and unload their own snowmobiles, nowhere for them to get gas, food, and lodging, if they wanted to stay out here. It wouldn't be a very good promotion to other states if they didn't have a central hub station to go snowmobiling. The snowmobile trail system is designed and marked around us. The other businesses with snowmobile rentals send their snowmobiles our way. We are a good destination for them. This would hurt other rental businesses as well. I think this business is essential for the Northern Black Hills, maybe the DOT doesn't think so or care about snowmobiling, but it is a big tourist business for the Black Hills. Did you know that our Snowmobile trail system has been rated #1 and #2 in the Nation for many, many years! The Game, Fish and Parks should be very proud of that! That is quite an honor!!

That is all I can think of for now. Thank you for taking our thoughts and comments into consideration. I hope this will be a win-win for everyone and be a safer road to travel on.

December 16, 2023 |

Email #1

Comments:

We own a cabin about 4 miles from Cheyenne Crossing; it will be our retirement home when I retire in 2 years. I wish I could attend the meeting. I don't know what proposals will be considered, but we urge you to preserve the highway in its present state. It is a beautiful highway now, and with its curves, it forces drivers to slow down

and appreciate the beauty of the area. Plus, the slower speeds reduces the chances of cars striking the abundant wildlife, like deer and elk. Simple road maintenance is one thing; but straightening or widening the highway strikes us as a bad idea. This beautiful highway should be left as it is. As they say, it is not broken, so please don't fix it. Thanks

Email #2

December 28, 2023

Comments:

Since 2013, we've own a home at Savoy. We urge you to preserve this highway as it is now and firmly oppose any proposal to widen or straighten the highway. This highway is a beautiful drive, a gem that should preserved and protected. A wider and straighter highway will increase traffic speed and semi-truck traffic, will increase deer and elk strikes, and will degrade one of the most beautiful drives. And the increased truck traffic will feed directly into Spearfish Canyon, a scenic byway that already sees a lot of logging trucks speeding through the canyon. Please protect and preserve this drive and canyon.

December 17, 2023 |

Comments:

This is such a beautiful stretch of road now.
Please don't ruin it or take away from the experience of a motorcycle ride on this road.

December 17, 2023 |

Email #1

Comments:

Please don't widen or straighten the road through the canyon. Lower the speed limit, help clean up some of the damage past storms caused. It is perfect the way it is now.

Email #2

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave the road as is. Lower the speed limit.

December 17, 2023 |

Comments:

Please leave things the way they are. Not interested in any project in or near the canyon. Leave the highway the way it is

December 18, 2023 |

Comments:

If the improvements are adding a better shoulder for cyclists, awesome!

If the improvements are to allow large trucks to travel faster, no thank you. Spearfish Canyon already has too many tractor trailers rolling over the speed limit. It's gonna come to a boil when they wipe out a herd of goats or cars stopped to look at the goats.

December 18, 2023 |

Comments:

Please send all updates on hwy 85 to 14a improvements.

December 19, 2023 |

Comments:

I travel this road often as my main route to Denver, I have driven it night , day, winter and summer, all of which impacts the road conditions. I agree that improvements are necessary but would hope the scenic beauty of the Black Hills would be preserved with this plan. The roadway and shoulder should be at the minimum widths to provide safe roadway travel while keeping the natural beauty of the trees and creek along the route . Because of the number of homes and driveways, in addition to the wildlife, I don't agree with an increased speed limit. Finally, I hope the state will consider the homeowner's along the route inconvenience and financial burden and be

December 19, 2023 |

Comments:

I approve and support SDDOT's U.S. Highway 85 from Wyoming to Cheyenne Crossing Project. The aspect that I love about SDDOT's U.S. Highway 85 from Wyoming to Cheyenne Crossing Project is that 6 foot shoulders will be added to US-85 from the Wyoming State Line to US-14A which will improve safety on US-85.

December 19, 2023 |

Comments:

I drive this road twice a month. If you comply with the recommendations of speed it is safe. I'd rather keep it as is versus increasing speeds. It's not going to make that much difference in time to reach your destination

December 20, 2023

Hi Mark... This is [REDACTED] from the very far east end of the project. I wanted to thank you for running a very good meeting on Monday PM. You did a great job of overview, explanation and handling concerns. [REDACTED] and I weren't the only passionate folks but you handled that well without getting off topic or extending the time.

We, along with the [REDACTED], the [REDACTED], the [REDACTED], the [REDACTED] from [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] from Cheyenne Crossing continue to be very concerned about the traffic speed from both the West and East. We would like the Hwy Dept to put some flashers and signage up on both ends from about a mile away from

Cheyenne Crossing warning of mixed traffic and intersections ahead.

In addition, [REDACTED] mentioned a visit with [REDACTED] regarding a possible change in the [REDACTED] entry and exit point. This could be done before the projected project end.

[REDACTED] and I wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and a great year ahead. Thanks again for your efforts on behalf of the residents and traffic on 85...Best Regards... [REDACTED]

Email #1

December 21, 2023 |

Thank you for meeting with us the other night. You did a great job being patient, explaining the changes proposed for widening the highway, controlling the speed better, creating pull outs and helicopter landing areas. All of this is great!

Our cabin, which our family has owned since 1968, is directly across from the [REDACTED] entrance. We have seen, through the years, the following very dangerous situations. Large four wheel and snow mobile trailers in addition to huge semi trucks traveling at high rates of speed from Lead, on Highway 85, past Cheyenne Crossing and [REDACTED], continuing to Wyoming.

In Summer 100's of four wheelers, daily, travel on 85 and Hannah road. On Hannah road, drivers are not cautious entering 85 and after the first Individual proceeds, the following continue, in groups of 5-10. [REDACTED] has 100s of people entering and exiting everyday, whether by car or on foot, crossing the bridge.

The congestion from Cheyenne Crossing, 4 wheelers, [REDACTED], Hannah Road and the high speed rate of highway traffic should be the most immediate concern at this time.

[REDACTED] entrance is hard to see, coming from Cheyenne Crossing and Wyoming. Hannah stop sign is too far back which makes it hard to see 85 traffic coming from Wyoming.

Lighted signs, pedestrian warnings, rumble strips, something needs to be done NOW. This is so important and cannot be delayed! Please put it with your immediate concerns.

Thank you very much! [REDACTED]

Email #2

January 11, 2024

Thank you Jennica,
Unfortunately, we still haven't seen flashing lights, warning signs, etc., all to signal drivers of the converging roads and congested area around Wikiup area and Cheyenne Crossing. This can't be put off and is long overdue.

We are thankful, with the limited snow this Winter, that there haven't been tons of large vehicles carrying snowmobiles this Winter which has made the Highway somewhat safer!! But, there are, as usual, huge semi trucks!!!

Please work to mitigate this problem by simply installing lights/warning signals/signs to warn drivers, NOW, to slow down and be cautious!!!

All the best and Happy New Year!!! [REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

December 21, 2023 |

[REDACTED] and I attended the public meeting on December 18th at the Spearfish Canyon Lodge regarding the proposed Highway 85 project. We appreciated all the highway engineering knowledge you disseminated with graphics to illustrate the proposed reconstruction of the road from the Wyoming line to Cheyenne Crossing. Obviously you have the expertise and statistics to make a case for the highway reconstruction. We are all for it!

Some additional comments that were of value were brought up by the public participants. Pull-outs are valuable and should be added wherever possible. A helipad should be included in the plan because of the naturally slow response time of on-the-ground emergency vehicles to the remote locations. Your rationale for the projected speed limits is solid.

We hope you can come to an understanding with the owners of [REDACTED] that can accommodate his concerns as well as reconstruct the highway there in a responsible manner.

What we also heard was that as traffic approaches Cheyenne Crossing from all sides, people are driving too fast for the congested nature of the area. Suggestions for rumble strips on 14A/85 descending the hill are good ones. Also helpful was a suggestion for reconfiguring the entrance to [REDACTED] Cabins. Maybe its placement could be modified, or a turning lane could be created. Obviously, speed reductions are necessary for the east end of the project as traffic nears Cheyenne Crossing and highway 85 really narrows down there. We hope that the rumble strips and speed controls could be implemented NOW!

We live [REDACTED] west of Cheyenne Crossing on a straight-away. Drivers really like to pass there, even though they run into blind corners east and west of it. At the east end near Cheyenne Crossing, the fact that there are more driveways makes a case for lower speed limits.

I like the DOT mission of "Safe and Efficient Travel." The main take-away from the meeting is that most accidents happen because of driver error. Wider road lanes and wider shoulders allow for driver recovery in case of driver errors. You have some unique challenges, and based on contact with Mark, Jennica and Todd Seaman, regional DOT engineer, we have confidence you will be able to meet those challenges.

For the information of the [REDACTED] there will be more land owner meetings in 2025, and construction is projected to begin in 2029.

December 23, 2023 |

Hi Jennica,

My husband and I are very glad we attended the meeting held on 12/18/2023 to find out about this project. We are spreading the word about your website with information to our neighbors and encouraging them to also write to you with their feedback.

I agree that Highway 85 needs to be improved with shoulders and more pull offs. I do Not agree with the proposed 65 mph speed limit from the WY border to the Eagle Cliff area! Even with the increased visibility and smoother flow of traffic, it's just not safe! Elk and deer crossing all year long, open range cattle in the summer

and snowmobile crossings in the winter are just a few of the reasons why. 55 mph is plenty fast and could add only 1-2 minutes of time to the trip instead of driving 65 mph. Drivers coming from WY can take Highway 585 if they need to drive that speed.

I would like to see several signs to warn drivers of the wildlife and slower UTV/ATV traffic. There is only one sign for the snowmobile trail crossing - right at the crossing. Might be too late to see the sign and the snowmobiles, especially at night. Maybe another sign 1/4 mile back from either direction would be safer. This is a recreational area and shouldn't be considered just a regular two lane highway.

I would also like to see signage for this section of 85 as being the "Icebox Canyon Scenic Byway" just as Spearfish Canyon is marked as a scenic byway on Highway 14A with mountain goat crossings and slower speed limits. Drivers are taking that route slower, watching for wildlife and enjoying the beauty. It's just as beautiful on Highway 85, slower speeds and safety are just as important!

December 23, 2023 |

Ms. Jennica Wilcox,

I would like to make a few comments about the Highway 85 project. I am a land owner. My property is just off of Highway 85, at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. My family has owned our property since 1975. We have traveled Highway 85 from [REDACTED] to Lead, thousands of times.

I am in favor of option 1 for the following reasons:

I like the idea of the shoulders and extra pull outs.

Widening some of the curves, should be taken care of by the new shoulders.

I'm ok with the speed limits. When I head to town(Lead), I set my speed control on 45 mph and ride it all the way to Cheyenne Crossing, before I go up the hill.

It's a beautiful drive, enjoying it a 40-45 mph is great!

I agree with your plan from Tinton Rd. to the state line, with the speed limit at 55 mph.

I suggest:

There is a real danger for motorcycles around O'Neil Pass, where the two 231 roads connect to Highway 85. Cars kick gravel on to the highway(someone crashes there every year). If you paved these intersections back 300 yards or so, the gravel won't be kicked on to the highway, making it much safer for the motorcycle group.

Option 2:

This is a *really* bad idea. I hate to tell you, people are already driving 65-70 mph on this stretch. If you increase the limit to 65, they will drive 75-80. This stretch of the road has migrating elk, loose cattle, horses, not to mention LOTS of deer. If someone hits an elk or cow at 65-70 mph(because how low modern cars are, and how high elk stand), that animal is coming through their windshield.

I'm concerned about someone plowing into the back of a UTV poking along the highway. I own one. They are not made to travel anywhere near 65 mph. What about a tourist that just came across the state line and slows down to look at our beautiful Black Hills?

Conclusion:

I retired from FedEx as a road driver. One of the first things that they taught us about driving, was about the difference between speeds, and how fast you got somewhere. Over long distance, you can save some time by driving 10 miles per hour faster, but on a short distance, like Tinton Road to the state line, I would guess you're only going to gain about four minutes. Is it worth millions and millions dollars of road construction and tearing up the countryside and endangering, wild animals and slower humans, to save four minutes? Think about that.

Comments:

Being a VRBO cabin owner on the Hwy85 route, especially along the most affected corner in question, I highly disagree with the assumption plan to increase speed and alter the road! The Hwy 85 should not be at interstate speeds, the enjoyment, the beauty, the experience of the scenic drive would be taken away. We have come across trucks tipped over and it wasn't even at the increased speed. The SAFETY of ALL that enjoy the Black Hills is at stake - tourists, snowmobilers, ATV/utv, motorcycles, and even animals! The curve before Hardy Station, if altered, will highly heighten the accident factor of the driveway out of [REDACTED] Lead. This projected plan is not for the betterment of the people or the state of South Dakota!

December 25, 2023

Dear Ms. Wilcox,

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to submit comment regarding the Highway 85 Project. Our comments have been added to the form that was provided and is attached to this email. We realize cell towers are not part of nor under the purview of the Highway Department, but if the goal is to save lives, improvement of cell coverage along the route could be just as, if not more important, than reshaping the roadway.

Best wishes in the New Year!

Comments from attachment:

We both support Option 1. We have lived on [REDACTED] off Hwy. 85 for almost six years and drive it regularly. Most people drive anywhere from 5-10 mph over the speed limit now, which may explain most of the injury/fatality accidents that occur. Raising the speed limit to 65 would only encourage people to go even faster. This will increase potential damage and injury when motorists inevitably encounter large elk, deer, coyotes, turkeys, stray cows, people driving recreational vehicles, and now, even black bear, which we are increasingly seeing up here. Higher impact crashes will surely result from an increase to a 65-mph speed limit, and with no cell service for most of the drive, it takes longer getting injured people the help they need.

While Hwy. 85 is in dire need of most of the improvements outlined in the presentation, especially repaving, widened shoulders, additional pull-outs, and reduction of unnecessary additional driveways, a modicum of caution and paying attention to road signage and speed limits would seem to us to make straightening out any curves and defacing the beautiful landscape unnecessary. We realize some changes will occur to build up the necessary space to widen shoulders. However, completely moving the road in some parts simply because humans refuse to use common sense seems a bit over the top and ludicrous. Part of what makes the drive from Lead up to the Wyoming border are those curves, where you look forward to what scenery awaits you around the other side. The views are breathtaking, especially in Winter and Fall!

Extra signage reflecting speed limits, the addition of rumble strips heading into curves, and better cell coverage along the drive may be more worthwhile investments and much more beneficial than completely reshaping the road in spots. This is especially true given that over the 5-year period noted from 2013-2018, the 79 accidents average out to approximately 15.8 per year. Of those, 59% are property damage only. That leaves approximately 6.5 accidents that involve injury, with only 2

fatalities over a 5-year period. Does the proposal of a significant move of the existing roadway, destruction of the landscape, and potential impact to wildlife make sense given this breakdown of the data??

The recommendations of adding more speed limit signs, rumble strips heading into curves, and better cell tower coverage, plus the repaving, building/widening of shoulders and additional pull-outs along this route seems more cost effective, less invasive to the landscape and wildlife, and would reduce time to get to an accident victim, by allowing them better chance of getting a cell signal to call for help. With minimal cell coverage, accident victims must either leave the scene to walk to a house, where nobody may be at home, or wait for another vehicle to come along and drive far enough to get a cell signal to call for help. These steps could all work to both reduce the frequency and severity of accidents as well as ensure prompt emergency medical aid when accidents do occur.

We hope that you consider wisely spending any funding, regardless of where it comes from, and that you will consider the additional options noted herein versus moving hillsides and roadway when there may be more feasible options available.

December 26, 2023

Jennica,

I would like to first introduce myself, I am [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We are approximately 4 miles from Hwy 85.

Looking at your proposed changes to the highway I see a lot of very good things in it, for instance taking out some of the unnecessary curves that cause blind spots for drivers as well as reducing the speed limits on sections of the highway.

The first area I would like to approach is the speed limits, I applaud the reduction in speed around Cheyenne Crossing but have major concerns about wanting to increase speeds in other areas of the highway.

I can see no good thing coming out of speeds of 65mph in the national forest on a 2 lane highway, the amount of time saved is negligible at best and the repercussions are immense! The wildlife that we enjoy in the black hills can be our greatest danger as well. We have herds of elk, whitetail and mule deer not to mention cattle. Striking any one of these can be fatal to both humans and the animal.

I am in total favor of redoing the road that you show as the 65mph route but only if the speed is 55mph MAX. I cannot and will not support any speed on the road that is greater than 55mph.

We have a number of tourists that come to the hills on the Canam Highway and they like to look around as it is their first experience in the hills, we already have enough riding bumpers at the current speeds I can only imagine if the speed was 65mph. The number of semi's on the highway are increasing and I don't want them coming up on a tourist who has never driven in the hills and have the semi bearing down on them at 65mph. I know it sounds great to have the added pull offs, in which I totally support but tourists have to slow down to pull off and going from 55mph is hard enough with cars behind making it 65mph will make it extremely difficult.

Again Jennica I think changing the road will make things safer let us not contradict the positives it does by increasing the speed on the highway hence making it less safe.

Everyone in the hills has a couple extra minutes to get to where they are going, Let's try and make sure they get there.

At the end of the day I would like to see the proposed changes to the highway except I would like to see the speed at a max of 55mph from the Wyoming SD border to just before Trailhead Lodge then reducing the speed to 50mph until the spring starts.

Again thank you for listening to our concerns it is very important to us to have a safe highway for travel

December 26, 2023

Comments:

Please do what you must to improve the highway section, keep in mind all the obstacles you will encounter, and get your job done. Ultimately, we will all have a safer road section and be better off. Ignore the non-sayers and move forward. I am fully confident it will be better and safer once completed. Is there any chance of a roundabout at Cheyenne Crossing? That sure seems like a safer roadway option for travelers.

December 27, 2023

Comments:

The proposed 65 MPH route should be used but with the speed limit of 55 MPH because of all the traffic that turns off of HWY 85 to other roads and cabins. I am hopeful that there will be turning lanes to these areas? The elk and deer crossings through this area at night will be horrible for night drivers going 65 MPH which isn't to say that people will go faster than the posted speed limit so increasing the speed will be dangerous all around.

December 30, 2023

Email #1

Comments:

I firmly opposed to the proposed projected highway construction from Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming border. The existing highway served the region for decades and will continue to do so indefinitely. Leave the natural beauty, stop turning the Black Hills legacy of unsurpassed natural beauty to concrete and asphalt. Thank you.

Email #2

January 2, 2024

Comments:

I am sending a second message concerning the proposed reconstruction of Hwy 85 through upper Spearfish Canyon to the Wyoming line. I lived in the Hills for 40 years and continue to visit frequently. Now a non resident visitor, I am shocked and disheartened with the concrete and asphalt visited upon our national Black Hills treasure. I fully accept significant responsibility for parts the process of that change since I have actively driven vehicles for a lifetime. My concern is with the process of change implementation in this case because of the uniquely delicate environment this portion of 85 traverses. May I suggest the long view in preserving natural beauty, balance, and the peace in God's creation. That if improvements are necessary, they be accomplished based upon sound public and environmental input with priority placed upon protective preservation of nature and not it's destruction. Thank you.

Email #3

January 3, 2024

I am disappointed in the limited time period allowed for public comment for the proposed Highway 85 construction project. A two week period during the Holidays appears dismissive and heavy handed. Citizen tax dollar spending should be premised upon citizen input.

Recent visits to the Hills have underscored a depressing shift in transportation focus toward high-speed , high volume asphalt racetracks. The Black Hills resident and visitor deserve better. Upper Spearfish canyon and the Limestone Plateau remain some of the least commercialized areas in the Black Hills and deserve heritage protection, not more asphalt, concrete, and the tourist traps that follow.

December 30, 2023

Comments:

No to the Wyoming line Highway U.S. 85 project! Don't destroy the most outstanding region of South Dakota! A reconstruction of U.S. Highway 85 would have an extensive impact on the spruce-lined landscapes that border U.S. 85 in the upper Spearfish Canyon wetland areas and along the rolling meadow country of the Limestone Plateau. There would be permanent damage to these areas if the hillsides were bulldozed and spruce were cut . If ever there was a place for people to slow down and look, this is it. No need to make U.S. 85 an express highway!

December 30, 2023

Comments:

As a person who has lived in the Black Hills my entire life, this wetland area on 85 near Cheyenne Crossing is one of the most spectacular sights. It doesn't matter if it's the middle of winter or when the wild flowers are in bloom. I feel you can not expand the road or move the creek without disrupting the natural environment. This has never been a road for high speed travel or large rigs, there are other roads for such purposes.

December 31, 2023

Comments:

Please dont touch the FLANDREAU SANTEE SIOUX LAND. YOU HAVE TO CONTACT ██████████ TO DO THIS.

January 1, 2024

Comments:

We say:

-No to the Wyoming line Highway U.S. 85 project. D.O.T.'S short comment period during Christmas vacation is ridiculous. Many of us want time, including summer months, to look at D.O.T. plans on the ground. We want to study their planning documents and visit the project areas in detail so we can fully understand what they are proposing.

Will D.O.T. please, in writing, ask Black Hills communities the question that so many of us are asking: Do people in this area even want this project?

January 2, 2024

Hello Ms. Wilcox,

Please find attached my wife and I comments on the planned project.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

My wife and I own a home located [REDACTED] We received notice of the proposed Highway 85 improvement via US mail and via [REDACTED] who is one of our neighbors. Overall, we are thrilled with the planned improvements! We strongly urge selecting the option with the 55 mph speed limit from Tinton Road to the WY border, rather than the 65 mph option. There are considerable wildlife crossings on this stretch of road. In addition, there are a lot of scenic drivers who already drive slower than the current speed limit and make frequent stops that would be put at higher risk of being hit. Drivers ultra familiar with the road and/or aggressive drivers would likely increase their travel speed to exceed the even the newly elevated limit. From a purely practical perspective, the higher speed would only save a few minutes of travel time given the relatively short distance involved.

January 3, 2024

Good morning.

We were unable to attend the Highway 85 Public Open House on December 18; but would like to submit a few brief comments based on our understanding of the speed limit proposals that are being considered for this project.

Our property is located [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In looking at the Highway 85 presentation posted on the SDDOT website, it appears that the two speed limit options being looked at for the highway from the Wyoming border to near where 85 intersects with Boles Canyon Road are to either leave the limit as is at 55MPH...or to increase it to 65MPH. We've watched the traffic going by our property in the two years that we have owned it and have several reasons we believe the limit should stay at 55 (even if some road sections are re-routed as proposed). You've likely heard from others who point to leaving the limit at 55MPH because of:

1. The constant risk of collisions with wildlife (deer, elk, etc) and cattle
2. Tourists new to the area looking at the scenery as they drive through the Hills instead of paying attention to the road (whether in a vehicle or on a motorcycle)
3. Bicyclists (usually several as part of long-distance bicycle events)
4. Families in rented side-by-sides traveling on an unfamiliar road
5. Snowmobilers crossing the highway (or sometimes traveling along the highway in the ditch).

In addition to those, we would add others...like:

6. The varying road conditions that can be found on Highway 85. Fall, winter and early spring can bring unexpected slippery/icy road surfaces-especially when approaching an area where the sun isn't able to reach the road. We have seen semis and vehicles that have gone off the road in these circumstances...likely because the drivers were overdriving road conditions.
 7. Big rig traffic...your presentation shows that the amount of truck traffic is 5% of the average daily traffic count...we see those logging trucks and other semis passing our place. Those trucks need extra time to slow for curves they'll encounter along 85.
 8. We can't count the number of times that we hear engines rev up as motorists pick up speed passing our place (since we are on one of the few short straight sections of the highway). In many cases, drivers exceed the posted speed limit by a few miles per hour; so, bumping the limit up to 65 will give some drivers the idea they can go 70 (or higher) resulting in the possibility of more accidents.
 9. Property along the last mile of Highway 85 before the Wyoming border (Lost Meadows) is in the process of being developed...housing is being added on these lots...which means more vehicles slowing down to enter their properties (or leaving their property to exit onto the Highway). By 2029, this area of Lawrence County will have undergone an increase in full time and part time residents.
- The "Corridor Characteristics" page of your presentation shows that the three "high crash locations" on the project are within the nine-mile section of 85 closest to the Wyoming border. We can't think of ANY reasons for bumping up the speed...maybe those were discussed at the meeting? We understand that you have to consider several factors as you determine all the elements that will go into this project, but we would ask that you reconsider any speed limit increases...please leave the maximum limit at 55.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I am opposed to any route changes or widening of Highway 85 from Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming state line. Significant construction and relocation of the route will cause irreparable damage to this already fragile ecosystem. I support maintaining this road along its existing route as necessary, but strongly oppose and widening or rerouting.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Do people in the area even want this project? The short comment period is a bit suspect... This project will take some time to review and consider. I believe the negative impacts of this consideration will be environmentally and visually significant.

January 3, 2024

Jennica,

██████████ asked if I would forward the information about the project to everyone that lives along Rapid Creek Rd.

I am sure that you have already received the information requested from a lot of them.

Attached is our 911 Listing that includes, names, street addresses (not mailing addresses), phone numbers and emails.

As for my husband ██████████ & I, we would prefer the speed limit stay at 55mph.

If you have any further questions, that I can help you with, please don't hesitate to contact me.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

It seems this project would significantly change the character and use of HWY 85 between Cheyenne Crossing and the Wyoming state line.

While I can support improvements and repairs to the road surface as it exists today, we do not need or want trees cut down, native plant habitat graded and replaced with exotic plant species, hillsides blasted away to make a straighter, faster road.

This is a case where road-builders want to build roads, but what they plan to build is not in keeping with values of rural character and natural attributes which many if not most of the users of this road hold.

I would like to see this project shrink to simple road repairs and resurfacing in order to retain the wonderful characteristics it has today. I do not want to see this road turn into a higher-speed major throughway like what has just been done with Sheridan Lake Road and what is happening now with Hwy 385.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I am writing to express my concern for the proposed construction on Hwy 85 from Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyo state line. First, the window for people to comment is extremely small and since we're just coming out of holidays, it may affect the number of people who want to respond but don't know about this.

Second, this is one of the most beautiful and scenic highways in the Black Hills and I would hate to see that changed by a wide highway whose construction will mean the elimination of old trees. This project is being rushed as far as citizen input and does stand to destroy a lovely and old area in the Black Hills. I ask that it not be undertaken with out a bigger window for comment and more planning.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I almost missed the comment period as it was scheduled over the holiday season. It's not proper (even if it is legal) to have a comment period about a major project over the Christmas-New Year holiday when most people are away from their computers and focused on other things. You should extend the comment period another 14

days or offer another comment period for this project before proceeding further.

Another issue is that many people will not be able to visit the project area at this time of year to make their comments relevant to this project. Winter conditions and distances to travel will inhibit many from this possibility and reduce public input.

As a long-time Black Hills resident, I'm tired of seeing formerly beautiful and serviceable roads widened and straightened because of perceived safety issues, most of which I presume arise because thousands of bikers are all trying to use these roads, all at the same time, each August for 10 days. I would suggest instead that you only repair damaged roadways, add a shoulder if you absolutely must (taking pains to protect nearby riparian and sensitive areas), but leave the roads as they are as much as possible. Then REDUCE THE SPEED LIMIT and enforce it. Widening and straightening only encourages speeding drivers to speed even more.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

An extended comment period is needed as the comment period fell over a holiday and many people likely had no opportunity to comment.

This is a beautiful stretch of road and my concern is in straightening it, it will be harmful to wildlife, streams, meadows, and landscapes that are part of the natural beauty of the Black Hills.

I wonder if the proposed changes will actually create more safety issues in that likely the speeds people travel will increase and the changes will encourage more truck traffic along 385. Wouldn't it be wiser (cheaper) and better to post more speed limit signs and increase policing of speeds and keep the natural beauty that exists. Nobody enjoys riding on I-90 so why create an eyesore.

Thank you.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Enough of this already! Enforce the speed limit laws now on the books. Why destroy what people live and vacation here in the Hills to see. 65 MPH is way to fast for the Canyon and the area. Should be 45 to 55 on most scenic byways or less. This death waiting to happen.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I think this should be left alone and just complete repairs. The speed limit should definitely be increased!!

January 3, 2024

Comments:

In regard to the proposed work on Hwy 85, I do not believe it is necessary for any part of the project area to be designed for 65 mph. It is a scenic area and people need to be able to slow down and enjoy it. I do think there are areas where the shoulders need to be widened and repaired, but there is no need to try to make it a 'super

highway' by straightening the curves. It appears that much of the re-design is being driven by motorcycle traffic during the Sturgis Rally.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I am asking that you do not change or straighten US Highway 85 from Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming Border. Shoulder repairs are needed and some widening of shoulders is also needed. I travel this road every other week and sometimes every week. There is nothing wrong and no change needed with this road besides widening shoulders and routine maintenance. The only problem is drivers in cars, pickups pulling trailers, motorcycles and logging trucks are constantly driving the road 10 - 15 mph over the posted speed limit. On every trip I am passed by vehicles in no passing zones while I am driving the speed limit. I have encountered people passing other vehicles in no passing zones and coming straight at me in the wrong lane. Also on every trip I encounter people crossing the center line because they are driving too fast to safely make the curves. Straightening this road will take away from the beauty of this scenic road and the Black Hills and only encourage people to drive faster than a posted speed limit and cause more accidents.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Please repair the road in its current footprint.
Do not widen or straighten.
A couple of pull outs to stop would be ok.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I think you should look at the accident/fatality data MINUS the incidents which occurred on this stretch during the Sturgis Rally window for the years of the study.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave it as is. No change needed

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave it alone. Normal repairs are fine.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I use to be a South Dakota resident and try to come back every summer. This scenic drive is a must. It would be nice if needed repairs could be made without changing the road. I have seen people fly and pass each other on a solid yellow line, perhaps adjusting the speed limit to 40-45 mph would be beneficial.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Please leave the Canyon/roads as is except for upkeep. This beautiful area would be severely hurt. We need to keep it as it is.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave it as is. Lower the speed limit during the rally.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Hi there,
I have a few concerns and questions about the proposed project.

Concerns:

Wider corners = faster speeds. I don't believe encouraging people to drive faster through our scenic areas benefits the local community. I believe this also encourages more logging and semi trucks to use the byway, which are extremely dangerous for wildlife and cyclists.

Riparian area. This is a sensitive area that I believe shouldn't be disturbed.

Who benefits? It seems to me this project primarily benefits motorcyclists, semi drivers, and loggers.

Caveat:

Cyclists would greatly benefit from increased shoulder width, but that is completely negated because the changes will increase both speed and traffic.

I do not see a net gain for the local community with this project and am opposed.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

My opinion is to leave the road way as it is with only repairs to existing areas

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I think the road should follow the same path it does current and not be straightened or widened.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I think the road is fine as it is. If anything it only needs shoulder work or maybe some more pullouts. Being a slower curvy road makes it ideal for motorcycle riding or just taking in the scenery. Straightening and speeding up a road that sees a lot of wildlife traffic seems like a bad idea.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Please leave the roadway as is. Some people still enjoy actually driving their vehicle on roads that don't just get one from point A to point B in the fastest manner.

Please consider using some of the funds for safe parking to enjoy the natural areas nearby.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I have been driving this section of highway for recreational reasons for much of my life. I also drove it to commute my stepchildren to their father for about 10 years. This highway is rarely patrolled, as a matter of fact I've never encountered a single person pulled over along there. The local people push their speed on a regular basis and regular visitors from WY and CO have discovered that the likelihood of a ticket is near zero. The safety issues need to be addressed thru signage and increased Patrolling of the area. The widening of the section from Cheyenne crossing has really reduced the experience, while safety issues continue to exist along there. I think increasing a few more emergency pull offs along with improved patrolling will help maintain the area as a scenic byway. The project as it is proposed will really hurt the natural feeling and invite higher speeds while reducing the enjoyment of the drive. Riparian areas need protection and outdoor tourism needs to be viewed as an "experience" not as a "how many and how fast". It will only encourage more traffic at a faster pace and as people approach the Canyon heading north of Cheyenne crossing the sudden change in flow will only put more pressure to that road as well.. Please re-evaluate the ways to improve safety with destroying the experience.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

This is one of my favorite scenic drives in the state. Please leave it as it is.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Please do not widen, straighten or increase the speed! It's to enjoy the scenery ... in a hurry - take the interstate. Thank you for requesting our consideration.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I am against widening the road. It is one of the few scenic roads left in the Hills in a state that is dependent on tourism. I would be in favor of lowering the speed limits and possibly adding some scenic turnouts.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

1. It is quite strange and inappropriate to have a comment period fall over the primary holiday season of the year.
2. The comment period should be extended so that people have an opportunity to research the project, educate themselves and drive this stretch of road to assess the proposed changes for themselves. We need to see if the proposed changes are too extensive and will harm the waterways, wildlife, landscape and safety of the road.
3. I support repairs to any existing crumbling road surfaces, eroding shoulders or structures such as bridges or drainage culverts that are falling into disrepair. These should be repaired in the most careful way possible to reduce any future erosion or other damage to the streams and natural landscapes.
4. I am concerned that any reconstruction to widen or straighten the road will be harmful to the streams, forests, meadows, wildlife and landscapes that are part of the natural heritage of the Black Hills.

I look forward to an extended comment period. Thank you for considering my request.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave the highway from Cheyenne Crossing to the WY line as it is except for needed repairs

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Opposed to the HWY 85 project. The area needs to be left as is. No need for increased speed through the area. There are wildlife habitats that will be disturbed and it will ruin the natural beauty of the area.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave it alone except for necessary repairs

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Please do not change anything along Spearfish canyon or the highway if you put it wider with speeds up to 50 or 55 no one can see the views of it anyway. The scenery alone is worth the slowdown of traffic. It's a scenic view not a freaking highway.thank you

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I would like the highway to remain as is with the 55 mph speed limit and not straightening of the roads. Maintenance repairs should be made to the existing road and shoulder.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave the road " as is " except for regular maintenance .
Wildlife crossings would protect people

January 3, 2024

Comments:

The Hwy 85 comment period should be extended. People are busy over the holidays and didn't get the info.

My comment, however is that DOT design shoulders, bike paths and lower speed limits on our Black Hills highways.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Please keep hwy 85 as is. This is a beautiful, scenic drive. We have driven this many years and love it the way it is. People need to slow down. Not much traffic on this road except maybe during the rally. Why spend that money for a 10 day event?

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave it the way it is. It doesn't need to be a race track in. It sure doesn't need to be any straighter. People need to slow down lower the speed limit provide more enforcement of the current speed limit the bikers and truck drivers drive through there like they're on the freeway, which is completely unacceptable including myself my family owns quite a few properties along the stretch of road, and we tend to enjoy them all summer long. It is the opinion of us and our neighbors, that this is an unneeded project and a waste of money. The current road could definitely use repaving, but it does not need to be moved widened. Or changed it anyway the only thing that needs to change is the speed limit and the enforcement I can tell you that not once last year did I ever see a highway patrolman up there in forcing the speed and people know it and I go up there every weekend all summer long. Leave it the way it is don't ruin it.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Hwy 85 is one of our favorite Scenic drives when we visit the Black Hills. It would be a shame to take away from this scenic drive by changing the highway and increasing vehicle travel speeds/speed limits.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

-NO... to the Wyoming line Highway U.S. 85 project. D.O.T.'S short comment period during Christmas vacation is ridiculous. We need time to understand this project and your two-week period doesn't even come close. I would like to say that I am a lifetime resident and taxpayer. As a proud true sportsman of Lawrence County there is not many places left here that are not in some way commercialized in the wrong way. In my opinion this proposed plan will defiantly ruin something that cannot be replaced such as: water, fish, game and solitude. These are all the reasons why I have chosen to stay in this area. Let's all look at what really matters here, instead of dollar signs!!

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Please leave this road the way it is. Slow traffic during the rally which will help with fatalities and animal strikes.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I would like to see that stretch left how it is. If anything I suggest adding pull offs and passing lanes.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

I like it as it is, leave it alone except for repairs to the existing roadway.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

This is not necessarily. Please do not destroy a scenic historic roadway. People come from all over the world to see and drive this beautiful road. Some turnouts is all that is necessary..

January 3, 2024

Comments:

The proposed possible widening of Highway 85 to the State line from Spearfish Canyon is yet another project that is taking away the beauty of the area. I have driven on Highway 385 toward Hill City and have seen how vast the changes will be. I have also driven on South Rochford Road toward Hill City and I am shocked at the changes the road project has made to the beauty of being in the Black Hills. I do respect the fact the SDDOT is taking safety into consideration but what about preserving the area? Tearing down the mountains, blasting the rocks and cutting down trees. These are all changes that cannot be undone. Please reconsider making these changes. Drive the area under consideration and experience the beauty. The road should be kept from encroaching anymore on the natural surroundings. Please do not take away any more of the natural landscape.

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave the road as is and only make necessary repairs

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Leave it alone!

January 3, 2024

Comments:

Please leave hwy 85 as is from Spearfish Canyon to the Wyoming line. Please just make necessary repairs. We don't need to lose this scenic hwy.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

This section of road should be left as is except for necessary repairs. Posting a slower speed limit during busier times is a better solution than destroying the natural beauty of the area potentially displacing wildlife and negatively impacting the natural environment.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

This stretch of Black Hills Highway is a scenic masterpiece, please leave it the way it is. We travel down it often on our way to and from Rochford after eating at Cheyenne Crossing by way of Hanna Road or on a drive up to O'Neal Pass. We always marvel at the beauty and peacefulness of this part of the Hills. It's a quintessential piece of what makes the Northern Hills so special. If speeding and crashes are the issue, consider lowering the speeds at curves and providing a few pull offs for drivers who want to take in the scenery, like there are over Lake Pactola and through Spearfish Canyon. Destroying scenic by-ways like this one destroys the beauty of what makes the Black Hills so unique and beautiful.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please leave the road alone! Part of its beauty is the windy roads and the scenic hwy. we drive 45 to enjoy the views. Increasing speed will cause more accidents and potentially harm more wildlife.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please leave it as it is, except for the necessary repairs. It is a very beautiful and peaceful drive.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Leave this road alone! This is one of the most scenic drives in South Dakota. I drive this road monthly in all types of weather. It is easy, fun and beautiful. It doesn't need to be widened. It seems like we are messing with a beautiful area just for the Rally. It also seems shady that the comment period is over the holidays.

Email #2

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Have you thought about the Elk heard that is constantly on that road at night? We don't need more cars and faster speeds. Leave the area alone it is fine as it is...

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Hello,

My family and I had a recent trip down to Laramie, Wy over the New Years Holiday traveling through this stretch of Highway to and from. With the snow in the Hills this stretch of road untouched for years glistened in the glow of the morning sun. The anticipated pass through this stretch of road always causes a breathtaking moment. It reveals many scenes recreated in movies.

To take away from that would be heartbreaking. It is a moment in the world where we are demanded to slow down from our bustling life's and take a look around.

So to the point widening the road would allow for drivers to believe the road is safer than what it might be, it would allow for a sense of freedom and I fear more distractions with faster speeds, will inevitably cause more vehicle crashes.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I see no need to disturb this beautiful highway that is pristine. It is not heavily traveled and should be left undisturbed. I am concerned that widening and increasing the speed limit will harm the fishery and other wildlife.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

There is no need to upgrade the current highway in spearfish canyon. It is a beautiful road to drive, and doesn't need to be widened to allow more or faster traffic. We need to preserve the beauty of the natural landscape around us.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

It is supposed to be a scenic highway so it should be left as it is. People like to drive slowly to look at the scenery. It does not need to have a speed limit of 65. That makes it unsafe for the people who take the road to enjoy the scenic beauty of Spearfish Canyon.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please leave as is except for minor repairs as needed

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Leave the road as is

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please leave US highway 85 and 14a to the Wyoming border as it is. We must protect our native riparian area! Speeds could be reduced if needed.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please do not move forward with the expansion of 85. I want to be able to show the natural beauty and habitat to my children like I did. No need to get to Wyoming 10 min faster...

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I think the proposed project looks great and will help to alleviate concerns with roadway accidents.

January 4, 2024

We agree the road needs to be upgraded.

It needs resurfacing.

It needs the shoulders upgraded and widened.

We DO NOT agree with straightening out the curves!

We DO NOT agree with upping the speed limit!

In fact maybe the speed should be lowered so there would be less crashes.

Why aren't there any speed limit signs throughout the canyon?

The lower the better because many don't follow the speed limit signs anyway and there is no law enforcement.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I write in opposition to the proposed project on U.S. Highway 85 From Wyoming to Cheyenne Crossing. I live a few miles from this scenic route and feel the speed limits should be kept the same and the road should not be widened or straightened. If anything, the speeds should be reduced along this beautiful stretch of 85. We frequently travel this road on our adventures in South Dakota and love it for it's natural beauty and curved roads.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I do believe the road should be maintained and perhaps a wider shoulder. Making changes that lead to increased speed is not going to improve the quality of the road or the safety. And definitely not preserve the beauty of the Black Hills .

In all honesty, setting a meeting close to the holidays when this plan was in the works for quite some time seems disingenuous. I get the BH Pioneer and did not see this meeting posted .

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I am very much For 'leaving our Black Hills/Spearfish Canyon roadways as they are except for repairs to the materials or clearing landslides. I grew up in the Black Hills. My favorite memories were car trips in the Hills and more frequently Spearfish Canyon.. trips not to be hurried, but enjoyed to take in the forests, wildlife, mountain streams.. not as highways-speedways for faster travel from one place to another. We need more leisure, peaceful places to getaway from the rush and hassle that's taken over our daily lives. Please give us and protect these get-aways in our life.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Having driven that stretch of highway many times in the 34 I have lived near Sturgis, and in all seasons (I run snowmobiles out of [REDACTED]), I find no reason to make any major changes other than routine maintenance. I would guess a majority of the accidents were due to excessive speed and/or overdriving the road conditions, texting, other distracted driving reasons, etc. Motorcyclists account for half the accidents. Most of the visitors to the Rally from other states don't know how to ride mountain roads and all vehicle drivers are getting worse and worse at ignoring posted speed reductions and curve warning signs etc. Please consider all comments and make good choices when deciding how to spend tax-payer money. Thank you!

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I was born in the Black Hills in 1964 and have lived in Sturgis, Spearfish and rural Lawrence County for many years. The most beautiful drive is Spearfish Canyon. I photograph the wildlife in the Canyon. Deadwood Visitor Centers carry my mountain goat greeting cards. Leave the canyon as it is in its pristine state. Widening the canyon will most likely chase off a main feature - the mountain goats. If drivers want to go to Deadwood faster they can take Highway 85. LEAVE the Canyon alone.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I am adamantly opposed to this construction.

I own an interest in a family homestead [REDACTED] and a taxpayer in Lawrence County. I am appalled every time I return to the beautiful Black Hills at the destruction of the beauty in the name of progress.

Put rumble strips near sharp turns etc. and lower the speed limit.

Do not change the path of the road, please.

Do not go the way of historic Deadwood and destroy the beauty and historical sites.

Thank you.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please do not change road. Decrease speed limit and or add signage if safety is reason for changing current road. If straightening a bit

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I object to the widening of Hwy. 85 in the proposed area. Also, there should absolutely be no increase in the speed limit. The road is safe when driven appropriately. I would hate to see potentially devastating environmental changes done to this area to accommodate reckless and unsafe tourists. The signage and roadway are sufficient if common sense is employed.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I strongly object to these proposed changes

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I would like to say that I think making these expansions will degrade the natural beauty of this particular area and increase the ability to speed. I am against expansion and think it will only create negative impacts on the landscape and the drivers.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please DO NOT mess with the serenity of Route 85. We who live in the Black Hills like the slower speeds and the wild life as is, without interference from SDDOT.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please, DO NOT alter Rt 85 from Cheyenne Crossing to the WY border. If you widen the corners people will just go faster and the creeks natural beauty will be ruined.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I strongly feel this road should be left exactly the way it is. There is opportunity for high speed travel just north of here on I 90. This is an extremely scenic stretch of road and currently keeps little spearfish creek clean and in tact. If there are too many accidents during the rally, lower the speed limit

January 4, 2024

Comments:

My parents owned [REDACTED] in rochford and we grew up on these roads. We come back several times a year and bring friends. The hills are being destroyed with the new growth. If you widen this section of road, it is no longer scenic but yet just another highway. Keep it the same with repairs and keep speed limits down. It is why people come to the hills. Just go online and look and pages and comments about the hills. This road is always mentioned.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Don't do this. The black hills will be all concrete soon 🤖🤖🤖

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please don't widen the road or straighten it through spearfish canyon.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

We are home and property owners of [REDACTED]

and property owners [REDACTED].

We adamantly oppose this proposed project for many reasons. We received notice of a public meeting late due to being out of town and were unable to attend. We are currently working and will continue to work on specific and factual data to back up the reasons why this rural scenic highway project is not in the best interest of local residents of both South Dakota and Wyoming.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Leave it alone and slow traffic down.

January 4, 2024

Email #1

Comments:

Increasing

Email #2

Comments:

While this road does need some work to provide more shoulder space, rerouting and increasing the speed limit is not necessary.

The amount of wildlife along this route alone should be enough to keep the speed limits down on this short

stretch of the highway.

I do also feel that the comment period should be extended given that most of it was over the holiday season.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

This is a scenic byway. Leave it as it is. It is beautiful and should not be changed other than maintenance.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

As a South Dakota native and lifelong (legal) resident of the state who spent most of the last 20 years living and working abroad in [REDACTED], I was shocked to see my home state employing the same techniques that the Chinese government uses to limit input from the public and from private businesses — namely, scheduling a public comment period during major national holidays when people are least likely to be watching the news, checking emails, and taking time to read government documents, and most likely to be traveling or otherwise unable to comment.

Since I still live [REDACTED], I don't feel it is my place to weigh in on the details of the project, but folks that live near the highway or use it regularly deserve sufficient time to review all of the details about the project in full and to make their voices heard.

Separately, having traveled a fair bit, it is important to remember that what makes the Black Hills special is that we are not Park City Utah, a prefab resort town, or Davos Switzerland, a soulless destination for globalist muckety mucks. We don't need six lanes of concrete highway. Our beautiful, winding, roads through deep forests and homey mountain villages are a big part of the reason people visit.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

There are far better and more needed places to spend our money than the hwy 85 project in the hills. It's beautiful, leave it alone and enforce speed limits there. Maybe help struggling counties out with their hwys first.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Please leave this road alone. The beauty of this area and this road is far more important to preserve than to remove the curves that are part of its beauty. Normal maintenance and repairs only. We do not need a faster speed limit

January 4, 2024

Comments:

This widening would further encroach on the natural beauty of that drive. Widening the roadway would take away a substantial amount of its charm. If rally death tolls are concerning, lowering the speed limit might be a better choice.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

It should be left as is except repairs. Leave the beauty of the canyon alone!!

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I would like to see the highway remain the same. I think that this section of the highway retains one of the few remaining areas of the road that has a lot of the natural scenery intact. It is such a scenic drive and I don't want that to be changed. I'm also worried about the impact to the creek/waterway that is along parts of this section if these changes are made. I also don't believe that the speed needs to be increased, if I read the changes correctly. My family drives that highway quite frequently as we have family in Newcastle Wyoming and so I'm familiar with the road. Drivers need to slow down and obey the speed limit and for motorcycle traffic, the emphasis for them needs to be on not over driving their skill level when it comes to highways throughout the Black Hills.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Leave the road design as is. Please.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

I don't think the speed limit should be increased and the road should stay as is. Reduce the speed if necessary if some of the more dangerous sections if necessary and maybe put up more warning signage

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Comments on U. S. Highway 85 proposed changes

First of all, I do think an extended comment period is necessary.

I think you will appreciate and be amazed by the input from

Black Hills residents when you have a comment period which does not fall during the major Holiday season of

the year.

Residents who drive this stretch of road during all seasons need the opportunity to give input.

I am concerned about widening and straightening which could have a harsh impact on the scenic values, and do harm to forests and existing meadows. The beauty of the Black Hills is why many choose to live and visit here. Straight, fast roads are available in many other states.

Please consider an extended comment period.

Thank you

January 4, 2024

Comments:

No , no, no!!! Leave things scenic and slow. Some places don't need speed. Slow and enjoy.

January 4, 2024

Comments:

Definitely am not ok with any widening or straightening of highway 85 from spearfish canyon to the Wyoming border that is a beautiful and historic scenic road that needs to be left as is it is meant to be to enjoy the beauty not destroy it. This is a ridiculous proposition

January 4, 2024

Comments:

That is a beautiful highway that doesn't need to be changed. I vote to leave it the way it is, it's a natural treasure here in the state and shouldn't be torn apart.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

I support the wider shoulders to allow safer travel for bicycles on highway 85 from WY border to Cheyenne Crossing. There is no need to make this stretch a 65 mph zone. Retain character and charm of the Black Hills with 55mph highway.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

Do not do this! Leave this beautiful stretch of road alone!

January 5, 2024

Comments:

Spearfish canyon is not designed to be a super highway. There is not need to provide for extra speed.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

I enjoy the drives in the scenic winding Black Hills. I feel that road construction would be detrimental to the visitors experience of enjoying the Hills. I suggest the speed limit be reduced on Highway 85, and allow visitors to enjoy the scenic beauty of the Hills, without orange and white cones and bulldozers obstructing their views. Thank you .

January 5, 2024

Comments:

I have driven this road from Lead to Moskee rd. everyday for 13 years, half of those in a logging truck,I dont think it necessary to take out corners... The biggest thing this road needs is to fix the shoulders, if someone does drop off it eithers pulls them completly off the road or they jerk the wheel to get back on and it sends them flying into the other lane...and Maybe mark the corners better.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

I believe this would destroy Spearfish creek from Icebox canyon through Spearfish. Highway 79 provides a fast way north and south and this is such a beautiful canyon please please please don't do this.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

My spouse and I grew up in the black hills and all of our family resides currently in the black hills and western WY.

We left due to work for many years but were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to move back full time approx 7 years ago.

In that time we have watched the black hills be devastated by mining expansions, housing developments and now roads that are only being redone to accommodate the thousands of tourists that can't manipulate curves. Motorcycles or cars.

I'm not at all in favor of this and know most who actually reside in this area and know how to drive here agree. Very sad to see more hills and natural beauty will be sacrificed for the sake of accommodating the tourists and not the local residents. Pretty typical for SD anymore though I guess.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

Please leave it as is except to repair existing roadway. Better use of money would be to slow down traffic which would ease the problems associated with the curves and wildlife. Maybe a few pull out areas would help.

January 5, 2024

Email #1

Hello;

This is our 2nd home [REDACTED]. Directly on Hwy 85.

We haven't been formally or informally notified of the proposed construction plan. My husband and I have looked online because our worker told us today and about the changes generally. If today is the last day for comment, that is really not right.

Even if the project doesn't begin until 2025, don't you have to inform the effected landowners?

We are actually in favor of widening and taking out the dangerous curves.

Of course it appears our property will be affected and we would like to review and discuss. Also, I have been in contact with DOT personnel about the dangerous curve on the south side of our property- requested better signage and such.

Glad to talk with you about this project. and will want to comment. Please call or email me today. Thank you!

Email #2

Comments:

We have a second home there in the canyon. We have not received notice, nor any clarification of what kind of construction will be necessary. We have reviewed your maps and summary of proposals for this project, however we do not know whether the DOT will require frontage land changes/acquisition, blasting, etc. Hard to comment with specificity.

Know that we have a dangerous curve there and it needs to be improved. I have communicated with the DOT about it a few times.

We appreciate updates or contact by someone with DOT.

Thank you!!

Email #3

Hello Ms Wilcox;

I have sent you 2 messages through the online comment portal for the Hwy 85 Wy stateline to Cheyenne Crossing project today. I may have sent the second comment to another Hwy 85 portal in error. Please check. Along with my comments, you should know I contacted another home owner closer to CCr who also knew nothing about this DOT project.

Owners [REDACTED]

They also would like more information. I sent the DOT links to them.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

Please leave this beautiful stretch of highway as it is! We love to ride our motorcycles here

January 5, 2024

Comments:

Leave this road alone expect for necessary repairs!!!

January 5, 2024

Comments:

I oppose the idea of making changes to Hwy 85, due to the impact that this project may have on fragile ecosystems for flora and fauna present in Spearfish Canyon (such as the Oreohelix Cooperi Snail). I propose an increase in monitoring/enforcing of speed limits (even if that means use of camera-radar), rather than restructuring the highway and increasing the speed limits. I utilize Spearfish Canyon for hiking, biking, and reconnecting with nature, and frequently am crossing Highway 85 on foot, and believe raising the speed limits would increase the likelihood of accidents and impact the local community's ability to utilize/enjoy what this scenic byway has to offer.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

This is in response to the proposed road changes US Hwy 85 Wyoming to Cheyenne Crossing.

First, I would like to request an extended comment period due to the fact that the comment period fell mainly through the holiday season when people were busy and not aware of the intended project.

Second, I am against the proposed construction to straighten parts of the road and increase the speed limit. This road is a beautiful drive that has allows travelers to enjoy the well-established habitat of the forest. Rather than straightening the road and increasing the speed, I believe that fixing any road surface issues and better signage to show travelers the uniqueness of the road. Accidents caused during the yearly Sturgis Rally are due to over-driving the curves and speeding and happens throughout the Black Hills. I don't feel the use of funds to make this area less appealing due to a 10 day event is enough of a legitimate reason for the construction.

I think this project needs to be revised and the comment period extended. Thank you.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

I am adamantly opposed to this project. This is a beautiful road...great one to drive while enjoying the scenery and beauty of the Black Hills. We continue to lose these scenic drives due to highway projects that widen, straighten, and ruin them. Some highways that were once leisurely, scenic drives that have been widened and straightened and are mostly now highways to get to gambling and other destinations fast are: Boulder Canyon, Spearfish to Deadwood, Vanocker Canyon, Sheridan Lake Road, and Mt. Rushmore Road. Those of us who have lived here or visited for years remember the beautiful, curving drives we would take on our way to various destinations without 4-lane roads and 65 mph speed limits. It is much different on those roads now, and much of the uniqueness disappeared long ago due to SDOT projects. Do we need to continue to ruin these drives that feature the true beauty of the Black Hills? Do we need to do these projects just for the convenience of the Sturgis Rally or gamblers or other people in a hurry? When doing traffic counts on roads, does the SDOT really take into consideration people may be driving them for the scenery and for pleasure? Are there not better places to spend taxpayer money? We really need to be preserving beautiful roads in the Black Hills before they all become history. Repair 85, but preserve its natural beauty.

January 5, 2024**Comments:**

Short and simple - do not straighten this road!

January 5, 2024

Friday, January 5, 20024

Hello Jennica,

This is a rather hurried comment due to short time to respond over the holidays.

I am writing regarding the proposed project on Hwy 85 between Cheyenne Crossing and the Wyoming border. I was at the public meeting and then got busy with holidays and out of town, only recently returning.

We need more time to consider this project and gather more information.

I understand the need to repair the road, however, I am very concerned that the proposed project endangering the surrounding land and wildlife. I feel more time is needed to consider other options with a goal of more preservation.

I hope the DOT will give more time and other options.

January 5, 2024**Comments:**

This is a rural highway keep it that way. Do not make any changes.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

The Hwy 85 project (from Wyoming state line to Cheyenne Crossing) came as a surprise to me. I wish I had more time to drive the area and read what is proposed.

If this is merely repairs to the existing roadway, I would support it. However, I am not in favor of another huge rebuilding of a road along a waterway that will risk damaging the creek and the Hills in order to make a straighter and wider and faster road. This is not what most residents of the Black Hills want, nor is it what tourists want when they come here to sight-see.

Tourists remember the fun of driving the Iron Mountain Road and slowly cruising up Spearfish Canyon. They don't write home about how wide and straight and boring a road was.

If the object is to drive as fast as possible from SD to WY, people can use I-90 or Hwy 79. When people live near or tour through Spearfish Canyon, they appreciate the beauty of the Hills and want the environment to remain as it has been since the last century.

And I'm certain the plants and wildlife will not benefit from massive roadwork, perhaps requiring blasting and excavation of rock and earth, and the faster traffic after completion.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

U.S. Highway 85 from the Wyoming State Line to U.S. Highway 14A

Project: NH 0085(106)0; Lawr06J, Lawrence County, PCN 06J8

1. I believe there should be at least one additional public comment period because this short period during the Christmas and New Year holiday season is not sufficient.
2. All comments should be available for review and discussion by the public which is helpful in refining this project .
3. What is the discussion of Destination Corridor planning for this project? The experience of the road and environs is applicable to this project area.
4. What is the potential for major safety enhancements from wildlife crossings? There is experience from many completed crossings in other states and countries and you recently received a federal grant for wildlife crossings.

U.S. Highway 85 from the Wyoming State Line to U.S. Highway 14A

Project: NH 0085(106)0; Lawr06J, Lawrence County, PCN 06J8

January 5, 2024 |

Jennica,

We live on [REDACTED], which is off of Hwy 85 in the O'Neil Pass area. We use this highway everytime we leave our residence. I am in total agreement that the highway needs some work, especially in the area of shoulders! Currently there is no shoulders at all, and that makes it very dangerous in places. We do not feel that it is necessary to straighten out the highway in order to increase the speed limit. The big safety factor to prevent motorcycle accidents in the area where I live, is getting rid of the gravel that is drug onto the highway

both from South Rapid Creek Road and O'Neil Pass road. We also have a problem with getting on the highway at times because we never know if someone is coming around the curves at a fast speed. If you increase the speed limit, it will only encourage drivers to drive faster and make it tougher to get on the highway, for us. We are also in the prime snowmobile area in the winter. I feel bad for all the snowmobilers that like to park their trailers in the large lot by the highway. If the road gets moved thru that area, snowmobilers will have to find another spot to park and hopefully it won't be along our gravel road, making it difficult for us to drive to our house!

We do want the shoulders added, but we really like the current speed limit on Highway 85. I don't want the beauty of the scenery on this highway to change so I would rather not have all the proposed major construction on straightening out the highway, if you leave the speed limit as is.

I thank you for considering our comments and concerns.

January 5, 2024

Comments:

Respectfully submitting my opinion on the proposed Hwy 85 project through Spearfish Canyon: This is not only a scenic roadway but also an historic roadway, and as such I feel that it should NOT be changed. It's a part of our Black Hills history - it shouldn't be widened

January 6, 2024

Comments:

Please, leave the canyon alone

We do not need to ruin some of the last beautiful and historic canyons we have in the Black Hills. When accidents happen it is almost always people that are at fault by going too fast. There is a ton of wildlife that live there as well. We have encroached enough.

January 6, 2024

Comments:

I was born and raised in the Black Hills. My mother also grew up there she would drive up through Spearfish Canyon and say to us kids this is God's place cause it's a place of beauty. The short of it leave it all alone. The only ones that want to change it is for greed and there's no price in my eyes to change the scenery threw the Canyon or some of the other places that you think needs changed.

January 7, 2024

Comments:

Please leave this beautiful road alone!!! This is one of our favorite scenic roads.

January 7, 2024

Comments:

There is no reason to spend this kind of money to actually ruin what is such a beautiful drive/ ride. If there is concern about accidents then that's on the operator. People need to just slow down and take in the beauty of our state. Please don't take this away from the people who have lived here their whole lives. Thank you.

January 9, 2024

Comments:

This is an obvious move to please outsiders of the black hills and not the residents of the area. That type of construction in a wetland here with micro biomes so fragile is total genocide of rare species of plants and animals I've only found in that small area. If this goes through it will destroy the hills as we know it, I've seen it happen on the new road next to lake Sheridan were that was the only place I've managed to find rare black trumpet mushrooms that are said not to grow here and since road widening have been bulldozed over and now no longer grow in the hills.

PLEASE save are rural areas so our children can also see the amazing unique plants and animals this island of micro biomes provides without turning it to a parking lot for visitors when we already have major access from almost all other directions.

Thanks for your time and Our future.

January 9, 2024

Comments:

Leave it alone!! Why do we have to mess up this beautiful nature drive - slow down - enjoy the beauty - it was never meant to be a race track!!

January 9, 2024

Comments:

An Environmental Impact Study should be done before any road construction starts.

January 9, 2024

Comments:

Please allow this beautiful area to remain as is, Highway 85 in the NORTHERN Hills.

As a former property owner in the [REDACTED] area for 23 years I have driven this road to my full time job in every weather condition and have always considered it the best maintained road and enjoyable beautiful drive. This road should never be a 65MPH road.

Thank You for your attention to this matter.

January 9, 2024

Comments:

Highway 85 Project:

Repair only what's needed. This is an extremely picturesque and scenic area that deserves preservation. Don't ruin it like Roughlock Falls and other Spearfish Canyon sites - where increased tourism was the prime goal, not preserving the natural beauty of the area.

January 10, 2024

Comments:

Please improve the road. I've been traveling hwy 85 since I was very young. While the scenery is amazing the road is treacherous. I have no doubts that the scenery will still be there once construction is complete, however it will be enjoyable to travel on as well.

January 10, 2024

Comments:

We used to commute between Four Corners, WY and Deer Mountain in SD so routinely drove US85 including on snowy winter days. We would encourage DOT to maintain the proposed section as it is. Please do not widen the road nor take out the curves. Icebox Canyon is a special place that, like the Needles Highway, should not be "improved".

January 12, 2024

Comments:

I bought land in SD 20yrs ago so I would be able to retire in the most beautiful place on earth. Please don't destroy or change what makes SD the heaven that is. You can improve on nature's beauty.

January 12, 2024

Comments:

Please leave this beautiful highway just as it is. It is a gem that should not be widened or straightened, which will only bring faster drivers, more cars, more commercial traffic. Inevitably, more deer and elk will be struck and killed. The increase in traffic, especially commercial traffic, will feed into Spearfish Canyon, a scenic byway and very special place. My husband and I were born and raised in the Black Hills, and we've owned our home near [REDACTED] since 2013. South Dakota has always been a hidden gem. We urge you to preserve and protect our great State, the Black Hills, and this very special highway. Thank you.,

January 16, 2024

Comments:

Please do not widen Highway 85 from Cheyenne Crossing to the WY border. This area is still so pristine and naturally beautiful. There is no need for motorists to travel through these canyons at high speeds. There are alternative routes to take to Newcastle if you need to travel faster. Along this highway are many trailhead parking lots for XC skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, biking, horse riding, climbing, and more. The stream along the highway is too picturesque to change. Leave nature alone.

This is our favorite route when we travel Spearfish to CO, especially our trip home. It's good for the spirit and soul. Such a relaxing ride after being on a road trip to CO.

Thank you for considering this splendid scenery and leaving it perfect.

January 22, 2024

The planned destruction of this unique and precious eco-system must not be allowed to move forward

Email #1

January 23, 2024

Good Afternoon Jennica,

Sorry I was unable to attend the meeting in regard to the construction of US Highway 85 from Cheyenne Crossing, south to the Wyoming boarder. I spend some time hiking on both the East and West sides of the highway. Usually I start hiking just south of the main Homestake water intake and on my journeys I have [REDACTED] fairly close to the present highway. I am not sure if the [REDACTED], but I will make them known to him.

Because I missed the meeting, would you please tell me when construction is to start, and what changes will be made to the highway? I would assume that where ever possible the highway would be widened. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. The first would be an [REDACTED] that crosses under the highway. This [REDACTED]

Anyway, any information that you could supply to me would be greatly appreciated. I am long retired and am available to [REDACTED]. As soon as winter passes, I will be out and about in the same area, [REDACTED] can be seen and accessed at this time.

Email #2

January 25, 2023

Hi Jennica,

If indeed you have an opportunity to look at the sites I mentioned, I would love to take the time to show you my concerns. I spend a lot of time and effort exploring in that area, and believe I have discovered some things that are little known or not known at all to most folks. In my youth I worked for the Homestake Water Department, and we did some projects in and around [REDACTED]. Also, I have hiked most of the main Homestake Water line. You have my e-mail address. Also, I live in Spearfish, and it is just a short distance to Highway 85 South. From 2003 until 2009 I worked part time for the [REDACTED], and before that spent over 20 seasons working out of Custer and Newcastle, and was on 85 as part of my work area.

Looking forward to visiting with you, and learning more about the project.

January 23, 2024

I hope you don't change this road. I don't know why you have to make every road through the hills a freeway. People can just slow down and enjoy the scenerie. Next you will want to straighten and widen the needles highway and the pig tails in the park. That's my opinion and I hope it makes a difference. I have lived here all my life(67 yrs) and have driven that road more times than I can count and never needed to get to my destination in that big of a hurry.

Email #1

January 24, 2024

Dear Jennica Wilcox,

Thank you for being open to receiving my comment.

My father, [REDACTED], taught [REDACTED] at South Dakota School of Mines for nearly five decades. My grandfather [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and eventually became the alumni director there. My father grew up in north central South Dakota and never let a day go by without stating an appreciation for how wonderful it was to live in Rapid City, so close to the Black Hills. The faculty of all departments of the School of Mines annually attended a picnic at Placerville Camp to revel in nature and remind themselves to add the value of the beauty of nature to their classroom curriculums. I can't speak for all those other faculty but as the son of the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I would sometimes, without identifying myself, ask students in social situations who had identified themselves as either current [REDACTED] students or graduates of that program, what kind of a teacher [REDACTED] was, or had been. It at first was a surprise but then seemed consistent that those students all appreciated and spoke of how much he had emphasized in his classes the importance of quality of life and that with science comes responsibility, They all stated that he introduced them to the notion that even though they learned tools for altering the face of the earth having those tools didn't mean they should always

use them just because they could. That quality of life also includes the respect and enjoyment of the beauty of the place where you live and finding ways to integrate one's self into its rhythms rather than impose false rhythms on the place. My grandfather grew up in Hill City, and though I don't know if he ever addressed openly such philosophical notions, he lived them. Like my father he always toured guests and visitors through the Black Hills, choosing the scenic byways, bringing along picnics and fishing poles, jars of water to collect bouquets of wildflowers. The Black Hills weren't a set of commodified resources but a cherished way of life.

I bring up this reminiscence to you in regards to the decision to be made about the fate of hi-way 85 between Cheyenne Crossing and the Wyoming border. Having witnessed the recent reconstruction of sections of Sheridan Lake Road which rendered a beautiful byway into a trough, removing iconic rock structures, shadow casting oak trees, banks of grasses and wild flowers and replacing them with broad bevels of exploded and planed ground sloping away to create straight wide road, replacing the intimate passage with a forgettable shot through time and space, I literally fear for hi-way 85. I could continue to list other roads, such as Vanocker Canyon and other once compelling experiences that have fallen to the notion that they had too many curves, were too difficult to plow, were too narrow to allow construction supply trucks through to building sites and so were made unrecognizable.

At a time when the world more than ever needs places of intact natural beauty, when people have been on the move more than ever in search of that, I believe we should be cognizant of that need and of how our small hi ways serve humanity. And of how few places are left to us to be left alone. It seems that the Black Hills has been discovered as one of the last relatively "unspoiled" places in the country and that that discovery seems to have green lighted the goal to spoil it. I totally understand that people want to move here in droves in search of what the plans for hi-way 85 would remove, a pace of life in a place of beauty that they seek desperately if just as tourists if not as unwitting destroyers by residential replacement. More than ever it is important at this junction in time to consider our future and what we owe ourselves as well as the rest of the country. It is important to think about remote places such as those in northern Alaska where most of us might never personally go but are sustained spiritually knowing they exist. These last few places left in the Black Hills such as the stretch of hi-way 85 in question are now in that category of places that people either personally experience or learn of and know that exist and are reassured. This is important to the nation going forward. We are at a time when we need to ask ourselves questions about what it is we wish to accommodate, the immediate commercial wishes of business, or the long term irreplaceable value of location, of biomes, time recorded in rock, thriving open spaces where orchids, flying squirrels, blue forget me nots, pine martins, bob cats, can be hoped for along the road side not as desperate lives dashing frantically across open wide lanes and road shoulders ending up was road kill.

I understand that other concerned citizens have written and sent in comments echoing my concerns and that their comments have been perceived as insisting that nothing be done to the road as it exists, I can't help but believe that that is an interpretation that they mean the road shouldn't be repaired. Of course the road should be maintained as all roads that continue to exist and be mapped will need to be repaired. Reconstruction as I perceive it and has been explained to me means widening of the lanes and adding wide shoulders per new standards when a road is improved and reconstructed, blowing up adjacent land and vegetation to do so. But in all honesty, honestly speaking, is that what anybody truly wishes for that section of hi way 85. Is that the responsible thing to even consider. Do our tools only include the blunt sledges? Surely in this modern day and age we also are capable of more intricately addressing the maintenance of one of the last treasured routes through this unique place on earth. I know that you even have a categorical name for this kind of address, "Destination Corridor". Please, understand that the public, the people that pay your wages, support you in that keeping hi-way 85 in that category of road. Going forward, what we have is the current standard for quality of

life. We can't go back to a completely unspoiled beauty. But we can maintain what we have, tenderly and with reverence for this place we are drawn to and love,

Thank you for your time and for that place within you that recognizes yourself in the irreplaceable beauty of where we live,

Email #2

January 25, 2024

Dear Jennica,

Thank you for responding to my letter and allowing me to understand more clearly what considerations the people you represent have been taking to mind. I do understand the pride of professionalism, looking at problems, searching for solutions and then feeling as though you have succeeded in making the right choice. As you seem to agree, choices are made after many considerations and turning all of them around to look carefully at them.

In the case of hi-way 85, that stretch from Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming border, I strongly feel that you and the people you represent have not been allowing yourselves to turn the choices around to look at them from all sides, that you have made up your collective mind based on achieving one solution, that of presumed safety, and that you aren't allowing yourselves to think about the longer term consequences of that choice.

I have not been given the privilege of knowing the numbers of vehicles that travel over that stretch of road routinely, nor what the actual rate of crashes is and what the actual causes of those crashes is, so I can't honestly comment about that without your consent of offering that information. What I can comment on and what I tried to say in my first letter to you is that once the earth's offerings are blown up, bull dozed, shoved around, the soil peds killed and hauled off or buried under suffocating layers of asphalt or concrete, once hillsides are removed and meadows fixed with iron or steel infrastructures, the people who travel that road will be the lesser for it. Perhaps they have made the choice to live where they can commute that route specifically because they can travel through those moist blooming meadows and at the feet of those limestone cliffs, in commune with those spruce forests with the hopes of seeing wildlife on its own terms. Perhaps they have made the choice just for that and your choice is to negate theirs without asking. But in the long term not just those people right now commuting, not just those big trucks right now hauling construction supplies should be included in the consideration of your choice on our behalf to violently and permanently alter a landscape dear to a greater population.

In a family where a member of that family is alcoholic, for example, for other members of that family to go out and purchase a gallon of vodka for that addicted member is considered enabling and unhealthy for that member as for the whole family, even though the choice to go buy that vodka is thought to somehow keep that alcoholic off the road, or prevent them from uncomfortable withdrawals.

I believe that when you make choices for the rest of us, ones that we pay you for, and that do us all a greater harm when there are other choices that could be made, you are failing to look at the choice from all sides and failing to think about the long term permanent consequences.

I'd rather not imagine that you haven't been paying attention to the news lately but I know many people have learned to turn it off for all the horror happening over the planet. I'm sure you are aware though that species are going extinct and that nature is going out of balance and that people are becoming more and more violent because of their disconnection from nature. Science, as you might know or have neglected to know, has shown that contact with nature and natural rhythms and natural phenomena lowers blood pressure, gives pause for the mind to reconsider knee jerk thoughts, supports better overall health, sometimes just from the reassurance that the planet is still doing okay and witnessing that up close. The roads we travel over play a bigger and bigger part of this means of connecting throughout the day just because so many of us do commute. Many people have chosen to commute down hi-way 85 rather than through the freeway system of Los Angeles. Because they have set that risk for themselves does that mean it is our responsibility to remove that risk. If a person builds a home next to an airport is it our responsibility to remove that airport to save them from the noise. And ultimately do we want to grid off the Black Hills and pave that grid with freeway lanes underlaid with culverts so that people can get as quickly as possible from points A to points B and enable our separation from the place we have chosen to live. Must we consider the Black Hills as an obstacle.

I would like you to consider that there is more than one way to identify that route, not just a destination corridor and not just a commuter/commerce route but either both or something that considers both. It is cliché perhaps but all the more pertinent to remember that life is a journey not a quick goal. That journey is daily and everywhere we are including the beautiful places we have to travel through, such as hi-way 85, and that safety is also a spiritual./quality of life matter.

In your reply to me you say it is important for you and those you represent to get feedback from the public. You seem, however, to have already made up your collective mind based on a limited and narrowly focussed criteria, before requesting that feedback. I implore you to reconsider your choice and to think about the longer term consequences of your proposal. for indeed, the consequences are very long term and you are making it on all of our behalf.

January 24, 2024

Could you send me some information on the plans for this project? I have a [REDACTED]. I have a [REDACTED] with power right off the highway that could be leased if needed for this project.

Thanks for the help.

Email #2

February 1, 2024

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] near the Wyoming border.

January 24, 2024

Dear Ms Wilcox,

I am writing to ask you to please consider changing this project from *A Commuter/Commercial Corridor* to *a Destination Corridor*.

The Black Hills are and should remain a destination and not a 'corridor.' I have been traveling in and around the Cheyenne Crossing area since first coming to the Black Hills in the Spring of 1969. I then moved here from Colorado in the Fall of 1969 because of the allure of the Black Hills. I would love to see their specialness preserved for now and for future generations. "You can't stop 'progress'" but you can sure make it more fun. *A Commuter/Commercial Corridor provides connectivity between residential and employment areas and/or is intended to carry goods from one point in the region to another or through the region. A Commuter/Commercial Corridor emphasizes vehicle throughput over access to adjacent property, reduced and reliable travel time, and lane and shoulder widths commensurate with commercial vehicles.* D.O.T.'s present US 85 Highway plan is based on this one. (wider faster road designs)

Destination Corridor road construction guidelines in which "driver/passenger experience of the road is the reason for the trip. Curves, narrower lanes, and slower speeds are not considered deficiencies but rather desirable characteristics of the adventure provided by the trip." (slow down and enjoy the country designs)

January 31, 2024

I am writing to offer comments on the U.S. Highway 85 from the Wyoming State Line to U.S. Highway 14A project.

I am not in favor of the aspects of the project to increase the speed limit. Especially if they require straightening of curves. I think that takes away from the natural beauty of the Black Hills.

Thank you for considering my input.

February 5, 2024

1. The proposed grading, widening and roadbed shifts almost certainly will damage natural environments, especially along Spearfish Creek where it will further encroach into and degrade wetlands. Also, I suspect that there will be a loss of beautiful stands of Black Hills Spruce which is of course detrimental to habitat and the scenic beauty of the Black Hills.

2. I do not see how the crash rate comparison to all of South Dakota is a valid comparison. Most of the terrain in South Dakota is extremely different from the Black Hills. The Black Hills should have roads appropriate to what it actually is: a unique, small, easily damaged mountain range and forest.

3. A more consistent travel speed hoping to improve safety can be achieved by either faster speed on the curves or slower speeds on the straightaways. I favor the latter. There is reality in "speed kills". Peter Norbeck was correct that the Black Hills is a place to slow down.

4. I suspect that significant safety improvements can be accomplished without the proposed grading, widening

and roadbed shifts. I suggest a lower speed limit, hardening existing shoulders, electronic speed signs as well as rumble strips across lanes and on shoulder edges. Also, I suspect that the DOT knows of additional speed management improvements to consider.

5. This corridor provides access from the Black Hills to Wyoming, Colorado and beyond, but it is not the only access to these states from the Black Hills of South Dakota. If travelers are in a "hurry", they should use alternate routes that give them safe options to travel at speeds over 45-55 mph. Hwy 85 from Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming border is approximately 20 miles. This is a minor portion of a traveler's journey to any place in the states of Colorado, Wyoming, and beyond. Travelers need to make plans to accommodate for the time it takes to travel at slower speeds leaving the road as is to preserve the natural environment and the serene beauty for which the Black Hills is known and sought after.

I do not support the project as proposed because improvements likely can be made without the proposed grading, widening and roadbed shifts that further degrade the natural environments that locals and visitors greatly value and enjoy.

U.S. Highway 85 from the Wyoming State Line to U.S. Highway 14A

Project: NH 0085(106)0; Lawr06J, Lawrence County, PCN 06J8

February 12, 2024

Jennica Wilcox,

I would like to comment on Project NH 0085(106)0; Lawr06J, Lawrence County, PCN 06J8.

I understand that realigning US Highway 85 with longer radii curves will allow higher vehicle speeds and higher speed limits, but I doubt that the resulting accident rate will be significantly altered. Here is my reasoning. Currently about half the drivers are exceeding the posted speed limits according to your statistics, and with that average speed there were 79 crashes. Then if the speed limit is increased to either 55 or 65 depending on the alternative, it is my belief that the average speeds will about be either 55 or 65. This means that again about half of the drivers will exceed the posted limit and will exceed the design speed for either alternative, except with the higher speeds, the crashes will be more destructive. What would be great is the mandated installation of automatic speed controls to limit speed to the posted speed limit with perhaps variations for changing road conditions. I believe that some jurisdictions are now considering such controls.

My next concern is the frequency of wild animal caused crashes reported to be 23% of all crashes. Unless there is going to be deer and elk proof fencing installed on both sides of the road, I believe there will be increased animal crashes from increased speed. Since the average vehicle driver reaction time is said to be about 0.75 seconds from seeing a danger such as an animal until applying the brakes, at a higher speed there will be even less distance to the animal after applying the brakes when the animal jumps out suddenly on the road. At 55 mph the vehicle will have traveled 60.5 feet in the 0.75 seconds before the brakes are applied; at 65 mph it will be 71.5 feet. In addition the braking distance increases dramatically from increased speed. For example, the average braking distance for cars is estimated to be 265 feet at 55 mph and 345 feet at 65 mph. Obviously those distances can vary based on many factors.

My final thought is that this canyon is one of most beautiful areas in South Dakota. I wish that more people would obey the lower speed limits and enjoy the view. The very little time saved by any higher speed limits is really insignificant in the big picture. Also disturbing more of the area with realignment would be unfortunate because even with reclamation of the old road it will never be as good as the original terrain and vegetation.

February 12, 2024

February 12, 2024

View of creek along Highway 85, December 28, 2023, 44.2642044N 103.9183500W



Please preserve and protect this quietly spectacular road as it is already a perfect entry into South Dakota's Black Hills. Thank you. [REDACTED]

February 13, 2024

Dear Jennica Wilcox,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Project: NH 0085(106)0; Lawr06J, Lawrence County, PCN 06J8.

The section of the road (Highway 85) from Newcastle (especially O'Neil Pass) north to Cheyenne Crossing should be designated as "The Most Scenic Roadway in South Dakota", a tourist destination rather than a simple commuter or commercial pathway. This section of U.S. Highway 85 is by far the significantly more scenic and intimate road through nature than compared to any section of the 19 miles of Spearfish Canyon (U.S. Highway 14A), which is designated as Spearfish Canyon Scenic Byway. This section should be included as the crown jewel of the scenic drive up the Spearfish Canyon Scenic Byway. Lawrence County, western South Dakota, and eastern Wyoming could be marketing this section of highway as a scenic destination, "The most beautiful road in existence within the Louisiana Purchase".

I have driven this road for over a half century and I see no reason to alter this road. It had worked for over a half century as is, why change now? My travels have taken me through this area in all seasons and all weather and road conditions and I have yet to crash into any of the adjacent road ditches. Invest in signs advertising this as the most scenic highway in South Dakota and enforce the existing speed limits. If you drive an average of 60 or 40 mph from the Wyoming line to Cheyenne Crossing the difference in time to make this trip is only 8 minutes.

Proposed plans for this section of road should be completely revised or eliminated for the 12 miles from O'Neil Pass north to Cheyenne Crossing. This small section of road is the most scenic section of highway that South Dakota has to offer. This wonderful section of highway that is adjacent and is the headwaters of Spearfish Creek is the most beautiful reach of stream also within South Dakota (Photo 1). Spearfish Canyon Scenic Byway is a beautiful drive anytime of the year, but even with its status as Scenic Highway, it is less scenic. Spearfish Creek between Spearfish and Cheyenne Crossing is removed from the road, less intimate, and placed at a greater distance below the wide road with wide shoulders and numerous areas of rip-rap and caged rocks that have been added to provide road width, stability and maintain stream integrity. It is less intimate than the nature experience that a driver receives from the creek between O'Neil Pass and Cheyenne Crossing. The primary supporting vegetation adjacent Spearfish Canyon Scenic Byway is common tansy AKA stinkweed, (*Tanacetum vulgare*), while bog orchids, squash berry and other unique plants are adjacent the road south of Cheyenne Crossing. This section of highway provides all tourists and residents entering South Dakota from Wyoming the most outstanding view of trees, riparian, wetland habitats, limestone walls and cliffs, abundant shrubs, numerous rare plants and animals, and provides the traveler with the most intimate contact with nature from a car, since this creek is so near the road in elevation and distance. The views and nature experienced along this road are unmatched, a cathedral of natural beauty.

Driving from [REDACTED] where I now live, to where I grew up in Lead, SD, this section of road always greets me, "Welcome Home". This is the best display from a highway to God's amazing beauty and diversity, especially after crossing much of eastern Wyoming. Instead of greatly altering this section, it should be preserved as the most scenic drive in Lawrence County, in western South Dakota, within the Louisiana Purchase, and quite possibly the only true comparisons would be from a few of our National Parks.

The stated objectives are to widen and straighten sections of the road, increase the road width and road margins. This will only decrease the intimate beauty of this section of road, and will allow for greater driving speeds and increase deaths of wildlife and probably humans. In the past decade, the simple re-surfacing of the

road with asphalt has been accomplished with little costs (compared to this project) and it is always completed before the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.

Highway 85 north of Deadwood was improved with a similar proposal in the late 1980's, if I recall the date correctly. The previous road was a nice, scenic, winding asphalt road, not in a narrow confined canyon, but it was replaced with a wider, straighter, concrete road, and road margins with rumble strips, and speed limits increased about 10 miles per hour greater than before. Replacing asphalt with concrete made the highway noise much greater. I can clearly hear road noise up to a mile west of the road where I frequently deer hunt, especially the rumble strips. This has greatly decreased my experience with nature with a loud constant highway noise frequently accompanied with rumble strip outbursts of irritating noise. I can only imagine the increase in noise by changing the road within the narrow canyon of Little Spearfish Canyon.

This section of roadway will primarily impact white spruce habitat on the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF). This section comprises a range of unique conditions, which includes springs and seeps that generally erupt near the toe slope of many of the adjacent steep slopes. The valley bottoms of this high elevation spruce and pine forests are relatively flat, but quite narrow in the stream valley which is a wetland habitat, but very steep in most other places until just south of O'Neil Pass. Another frequent characteristic of spruce habitat is its moist soil surface; it is often covered with a layer of abundant mosses and lichen species. Over twice as many moss species have been found in spruce habitat compared to pine habitat. Unique forbs are also often found among the moist moss covered rocks, litter and soil in spruce habitat. Spruce habitat is considered by BHNF personnel to be high probability plant habitat. Rare and unique plants that include sensitive and rare plants, plants with their associated unique habitat requirements, and plants that BHNF managers lack enough information about as to adequately address management concerns including plant viability of some of these species. Over 40% of the rarest and least understood plant species found on the BHNF occur within habitat that contain spruce as a dominant or codominant tree species. Some of the largest remaining old-growth pine trees also reside adjacent to this proposed project. The majority of the BHNF spruce habitat is found within Lawrence County and western Pennington County and this is why Lawrence County has about 1,400 plant species within its borders, making it the most plant-diverse county within the state. With plant diversity you also get scenic diversity. A very large population of South Dakota's state flower, the Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla patens*) is currently found adjacent the current highway and if you are lucky to stop nearby in the early summer when they are flowering, it can be a real treat and photo opportunity. This area would be destroyed with the current plans.

Spruce forest is estimated to comprise only about 4-5% of the forested habitat found on the BHNF (DeBlander 2002, Walters et al. 2013) and this unique section of riparian habitat is only found in Lawrence County. Reducing or altering these relatively small, unique spruce wetland habitats will further degrade Black Hills wetland spruce habitat. There will more than likely be a great decline in chokecherries, service berries, raspberries, and squashberry adjacent this section of highway, which may never grow back, but currently provide robins and numerous other birds and small mammals food in the fall and a wide variety of leaf color in the fall, nesting habitat in the spring, and mule deer browse material in the winter. This small section of stream and spruce habitat is one of the few areas in the northern Black Hills that have lacked public livestock grazing, which has greatly benefited this area's development to its current scenic condition. The fenced enclosures adjacent this section of road are within the watershed used to draw water from the creek for use in Lead and Deadwood. Water quality would likely be impacted in negative ways with this major construction, at least temporarily and possibly long term.

Brown and Cook (2006) report the BHNF has a strong moisture gradient from 740 mm in the northern high elevations of the Black Hills to 480 mm in the southern Black Hills that results with spruce and aspen to be occasional co-dominants at the higher and wetter areas of the forests in the northern and central Hills

(Lawrence and Pennington Counties). There will be an increase in solar radiation reaching the soil surface and roadway within this very cool (in the summer) and cold in the winter habitat by widening this road and margins. By removing trees any trees while widening and straitening the roadway will increase airflow and sunshine and both will alter this very unique moist habitat. The wider highway and land adjacent the road will be subjected to increased solar radiation and increased wind speed (both drying factors), which will reduce resiliency of its unique spruce understory habitat which is where over 40% and possibly more of the rare plant species found within the Black Hills National Forest lives. This small section of riparian wetlands and adjacent forest provide habitat for at least a half dozen orchids and one of the few reaches with American dipper birds (*Cinclus mexicanus*), America's only truly aquatic songbird. The resulting herbaceous vegetation will likely be converted to common tansy and other weeds since the Department of Transportation has a long history of greatly degenerating adjacent vegetation with most road improvements.

This very unique habitat in Lawrence County will be ignored because this road project will likely impact such a small percentage of the habitat on the Black Hills overall in the initial planning and construction. However, over the long-term of this project, the next 50 years will decrease Lawrence Counties' ecological resiliency of the micro climate, the scenic beauty, water quality issues, and multiple ecological services. What will be lost may be simply measured by acres or perhaps square feet of soil impact, which will imply little damage in the eyes of highway engineers. When in fact it is very difficult to comprehend and understand the future losses. South Dakota will lose or have diminished many of the ecological services that this small section of road provides the citizens of South Dakota.

Altering this road will impact both the surface and subsurface flow of water, which will impact water quality. Fill material will probably be provided by the cheapest source and could possibly contain a completely different geological make up which would change the soil chemistry and thus the current habitats. The current geology is primarily Madison limestone. Adding fill and altering the current hydrology will create different scenarios at multiple sites where fill is added and current hydrology is altered. These changes will alter existing conditions and probably increase or decrease the soil moisture and chemistry required for certain orchids or other plants. Depending upon the fill material, the pH, subsurface flow, mineralogy at the microscale could greatly exceed current conditions conducive to the current plant life growing in this narrow unique canyon. Fill material and these hydrological changes may also impact water quality.

It is impossible to place a dollar value on this road as it relates to ecological services since they include rare species habitat, scenic beauty value, water purification, sediment filtration, and unique wildlife habitat. All ecological services provided by this unique spruce habitat and the benefit it provides Lawrence County, SD should be considered. An ecological service is a process that would be provided by (in this case) spruce habitat adjacent the current road and that benefits man; aesthetics is an example of an ecological service. Another ecological service provided by riparian spruce forests includes a disproportional amount of rare plant habitat (the half dozen orchid species Photo 2), the American dipper habitat, for example, both of which continue to decline. Rare plants and animals and common vegetation and wildlife will certainly be adversely impacted by widening the road and changing the current path that has worked well for over a half century.

Bird watchers in the United States spent about \$700.00 per person on average and there were 271,000 bird watchers reported in South Dakota in a report by Panjabi (2005). There are many more sustainable economic interests and supports that could be provided to local communities associated with this road and the adjacent diverse forest ecosystem. Also listed in Panjabi (2005) were at least three bird species that were reported to be tied to spruce or high elevation spruce habitat. The American three-toed woodpecker is restricted to mature stands of spruce. The brown creeper is found in old-growth and spruce and much of the only old-growth pine are found adjacent or within these remaining spruce habitats. Swainson's thrushes were reported to be found

wherever high elevation spruce were growing (Panjabi 2005). A comment was also presented to maintain habitat for golden-crowned kinglets, as outlined in specific direction pertaining to spruce habitat (USDA FS 2007; 2005). This section of road could be promoted in its current condition as a bird watchers must see highway.

SUMMARY

The most Scenic Road within the Louisiana Purchase should remain as is, especially the section between O'Neil Pass and Cheyenne Crossing. Altering this 12 miles of roadway will create adverse conditions to areas adjacent the road which include the most scenic sections of roads in all of South Dakota and the adjacent states. Removing curves, increasing the road and road margin widths, adding rip rap and other road stability and structural modification will unfavorably change this most unique and beautiful riparian spruce habitat and significantly decrease the ecological service it currently provides in scenery and aesthetics alone. Other changes that impact hydrology, water quality, solar radiation, wind speed, minerology (depending on fill and amount of disturbance while altering the road) will only be known in the future. This section of roadway is also the most fun to drive in any vehicle but especially on a motorcycle due to the closeness to the stream and vegetation, the cool year round temperatures, all the curves, and change in elevation. Changing this road will make it like the rest of South Dakota's roads. Altering this road in anyway, in my opinion will forever remove one of the best locations from South Dakota's heritage of natural beauty.

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February 14, 2024

I want to comment on the DOT's plans to reconstruct US 85, Cheyenne Crossing to the Wyoming line. Please leave it alone or at most install new black top. As far as highways go, that's a beautiful stretch. It used to be really awesome all the way to Newcastle, WY. I grew up riding in rigs on that highway, and later driving a rig twice week across it. That section of highway has always been the best part of every trip.

It cannot be widened without damaging the fragile canyon. And no matter your intentions, you will not make it safer by making it wider or straighter. Please leave it alone. Thank you.

February 15, 2024

To whom it may concern at the state level,

I am writing about my concerns about the reconstruction/redesigning of Highway 85 from Cheyenne Crossing to the state line. I travel that beautiful, scenic stretch of highway to get to ski at Eagle Cliff ski area and to get to a friend's cabin in the northern Hills. I slow down in every season when I drive that road as I appreciate the rarity of a road like this (still) in the Black Hills. I would be horrified if any of the Eagle Cliff trails were affected by this project. It is one of the few Nordic ski areas in the Black Hills and we need to preserve this.

I support repairs to any existing crumbling road surfaces, eroding shoulders or structures such as bridges or drainage culverts that are falling into disrepair. These should be repaired in the most careful way possible to reduce any future erosion or other damage to the streams and natural landscapes.

As a trained and observant biologist, I am concerned that any reconstruction to widen or straighten the road will be harmful to the streams, forests, meadows, wildlife and landscapes that are part of the natural heritage of the Black Hills.

People come to the Black Hills for recreation (a multi-million dollar per year industry). I understand one of the reasons for this project is to make this road more like the roads in the rest of SD. There are wide, straight, flat roads east of the Black Hills yet the Black Hills is unique to scenic byways. Comparing these types of roads is like the old Apples and Oranges comparison-It should not be done.

Also, I wonder if the mining companies who have claims on either side of Highway 85 in this area have influenced this decision to make the road easier for huge industrial vehicle travel?

I vote for keeping the speed limits down and yes, doing some repair work to make the road safe is good. Let's not ruin the charm of the Black Hills because folks want to go too fast on this road, especially the motorcycles.