

increases. The extent to which newcomers would re-locate permanently to Big Horn County would depend on a number of factors affecting quality of life, such as housing, local services (including public education) and infrastructure.

### **Housing Needs**

Housing quality and quantity are current issues that will continue into the future unless something changes. Poor housing quality will deter residents from staying and newcomers from relocating to the county. Increased numbers of seniors will create specialized housing needs.

### **Economic Conditions**

Poverty will remain high as long as unemployment rates are high. Reducing unemployment rates depends on creation of jobs that can be filled by local residents. There is potential for significant job creation in the future, but local residents may still have difficulty obtaining jobs that pay a living wage. Education plays a key role in obtaining jobs, and the county's school drop-out rate is an issue.

### **Local services**

Local services are important for retaining and attracting residents. The county is quite large and services such as fire protection, ambulance, law enforcement, schools, and medical centers can be distant from the individuals needing the services. Law enforcement has been a historically chronic problem, particularly in areas where jurisdictions among BIA, Tribal governments, county sheriff are confusing and result in long response times and complexities for residents. Schools with high drop-out rates create incentives for residents to school their children elsewhere or leave the area, and they are a disincentive for others with children to relocate to the county. The high proportion of youth creates special needs for services. Increased numbers of older persons will also create increased demands for medical care, transportation, and other services.

### **Infrastructure**

Keeping infrastructure in good condition is important for retaining and attracting residents, similar to provision of services. Major construction projects like the rural water system and coal mine expansion would put increased pressure on roads and highways, directly from truck traffic and indirectly from workers. A rural water system could provide water to communities and additional water needed for fire-fighting (as identified in the 2013 Community Wildfire Protection Plan). Once in place, the water delivery system will need ongoing funding for regular maintenance and long-term replacement and repair. Sewer systems are in various degrees of upkeep and operation in the county. Some need considerable work to provide for existing residents, and it would take additional upfront funding and operations costs for population increases. If population decreases in the future as anticipated, it will be more difficult to generate revenues from taxes and user fees to offset improvements and maintenance to any public infrastructure. The infrastructure that Big Horn County maintains includes county roads, and county buildings, such as the court house, fairgrounds, library, and public health department, and other buildings it supports including the museum, senior center, etc.

## Natural resources

Natural resources could be affected by development in the future. Coal development is intensive but limited to specific geographic areas and subject to requirements for reclamation. Concerns about wind generation include affects to viewshed, noise, and wildlife, particularly birds. Flooding is a natural occurrence and will continue in the future. The more development occurs in the floodway and floodplain, the more costly it will be to recover from flood events.

### Sources:

Cambridge Systematics. 2010 Montana State Rail Plan. Prepared for the Montana Department of Transportation.

## 4. GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND IMPLEMENTATION

### 4.1 CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

The Big Horn County Planning Board reviewed the status of the many implementation strategies of the 2002 Growth Policy as they contemplated the development of new actions for this 2013 Growth Policy. Recognizing that many of the 2002 Growth Policy action strategies were never completed, the Planning Board concluded that the 2002 Growth Policy may have been overly ambitious and also somewhat vague about the task. Consequently, the planning board recommended focusing the action strategies of this 2013 Growth Policy on only those items directly under the authority of the Big Horn County Commission or the planning board.

### 4.2 VISION FOR BIG HORN COUNTY'S FUTURE

The following is the vision as included in the 2002 Growth Policy, with a few word changes recommended by the Planning Board.

*Farming and ranching remain an important component of Big Horn County's way of life and landscape, punctuated by communities with "small town" characteristics of friendly residents, commercial and retail businesses that serve local residents and visitors, and safe, clean neighborhoods.*

*The economy is diversified, building upon the agricultural base and natural resources such as coal, gas, and oil, providing a living wage, and economic enterprises are scaled appropriately to be consistent with residents' quality of life expectations.*

*County, town, and tribal governments in Big Horn County work together on issues that overlap jurisdictional boundaries.*

*Land use change and development occurs in such a way so as not to jeopardize water quality or availability and other natural resources.*

*Big Horn County remains a good place to live and visit as evidenced by low crime rates, clean air and water, quality outdoor recreation experiences with abundant wildlife, open space and scenic vistas, and historic sites and cultural places that are retained, understood, and respected by residents and visitors alike.*

## 4.3 GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

### Communication/Coordination

*Background:*

*There are many overlapping concerns and responsibilities among the local municipalities, Big Horn County, and tribal governments of the Crow and Northern Cheyenne. These include land use policies and regulations, law enforcement, fire protection, etc. The “patchwork” pattern of land ownership on the Crow Indian Reservation presents particular issues--what applies to one parcel may not apply to the next door neighbor.*

*There is very limited communication between the county planning board and the city-county planning board, although some issues overlap the boundaries.*

*It is not easy for the general public to stay informed of county activities. The newspaper is one source, but needs to receive information. The county’s website is outdated.*

**Goal 1:**

**Improve communication and coordination between the county and city of Hardin, town of Lodge Grass, Crow Tribe, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, and general public.**

**Goal 1: Objectives:**

- a. Improved communication creates better understanding of issues.
- b. Coordinated solutions among jurisdictions leads to cost savings and better results.

Goal 1: Implementation Strategies:	Timetable
a. County to continue to provide information to the municipalities, and Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribes on issues of shared concern and to request participation in identifying solutions.	Immediate and ongoing
b. Planning Board to request copies of city-county planning board’s agendas and meeting notes and will reciprocate by doing the same.	Immediate and ongoing
c. County to update the website with current information, including agendas, meeting notes, and documents for public review.	Initiate within 1 year

## Infrastructure Strategy

### *Background:*

*Big Horn County is responsible for over 1500 miles of county roads and bridges, county buildings and facilities (court house, fairgrounds, fire facilities, new airport, etc.), and major equipment (road graders, etc). Maintaining county infrastructure is costly, particularly when considering the long-term costs of major replacement and repair. The county does not have a capital improvements plan (CIP) that inventories condition of roads, bridges, buildings, and equipment and schedules and budgets for major/repair and replacement.*

*Although Big Horn County government does not have any water or sewer facilities, the condition of these facilities is important to the county. Most CIPs have at least a 10-year time frame for budget purposes, but extend out as far as 50 years for scheduling major repair and replacement.*

*The county is being affected by increase of non-agricultural heavy truck traffic on county roads and state highways. As reported by [USA Today](#) (September 10, 2007), one 40-ton truck does as much damage to the road as 9,600 cars.*

### **Goal 2: Provide for the long-term infrastructure needs of the county.**

#### **Goal 2: Objectives:**

- a. A standardized approach to long-term repair/replacement of infrastructure owned by Big Horn County.
- b. County assistance where possible on provision of other non-county infrastructure, such as community water and sewer.
- c. Non-agricultural semi-trucks pay their fair share of impacts to county roads.

<b>Goal 2: Implementation Strategies:</b>	Timetable
a. Big Horn County to develop a Capital Improvements Plan to inventory county-owned infrastructure and major equipment, including current condition, and set a multi-year schedule and budget for major repairs, renovation, and replacement.	Initiate within 2 years
b. Big Horn County to provide grant-writing assistance and match-funding within reasonable limits to support community water, sewer, and storm drainage systems.	Ongoing
c. Big Horn County to identify and implement a system to recoup costs to county roads caused from non-agricultural semi-trucks. Begin with an assessment of fees for new approaches onto county roads.	Initiate within 2 years