

Missoula Streets Close for River City Roots Festival

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MISSOULA, Montana, Downtown Missoula will come alive this week as the city prepares to host its annual River City Roots Festival, with street closures beginning on Thursday and lasting until late Sunday evening. The event, which has become a summer tradition in western Montana, is expected to draw thousands of visitors for live music, local food, family activities, and a celebration of the region's arts and culture.

The street closures will mainly impact the city's central business district. Higgins Avenue, a key artery through downtown, will form the core of the restricted area, with several surrounding streets also closed to accommodate stages, stalls, and public gathering spaces.

Missoula City Council confirmed that diversion routes will be in place throughout the weekend to minimise disruption, but officials urged motorists to allow extra travel time. Roadblocks will be lifted late on Sunday night, after the final performances conclude and crews dismantle festival infrastructure.

Police have also announced extra patrols to help manage traffic and ensure the safety of festival-goers, with emergency access routes kept open at all times.

As with previous years, the closures are expected to create a mixed response from local businesses. While some shop owners have raised concerns about reduced vehicle access, restaurants, bars, and hotels are preparing for increased trade as large crowds converge on downtown.

The Missoula Downtown Association, which coordinates the festival, defended the temporary measures, stressing that the long-term economic and cultural benefits outweigh short-term inconvenience.

In a recent briefing, one organiser explained: *"We know closures can cause difficulties, but the festival brings tens of thousands of people downtown. It is an opportunity for small businesses to showcase themselves and for the community to celebrate together."*

The River City Roots Festival, now in its nineteenth year, has grown into one of Montana's most significant cultural gatherings. The two-day programme features free entry, which organisers regard as central to its popularity. Shuttle buses will run from designated areas to help ease congestion, while visitors are encouraged to use public transport or bicycles due to limited parking.

For Missoula, the festival is more than just entertainment. Local leaders view it as a cornerstone of community identity, designed to highlight the city's creative spirit and attract tourism. Each year, it draws thousands from across the state and beyond, boosting hotel bookings, restaurant sales, and retail footfall.

“River City Roots is our way of showing the best of Missoula to the world,” one Downtown Association spokesperson said. “It is about more than music and food – it’s about pride in our city and its people.”

Since its launch in 2006, the festival has steadily expanded in size and ambition. With that growth, however, has come debate over its impact. Parking shortages and traffic congestion remain common complaints, particularly from those who live or work in the downtown area.

City officials argue that the benefits outweigh the challenges. They note that the festival promotes local culture, generates revenue for small businesses, and provides free entertainment to families at a time when costs for other leisure activities continue to rise.

As Missoula continues to grow, the River City Roots Festival faces the challenge of maintaining its community focus while accommodating larger audiences each year. Organisers say they are committed to keeping the festival free and inclusive, while ensuring it remains safe and sustainable.

By Monday morning, the streets will reopen, the stages will be packed away, and the city will return to its normal rhythm. Yet for many, the weekend will leave lasting memories of music, art, and a strong sense of community spirit.