

CHAPTER 9: TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SUMMARY

Effective transportation and infrastructure systems are critical to maintain the productivity, health, and safety of a region. People travel to work, stores, and services. Although the Villages in Antrim County are walkable communities, they do not provide all the necessary services. People have to travel to other communities and locations to meet their needs. This travel is usually by vehicle, therefore it is important to understand the current road conditions and future plans.

Although Antrim County is growing in population, the overall density is not sufficient for improved services such as water and sewer throughout the County. However, many of the denser locations, such as the Villages, do provide improved services. The remainder of the County is serviced by well and septic.

Prior to land areas being designated for certain density and uses, the infrastructure capacity should be studied. It would not be advisable for a high intensity use, such as a manufacturing operation to be located on a limited access road with a well and septic field. Nor would it be advisable for a subdivision to have five acre lots when it is serviced by water and sewer. The availability of services will impact future growth in terms of use and rate.

EXISTING ROADWAYS

There are many well-developed and direct routes in the County such as Highway 593 which runs from Elk Rapids through Kewadin, Torch River, Alden, Clam River, Central Lake, Ellsworth, and north to Charlevoix. Highway 618 is an east-west connection from Alden to Mancelona. Highway 620 extends from Bellaire through Green River, Alba, and to Otsego County. Highway 624 branches from Michigan Highway 66 to Central Lake. There are a number of other paved County roads that generally provide adequate circulation for development. It should be noted that Torch Lake makes it difficult to have an east-west roadway because it almost completely traverses the County from north to south. The majority of the county roads are paved.

There are two State trunklines traversing Antrim County. The length of US-31 is approximately 24 miles and provides a north-south route through the County. It is located along the western edge and in some locations near Lake Michigan. It passes through Banks, Torch Lake, Milton, and Elk Rapids Townships. US-131 enters the County at the southern edge and travels through Custer, Mancelona, Chestonia, Star, and Warner Townships. It is approximately 18 miles long within the County.

There are three state highways. Michigan Highway M-66 branches north from US-131 in Mancelona Township and provides a fairly direct route to Charlevoix. It is approximately 14 miles long within the County. Highway M-88 also branches from US-131 in Mancelona and travels to US-31 in Eastport. This roadway provides an integral connection in the County and is approximately 26 miles long. State Highway M-32 extends a short distance through the northeast section of Antrim County; it runs through Warner and Jordan Township, north to Highway 66 in Charlevoix County. It is approximately 9 miles long within Antrim County.

According to the Antrim County Road Commission, there are 664 miles of local County roads, 210 miles of primary County roads, and 99 miles of State trunklines. The Antrim County Road Commission is responsible for the maintenance and snow plowing of these roadways. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) contracts with Antrim County for the maintenance and snow plowing of the State trunklines.

The Road Commission receives its funds through taxation, via the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). The Road Commission is only responsible for publicly owned roads. The Road Commission and MDOT are not responsible for private roads; snow removal and maintenance of these roads are funded privately.

In October 2005, members from Antrim County Road Commission, Traverse City Transportation Service, Michigan Department of Transportation, and Northwest Council of Governments studied the road surfaces in Antrim County. This study was part of an Asset Management study for the counties in the region (Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford). Asset Management involves visually inventorying the county roads and prioritizing any needed improvements. This inventory includes collecting and assessing data about the following characteristics: roughness (ride), surface distress (condition), surface skid characteristics, and structure (pavement strength and deflection).

The outcome of this study showed that 50.9% of Antrim County's roads were rated very good to excellent. Among the ten counties in the region, this was the highest

percentage of roads with this rating. Only 3.8% of the roads were rated failing to fair. This classification was primarily for Williams Road between US 31 and Cairn Highway. The remainder of the roads received a fair to good rating. (Source: 2006 Northwest Council of Government Asset Management study).

FUTURE ROAD PLANS

In December of 2005, Antrim County Road Commission adopted their road improvement plan for 2006 to 2010. This road improvement plan is required so that the Road Commission can receive funding. This plan lists the following projects:

~~2006 Alden Highway (CR 618) from Comfort Road to M-88
Crush and Shape (regrading): Complete~~

2007 Cairn Highway (CR 593) from Elk Rapids Village to Quarterline Road
Repaving

2008 Alba Highway (CR 620) from M-66 to US-131
Crush and Shape (regrading)

2009 Alba Highway (CR 42) from US-131 to the County line
Seal coating

2010 Old State Road (CR 624) from Central Lake Village limits to Derenzy Rd.
Crush and Shape (regrading)

PRIVATE ROADS

The majority of newer development is served by private roads. State law encourages the development of private roads during land division. Private roads are privately maintained. At this time, there are no county-wide standards or inventory for private roads.

ALTERNATIVE MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

Mass Transit

A bus system called Antrim County Transportation (ACT) was established in 1977 and provides public transit services to all citizens in Antrim County. It operates Monday through Friday, 6 am to 6 pm. This operation has 15 vehicles, 14 of which are capable of lifting wheelchairs.

In the 2005 fiscal year, this system logged 263,809 miles in 8,629 vehicle hours. During this time, there were 53,159 riders (this number includes the total amount of people on a bus every day; therefore a person riding a bus every day would have been counted every day).

At this time, ACT does not have a descriptive long range plan; however they would like to increase their ridership by focusing on areas that have higher densities. They are also working with surrounding counties to create a more comprehensive transit system. Many of the riders travel to Traverse City, Gaylord, or Petoskey for their services and shops. Eventually, ACT would like to provide consistent travel to these areas.

TRAILS

As the population increases, people become more demanding of services that are offered in higher density areas. One of these services is trails. Although Antrim County has a rustic character, it does not have a comprehensive trail system. There are some organizations that are focusing on providing trails in Antrim County. All of these projects are preliminary, however if they are built, they will improve the quality of life for residents by offering a different form of transportation and providing additional recreation. The following list of trail projects is preliminary, there may be more projects that are being pursued, but are not being promoted.

Preliminary list of trail projects in Antrim County:

- Grass River Natural Area: a trail built on an old railroad grade between Alden and the Bellaire trail. This trail would be a 2.4 mile stretch through the Natural Area.
- Elk Rapids Rotary Trail: a trail linking the Village of Elk Rapids to Whitewater Township in Grand Traverse County.
- Little Traverse Wheelway: a trail connecting Antrim County to the Little Traverse Wheelway in Charlevoix County.

AIRPORTS

Antrim County Airport

The Antrim County Airport is a vital component to the transportation and infrastructure in Antrim County and Northwest Michigan.

The Airport is owned and operated by Antrim County and is located ½ mile northeast of Bellaire in Kearney Township.

Basic information:

- Airport Reference Point: Latitude 44° 59' 18.874"N, Longitude 85° 11' 54.078"W.
- FAA Site Number: 09562.*A
- National Plan of Intergraded Airport System Classification: General Aviation.
- Acreage: 363 acres
- Elevation: 623 above sea level
- Mean Normal Maximum Temperature: 81.3° F
- Runways: Runway 02/20 is 5,000 feet in length and 100 feet wide.
- Pavement: Constructed of bituminous pavement with a gross weight bearing capacity of 55,000 pounds dual wheel main landing gear configuration.
- Lighting: Medium intensity runway lights.
- Landing Aids: PAPI, REIL, and GPS.

The airport is capable of handling corporate jets and hanger space for rent. North Country Aviation provides charter service to and from the airport.

With the Traverse City International Airport and the Pellston Regional Airport within 60 Miles of Antrim County, a scheduled commuter service is unlikely.

There are four other airports in Antrim County. These airports serve mainly private individuals and do not have the capacity to serve the public with regularly scheduled flights throughout the United States and the world. The airports include:

- Air Park North in Alba
- Lakes of the North Airport in Mancelona
- Mancelona Municipal Airport in Mancelona
- Torchport Airpark in Eastport

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

The majority of County residents are served by well and septic systems. The following locations provide water and sewer to their residents: Village of Elk Rapids, Village of Central Lake, Village of Bellaire, Schuss Mountain, and Shanty Creek Resort. The following locations only provide water to their residents: Village of Mancelona, Mancelona Township, and Village of Ellsworth. Currently, the Village of Mancelona is constructing their sewer.

Areas serviced by water and sewer are able to have higher density and more intensive land uses. However, higher densities are needed to fund these improvements. At the current density levels in the County, it is unknown if any other locations will be able to provide improved infrastructure services.

Central Lake, Chestonia, Custer, Forest Home, Helena, Kearney, Mancelona, Star and Warner work together through a Township Ambulance Authority through a millage levied together. Torch Lake and Milton levy their own millage to provide their own ambulance service. Banks, Jordan, Elk Rapids, and Echo do not levy a millage for ambulance services.

The Villages in Antrim County provide some form of police protection. The Villages of Elk Rapids, Mancelona, Bellaire, Ellsworth, and Central Lake all have their own police force but do not provide a 24 hour 7 day a week police force. The Antrim County Sheriff's office, which patrols the unincorporated areas of the county, also covers these areas when their police force is not working. In addition, Torch Lake Township and Mancelona Township have Constables.

Most Townships levy a Millage for fire protection in their township: Banks, Central Lake, Chestonia, Custer, Echo, Elk Rapids, Forest Home, Helena, Kearney, Mancelona, Milton, Star, and Warner. Jordan Township does not levy a Millage for fire.

Land-line phone services, gas, electricity, and cable services are available throughout the County. Cell phone reception is adequate through most of the County. As the technology advances, having high-speed internet and wireless connections will become more important to increase and improve communications.

At this time, many of the utility lines are above ground.

IMPLEMENTATION: (What should be done next?)

1. To compete in a global economy, communities should include in their infrastructure development plans the inclusion of wireless and broadband technology. Northern Lakes Economic Alliance (NLEA) has undertaken an initiative to bring wireless and broadband technology to this area. The county is encouraged to be active participants in this process and to include their village and township counterparts as key stakeholders as well. A broad coalition of government, private sector, and providers of these services should be convened, updated, and included in the ongoing efforts of NLEA to bring these technological resources into the local communities countywide.
2. Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency (NWMCHA) has created a “Septage Waste Disposal Committee.” This committee is actively working toward a sanitary code implementation strategy intended to address increasing problems related to septage disposal and related problems in terms of (related) water quality, and wetlands protection. New and emerging technologies, advanced treatment systems for waste disposal, offer tremendous potential for protecting our groundwater, surface water, and wetland resources.

It is recommended that the county work closely with NWMCHA, environmental advocacy groups, villages, townships, the MDEQ and the EPA, in order to research, develop, and implement decentralized clustered septage disposal systems that take full advantage of cutting edge technologies that provide for protection and preservation of our freshwater and wetland resources.

3. Assist in the development of private road standards. These standards should address design speed, right-of-way width, pavement width, and the proper use of traffic control devices.
4. Work with the utility companies to develop an educational booklet describing the benefits of undergrounding utilities and how homeowners can underground utility lines on their property.