

Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area Long Range Transportation Plan, 2005 to 2030

Executive Summary

The Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area encompasses approximately 110 square miles with an estimated 2000 population of 104,000. The planning area includes the Cities of Eau Claire, Chippewa Falls and Altoona, the Village of Lake Hallie, as well as portions of the Towns of Brunswick, Pleasant Valley, Seymour, Union, and Washington and in Eau Claire County, and Anson, Eagle Point, Hallie, Lafayette, Tilden and Wheaton in Chippewa County.

Urban Growth Forecasts

Growth forecasts prepared for the planning area indicate a 30% increase in population, reaching 135,000 by the year 2030. This growth in population will require an additional 12,422 housing units during the planning period. Employment forecasts are even more optimistic, projecting a 44% growth in total employment by 2030 to each a total of 95,277 employed people in the labor force. The combination of population and employment growth will place increased demands on the transportation system. Automotive travel represents the dominant mode of personal transportation for planning area residents, accounting for 90% of workers who commute to work. Based on population growth and the increased availability of automobiles, the planning area's street and highway system will be required to accommodate an additional 21,100 automobiles by 2030. Total vehicle miles traveled in the planning area will increase by approximately 63% by 2030, reaching 4.6 million miles per day.

Other modes of transportation also contribute to the overall mobility of planning area residents. Public and private transit and paratransit, bicycling and walking are all important components of the total personal transportation picture.

**Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area
Growth Trends and Projections
1990 - 2030**

	1990	2000	2005	2010	2020	2030
Population	91,415	104,005	109,262	114,515	125,025	135,030
Housing Units	35,794	42,413	43,880	45,990	50,211	54,835
Employment	54,732	66,332	71,287	76,242	86,152	95,277
Automobiles	55,839	72,102	74,596	78,183	85,359	93,220

Sources: U.S. Census, 1990 and 2000

West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission Estimate for 2005 and Projections for 2010, 2020, and 2030

Land Use Impacts

The projected population and employment growth will have a substantial impact on land use and development patterns in the planning area. Currently, developed land uses occupy approximately 48,000 acres (50%) of the 96,000 acres of potentially developable land within the planning area. Of the total developed acreage, residential land uses account for 42%, while the transportation infrastructure (roads and rail) occupies 24% of developed land. Future land use projections, incorporated from municipal plans, indicate a somewhat higher potential for residential development than might be warranted by the 2030 population forecast. However, even with a more moderate forecast for residential development, total developed acreage will increase by over 14,000 acres to occupy 62,000 acres, or 64% of the total developable land in the planning area. Of particular concern to current and future development plans is the existence of approximately 17,550 acres of water and identifiable environmentally sensitive areas within the planning area.

The continued expansion of the urban area also raises concerns over land use and growth management issues. Such issues include: the impacts of urban sprawl, the cost-efficiency of providing urban services, protection of the environment, ensuring public safety and social equality, and trying to alleviate jurisdictional problems resulting from rivalries over tax base enhancements. These issues are growing focal points for both land development and the investment in transportation infrastructure and services.

The Transportation System

The Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area contains approximately 700 miles of streets and highways. Approximately 240 miles, or 34% of that road system, is comprised of higher functioning urban arterials and collectors. Traffic volumes on major arterials, such as Hastings Way and Clairemont Avenue in Eau Claire and Bridge and Main Streets in Chippewa Falls, are between 20,000

and 48,000 vehicles per day. Both vehicle miles traveled and vehicle hours traveled by motorists are expected to increase by 63% and 83%, respectively, by 2030, resulting in increased traffic congestion and a higher incidence of vehicular conflicts.

Public transit and specialized transportation services in the planning area serve the needs of those who are transit dependent. The Eau Claire Transit System and the Chippewa Falls Shared-Ride Taxi System, together, provided over one million revenue passengers rides in 2004. Both public transit and paratransit providers are facing increasing challenges in maintaining cost-efficient services due to expanding service areas and funding limitations.

Bicycle and pedestrian facilities also play an important role in the personal mobility of planning area residents. Physical and man-made barriers are the primary factors restricting bicycle and pedestrian movement in the planning area. In many instances, the lack of connecting segments and supporting facilities serve as impediments to bicycling and pedestrian use.

Other modes of transportation addressed in the Long Range Plan include passenger and freight movement by air, rail, and highway. The primary factors affecting the availability of intercity passenger travel by air or bus, as well as freight movement by air, rail or truck, are largely influenced by external market conditions for those modes of transportation. Intercity passenger travel by air and bus, along with freight movement by air and rail, have not experienced appreciable growth over the years, while freight movement by truck has grown substantially. These trends are expected to continue, placing even greater emphasis on the need for a sound highway system to serve the Chippewa-Eau Claire planning area and the state.

Transportation System Improvement Recommendations

Current traffic volumes are exceeding the roadway threshold capacity on approximately 54.6 lane miles of the urban street and highway system, contributing to increased levels of congestion and diminishing safety. The continued growth of the urban area and the associated increase in traffic volumes are expected to further impact the existing road system, resulting in almost 99.4 lane miles of roadway experiencing volume-to-capacity deficiencies in 2030. To address these deficiencies, a number of recommendations have been developed for consideration by state and local transportation authorities. They include transportation system management and transportation demand management actions, as well as capacity expansion alternatives that require construction of additional travel lanes. Among the capacity expansion alternatives, several have already been committed to in state and local programmed budgets, while others are identified as planned projects for possible

future implementation during the planning period. These projects are listed in the following table and depicted on Maps 31 and 33 in Chapter VII.

**Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area
Recommended Highway Improvement Projects
2005 - 2030**

COMMITTED PROJECTS

1. The expansion of the USH 12 bridge over the Chippewa River.
2. The completion of the STH 29 bypass of Chippewa Falls.
3. The reconstruction of Park Avenue to four lanes from Jeffers Street to Peterson Lane.
4. The completion of the USH 53 Bypass of Eau Claire.
5. The reconstruction of STH 93 to four lanes from I-94 to Cedar Road.
6. The extension of Galloway Street from Moore Street to Brookline Street.
7. The extension of Seymour Cray Sr. Boulevard from CTH I and STH 178.
8. The construction of Commercial Boulevard from CTH OO to Melby Road.

PLANNED PROJECTS

1. The reconstruction of Birch Street to four lanes from Starr Avenue to Pine Street.
2. The reconstruction of STH 37/85 to four lanes from the eastbound on-ramp of I-94 to the intersection of STH 37 and 85.
3. The reconstruction of CTH AA to four lanes from Gateway Drive to House Road.
4. The reconstruction of the STH 29/124 interchange to an at-grade two-lane roundabout.
5. The reconstruction of USH 12 to four lanes from Winchester Way to Shultz Road.
6. The reconstruction of CTH T to four lanes from Alpine Road to old STH 29.
7. The construction of a new diamond interchange at USH 53 and Bridgewater Avenue.
8. The reconstruction of USH 12 to six lanes from Vine Street to the North Crossing.
9. The closure of the Spring Street bridge over Duncan Creek to vehicular traffic
10. The reconstruction of CTH S to four lanes from the USH 53 interchange to STH 178.
11. The reconstruction of CTH X to four lanes from CTH J to CTH K.
12. The construction of Gateway Drive as a four-lane from Hamilton Avenue to 3rd Street East.
13. The construction of Alexander Street as a two-lane from E. South Avenue to old STH 29.

An extensive evaluation was conducted of the Eau Claire Transit System to try to address operating deficiencies of both short-term and long-range concern. Recommendations were developed to improve the operating efficiency and revenue enhancement capabilities of the system. The recommendations addressed the primary elements of service delivery, capital acquisition programming, fare structuring policy, financing and marketing, performance monitoring and the integration of land use planning into service delivery. Many of the recommendations are already being implemented by the Eau Claire Transit System.

The demand-response transit and paratransit service providers in the planning area are more dependent upon revenue enhancement mechanisms to improve service delivery. Increased local funding initiatives and service efficiencies are recommended to try to address limited state and federal transit funding. Improved cooperation and coordination between transportation providers, public agencies, and municipalities can also expand service delivery.

Bicycle facilities that utilize part of the roadway, along with most pedestrian facilities adjacent to public thoroughfares, are recommended to be incorporated with street and highway improvement projects when they are programmed. The bicycle transportation component of the long range plan recommends adding paved shoulders to 31 miles of rural roads, increasing the capacity on 88 miles of urban streets to accommodate a wide curb lane or bike lane, and constructing 41 new miles of separated bike paths. In most instances, the paved shoulders on rural roads and physically separated bike paths also serve the needs of pedestrians. The proposed bikeway system for the planning area consists of 85 miles of existing on-road and off-road bicycle facilities, along with recommended improvements to 160 miles of the identified system.

The emphasis on the highway system to accommodate the intercity movement of people and goods is recognized by the development and implementation of major highway improvements such as the STH 29 and USH 53 bypass projects. In addition to selected capacity expansion projects serving intercity travel, the plan identifies the need for increased investment in the preservation and improvement of the existing street and highway system.

Transportation and land use are recognized as inter-related issues. They each can have a significant influence over the development and functioning of the other. The adverse land use impacts and growth management concerns that are discussed in the plan can result from a lack of coordination and cooperation regarding growth. One of the principle goals that have been adopted to guide the development and implementation of the long range plan focuses on the need to coordinate the provision of transportation facilities and services with land use development plans and policies.

Financial Plan for Implementation

Cost estimates for the implementation of the plan have been developed using life-cycle costing methodology and annual inflation factors to try to accurately depict the longer term expenditures that will be needed to support the urban transportation system. Anticipated funding for the plan's implementation have also been identified from available federal, state and local sources based on current funding levels and cost-sharing formulas. Based on this cost estimating process and the transportation system needs identified through the planning process, an average annual expenditure of \$91.2 million would be required to address those transportation needs in the Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area through the 2030 planning period. A breakdown of those required annual expenditures by mode of transportation identifies the following distribution of costs and anticipated funding availability:

**Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area
Transportation System Financing
2005 – 2030**

	Estimated Costs (\$ million)	Anticipated Funding (\$ million)
Streets and Highways		
• Operations & Maintenance	\$39.0	\$22.4
• Preservation (3R)	\$39.0	\$27.2
• Expansion	\$5.4	\$5.4
Transit		
• Operating	\$6.3	\$6.3
• Capital Acquisition	\$0.7	\$0.7
Bicycle/Pedestrian		
• On-Road Improvements	\$0.3	\$0.3
• Off-Road Construction	\$0.3	\$0.3
Planning		
• MPO Activities	\$0.2	\$0.2
TOTAL AVERAGE ANNUAL	\$91.2	\$62.8

The availability of existing and anticipated future transportation funding to address these needs is questionable. Currently available funding from combined federal, state and local sources only address two-thirds (\$55.0 million annually) of the identified street and highway needs in the planning area. While major expansion projects have been committed to in the near term, longer range projects will face funding uncertainties that will depend on federal, state and local transportation funding priorities. The availability of future transit funding also faces those same uncertainties if federal and state support does not keep pace with growing transit demands, increasing the financial responsibility of local municipalities for their local transit systems. Similar uncertainties concerning the availability of transportation funding to support the bicycle and pedestrian needs identified in the plan will place an increased burden on local municipalities in prioritizing and funding their transportation projects. **Faced with these funding uncertainties, the MPO will continue its policy that emphasizes system preservation over capacity expansion in its project prioritization process in the TIP.**

In addition to prioritizing system preservation projects over capacity expansion projects, the MPO encourages local and state officials to pursue additional revenue sources to address the identified transportation funding shortfalls. Additional transportation revenue can be pursued from the following local sources to address the \$28.4 million average annual funding shortfall over the 25-year planning period.

- \$3.4 million – Use of development agreements for private funding of new infrastructure construction.
- \$2.2 million – Dedicate a portion of the county sales tax for transportation use.
- \$5.4 million – Increase the transportation budget from general fund revenues.
- \$3.5 million – Use of utility/impact fees to fund transportation projects.
- Establish a Regional Transportation Authority with a separate taxing authority for dedicated transportation purposes.
- \$0.5 million – Use of Transportation Enhancement program funds.
- \$4.0 million – Use of Tax Increment Financing districts, Community Development Block Grant program funds, and Transportation Economic Assistance program funds to implement transportation projects.
- \$3.0 million – Use of special assessments for local street improvements.
- \$6.4 million – Use of bonding for transportation projects.

Also, since local municipalities rely on State revenue sharing and dedicated transportation funding programs to help support local transportation projects and services, the State should also strive to increase transportation revenues. Additional state transportation revenue can be pursued from the following state sources and/or actions:

- Discontinue the transfer of state transportation funds for non-transportation purposes.
- Use of bonding for transportation projects.
- Reinstate gas tax indexing.
- Dedicate a portion of the state sales tax from the sale of automobiles and automotive related parts to the transportation fund.
- Increase the vehicle registration and licensing fees.
- Adopt a value-based licensing fee.
- Evaluate the implementation of toll roads on high volume corridors.
- Evaluate changes to state transportation funding formulas for the distribution of state and federal transportation funds to local municipalities.
- Permit the establishment of Regional Transportation Authorities to assist with funding local transportation projects and services.
- Implement user fees based on miles driven.

While the State's ability to increase transportation revenue from various sources is acknowledged, the dedicated use of those funds for transportation purposes has been breached in recent years, creating a level of uncertainty for the future use of existing or new transportation revenue at the State level. State and local municipalities have also come to rely more heavily on bonding for transportation projects. The long term affect of increased borrowing to address needed transportation improvements also carries with it an increased financial risk regarding the availability of transportation funding for future projects.