West Central Minnesota

July 2013

Regional Transportation Plan

West Central Initiative

Investing resources
in our communities
for regional success

Regional Transportation Plan

for

West Central Minnesota

July 2013

Becker, Clay, Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail,
Pope, Stevens, Traverse and Wilkin Counties

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Cover Photo: The Central Lakes Trail in Alexandria.

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Introduction

West Central Initiative (WCI) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit foundation serving the Minnesota counties of Becker, Clay, Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail, Pope, Stevens, Traverse and Wilkin in west central Minnesota. WCI coordinates regional transportation planning activities under contract with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) District 4.

WCI's primary goal, as declared in its vision statement, is to "unite ideas and resources to help people and communities create a better tomorrow." That goal is reflected in WCI's transportation planning program, which strives to work with local planning efforts across the region, along with MnDOT's district planning, to develop a comprehensive, coordinated and continuing transportation program for the region.

As part of its transportation planning program, WCI convenes meetings of a regional Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). The main purpose of the TAC is to help guide WCI's transportation planning program. The TAC also serves as an advisory body to the MnDOT District 4 Area Transportation Partnership (ATP). As such, The *Regional Transportation Plan for West Central Minnesota* was developed to serve as documentation for the TAC's advisory role with respect to the ATP.

The *Regional Transportation Plan* (RTP) is a multi-modal plan, including information about all elements of the regional transportation system. Elements included in the RTP include highways, rail, air, bicycle, pedestrian, transit, and freight movements. The main focus of the first RTP, published in 1999, was on the state trunk highway system and on the goals and objectives for that system.

This update to the RTP builds upon the 2004, 2007 and 2009 updates, which expanded the RTP to include additional information about the county highway systems in west central Minnesota as well as the state trunk highway system. Information about the other modes that make up the overall regional transportation system has been included as well.

The process used to develop and update the RTP is an open, public process. Several methods of gaining input from both elected officials and the general public were utilized in the development of the RTP. Over the years, surveys to local officials, regional public input meetings, online comment solicitations and review by the TAC and RTP subcommittee have all been methods that have been employed in the development and update of this plan.

Regional Profile

West central Minnesota shares many characteristics with most rural areas in the upper Midwest. Since 1940, the region has experienced a steady aging of the population connected with out-migration of young adults and their children.

Region 4 is experiencing modest population growth. The total population of the nine counties in 2010 was 221,688. Population has been steadily increasing since 1930 with the exception of the 1990 Census. Current population projections forecast that the region will continue to have modest growth into the future, with growth being concentrated in those areas in close proximity to recreational and natural amenities (e.g. lakes areas). The State of Minnesota also continues to experience a population increase.

West central Minnesota is currently experiencing shortages of housing which are unprecedented in recent history. Many communities in the region are experiencing housing shortages, particularly decent, affordable renter occupied housing. Many businesses are reporting that a shortage of housing is affecting their ability to attract needed labor.

At a regional level, economic and community development efforts are focused on three pressing issues: creation, retention and enhancement of living wage jobs through the use of technology and by addressing affordable housing and skilled labor shortages. These three issues are critically interrelated and must be addressed together to effectively improve the economy of the region.

Transportation Profile

West central Minnesota is well served by an extensive roadway network, which connects the region to the rest of Minnesota and the United States and Canada. This roadway network provides for the primary means of transportation in the region: private automobile travel. Included in the roadway network are federal, state, county, township and city roadways. Scenic Byways enhance the roadway network, while other recent efforts have improved safety and travel conditions – including access management, roundabouts and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS).

Efforts to develop and enhance pedestrian and bicycle facilities have continued in west central Minnesota in recent years. The Central Lakes Trail and future Heartland Trial constitute major trails corridors in the region. Local and regional trails also accommodate the transportation needs of bicyclists and pedestrians. Along with regional trails, local pedestrian and bicycle facilities form a critical part of the overall transportation network.

Transit plays an integral role in the overall transportation system in West Central Minnesota. The transit systems in the region serve many different types of people with several distinct trip purposes. MnDOT recently updated the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan, and has also worked with WCI to update the transit coordination study, which will assist transportation providers in the region in their efforts to provide efficient and effective transportation services to all residents of west central Minnesota.

While the primary focus of the RTP is on surface transportation, aviation also plays an important role in moving people and freight. Fifteen public airports and two public seaplane bases serve the WCI planning area. Twelve of the 15 public airports have paved and lighted runways. The remaining three airports have lighted turf runways.

There are four rail lines serving WCI's planning area: Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Canadian Pacific Rail System, Red River Valley & Western Railroad and Ottertail Valley Railroad. Safety at highway-railroad crossings is an important consideration in the regional transportation system. Recent efforts have been made to maximize the safety of the traveling public when crossing railroad tracks, and efforts are underway for future rail safety projects as well. As rail corridors are abandoned in the future, efforts should be made to preserve those corridors for future transportation purposes.

The commercial trucking industry has expanded in the area with a shortage of freight cars and limited service by the railroad. These trucking companies provide a vital link between agricultural producers and national markets. Ideas for improving this important component of our transportation network include the development of a 10-ton County State-Aid Highway network and the possible designation of a western Minnesota truck route. The Western Minnesota Regional Freight Plan was completed in 2009, and will help guide future freight investments.

Goal Statements

In the development of this plan and previous editions, a series of goal statements have been formulated. These statements were developed through input gathered at public meetings and by the West Central Minnesota Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC).

These goal statements were prioritized by the TAC as follows:

- Document the need for additional transportation funding in west central Minnesota.
- Provide a safe and efficient transportation system for all users.
- Support west central Minnesota's agricultural, tourism and manufacturing economies.
- Emphasize the movement of goods and people rather than the movement of vehicles.
- Maintain the existing transportation system at state and national standards.
- Coordinate transportation planning between all levels of government.
- Develop a transportation system that minimizes negative environmental and community impacts, while enhancing the quality of life.

Proposed Future Transportation Improvements

In the process of updating the Regional Transportation Plan, several transportation projects have been identified as being necessary or desirable to accommodate the safe and efficient movement of people and freight in the region.

While several proposed future transportation improvements are listed in this plan, the intent of the Regional Transportation Plan is to coordinate with other plans in the region. As such, any planning documents that are developed by jurisdictions within the region – including townships, cities, counties and MnDOT – should be considered as part of the overall regional transportation network.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

West Central Initiative (WCI) is a non-profit, independent public foundation serving the west central Minnesota counties of Becker, Clay, Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail, Pope, Stevens, Traverse and Wilkin. This nine-county area is also known as State Planning Region IV.

WCI is contracted with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to provide regional transportation planning services for Region IV. This partnership developed as a result of provisions in Federal transportation legislation requiring state departments of transportation to include local input in their planning and decision making processes.

As part of the transportation planning program, WCI prepares a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP is a multi-modal transportation plan, including information on different elements of the transportation system in the region. The RTP covers the aforementioned counties (Figures 1-1 to 1-3), and efforts are made to coordinate with local city and county plans, as well as the state transportation plan.

Background

A Regional Development Commission (RDC) once served the west central region of Minnesota, providing regional planning functions for the area. The West Central RDC was designated in 1973. The RDC served the region for nearly a decade, until it was disbanded in 1982. From 1982 until 1997 there was no regional transportation planning taking place in this part of Minnesota.

In the 15-year period between the dissolution of the RDC and the involvement of WCI in regional transportation planning efforts, transportation planning was done primarily at the local and state levels in the region. Most of this local-level planning still takes place. However, a lack of regional planning can result in inefficient coordination between townships, cities, counties, and the state, and could potentially result in fewer projects being eligible to receive Federal surface transportation funding.

WCI's primary goal, as declared in its vision statement, is to “unite ideas and resources to help people and communities create a better tomorrow.” That goal is reflected in WCI’s transportation planning program, which strives to work with local planning efforts across the region, along with MnDOT’s district planning, to develop a comprehensive, coordinated and continuing transportation program for the region.

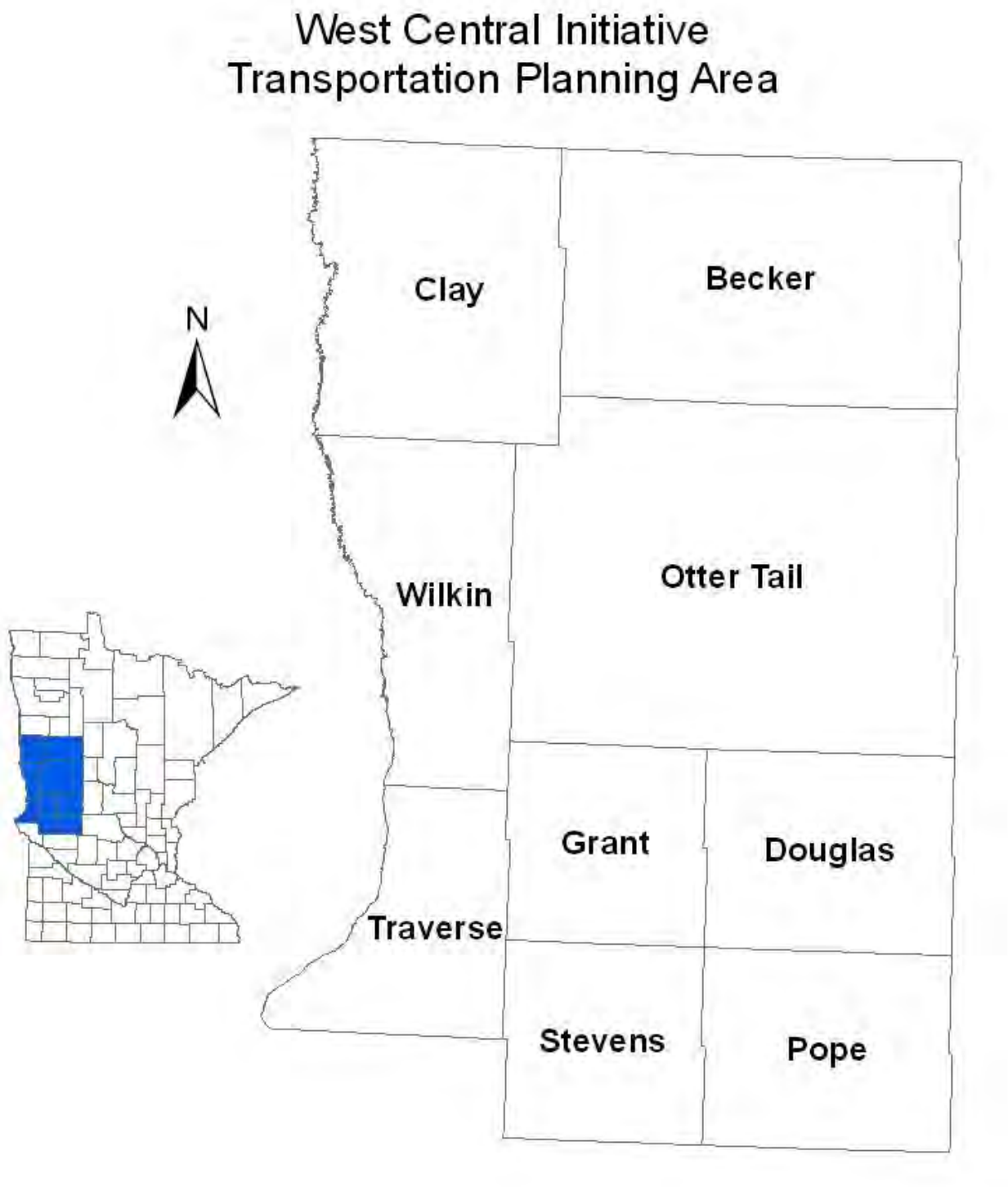

West Central Initiative
Transportation Planning Area
N
Clay
Becker
Wilkin
Otter Tail
Grant
Douglas
Traverse
Stevens
Pope

Figure 1-1

Major Cities in WCI Planning Area (Population of 1000 or Greater)

Figure 1-2

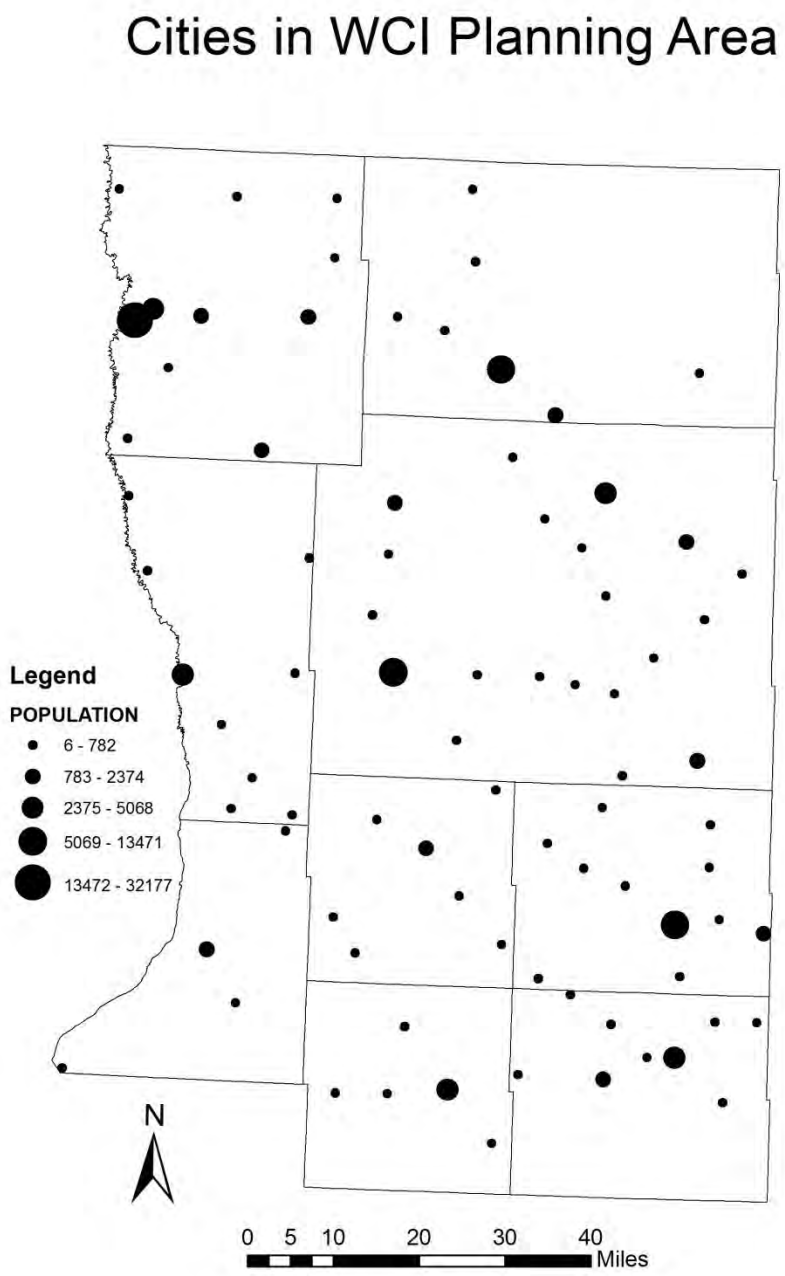

Cities in WCI Planning Area
Legend
POPULATION
6 - 782
783 - 2374
2375 - 5068
5069 - 13471
13472 - 32177
N
0 5 10 20 30 40
Miles

Figure 1-3

Transportation Advisory Committee

An important element of WCI's transportation planning program is the regional Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). The main purpose of the TAC is to help guide WCI's transportation planning program. The TAC also serves as an advisory body to the MnDOT District 4 Area Transportation Partnership (ATP). The ATP is the committee that helps MnDOT determine how Federal surface transportation dollars are spent in the region.

Major duties of the TAC include:

- Generating a vision and plan to guide the investment recommendations in the Regional Transportation Plan.
- Developing communications systems and promoting cooperation among all of the partners required for coordinated transportation planning.
- Bringing order and direction to efforts to meet regional transportation needs.
- Serving as a "champion" for coordinated regional transportation planning.
- Encouraging communities and other jurisdictions within the region to coordinate local transportation planning and investment with each other and with the broader regional plan.

The TAC consists of the following membership:

- Two state representatives
  - One MnDOT
  - One State Patrol
- Four county representatives
  - Two county commissioners
  - Two county engineers
- Three city representatives
  - One large city (5000+ population) elected official
  - One large city staff person – typically an engineer or planner
  - One small city (<5000 population) representative
- One township representative
- One White Earth Tribal representative
- Four modal representatives
  - One aviation representative
  - One freight representative
  - One public transit representative
  - One trails representative

A list of TAC members can be found on WCI's web site, at www.wcif.org.

Efforts are made to geographically distribute and rotate TAC membership to ensure that all parts of the region have an opportunity to be represented on the committee.

The TAC also has three ex-officio members. One represents the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments (Metro COG), while the other two represent the District 4 Area Transportation Partnership. The ex-officio members represent the interests of their respective agency and committee and assist WCI staff in ensuring the regional transportation planning program will be coordinated with the planning efforts in adjacent areas.

Status of the Regional Transportation Plan

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is a multi-modal plan, including information about all elements of the regional transportation system. Elements included in the RTP include highways, rail, air, bicycle, pedestrian, transit, and freight movements. The main focus of the first RTP, published in 1999, was on the state trunk highway system and on the goals and objectives for that system. The 2004 update to the RTP expanded upon some of the modal elements that were only briefly addressed in the 1999 plan. The 2007 update to the RTP included additional information about the county highway systems in west central Minnesota. This 2013 update maintains and expands upon previous updates. It is anticipated that the next update of the RTP, tentatively slated for 2016-17 would include a significant update to reflect recent changes in Federal surface transportation legislation – including MAP-21 and subsequent bills – as well as updates to various MnDOT planning studies, including the Minnesota GO visioning process, the State Highway Investment Plan, and various modal planning documents, such as the state bike plan.

Specific modes and transportation issues sometimes warrant plans and studies over and above the information included in the RTP. In May 2001, WCI published the *Truck Weight Sub-Committee Final Report*, a document describing some of the challenges faced in the region by freight movement utilizing heavy commercial vehicles. In 2005 WCI developed a draft regional multi-use trails plan, which includes information about pedestrian and bicycle facilities, snowmobile and ATV trails, scenic byways and other trail usages, as well as contact information and a resource guide for trail advocates to use in their work on trails throughout the region. The regional trails plan is scheduled to be updated in 2014-15.

In addition, WCI's planning staff actively participates in other transportation planning projects within the region, in particular, those involving multiple agencies and jurisdictional partnerships. Examples of past projects include the "Connect Detroit Lakes" project, the Fergus Falls Tower Road Bridge project and the Fergus Falls Lincoln Avenue Corridor Study.

MnDOT has partnered on an increasing basis with the regional development organizations in Minnesota to conduct various planning projects and studies. A recent example of this is the work on the Urban Area Boundary Adjustment project that involved the update of Census-defined urban areas in the state.

WCI also monitors other regional studies and planning processes in order to ensure coordination amongst planning efforts. Examples of this include plans and studies initiated by the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments (Metro COG) and joint projects between MnDOT and the North Dakota Department of Transportation.

It is the intent of this plan to coordinate with other planning processes whenever possible. Currently, MnDOT has several plans in process that will have implications on the transportation system in west central Minnesota. MnDOT is in the process of updating the Statewide Highway Investment Plan, scheduled for completion in 2013. Also, MnDOT is working on a Freight Rail Economic Development (FRED) plan, scheduled for completion in 2013. The Otter Tail Valley shortline railroad has been mentioned as a possible pilot location for the FRED planning process.

Public Involvement in the Planning Process

The process used to develop and update the Regional Transportation Plan is an open, public process. While long-range, regional transportation planning usually does not spark the interest of the average citizen, elected officials – who are elected to serve the public interest – are directly involved in the transportation planning process.

As the 2013 RTP is a relatively minor update to the plan, a more limited public input process was employed. Input for the plan was received primarily from TAC members and MnDOT planning staff. In addition, comments on the RTP are collected between update periods for consideration when an update is completed. The plan will be presented at the July TAC open house meeting, and further comments will be considered at that time.

A 2004 transportation survey is being included in the 2013 RTP update as an archival record of previous input processes. An update to the survey will be included in the next update of the RTP.

The 2004 survey was sent to elected officials and staff in each of the nine counties, 83 cities and 238 townships in west central Minnesota. Survey recipients at the county level included county commissioners, engineers and administrators/coordinators. At the city level, surveys were sent to the mayor, council members and city clerk. Surveys sent to township officials were sent to the town board chair and town clerk. The survey instrument and results can be found in Appendix A.

As an interim step, TAC members were asked to identify projects and issues relating to the region's transportation system; this information is included in Chapter 5: Regional and Community Improvement Projects.

Relationship to the Area Transportation Partnership

MnDOT created the Area Transportation Partnership (ATP) process to fulfill the requirement of Federal transportation legislation that mandates state and local coordination with regard to transportation planning and programming activities. The District 4 ATP is the body that recommends Federal surface transportation funding expenditures in the district. WCI's Planning Director serves in a staff support role on the MnDOT District 4 ATP.

Planning activities differ from programming activities in several ways. Most notably is the time frame in which projects are discussed. Project planning usually looks out beyond a five-year time frame, often taking a 20-year look at the needs of the area. Programming typically looks out three or four years. The Federal funding cycles that the ATP must follow are based on a four-year time frame. Another difference is that jurisdictions responsible for implementing transportation projects are not bound by the recommendations in a transportation plan. However, once a project reaches the programming stage, a jurisdiction has generally committed to seeing that project though to completion.

MnDOT works within the context of several planning and programming documents, including:

- Minnesota GO: A Collaborative Vision for Transportation
- Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan
- The Minnesota State Highway Investment Plan 2014-2033 (MnSHIP)
- The State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

More information about these plans can be found in Chapter 3: Transportation Profile. In addition, MnDOT regularly updates various plans that provide direction for different transportation modes including transit, rail, bikes, pedestrians, freight and aviation.

In addition to the planning processes employed by MnDOT and WCI, cities and counties often engage in planning and programming for transportation projects. Counties have 5-year work plans that help guide their planned transportation investments. Many cities develop a 3-5 year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) that serves the same role. Some cities and counties – and occasionally townships – also develop comprehensive plans to guide their growth over longer time periods.

WCI recently launched a CIP grant program to encourage communities in the region to develop CIPs with a focus on their water infrastructure. For more information, visit http://www.wcif.org/page/cip.

The programming process currently used by the ATP involves counties and cities working together to bring projects to the ATP for approval, while Metro COG develops a prioritized project list for the Minnesota portion of the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. The TAC does not submit a prioritized project list at this time. If, at a future date, the TAC and ATP feel that it would be beneficial to have a regional list of transportation projects submitted to the ATP, changes to this policy could be made at that time.

The ATP consists of the following membership:

- Five MnDOT representatives
  - District Engineer
  - Assistant District Engineer
  - State Aid Engineer
  - Transit Manager
  - Planning Director
- Six county representatives
  - Two elected officials from Region 4 counties
  - Two county engineers
  - One representative from Region 2 (Mahnomen County)
  - One representative from Region 6W (Big Stone and Swift Counties)
- One city engineer representative (state aid city)
- One public transit representative
- One White Earth Tribal representative
- One MPO representative (Fargo-Moorhead Metro COG)

Primary staff support is provided by the MnDOT Planning Director. Transportation planners from the three regional development organizations (Regions 2, 4 and 6W) also serve in a non-voting, staff capacity role on the ATP. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) also has an ex-officio membership position on the ATP.

A list of current ATP members is available on MnDOT's web site, at http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d4/atp/.

CHAPTER TWO

Regional Profile

Introduction

In this chapter, a variety of socio-economic indicators are presented and analyzed to determine their relative influence on the region. Data is presented for the entire region and for each individual county. When possible, this data is then compared to like data for the State of Minnesota. The analysis attempts to point out trends in and between the counties and determines the impact of these trends on the region as a whole. The data contained herein is generally limited to those factors that have a direct impact on the present and future economy of Region IV. Much of the information contained in the tables and charts presented in this section were extracted from several Internet web sites prepared by various planning agencies.

The data in this chapter comes directly from the 2011-2016 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for West Central Minnesota. Therefore, the focus of this chapter is on the impact that several socio-economic indicators have on the economy of west central Minnesota. Transportation and the economy are, however, closely tied together. Where applicable, the impact that the aforementioned socio-economic factors have on transportation is specifically noted, although most of the chapter does more easily facilitate discussion of economic development.

In the interest of publishing the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) on schedule, the formatting of this chapter has been left as-is from the CEDS. Therefore, some stylistic difference will be apparent between this chapter and the remainder of the RTP. The entire CEDS can be viewed at http://www.wcif.org/?page=CEDS

II. THE AREA, ITS ECONOMY, ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A. REGIONAL OVERVIEW

2010 Population	**:**	**221,688**				
				Labor Force 2010 ann. avg.	:	122,078
2000 Population	:	210,059		Employed 2010 ann. avg.	:	114,460
2000 Minorities	:	10,944	5%	Unemp. Rate 2010 ann. avg.	:	6.2%
2010 Minorities	:	12,545	5.7%	(Employment #'s not seasonally adjusted)		

Source: U.S. Census and MN Department of Employment and Economic Development

The available labor force did not increase very much from 2009 (122,001) to 2010 (122,078) based on DEED numbers. This trend was also seen at the individual county level as the labor force stayed relatively consistent from recent years. However, the 2010 annual average for employed persons increased significantly, which in turn caused the unemployment rate to drop by 0.8%. The stable labor force number from 2009 to 2010 is thought to be due to a combination of things including a balance of people leaving and entering the workforce, as well as moving to and leaving the region.

1. Population Characteristics

West central Minnesota shares many characteristics with most rural areas in the upper Midwest. Since 1940, the region has experienced a steady aging of the population in addition to the out-migration of young adults and their children. While the region's economy and employment base were largely dependent on farming in 1940, by 1990 less than one percent of the region's population identified themselves as full-time farmers. The majority of the household income of those who farm came from off-farm sources. Still agriculture remains an important part of the region's economy, and will be discussed in further detail later in this document at both the regional and county level.

Region 4 experienced overall population growth over the last decade (5.5%), but not as the same rate as the state, which experienced a 7.8% increase in the same time period. The total population of the nine counties in 2010 was 221,688, up from 210,059 in the year 2000. Previous State Demographer estimates painted a slightly bleaker picture in recent years. Most recently, 2009 estimates showed a regional population at approximately 3,000 less than the results of the recently released 2010 Census data. However, the distribution of population in the region continues to change rapidly. Rural areas and most of the smallest communities in the region continue to lose population. The region's larger communities have absorbed many of those losses. Table 01 shows the changes in population by county for the last 20 years.

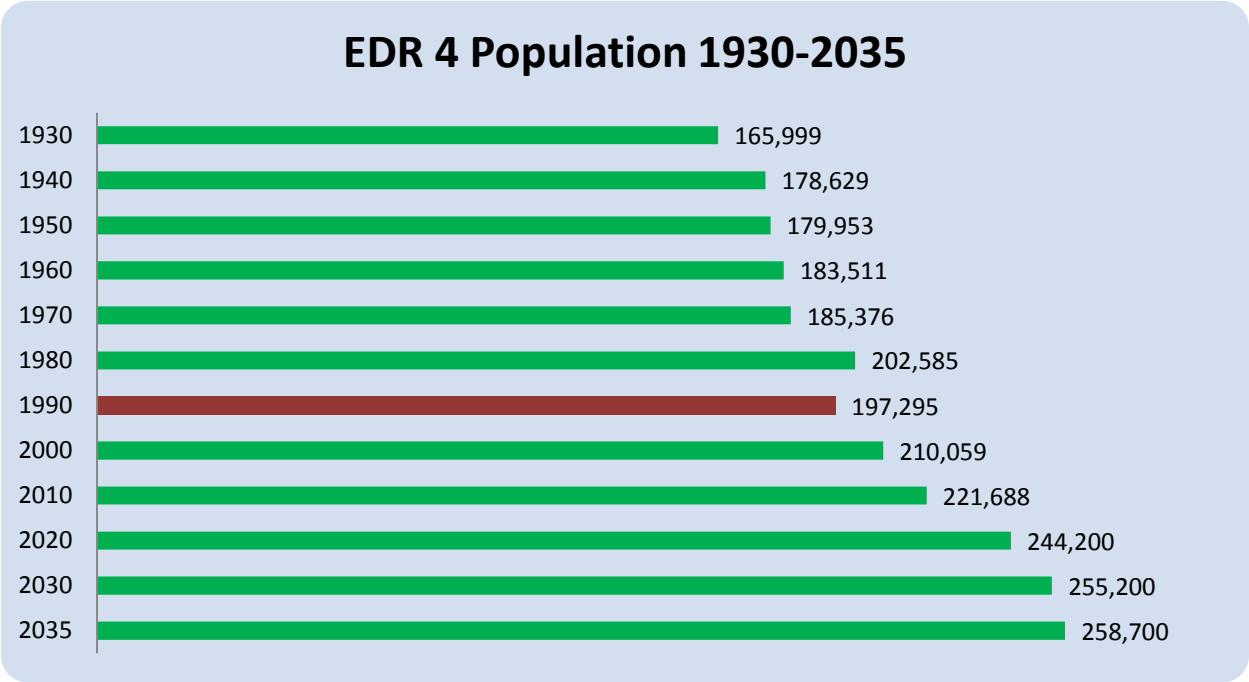
Table 01

	2010 Population	2000 Population	1990 Population	# Change 2000-2010	% Change 2000-2010	# Change 1990-2010	% Change 1990-2010
Region 4	221,688	210,059	197,295	11,629	5.5%	24,393	12.4%
Becker	32,504	30,000	27,881	2,504	**8.3%**	4,623	**16.6%**
Clay	58,999	51,229	50,422	7,770	**15.2%**	8,577	**17.0%**
Douglas	36,009	32,821	28,674	3,188	**9.7%**	7,335	**25.6%**
Grant	6,018	6,289	6,246	-271	-4.3%	-228	-3.7%
Otter Tail	57,303	57,159	50,714	144	0.3%	6,589	13.0%
Pope	10,995	11,236	10,745	-241	-2.1%	250	2.3%
Stevens	9,726	10,053	10,634	-327	-3.3%	-908	-8.5%
Traverse	3,558	4,134	4,463	-576	-13.9%	-905	-20.3%
Wilkin	6,576	7,138	7,516	-573	-7.9%	-940	-12.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Overall population has been steadily increasing since 1930 with the exception of the decade between 1980 and 1990. Current population projections forecast that the region will continue to have modest growth into the future. Most significantly, based on annual estimates it was believed that the population for Otter Tail County fell below the year 2000 population. Upon the release of the 2010 Census data, this was shown to be incorrect, and the population actually experienced a slight increase. In addition, Clay County's population was found to be 2,236 people greater that 2009 estimates in 2010. Clay has been the fastest growing county adding the most people (8,577) since 1990. Most of this growth is centralized in the Moorhead/Dilworth area, which is part of the Fargo/Moorhead MSA metropolitan statistical area.

Figure 01



Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Minnesota State Demographer's Office

West central Minnesota has not experienced as much population growth between 1930 and 2000 as the rest of Minnesota nor the U.S. While the populations of the U.S. and Minnesota declined between 1950 and 1970, Region 4 saw a 3% increase between 1950 and 1970. Previous estimates out to 2035 had anticipated that the Region's population would exceed 224,000 by 2010. As a result of the 2010 Census population data, it is now known that this was an over estimate. After revised analysis the State Demographer anticipates that population growth will still achieve similar numbers as previously estimated by 2030 and out. See Figure 01 for the projected change in population.

The average population of persons over 65 makes up about 18% of the total population in the region. Traverse County has the highest percent of the population over 65, but it also has the smallest population in the region, at 3,558. Grant, Otter Tail, Pope and Douglas are the next with the largest percentage over 65 cohort. The over 65 percentages are expected to increase in future years as more of the population turns 65 by natural age progression and through retiree relocations to the area. According to the MN State Demographic Center the over 65 population is anticipated to increase steadily over the next 24 years to a point where over 27% of the Region's population is over 65. The growth associated with retiree relocations may have been somewhat delayed due to the impact of the recession on people's retirement accounts and their ability to retire as soon as expected.

The racial makeup of the region remains primarily white. Minorities consisted of 5% of the population in 2000, and 5.7% in 2010. It should be noted that the region saw a 14.6% change in minority population in that period. This segment of the population in 2010 was 12,545, an increase of 1,601 people from 2000 (10,944). Racial population makeup of all the counties except Becker County is at least 93% white. Becker County, at 88% white is the most racially diverse. The county has 7.6% of the population being American Indian. Traverse County also has a significant American Indian population. Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin make up the highest number of minority persons for the region.

Table 02

	Total Population	White Pop	Other Race	% Other Race	% White
Region 4	221,688	209,143	12,545	5.7%	94.3%
Becker	32,504	28,720	3,784	11.6%	88.4%
Clay	58,999	54,684	4,315	7.3%	92.7%
Douglas	36,009	35,186	823	2.3%	97.7%
Grant	6,018	5,864	154	2.6%	97.4%
Otter Tail	57,303	55,080	2,223	3.9%	96.1%
Pope	10,995	10,766	229	2.1%	97.9%
Stevens	9,726	9,110	616	6.3%	93.7%
Traverse	3,558	3,352	206	5.8%	94.2%
Wilkin	6,576	6,381	195	3.0%	97.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

According to the 2009 Report: "*Minnesota Population Projections by Race and Hispanic Origin, 2005 to 2035"* developed by the State Demographic Center, the region is forecast to have 9.5% of the total population being a minority by 2035. This is not at the same level of anticipated statewide minority population of 24.8%, or the nation at 46.9% for 2035, but it does indicate that the minority population for the region will essentially double.

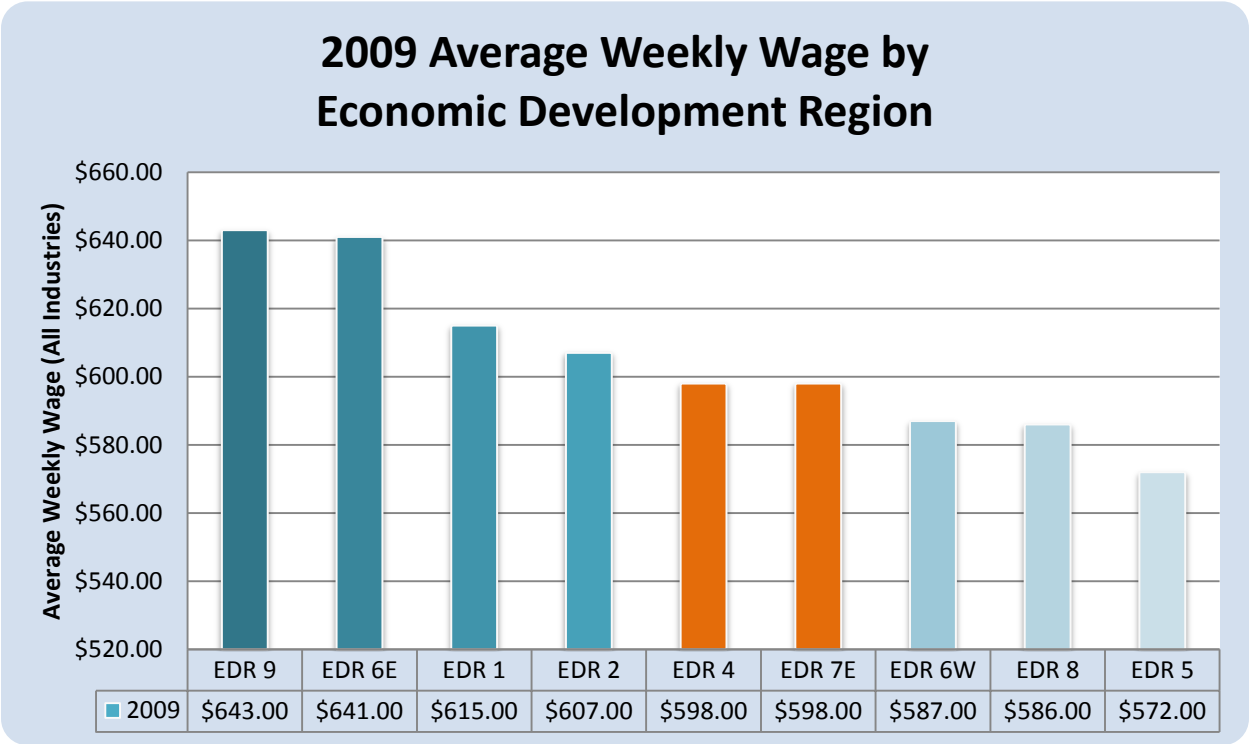
2. Economic Development

** A majority of the following information was taken from the WCI's Five Year Strategic Plan July 2011-June 2016, with some modifications to ensure tie-in with CEDS requirements and goals and objectives specific to WCI's economic development programs.*

Like the rest of the nation, west central Minnesota has felt the impact of a severe recession in the past few years. Our rural counties were a little more buffered from the effects, thanks to agriculture and agriculture-related businesses doing

well during this same period, and the lack of huge increases in housing values in the preceding years.
Over all, in the last five years there has been some improvement in the region's average wage compared to other rural regions and our region is now tied at fifth out of nine rural regions in Minnesota (FIGURE 02).

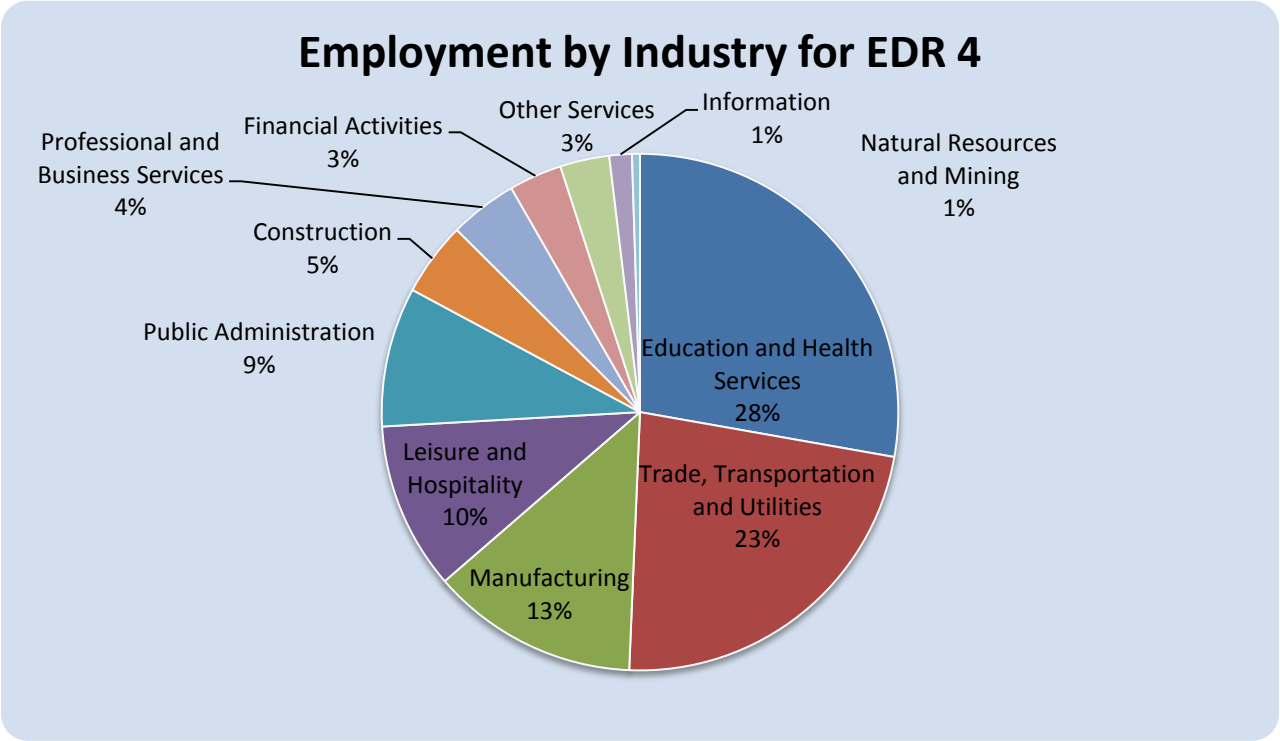
FIGURE 02



Source: QCEW Data MN DEED

Four (4) industries make up 74 percent of the jobs in west central Minnesota (FIGURE 03): Education and Health Services; Trade, Transportation and Utilities; Manufacturing; and Leisure and Hospitality.

FIGURE 03



Source: QCEW MN DEED

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) project a decreased demand for workers in the manufacturing industry for the Northwest Planning Area (which includes EDR4) over the next few years. DEED forecasts a 2.1 percent decrease in employment from 2009 to 2019. That is a total of 549 fewer jobs, from an industry that employed an estimated 25,770 people in 2009. Previous (pre-recession) projections for manufacturing showed a 3.8 percent *increase* in employment from 2004 to 2014.

Table 03

	Estimate Year Employment 2009	Projected Year Employment 2019	Percent Change	Total Change
Total, All Industries	250,094	269,203	7.6	19,109
Natural Resources & Mining	4,839	4,955	2.4	116
Construction	9,303	10,097	8.5	794
Manufacturing	25,770	25,221	-2.1	-549
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	44,451	45,655	2.7	**1,204**
Financial Activities	7,357	8,123	10.4	766
Professional & Business Services	9,012	11,014	22.2	**2,002**
Education & Health Services	56,428	66,976	18.7	**10,548**
Leisure & Hospitality	24,330	26,163	7.5	**1,833**
Other Services	10,048	10,641	5.9	593
Public Administration	22,901	23,621	3.1	720

Source: MN DEED

Despite projections, manufacturing remains an important industry for the region, employing a sizable portion of our population. It has higher wages; it also creates employment in other industries, as it is an economic multiplier. Also, it offers opportunities to bring new money into the region from around the world, develops infrastructure and technology, and builds human capacity in the workforce.

According to *Enterprise Minnesota's State of Manufacturing* report, manufacturers are noticeably more optimistic about the economy in 2010 than they were in 2009. More than a quarter of manufacturing executives (26 percent) anticipate economic expansion in 2010.

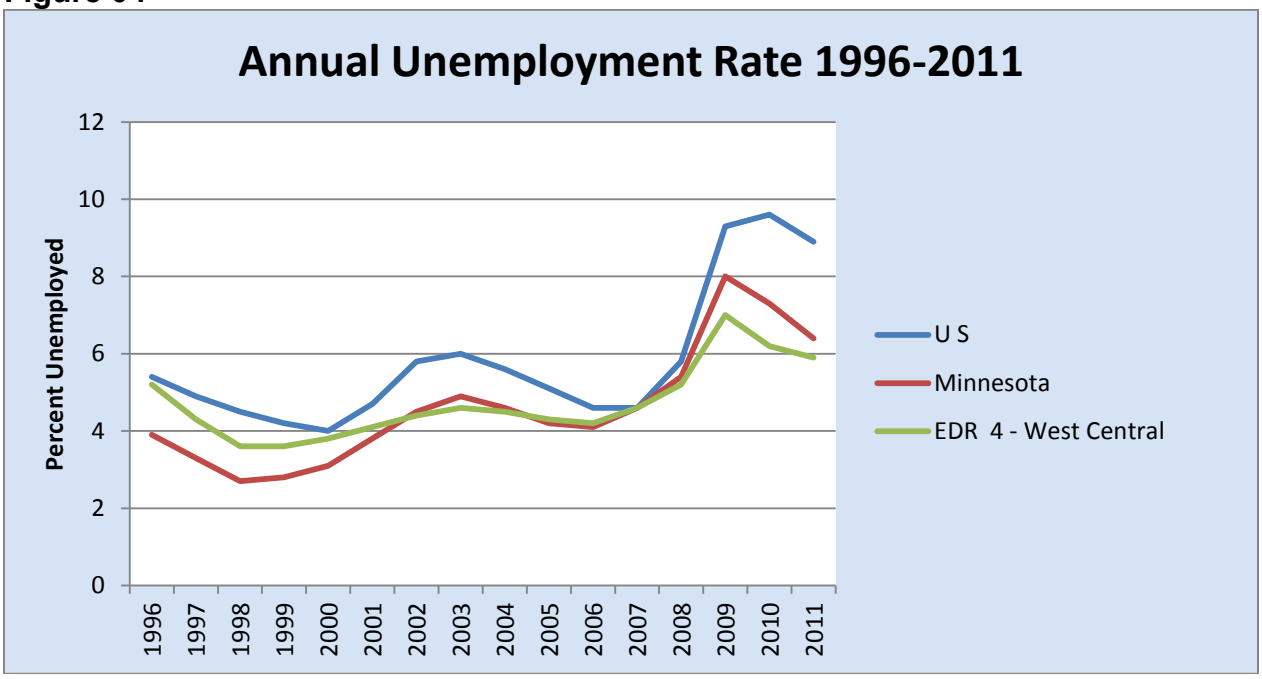
The scope of these projections is significantly expanded beyond the region. West central Minnesota has not experienced much loss of manufacturing jobs over the past 20 years when compared with other rural regions of the state, although it had been projected. As indicated in Table 03, we will continue to see significant growth in the Education & Health Services, Trade Transportation & Utilities, and Professional & Business Services. Future employment forecasts

prove difficult to substantiate in the current economy. Like other rural areas in the nation, our region will probably see more drawn out long term impacts of the recession as the rest of the country balances out.
Agriculture plays a big part in the regional economy. In 2002 the total market value of products sold (crops and livestock) in the region is $775,410,000. In 2007 that amount increased to $1,422,571,000. Cash Receipts (excluding Government Payments) for all farms in the Region in 2009 totaled almost $1.5 billion, and in 2008 totaled over $1.9 billion.

The 2012 Census of Agriculture is currently underway. The timeline for the data to be released is not until 2014. Continuing efforts are being made to locate reliable data relating to agriculture to incorporate into this document that will provide a better quantifiable nexus to agriculture and the health of this region's economy.

Unemployment for the region has maintained levels that fall well below the state and nation since the start of the recession. It should be noted that these numbers aren't necessary representative of the true unemployment situation. They do not track "discouraged workers", that is people that are no longer seeking employment and they are not collecting unemployment benefits. The numbers also do not track those that have exhausted their unemployment benefits. However, the data does provide a standard comparison that allows for analyzing the numbers compared to other areas. Based on recovery time trends from previous recessions, it is anticipated that it will be a few years before we see what is viewed as "normal" unemployment. Figure 04 shows unemployment rate comparisons for the last fourteen years for the region, state, and nation.

Figure 04



Source: MN Department of Employment and Economic Development

West central Minnesota has experienced fluctuations in Per Capita Income (PCI) in recent years when compared to the nation. Some counties in recent years exceeded the national PCI. The most recent data shows a decrease in 2009 PCI compared to 2008, and now rose again in 2010. The PCI amount increased for the state and only slightly increased for the nation. The most likely cause of the decrease was a reflection of the anticipated overall reduction in income, as a result of impacts caused by the economy such as decreased property values, wages, and investment returns.

PCI for Region 4 was about 76% of Minnesota's in 1996 and 73% in 2000, indicating a growing gap for the Region. This trend has reversed in recent years with the region's 2010 PCI ($35,853) being 84% of the state's PCI. It is important to remember that PCI is derived from taking the sum of all personal income and dividing that by the total population, meaning income is equally divided among all persons regardless of age or employment situation. A large youth or elderly population may experience lower per capita income because not as much income is generated by those age groups.

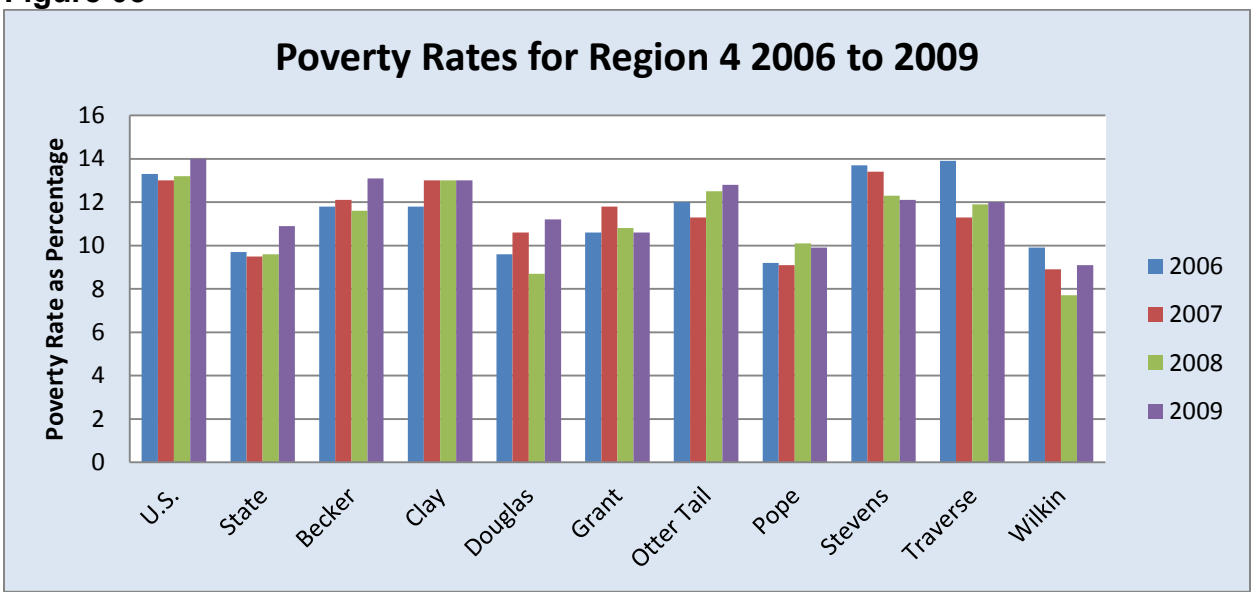
Table 04. Per Capita Income by County: Region 4, 2009

County	Per Capita Income 2010	Percent of MN 2010 ($42,798)	Percent of US 2009 ($39,937)
Becker	$35,941	84%	90%
Clay	$34,266	80%	86%
Douglas	$36,452	85%	91%
Grant	$40,215	94%	101%
Otter Tail	$34,033	80%	85%
Pope	$38,566	90%	97%
Stevens	$41,148	96%	103%
Traverse	$46,652	109%	117%
Wilkin	$40,473	95%	101%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Poverty rates for 2009 showed some fluctuations mostly in relation to significant increases for most counties, most notably for Douglas County which previously fell below the state rate by almost a full percentage point in 2009, to 11.2% an increase of 2.5%. Poverty rates in west central Minnesota are not as extreme compared to the national average for most counties in the region (see Figure 05). However, every county in Region 4 has a greater poverty rate than Minnesota, except for Grant, Pope, and Wilkin Counties. Poverty is one statistic that can have its true strength hidden by migration. If a lack of opportunity leads to the out-migration of individuals and families likely to be living in poverty, then poverty rates will appear lower than if the population stayed in place. An indicator of this occurrence can be justified by looking at annual population estimates and comparing those numbers to poverty estimates. Out migration can be caused by many contributing factors, so these should be measured carefully.

Figure 05



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

3. Regional Partners

In determining the best focus for our resources, we look at industries that provide the best wages for their workers.

In the retail sector (Trade, Transportation & Utilities), the recognition is that for most positions, training is provided on the job, and pay is typically near that minimum-wage threshold. These jobs are an important part of the region's economy, but focus on developing more jobs in this sector is not a high priority. However, there are opportunities for quality employment for owner/operators of small retail firms. Economic development programs can help with the creation and expansion of these self-employment opportunities by helping young companies access capital and support management assistance programs.

The Services Sector also provides opportunities for self-employment that can produce higher than average earnings for the owner/operator. All of these opportunities can be supported by providing start-up and expansion capital, and management assistance.
Although Leisure & Hospitality is the fourth largest employment sector in the region, because of the very low wages in these jobs, priority is applied elsewhere, again recognizing that jobs in this sector play an important role on the regional economy.

We have chosen to focus on helping the manufacturing sector grow because wages are usually substantially higher in that sector and there is often opportunity to advance with added skills training.

REGIONAL PARTNERS

In addition to WCI resources and programs, there are a number of partners and other assets available to address the need for quality employment in the region. These include local economic development programs, state and federal financial assistance programs, business assistance providers, utility companies and existing businesses in the region. A summary of the assets available and the providers follows (TABLES 05 & 06).

Loan Program Assets

Economic development loans are provided in the region through a number of state, federal and local programs, in addition to WCI loans. Table 05 shows the loan program assets available to the region that can be used to support development of quality employment opportunities.

TABLE 05: ASSETS PROVIDING FINANCING FOR QUALITY EMPLOYMENT

ASSET/PROGRAM	PROVIDED BY

Lending programs	• MN Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED)
	• The Small Business Development Loan Program
	• USDA Rural Development
	  o Intermediary Relending Program (IRP)
	  o Business and Industry Guaranteed Loans (B&I)
	  o Rural Development Loan Assistance;
	• Small Business Administration
	  o SBA 7a, and Low-Doc Loan Programs
	• MN Business Finance Corp. SBA 504 loan program
	• Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation
	  o Intermediary Relending Program (IRP)
	  o Rural Business Enterprise Loan Program
	• West Central Initiative
	  o Business and Industry Loan Fund

Incentive Programs	• MN Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED)
	  o Minnesota's Job Opportunity Building Zones (JOBZ) program; Benefits will expire in 2015
	  o The Minnesota Investment Fund Angel Tax Credit
	• Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation

Micro Lending	• West Central Initiative
	  o Small Enterprise Loan Fund (SELF)
	  o Component Funds
	• Local Economic Development Authorities or Corporations

Equity Investors	• Granite Equity • RAIN Source Capital • Local investors

Business Assistance Assets

Table 06 shows the assets available in the region for business assistance. While these assets cover a wide range of needs, the levels of certain services, especially management assistance, are not sufficient to meet the need.

Enterprise Minnesota, a major service provider to manufacturing companies, is a strong partner for WCI. The Small Business Development Center, another WCI partner, has seen a change in location to Concordia College in Moorhead, and a change in how it implements its programs, including establishing rotating satellite offices throughout the region.

Comprehensive entrepreneurial training programs have all but disappeared because of lack of funding. Additional services are being provided by Minnesota State Community and Technical College in Detroit Lakes and Alexandria Technical College with support from WCI.

TABLE 06: ASSETS FOR ASSISTANCE TO BUSINESSES

ASSET/PROGRAM	PROVIDED BY
Consulting and Business Services	• Enterprise Minnesota • MN Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED) ○ The Small Business Assistance Office • Small Business Development Center • SCORE • Anderson Center for Management and Business Development • Private Consultants • Angel Investors
Business Workshops / Classes	• Minnesota State Community and Technical College - Detroit Lakes • Alexandria Technical College • Anderson Center for Management and Business Development
Incubator space	• Minnesota State Community and Technical College - Detroit Lakes - Business & Entrepreneurial Services • City of Frazee Business Incubator- Business & Entrepreneurial Services

Workforce

Recognizing that a skilled workforce is a high-priority for the region and that it is closely tied to the success of our businesses and economic development programs.

Since the 1980s, west central Minnesota has experienced decreasing numbers of people in its potential labor force due to a number of factors including the out-migration of young families, disability, retirement, export of the region's youth and a reduction in the number of farms in the region.

West central Minnesota has enjoyed relatively low unemployment in the past 15 years, but it has spiked in the past two years due to the economic downturn. While currently there are more job seekers and fewer jobs, this statistic will likely change moving forward. According to DEED, the labor force will be significantly impacted by the wave of retiring Baby Boomers from 2000 to 2030. The region is expected to encounter a decrease in the working-age population for the next 16 years before rebounding in 2030. This reduction in the working-age population coupled with the anticipated growth in jobs will lead to a shortage of workers.

REGIONAL ASSETS

There are many organizations that address portions of the need for skilled labor in the region. The Labor Force Development Council (LFDC), which we convene, provides a platform for collaboration and information sharing. Table 07 describes other assets available in the region to address workforce needs.

TABLE 07: ASSETS FOR WORKFORCE NEEDS

ASSET/PROGRAM	PROVIDED BY
On-the-Job Worker Re/training	• Businesses • Enterprise Minnesota • Specialized Consultants • Technical Colleges • Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program (Rural Minnesota CEP) • Experience Works!
Regional Planning/Coordination	• Labor Force Development Council • Workforce Investment Board • Packaging Machine Manufacturing Consortium • Tri-State Manufacturers Association • MN Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED) • Central Minnesota Area Health Education Center (AHEC)
Resources for Job Seekers	• Community Action Agencies • County Social Services Agencies • MN Workforce Centers • Northern Connections • Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program • MN Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED) Labor Market Information

TABLE 07 CONTINUED: ASSETS FOR WORKFORCE NEEDS

Training for Entering & Re-entering Workers	• High School Vocational Programs • Technical Colleges • Rural Minnesota CEP • Adult Basic Education
Worker Recruitment	• Businesses • Local Economic Developers • MN Workforce Centers • Central Minnesota AHEC • DEED Business Service Specialists
Youth-Focused Programs	• Businesses • K-12 Education • Minnesota Dept. of Education • Post Secondary Education • Rural Minnesota CEP • Lakes Country Service Cooperative • CTIC – Community Transition • Central Minnesota AHEC • Tri-State Manufacturers Association

Table 08 shows that there are organizations, resources and programs available to help communities with assessment, planning and leadership development. These resources are available within the region and work with individual communities. We may act as a liaison for communities and organizations to access these resources via our community leadership grants or by providing contacts.

TABLE 08: COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT ASSETS

ASSET/PROGRAM	PROVIDED BY
Community Assessment, Planning, and Technical Assistance	• Private Consultants • Staff of Large Communities • Utility Companies • University of Minnesota Morris Center for Small Towns • WCI Staff • University of Minnesota Extension Service • Headwaters Regional Development Commission • Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation • Minnesota Design Team • Minnesota Main Street Program • Engineering Firms
Leadership Development Programs	• University of Minnesota Extension Service • Blandin Foundation • Ad Hoc Groups • Chambers of Commerce • Educational Institutions
Facilitation & Group Process	• University of Minnesota Extension Service • Private Consultants • WCI Staff
Organized Philanthropy	• Fargo-Moorhead Area Foundation • Central MN Community Foundation • Minnesota Community Foundation • WCI Component Funds • GiveMn • Leave a Legacy Program • Impact Foundation • Dakota Medical Foundation

4. Regional Economic Development Opportunities and Needs

The following five topics serve as the primary focus areas to create a positive economic development climate for the region. Success in these categories will define a successful implementation of the CEDS.

Business Development: We want to increase a business's chance of success in west central Minnesota. Thriving businesses mean a thriving economy and strong communities in our region. We encourage local ownership of business because they are more likely to stay in the region, which then increases individual and community wealth and economic well-being. We provide resources

to businesses covering the range from initial concept to major expansion. We do this by:

- Helping support business assistance programs such as the Small Business Development Center, the Minnesota State Community and Technical College's Business and Entrepreneurial Services Center, Alexandria Technical College's Customized Training Center and Enterprise Minnesota
- Offering loan funds that complement and augment traditional lending sources, such as our Small Enterprise Loan Fund and our Business and Industry Loan Fund
- Seeking innovative ways to help businesses grow and become more competitive through pilot projects such as New Solutions
- Making a few strategic equity investments in businesses that benefit our region

We will continue to support a flexible mix of services to help entrepreneurs start up, expand and/or improve their operations. We will also continue to research and seek equity investment opportunities that fit the needs of our region.

Workforce Development: We believe that a well-trained workforce attracts businesses and helps businesses within the region become stronger. Increasing a worker's skill level often means a better-paying job for the worker. With an increase in the number of opportunities, and with more opportunities to advance their skills, more people will move to the region. Our Workforce 2020 training program increases the skills of workers by investing in and supporting worker training that makes employees more productive and therefore, more valuable to their employers. Because the best opportunity for jobs that pay well and offer advancement possibilities exist within the manufacturing sector, we focus the majority of our workforce training investments in manufacturing sector employees.

We see value in encouraging development and sharing information about new ways to prepare workers who don't have the needed skills for careers in the region, careers that can support them and their families. We regularly convene the Labor Force Development Council, a peer-learning council that allows our partners in workforce development to network work more closely together and engage in mutual problem solving. We encourage the development of innovative approaches to training and preparing workers.

Economic Development Planning: Communities that plan for future growth are more likely to access federal dollars and are ready for new and expanding businesses. We work with the communities of west central Minnesota as the regional Economic Development District (EDD) designee. We contract with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to serve as the EDD designee for Minnesota District IV. As the designee, we compile this document, the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS); convene the regional EDD Board and economic development professionals networking meetings; and provide technical assistance to units of government, which includes applying for project funding from EDA. Technical assistance is also provided to communities relating to other various community and economic development initiatives.

Transportation Planning: One major component in the strength of the growth in the region's economy, especially its manufacturing sector, is ready access to excellent surface transportation options. The strongest economic growth in the region is concentrated in the I-94 and U.S. Highway 10 corridors. Most of the industrial growth in the region occurs in communities with excellent rail access. Maintaining highway and rail links to the region is critical to the region's long term economic health. The Transportation Planning and Economic Development Planning work go hand in hand and are interconnected.

Prior to 1998, in absence of a Regional Development Commission (RDC), there was no organized forum for regional input into state and federal planning for transportation investment in the region. In 1998, we contracted with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to provide transportation planning services for the region. In 1999, we published the first regional transportation plan developed since the disbanding of the region's RDC in 1982. A new plan is published by us every four years. This partnership allows for coordinated, long-range, regional transportation planning and provides access to transportation dollars. Communities can compete better for transportation funds when they have a well thought out plan in place.

As a part of our work with communities and the region, we will continue to help meet our critical transportation needs by contracting with MnDOT to provide regional transportation planning services.

Community Infrastructure

WCI's 2003 study of rural infrastructure in west central Minnesota uncovered more than $800 million in infrastructure needs, with over half of the need being for immediate repair or replacement of failing systems.

The potential consequences of inaction are enormous. As failing systems continue to degrade, each day that goes by sees an increase release of polluting effluents into the region's environment. Water system issues can also create significant public health problems, and storm sewer problems can result in flooded basements and other damage to homes and businesses. Not only are there health and environmental impacts associated with failing infrastructure, there are huge economic impacts as well. Outdated and failing water infrastructure systems affect the communities' vitality and their ability to grow, maintain and compete for people, jobs and businesses.

To follow up our 2003 study, we created a pilot project that looked at the unique infrastructure needs of various west central Minnesota cities and came up with alternative and sustainable total system approaches for water, wastewater and storm water treatment. We contracted with Yellow Wood Associates, Inc., an independent firm, to use its Green Community Technologies process to conduct an inventory and assessment of the participating cities of Battle Lake, Brandon

and Ottertail. The engineering firms of Widseth Smith Nolting and Interstate Engineering worked closely with Yellow Wood. The three municipalities received individualized reports that included options for alternative approaches to water, wastewater and storm water issues. Yellow Wood also developed outlines of the process for other cities to use as they examine their water management issues.

We foresee that some communities will use our new Capital Improvement and Comprehensive Plan grant program to create plans for infrastructure remediation.

The second part of the plan is to bring reliable information to community leaders, funders, regulators and policymakers around this topic, encouraging their action to help resolve rural infrastructure problems. We are working with Blueprint Minnesota; a grassroots initiative that seeks to build awareness about the critical role that water infrastructure plays in protecting public health and promoting economic prosperity.

5. Emerging Regional Opportunities and Issues

This section will briefly highlight several areas of need that emerged from our planning process as potential additional needs and opportunities. We also highlight the work we are able to do in each area, as part of a greater regional effort to be taken on by other partners:

1. Agriculture and Agri-Business

Two types of needs were identified in the agriculture and agri-business sector: 1) financing for value-added processing facilities; and 2) research on processing opportunities for area crops.
The financing needs of most value-added processing projects are very large. Smaller projects tend to start at $20 million, and larger projects can cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

One key factor to remember is that there is no simple way to adequately ensure benefit to the region if the concept is commercialized, or that the project will be sited in the region after the research is conducted. To be financially viable, these projects must be developed in locations appropriate to the market for the product, without regard to the location of the growers investing in the cooperative. Once applied research on project feasibility has been completed it is difficult to control the use of the information collected.

2. Healthcare

With the signing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) by President Obama in March 2010 and changes made to the law by subsequent legislation, healthcare and more specifically healthcare reform has been under a microscope. The ACA provides plenty of opportunities for changes in healthcare in the near future. However, with the complexities as well as the breadth of the

provisions in the ACA, considerable time and energy will need to be spent by policy makers, state officials, healthcare leadership, healthcare providers and consumers to understand the impact of the ACA.

The main focuses for the ACA include: expanding coverage, controlling health care costs and improving the health care delivery system. All of these areas affect west central Minnesota communities and residents; however, local attention can be focused specifically on improving the health care delivery system.

A good first step in improving the healthcare delivery system is ensuring access to necessary dental, medical and mental health services. Access to care is often measured by Health Professions Shortage Areas (HPSAs) that are identified by the Office of Rural Health and Primary Care. As of May 2010, five of our nine counties were designated as Dental HPSAs and six full or partial counties were designated HPSAs for Primary Care. All nine counties were designated at Mental Health HPSAs in 2007 and this status is unlikely to change in 2011 when the mental health designations are reviewed.

The healthcare workforce is a vital component to access to care. Healthcare facilities in the region will need the full spectrum of providers, from assistants and technicians to physicians and pharmacists, in order to improve the health and well being of ourselves and our neighbors. Recruitment and retention of the healthcare workforce will be individualized for each facility and community, but should also be tracked and considered on a regional level for greater success. Looking at recruitment and retention on a regional level also opens the door for federal dollars, many of which are going untapped, through National Health Service Core and the Patient Navigator or Rural Health Network Grant Programs.

Another beneficial impact of looking at the recruitment and retention of the healthcare workforce from a regional level is the attention that has been placed on Health Information Technology (HIT). Due to the increasing speed of changes with technology and the requirement for electronic medical records, healthcare facilities across the country are searching for skilled HIT staff. Rural healthcare facilities may struggle to recruit and retain HIT staff since small HIT departments may face isolation and lack opportunities for professional development and networking.

In addition to having a comprehensive workforce in place, healthcare facilities and community organizations will also have the opportunity to respond to the changing needs of the population. Demographic shifts, specifically the continued increase of aging boomers in the region, will put additional strain on the area healthcare systems. As the push to “age in place” continues, there will be changes in long-term care services. The current cultural paradigm shift from an institutional model to a community model in long-term care facilities is a prime example of change already taking place. There will also be an increased need

for contract and agency services, like home health agencies and public health services, and resources for care providers.

3. Senior Citizens

In 2011, the first of the Baby Boomer generation will turn 65. In the next 24 plus years, the aging of our society will dominate the demographic landscape. In the past few years, the senior housing market has expanded greatly in the region. Most recently, individuals and organizations have utilized WCI's loan programs to help fund the start-up/expansion of assisted living facilities, in-home care and nursing homes.

The large number of individuals reaching retirement age in the next 5-10 years means businesses need to be concerned about capturing the knowledge these workers have, and finding employees to replace them.

The Labor Force Development Council (LFDC) and WCI are working to raise awareness of the resources available to businesses that can assist them with this transition. In addition, with the workforce shortage that is predicted, it will continue to be a good business practice to employ the older experienced worker. Not only will this maintain the knowledge base for the company but allow for a flexible employment opportunity for the worker who wants to modify their work/life balance.

4. Social Welfare Programs

We believe that the most effective means for reducing poverty is to increase the economic opportunities for the region's citizens, and to help them benefit from available opportunities. WCI loan programs and workforce training programs are designed specifically for these purposes.

WCI convenes a Family Economic Success (FES) Council that is made up of representatives from regional nonprofits and government organizations. The council meets regularly to come up with tactics to tackle the barriers that keep families from succeeding. In particular, three workgroups focus on:

- **Asset building** — strategies to help families build wealth and save for the future.
- **Early childhood/child care** — resources to ensure that all young children get a good start in life with quality early care and education; and
- **Jobs, careers and employability** — the skills and education necessary to get good jobs and build careers.

We established FES Local and Regional Impact Grants to help fund projects that have been developed in the workgroups.

In 2005, we helped launch Northern Connections, a private, non-profit organization based in Perham, Minn. that serves families in west central Minnesota by connecting individuals to resources that help them achieve financial independence. This completely telephonic service provides one-on-one

assistance to help individuals reach financial and personal goals through re-employment, job retention, career advancement and asset accumulation.

Because we believe that prevention is a powerful means of reducing the need for social welfare programs, we are committed to the Early Childhood Initiative and the regional ECI coalitions, which strive to make sure our region's youngest citizens receive the best start in life for a healthy and prosperous future.

5. Telecommunications

In previous years, we frequently were asked to play a significant role in developing telecommunications infrastructure. The impetus for this was a concern that without our intervention the region might become a "telecommunications backwater." We were seen as having a direct role in enabling the region to benefit from the economic and employment opportunities associated with the new information age. We examined this issue closely and disagreed with the fundamental premise that market forces would be inadequate to bring appropriate telecommunications technologies to most of the region.

Instead, we responded by bringing commercial telecommunications providers together with local stakeholders to examine the market and determine whether market-based solutions could work here. As a result, the telecommunications providers jumped in and began to aggressively offer competitive services, making a full range of telecommunications services available within most of the region's communities.

In 2009, we worked with the EDA Center at the University of Minnesota—Crookston to conduct a regional businesses broadband survey. This was part of a statewide study to determine the impact of broadband technology on businesses throughout Minnesota.

Most recently, the Blandin Foundation has contracted with us to provide regional outreach for its Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities (MIRC) program. Blandin received a $4.8 million stimulus grant to help increase broadband access in rural communities across Minnesota. Stevens County is the MIRC site in west central Minnesota.

6. Tourism

Given the natural amenities of the region—thousands of lakes and tens of thousands of acres of prime recreational land, tourism is an important industry sector for the region. This is especially the case for several communities in the region, including Alexandria, Battle Lake, Detroit Lakes, Osakis, Ottertail, and Perham. ~~is reliant on tourism.~~

While tourism is certainly economically beneficial for those who own tourism-related businesses, the average weekly wage of workers employed in leisure and

hospitality industries is extremely low, with an average wage of $199 per week. Most tourism-related jobs can be characterized as low-wage, part-time and seasonal, and almost no jobs in the industry offer benefits. We understand the important role of tourism in bringing new people to the region, and acknowledge that it could lead more people to move to the region after a positive vacation experience here.

7. Public Education

K-12 public education in Minnesota has shifted gears in the past five years primarily due to fiscal pressures and federal legislation. With a combination of state funding not meeting the demands of inflation and decreasing student enrollments across the region, school district funding has dwindled. As a result, schools have significantly cut both non-instructional and instructional staff. By decreasing instructional staff, schools are also reducing the number of course offerings to students. Many schools try to avoid cutting teacher positions in core areas, including math, science, language arts and social studies. At the expense of holding core areas harmless, course elective offerings have diminished. Schools are attempting to add back electives through online learning and other distance learning programs.

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has placed significant focus on raising student achievement in math, reading and science. NCLB holds districts accountable for increasing student achievement through measurement of results on one annual standardized test. With so much state and federal emphasis on math, reading and science, districts have poured resources into those disciplines, which have arguably compromised a more well-rounded education. Nonetheless, students have become better readers and more knowledgeable in math and science.

Open enrollment in Minnesota marked the first step toward what we know now as school choice. Open enrollment broke down our traditional district borders by allowing students and their parents to choose a school that fits their needs. Most recently, online learning and charter schools have become more prevalent and have given students more educational options. More options have created a more competitive education market, so public education leaders are making creative program changes or additions to attract learners.

District leaders have worked diligently to come up with new ways of consolidating and sharing resources between districts to create efficiencies. Talks of sharing transportation, technology services, administrative services, food services, custodial services and business services between districts are ongoing. Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) often serves as the platform for approximately 35 school districts in west central Minnesota to discuss sharing opportunities. Technology and business services have recently been established at LCSC as a result of district conversation and needs.

School superintendents and their local boards of education will continue to explore opportunities to share resources with other districts but generally are not interested in full-fledged school consolidation. As the largest employer in many communities, school districts feel the importance of maintaining as much independence as possible. A soured economy has forced districts to explore new avenues to trim budgets and at the same time preserve their identity.

8. Housing

In our many meetings throughout the region, the issue of affordable housing often rose to the top of discussions. In 1993, we helped form the West Central Minnesota Housing Partnership to assist underserved communities to preserve, improve and increase affordable housing for low-to moderate-income families and individuals in our nine-county region. Due to state funding cutbacks this organization will be dissolved in late 2010 or early 2011.

We have found that the Home Loan Division of Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation (MMCDC) provides affordable home loans to first-time homebuyers and other members of the local workforce. By offering a combination of low-interest loan products and down-payment assistance, they can help provide loans for purchasing a home, new construction, refinancing, remodeling and more.

By partnering with the Northwest Minnesota Housing Cooperative, a construction company owned by local contractors and material suppliers, MMCDC is able to build quality homes, bring affordable housing to rural communities and provide year-round work for local cooperative members.

9. Renewable Energy

Minnesota is one of the top producers of renewable energy in the nation and is ranked third in wind energy production and fourth in ethanol production in the nation.

We have partnered with the Rural Energy Development Initiative (REDI) a statewide program administered by the Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) and sponsored by the State of Minnesota and the Center for Rural Policy and Development.

The goal of REDI is to maximize rural economic development and stabilize rural economies by building renewable energy capacity, expertise and leadership throughout Minnesota. This goal will be accomplished by providing organizing and technical assistance to rural entities seeking to develop wind energy projects for the purpose of selling the energy to an electric utility and by raising awareness of the local economic, community and environmental benefits of renewable energy development.
Through a grant from REDI, we have provided financing for costs related to early-stage project development and feasibility analysis for wind energy electric generation projects that intend to sell the electricity to an electric utility.

An additional REDI grant enabled us to provide funding for five manufacturers to participate in bench-top experiments that will address the concept and feasibility of using the anaerobic digestion process to recover renewable energy from their solid and liquid wastes.

10. Business Incubators

Business Incubators have recently become an emerging strategy that communities, especially smaller communities have been taking advantage of. The Business and Entrepreneurial Services center at M-State Detroit Lakes has partnered with 5 communities in the Region to develop business incubators in those communities. Those communities are Detroit Lakes, Frazee, Hawley, Perham, and New York Mills.

The program not only provides physical space and equipment access, but also technical assistance and mentoring. There are a total of 50 incubator office spaces under the BES program.

The City of Hoffman also has what can be called a retail incubator, currently with 25 vendors. The Main Street Galleria has been open for several years and was modeled after a program in Wadena, Minnesota. The overall intent is that graduates can move to a storefront on Main Street.

The City of Fergus Falls has launched a telework initiative for the community and also a Telework Hotel. The Hotel offers space for a daily, weekly, or monthly rate. Space options include a training room, 2 conference rooms, 3 private offices, and 4 public work stations.

Business Incubator is becoming a popular concept primarily as a city government led effort and in some cases, as a privately funded venture.

CHAPTER THREE

Transportation Profile

Introduction

This chapter describes the current transportation system that serves west central Minnesota. Descriptions of a variety of modes are included in this chapter, including state, county and local road systems; motorized and non-motorized trails networks; transit systems; aviation; and rail systems.

Roadway System

Introduction

West central Minnesota is well served by an extensive roadway network, which connects the region to the rest of Minnesota as well as the United States and Canada. This roadway network provides for the primary means of transportation in the region: private automobile travel. Included in the roadway network are federal, state, county, township and city roadways.

State Trunk Highway System

Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) District 4 is responsible for just over 1600 centerline miles[i] of state trunk highways, totaling approximately 3,650 lane miles. Of this mileage, the majority (approximately 1,285 centerline miles, or 80%) is within the West Central Initiative planning area. The remaining mileage is in Big Stone, Mahnomen and Swift counties, which are not located within WCI's planning area.

The state trunk highway system includes Interstate Highways, U.S. Highways and Minnesota State Trunk Highways (see Figure 3-1).

Local and Other Highway Systems

The local highway system consists of roads and highways maintained by counties, cities, and townships. These roads and highways are funded primarily with local property taxes and/or state-aid funds administered by MnDOT.

County State-Aid Highways (CSAHs) have a functional classification of collector or higher and are eligible for Federal funding through the MnDOT Area Transportation Partnership (ATP). County Roads are primarily funded by local taxes; however, they are eligible for Federal surface transportation funding through the ATP if functionally classified as a collector.

In addition, other jurisdictions maintain roadways throughout Region 4. These roadways include Indian Reservation Roads (IRR), State Forest Roads and State Park Roads.

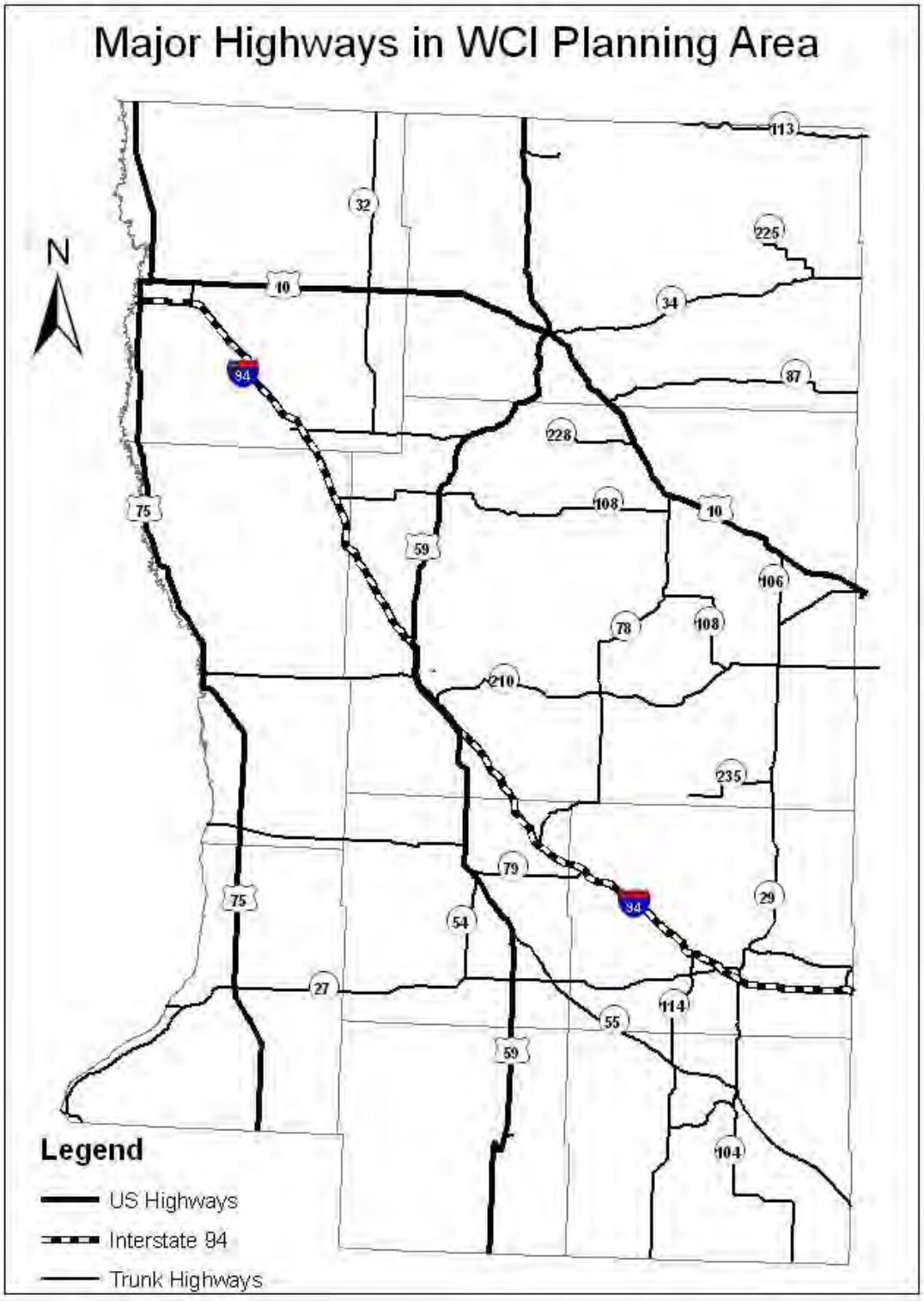


Figure 3-1: State Trunk Highways in WCI Planning Area

Tables 3-1 through 3-9 list roadway mileages in each county within Region 4.

Table 3-1: Becker County Highway Mileage		
System	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles
U.S. TRUNK	58.832	170.712
MINNESOTA TRUNK	91.681	184.299
COUNTY STATE AID	480.999	962.138
MUNICIPAL STATE AID	15.654	31.308
COUNTY	199.039	398.078
TOWNSHIP	1,140.58	2,281.16
MUNICIPAL STREETS	57.967	116.069
INDIAN RESERVATION	7.89	15.78
STATE FOREST	59.295	118.59
STATE PARK	1.544	3.088
-----SUBTOTAL------->	2,113.48	4,281.22

Table 3-2: Clay County Highway Mileage		
System	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles
INTERSTATE TRUNK	26.997	107.988
U.S. TRUNK	64.926	193.296
MINNESOTA TRUNK	86.45	177.26
COUNTY STATE AID	399.692	799.384
MUNICIPAL STATE AID	36.126	90.632
COUNTY	341.286	682.172
TOWNSHIP	979.88	1,959.76
MUNICIPAL STREETS	163.251	327.212
STATE PARK	0.66	1.32
-----SUBTOTAL------->	2,099.27	4,339.02

Table 3-3: Douglas County Highway Mileage		
System	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles
INTERSTATE TRUNK	34.668	138.672
MINNESOTA TRUNK	79.815	167.742
COUNTY STATE AID	382.766	768.812
MUNICIPAL STATE AID	18.052	36.104
COUNTY	154.628	309.256
TOWNSHIP	732.77	1,465.54
MUNICIPAL STREETS	82.982	165.964
STATE PARK	2.561	5.122
-----SUBTOTAL------->	1,488.24	3,057.21

Table 3-4: Grant County Highway Mileage		
System	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles
INTERSTATE TRUNK	9.615	38.46
U.S. TRUNK	18.614	37.598
MINNESOTA TRUNK	97.888	196.786
COUNTY STATE AID	228.896	457.792
COUNTY	223.114	446.228
TOWNSHIP	463.191	926.382
MUNICIPAL STREETS	37.024	74.048
-----SUBTOTAL------->	1,078.34	2,177.29

Table 3-5: Otter Tail County Highway Mileage		
System	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles
INTERSTATE TRUNK	32.7	130.8
U.S. TRUNK	73.363	212.576
MINNESOTA TRUNK	204.632	411.558
COUNTY STATE AID	920.223	1,842.50
MUNICIPAL STATE AID	24.354	53.05
COUNTY	133.052	266.104
TOWNSHIP	2,278.53	4,557.05
MUNICIPAL STREETS	172.985	345.595
STATE PARK	10.16	20.32
-----SUBTOTAL------->	3,849.99	7,839.55

Table 3-6: Pope County Highway Mileage		
System	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles
MINNESOTA TRUNK	123.315	249.871
COUNTY STATE AID	297.002	594.004
COUNTY	77.694	155.388
TOWNSHIP	679.694	1,359.39
MUNICIPAL STREETS	49.754	99.508
STATE PARK	0.93	1.86
-----SUBTOTAL------->	1,228.39	2,460.02

Table 3-7 Stevens County Highway Mileage		
System	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles
U.S. TRUNK	24.372	48.744
MINNESOTA TRUNK	52.505	105.355
COUNTY STATE AID	243.732	487.464
MUNICIPAL STATE AID	7.926	15.852
COUNTY	123.198	246.396
TOWNSHIP	572.613	1,145.23
MUNICIPAL STREETS	44.146	88.362
-----SUBTOTAL------->	1,068.49	2,137.40

Table 3-8: Traverse County Highway Mileage		
System	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles
U.S. TRUNK	30.995	61.99
MINNESOTA TRUNK	46.322	92.644
COUNTY STATE AID	245.114	490.228
COUNTY	236.352	472.704
TOWNSHIP	529.824	1,059.65
MUNICIPAL STREETS	28.972	57.944
-----SUBTOTAL------->	1,117.58	2,235.16

Table 3-9: Wilkin County Highway Mileage		
System	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles
INTERSTATE TRUNK	11.229	44.916
U.S. TRUNK	46.425	94.534
MINNESOTA TRUNK	70.197	140.394
COUNTY STATE AID	312.493	624.986
COUNTY	196.188	392.376
TOWNSHIP	833.199	1,666.40
MUNICIPAL STREETS	45.94	92.06
-----SUBTOTAL------->	1,515.67	3,055.66

Complete Streets

The concept of Complete Streets, while not altogether new, is the culmination of several years of work towards making streets usable by a variety of users, and fitting into their context. Many consider the Context Sensitive Design/Solutions concepts to be a direct predecessor to the Complete Streets movement.

According to MnDOT, the goal of Complete Streets "is an integrated transportation system that: includes all modes of transportation (transit, freight, automobile, bicycle and pedestrian) and serves everyone, all ages and abilities."

In 2008, the Minnesota Legislature directed MnDOT to study the development of a Complete Streets policy. Over the following years, MnDOT has worked extensively on Complete Streets, and has subsequently developed a policy that covers all state-controlled roads – including all US and State Highways.

While the MnDOT Complete Streets policy does not cover local city or county streets, many counties and municipalities in Minnesota have chosen to voluntarily adopt their own Complete Streets policies and resolutions. Thanks to the work of PartnerSHIP 4 Health in the northern part of WCI's region, several local jurisdictions in our region have adopted Complete Streets policies, including: the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments, Breckenridge, Battle Lake, Dilworth, Wilkin County, Clay County, Otter Tail County, Fergus Falls and Frazee.

More information about Complete Streets is available on MnDOT's web site at: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/completestreets/index.html, and at the web site of the Minnesota Complete Streets Coalition: http://www.mncompletestreets.org/index.html.

Access Management

Access management is the planning, design and implementation of land use and transportation strategies that maintain a safe flow of traffic while accommodating the access needs of adjacent development (Figure 3-2)[ii].

MnDOT has been working on access management issues for a number of years. Their efforts have included conducting workshops and training sessions to make local units of government aware of access management and the development of access management guidelines for state highways. MnDOT Central Office staff has also worked with the MnDOT Districts to identify and implement access management category assignments for State Trunk Highways.

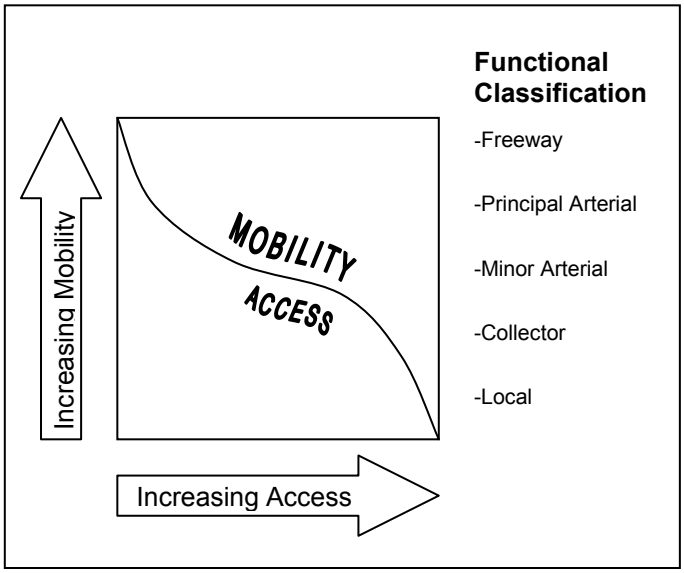


Figure 3-2.
Access Management Road Hierarchy

In addition to the State Trunk Highway system, Access Management Guidelines can be applied to other highway networks, including county and local roads. MnDOT encourages local units of government to work with Central Office staff and the MnDOT District office to implement Access Management guidelines on county and local road systems. Coordination between MnDOT and local government is a key component of WCI's transportation planning program. WCI has assisted MnDOT in hosting an Access Management workshop for local elected officials and staff to learn more about Access Management.

More Access Management information and resources are available on MnDOT's web site, at http://www.dot.state.mn.us/accessmanagement/

Roundabouts

A roundabout is a type of circular intersection where traffic flows in a counter-clockwise direction around a central island. Roundabouts are used in certain applications instead of other more traditional traffic control devices, such as stop signs or traffic signals.

Roundabouts can offer several advantages over "traditional" intersections, including better traffic flow, better fuel efficiency, improved air quality and increased safety.[iii]

Roundabouts are becoming more commonplace on roadways in Minnesota – both in the Twin Cities and in Greater Minnesota.

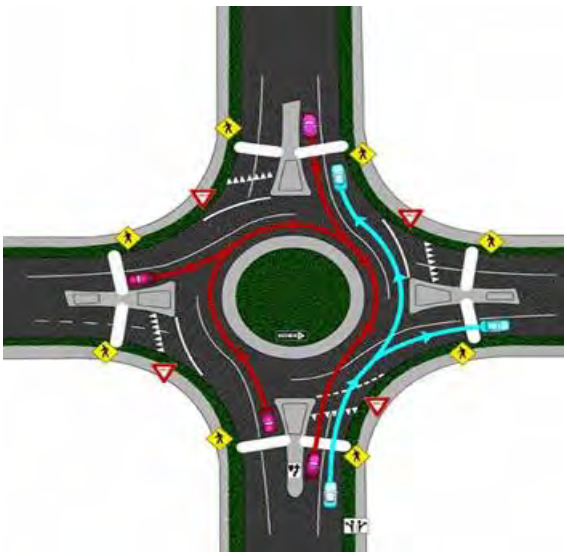


Figure 3-3.
Diagram of a Roundabout
(from MnDOT web site)

At least four roundabouts have been constructed in west central Minnesota. One roundabout is at the intersection of Alcott Ave./Tower Rd./CR 1/CR 15 in Fergus Falls. This roundabout is located at the south end of the new POW–MIA Veterans (Tower Road) Bridge that was constructed in 2012. The City of Moorhead has constructed two roundabouts in the developing area northeast of the new 34th St. interchange at I-94. MnDOT has also constructed a roundabout on TH 75 south of Moorhead, at the intersection with 60th Avenue South.

In addition, at least two other roundabouts are being planned for locations in Alexandria (at TH 29 South/County Hwy 28/County Road 87) and Detroit Lakes (at US 59/Willow St). These roundabouts are planned for construction in 2014-15.

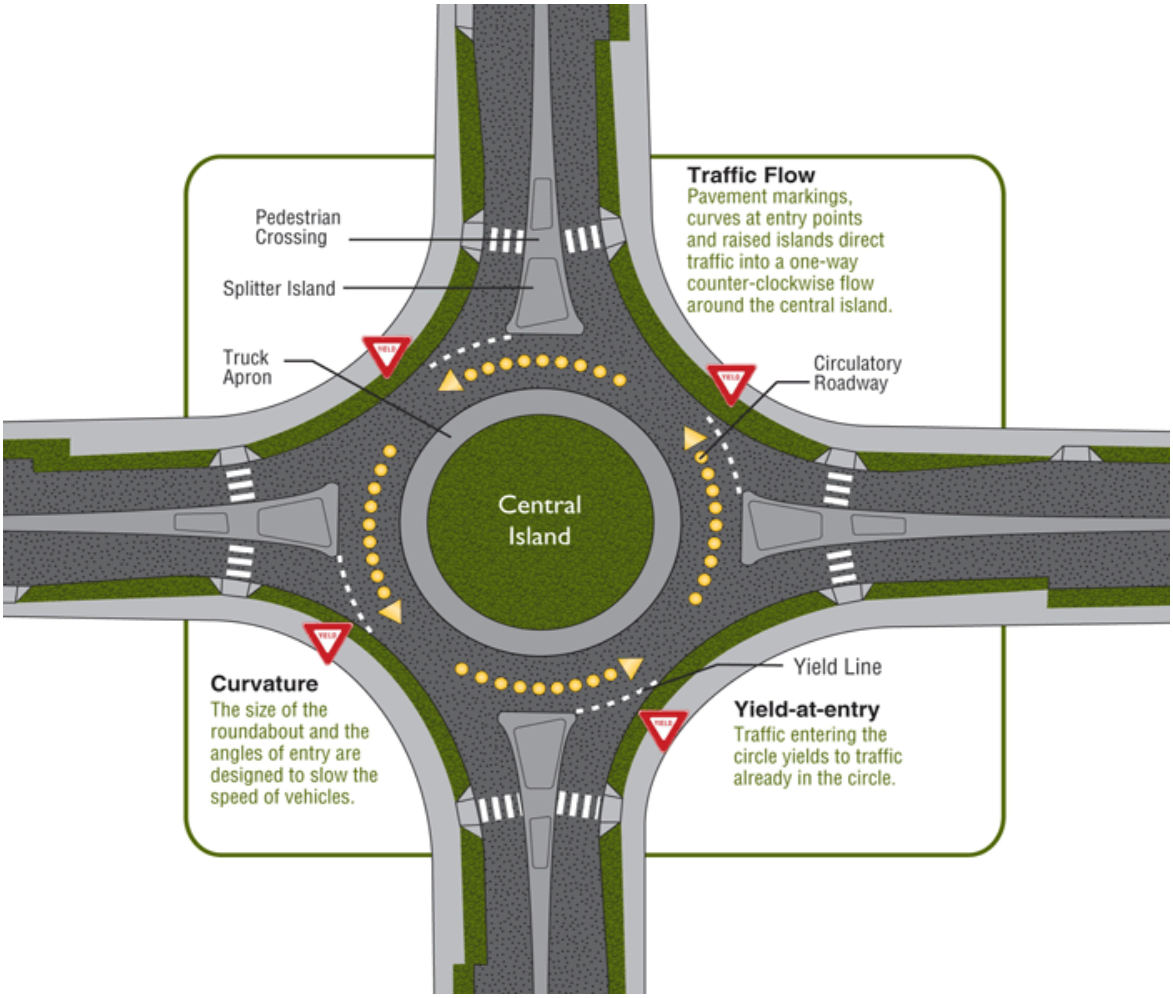


Figure 3-4.
Design Features of a Roundabout
(from MnDOT web site)

More information and resources on roundabouts can be found on MnDOT's roundabout web site: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roundabouts/.

Scenic Byways

The Minnesota Scenic Byway Program is designed to establish partnerships with communities, organizations and government agencies to match resources with grassroots marketing and economic development efforts. The program exists to:

- Identify highway routes of exceptional interest
- Promote travel and recreation on those routes
- Enhance and provide stewardship for the features that distinguish those routes[iv].

Significant portions of four state-designated Scenic Byways can be found in WCI's planning area: the King of Trails Scenic Byway (Figure 3-5), the Otter Trail Scenic Byway (Figure 3-6), the Lake Country Scenic Byway (Figure 3-7), and the Glacial Ridge Trail Scenic Byway (Figure 3-8). A very short segment of a fifth Scenic Byway, the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway (Figure 3-9), is also located within the southwestern most tip of the region, near Browns Valley.

The King of Trails Scenic Byway follows U.S. Highway 75 through the entire western portion of Minnesota. The portion of this scenic byway in Region 4 runs from the north Clay County line on the north, to the south Traverse County line on the south end of the region.

Figure 3-5. King of Trails Scenic Byway

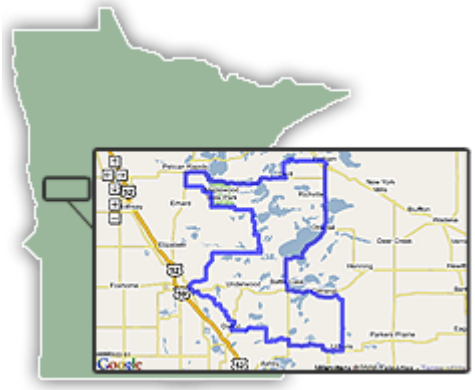


Figure 3-6. Otter Trail Scenic Byway

The Otter Trail Scenic Byway consists of a loop located entirely within Otter Tail County. This byway mostly follows a variety of county and state highways in completing the loop. The entire byway is located within Region 4.

The Lake Country Scenic Byway follows Highway 34 between Detroit Lakes and Walker, with a spur along Highway 71 to Lake Itasca State Park. The portion of the byway in Region 4 runs from the City of Detroit Lakes on the west to the east Becker County line.

Figure 3-7.
Lake Country
Scenic Byway

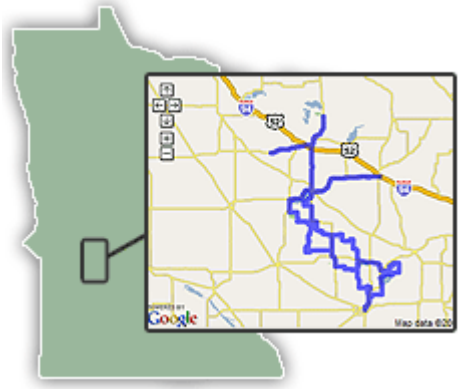


Figure 3-8.
Glacial Ridge Trail
Scenic Byway

The Glacial Ridge Trail Scenic Byway meanders through several counties in west central Minnesota. The byway travels on state and county highways through the southern portion of Region 4, including parts of Douglas and Pope Counties.

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway follows the Minnesota River through its entire length. There is only a very short segment in west central Minnesota, near the City of Browns Valley.

Figure 3-9.
Minnesota River Valley
Scenic Byway

Intelligent Transportation Systems

The Intelligent Transportation Society of America states:

> *Intelligent Transportation Systems, or ITS, encompass a broad range of wireless and wireline communications-based information, control and electronics technologies. When integrated into the transportation system infrastructure, and in vehicles themselves, these technologies help monitor and manage traffic flow, reduce congestion, provide alternate routes to travelers, enhance productivity, and save lives, time and money.*
>
> *Intelligent Transportation Systems provide the tools for skilled transportation professionals to collect, analyze, and archive data about the performance of the system during the hours of peak use. Having this data enhances traffic operators' ability to respond to incidents, adverse weather or other capacity constricting events.*
>
> *Examples of Intelligent Transportations Systems include:*
>
> ***Advanced Traveler Information Systems** deliver data directly to travelers, empowering them to make better choices about alternate routes or modes of transportation. When archived, this historical data provides transportation planners with accurate travel pattern information, optimizing the transportation planning process.*
>
> ***Advanced Traffic Management Systems** employ a variety of relatively inexpensive detectors, cameras, and communication systems to monitor traffic, optimize signal timings on major arterials, and control the flow of traffic.*
>
> ***Incident Management Systems** provide traffic operators with the tools to allow quick and efficient response to accidents, hazardous spills, and other emergencies. Redundant communications systems link data collection points, transportation operations centers, and travel information portals into an integrated network that can be operated efficiently and intelligently.*
>
> *Technology Solution for Transportation*
> *New applications and technologies are being developed every day. Better-known examples of ITS technologies include:*
> - *On-board navigation systems*
> - *Crash notification systems*
> - *Electronic payment systems*
> - *Roadbed sensors*

- *Traffic video/control technologies*
- *Weather information services*
- *Variable message signs*
- *Fleet tracking and weigh-in-motion technologies*

The future of ITS is promising. Yet, ITS itself is anything but futuristic. Systems, products and services are already at work throughout the country. Still, the wide-scale development and deployment of these technologies represent a true revolution in the way we, as a nation, think about transportation.[v]

ITS has the potential to increase the efficiency and safety of the transportation system in west central Minnesota by implementing some of the aforementioned technologies.

MnDOT ITS Initiatives

Recent efforts in Minnesota have advanced ITS technology in the state. MnDOT operates an ITS program known as *Minnesota Guidestar*. Current Guidestar projects include "improving traveler information, improving safety at rail crossings, testing systems on vehicles to assist drivers, and creating statewide operations centers for managing the transportation system."[vi]

Guidestar projects in Region IV include:

- I-94 Gate Closure Operation
- Moorhead Area Integrated Train Detection and Traffic Control System
- West Central Minnesota Transit Link
- Transportation Operation Communication Centers

In 2004, MnDOT District 4 completed work on an ITS Scoping Study to identify and prioritize ITS needs in the District. The study lists the following goals for ITS deployment in the District:

- Increase operational efficiency and capacity of the transportation system
- Enhance personal mobility, convenience, and comfort of the transportation system
- Improve the safety of the transportation system
- Enhance the communications between transportation and emergency response agencies

A number of projects were identified for implementation in District 4 by the scoping plan. Short-term (0-2 years) projects include: permanent and portable dynamic message signs, highway-rail crossing safety systems, automatic anti-icing systems, speed reduction systems, integrated signal systems, and

improvements to dissemination of information to agency partners. Many of these projects have been completed.

Intermediate-term (3-5 years) projects include: an Incident Management/Alternate Route plan, traffic signal pre-emption for emergency vehicles, cameras for Road Weather Information System (RWIS) stations, and enhanced highway reference (milepost) signs. Long-term (6-10 years) projects include interactive travel information kiosks and a portable traffic management system.[vii]

In the years since the scoping study was completed, MnDOT has moved to a deployment phase for ITS in District 4. The projects selected by MnDOT include:

- Travel Related Weather Forecasts
- Portable Dynamic Message Signs
- Maintenance Automated Vehicle Location
- Traffic Signal Enhancements
- Emergency Vehicle Preemption Systems
- Closed Circuit TV Surveillance Cameras
- Permanent Dynamic Message Signs
- Portable Speed Detection and Advisory System
- School Bus Stop Warning System
- Transit CAD Upgrade

More information on District 4 ITS deployment is available at:
http://www.dot.state.mn.us/guidestar/2006_2010/district_deployment.html

Other ITS Initiatives in Minnesota

In addition to MnDOT's work, statewide ITS is being promoted by the Intelligent Transportation Society of Minnesota (ITSmn). ITSmn works to foster grassroots involvement in ITS in Minnesota. Current efforts include bringing the 2013 National Rural ITS Conference to Minnesota.[viii]

The Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments (Metro COG) also has an ITS Plan that has been developed as part of its planning process for the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area. Metro COG is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area, which includes the western portion of Clay County in the northwest corner of Region IV. The Metro COG ITS plan is available at Metro COG's web site: http://www.fmmetrocog.org/new/index.php?id=131

Other examples of recent ITS-related projects include the development of various smart phone apps, and the update of the ARMER (Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Responses) emergency services radio system.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Transportation by bicycle and as a pedestrian has become a very strong trend in Minnesota in recent years. These modes of transportation, while having a much longer history than the automobile, tend to be overlooked in many areas. A resurgence in interest has recently brought the issues of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to the forefront.

Local sidewalk systems, as well as bicycle routes, lanes and paths all play an important role in the transportation network. Some communities in the region have sidewalk systems – if not covering the entire city, then at least in more densely developed parts of town. In general, WCI staff have encouraged communities to preserve and replace (as necessary) their existing sidewalks, and to build sidewalks in areas that are not currently served by them. In addition, WCI encourages communities to develop strong ordinances to protect their sidewalks, and to address maintenance issues.

A few communities also have bicycle routes or lanes, with some bike paths, as well. The definitions of bike routes, lanes and paths are as follows:[ix]

- BICYCLE ROUTE - The term "bicycle route" means a roadway or shoulder signed to encourage bicycle use.

- BICYCLE LANE (BIKE LANE) - "Bicycle Lane" means a portion of a roadway or shoulder designed for exclusive or preferential use by people using bicycles. Bicycle lanes are to be distinguished from the portion of the roadway or shoulder used for motor vehicle traffic by physical barrier, striping, marking or other similar device.

- BICYCLE PATH (BIKE PATH OR OFF-ROAD BIKEWAY) - "Bicycle Path" means a bicycle facility designed for exclusive or preferential use by people using bicycles and constructed or developed separately from the roadway or shoulder.

WCI Efforts

WCI has been involved in numerous efforts over the years relating to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. For several years, WCI has coordinated the Transportation Enhancement application process for MnDOT. With the new MAP-21 Federal surface transportation legislation, MnDOT is re-evaluating how to solicit for the new Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), which now

includes Transportation Enhancements, Scenic Byways and Safe Routes to School.

WCI conducted a multi-use trails inventory in 2001 and updated the Regional Trails Plan in 2007. The plan is scheduled to be updated again in 2014-15. The trails plan lists goals and objectives for the regional trails network, and indicates desirable corridors and connections for trails development, while avoiding identifying specific routes that future trails might follow. The trails plan is available on WCI's web site, at: http://www.wcif.org/?page=Trails_Planning.

In addition to the development of a trails plan for the region, WCI occasionally hosts meetings of a regional Trails Networking Group (TNG), as well as a Trails Planning Committee (TPC), which serves as a subcommittee to the West Central Minnesota Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). The purpose of the TNG is to facilitate discussions between trails users, advocates and professionals. Typical meetings include networking time and a "round-robin" session during which participants can talk about their recent trails activities. Informational presentations are often part of TNG meetings as well.

The TPC serves to assist in the development of the Regional Multi-Use Trails Plan. This group will guide the development of the goals and objectives for the trails plan, and ensure that constituencies from around the region have input into the planning process. This is a similar function to the one that the TAC plays in regard to the Regional Transportation Plan.

In the fall of 2012, WCI hired an Active Transportation Planner to assist with various activities relating to active transportation – focusing on bicycle and pedestrian activities.

Safe Routes to School

In 2012, MnDOT began contracting with Regional Development Organizations (RDOs) around the state – including WCI – to complete SRTS plans for communities. The planning process includes an evaluation of the current walking/biking situation in each community, and some recommendations to improve the conditions for kids walking and biking to school. In short, SRTS programs encourage kids to walk and bike where it is safe to do so, and where it's not safe, SRTS programs develop recommendations to make it safe.

Three communities in WCI's region were selected by MnDOT to receive planning assistance from WCI in 2012: Barnesville, Battle Lake and Perham. The SRTS plans for those communities are in the process of being completed in summer of 2012, and will be posted on WCI's web site upon completion. In addition, four

more communities will be receiving planning assistance in 2013, including Glenwood, Frazee, Lake Park and Parkers Prairie.

Regional Initiatives

Trail development efforts have been a hot topic in west central Minnesota in recent years. With the development of the Central Lakes Trail along the I-94 corridor, Legislative authorization for an extension of the Heartland Trail to Moorhead, as well as several other local and regional trails throughout the region, much has been done to accommodate the regional transportation needs of bicyclists and pedestrians.

Significant local trail developments include the Legislative authorization of an extension to the Heartland Trail. The Heartland Trail currently runs 49 miles between Walker and Park Rapids, connecting to the Paul Bunyan Trail in Walker. The Heartland is planned to be extended to Moorhead, passing through Detroit Lakes and Frazee. A specific route hasn't been identified, but initial funding for planning and development has been provided by the Legislature.

Another new project seeking state bonding funds is a proposed trail between Pelican Rapids on the west, Perham on the east, connecting to Maplewood State Park in-between. Planned extensions on either end of this proposed trail would connect it to the Heartland Trail extension at Frazee, and the Central Lakes Trail at Fergus Falls.

State Initiatives

On a statewide level, MnDOT recently completed its Statewide Bicycle Planning Study, which is available at http://www.dot.state.mn.us/bike/study.html. The study updated the state bike map, and developed a process to facilitate future map updates.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has also published a very useful guide to trail development. The *Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines,* published by the DNR in 2007, is available for free download on the DNR web site, at:
http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/publications/trails_waterways/index.html.

Another significant development in trails planning and funding was the passage of the Minnesota Legacy Amendment. According to the Legacy web site: "In 2008, Minnesota's voters passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment (Legacy Amendment) to the Minnesota Constitution to: protect drinking water sources; to protect, enhance, and restore wetlands, prairies, forests, and fish, game, and wildlife habitat; to preserve arts and cultural heritage; to support parks

and trails; and to protect, enhance, and restore lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater."

Out of a desire to conduct better planning for trails funding in Greater Minnesota via the Legacy Act, the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Coalition was formed. The GMRPTC advocated for increased funding for parks and trails in Greater Minnesota, and ultimately was successful in having the Minnesota Legislature appoint a Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission in 2013. The Commission will work to develop plans for how Legacy funding will be spent in Greater Minnesota.

Transit Systems

Transit plays in integral role in the overall transportation system in west central Minnesota. The transit systems in the region serve many different types of people with several distinct trip purposes. Examples of types of trips served by local transit providers include commuting, shopping and medical trips. While public transit systems are available to anyone who wishes to use them, the primary users of the transit system include shift workers, the elderly, the developmentally disabled and students. Information in this section is from the MnDOT 2012 Minnesota Transit Report.[x]

Section 5311

Public transit systems are governed by Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311. There are five public transit systems operating in WCI's planning area:

Rural

- Becker County Transit – serving Becker County
- Rainbow Rider – serving Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens, Traverse and Wadena Counties
- Transit Alternatives – serving Clay and Otter Tail Counties (with connections to Becker County Transit)

Urbanized

- Moorhead Metropolitan Area Transit – serving Moorhead and Dilworth, with connections to Fargo and West Fargo, North Dakota

Small Urban

- Morris Transit – serving the city of Morris

Elderly & Handicapped

- Moorhead Metropolitan Area Transit - Paratransit – serving Moorhead and Dilworth, with connections to Fargo and West Fargo, North Dakota

There are 78 regular vehicles in the public transit fleet, including 63 medium buses (class 400 and 500), and 10 large buses (class 700). Figure 3-11 illustrates the transit vehicle classification system that MnDOT uses. Busses in Class 100 (mini-van) and Class 200 (van) are not shown.

In 2011, the public transit systems in west central Minnesota served over 847,000 riders – up significantly (~200,000) over ridership from 2007. Total operating costs in 2011 for the public transit systems in the region were approximately $5.3 million.

In 2006, Otter Tail County began public transit service for the first time. Productive Alternatives, a former Section 5310 recipient based in Fergus Falls, merged their existing fleet of buses with the Pelican Rapids Transit system (sec. 5311), as well as the Fergus Falls Senior Transit system (sec. 5310) to form Transit Alternatives, also known as The Otter Express.

The majority of the region is served by some sort of public transit. The only county without transit service in the region is Wilkin County. Discussions have taken place to begin to determine how to best serve the county with transit. One idea that seems to have some support would involve expansion of existing transit service into Wilkin County, likely by Transit Alternatives.

#300 Small Light-Duty Cutaway Chassis Bus (Up to 12,500 GVWR) ☞ Approximately 16' – 22' ◆ Raised roof/dual rear wheels ◆ Life Years = 4 ◆ Life Mileage = 100,000 ◆ Life Years Ceiling = 5	
#400 Medium Light-Duty Cutaway Chassis Bus (12,300 – 16,000 GVWR) ☞ Approximately 20' – 30' ◆ Raised roof/dual rear wheels ◆ Life Years = 5 ◆ Life Mileage = 150,000 ◆ Life Years Ceiling = 7	
#500 Medium-Duty Purpose Built Bus (17,000 – 24,000 GVWR) ☞ Approximately 25' – 35' ◆ Life Years = 7 ◆ Life Mileage = 200,000 ◆ Life Years Ceiling = 9	
#600 Medium Heavy-Duty Purpose Built Bus (21,000 – 32,000 GVWR) ☞ Approximately 25' – 35' ◆ Life Years = 10 ◆ Life Mileage = 350,000 ◆ Life Years Ceiling = 13	
#700 Large Heavy-Duty Purpose Built Bus (over 32,000 GVWR) ☞ Approximately 30' and longer **Pusher – Rear Mounted Engine** ◆ Life Years = 12 ◆ Life Mileage = 500,000 ◆ Life Years Ceiling = 15	

Figure 3-10.
MnDOT Transit Vehicle Classification and Replacement Guidelines

White Earth Transit

The White Earth Nation also provides transit service in Becker and Mahnomen Counties. In Becker County, the system connects to Becker County Transit in Detroit Lakes at the recently renovated Depot, which serves as the White Earth Transit Station (Figure 3-11). For more information on White Earth Transit the Depot, visit: http://www.whiteearth.com/programs/?page_id=450&program_id=11 and http://www.whiteearth.com/tribal_entities/?page_id=420

Figure 3-11: The Depot/White Earth Transit Station in Detroit Lakes

Section 5310

FTA Section 5310 governs transit systems that provide transportation for the elderly and disabled. According to MnDOT, the purpose of the Section 5310 program is to "meet the special needs of elderly persons and persons with disabilities for whom existing mass transportation services are unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate."

2012 Section 5310 providers in the planning area include:

- Becker County DAC – Detroit Lakes
- Connections of Moorhead – Moorhead
- Essentia Health St. Mary's – Detroit Lakes
- Perham Health – Perham
- Rainbow Rider Transit Board – Lowry
- Stevens County DAC – Morris
- White Earth Reservation Tribal Council – White Earth

Changes with MAP-21

The MAP-21 Federal Surface Transportation Bill will have significant impacts to the way transit systems are funded and operate in the region. The JARC (Job Access Reverse Commute – Section 5316) and New Freedom (Section 5317) transit programs have been repealed, and will no longer be funded. However, JARC projects may be eligible under the 5311 program, and New Freedom projects may be eligible under the 5310 program.[xi] MnDOT is currently working to interpret future project eligibility under MAP-21, as the USDOT formulates the rules under the new bill.

Transit Plans and Studies

MnDOT recently updated the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan. According to the Office of Transit, the document "is a 20-year strategic plan that provides directions for the future of public transportation in Greater Minnesota. The plan describes current challenges in the state, examines future transit service needs and analyzes future levels of funding to meet that need." For more information or to view the plan, visit:
http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/reports/transitplan/index.html

In 2011, WCI worked with MnDOT and the Minnesota Department of Human Services to update the Transit Coordination Study for west central Minnesota, which was first developed in 2006. The goal of the study was to inventory all existing transportation providers – including, but not limited to: public transit, private transportation companies, human services transportation providers and others that provide transportation services in and around the region.

In addition to the inventory, the study identifies possible opportunities for coordination among existing transportation providers and makes recommendations to address the gaps that are identified.

The West Central Minnesota Transit Coordination Study is available on WCI's web site, at http://www.wcif.org/?Transit_Plan.

Additional information about transit coordination can be found at http://www.coordinatemntransit.org/

MnDOT recently worked with the Regional Development Organizations (RDOs) in Minnesota – including WCI – to develop the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan (Figure 3-12). MnDOT states that this plan "was developed by MnDOT in 2011 to determine the level of funding required to meet at least 80 percent of total transit service needs in greater Minnesota by July 1, 2015, and at least 90 percent of total transit service needs in greater Minnesota by July 1,

2025. The plan sets priorities for transit investments in scenarios of both expanded and contracted future funding." For more information, go to: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/reports/investmentplan/index.html

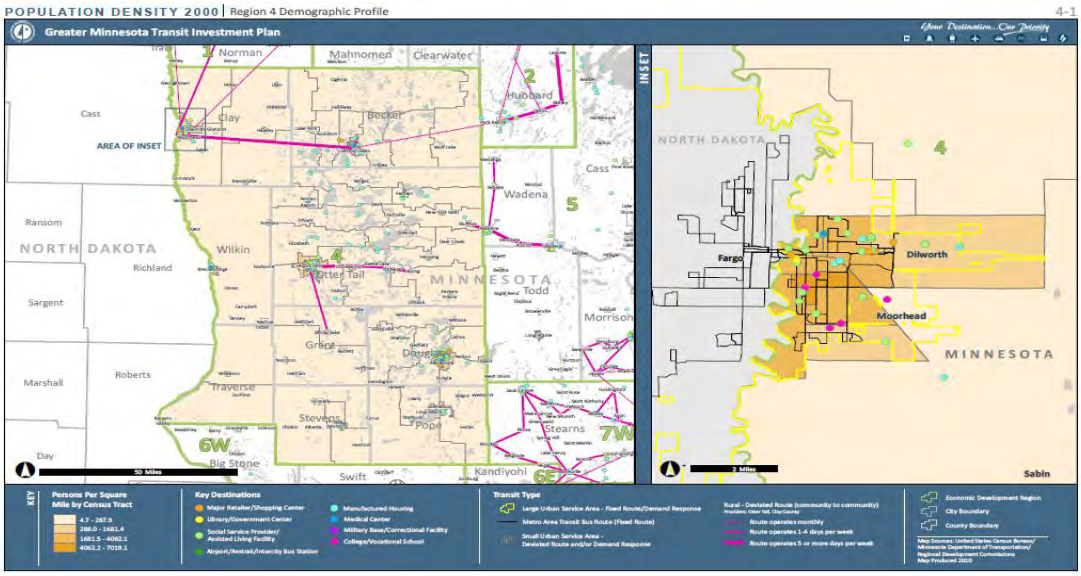


Figure 3-12: Region 4 Demographic Profile Map

Aviation

While the primary focus of the RTP is on surface transportation, aviation also plays an important role in moving people and freight. Fifteen public airports and two public seaplane bases serve the WCI planning area. Twelve of the 15 public airports have paved and lighted runways. The remaining three airports have lighted turf runways. Figure 3-13 shows the location of public airports in the region.

Airports and seaplane bases in west central Minnesota include:

- Alexandria Municipal Airport (Chandler Field)
- Detroit Lakes Airport (Wething Field)
- Elbow Lake Municipal – Pride of the Prairie Airport
- Elbow Lake Municipal – Pride of the Prairie Seaplane Base
- Fergus Falls Municipal Airport (Einar Mickelson Field)
- Glenwood Municipal Airport
- Hawley Municipal Airport
- Henning Municipal Airport
- Herman Municipal Airport
- Jolly Fisherman Seaplane Base (Waubun)

- Moorhead Municipal Airport
- Morris Municipal Airport
- Pelican Rapids Municipal Airport (Lyon's Field)
- Perham Municipal Airport
- Starbuck Municipal Airport
- Wadena Municipal Airport
- Wheaton Municipal Airport

Currently, there are no airports within the planning area that provide regularly scheduled air passenger service. Airports nearest the region that do offer air passenger service include: Bemidji Regional Airport in Bemidji; Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport in Brainerd; Grand Forks International Airport in Grand Forks, ND; Hector International Airport in Fargo, ND; St. Cloud Regional Airport in St. Cloud and Thief River Falls Regional Airport in Thief River Falls.

For detailed information about the public airports and seaplane bases that are located in the planning area, visit the MnDOT Public Airports Map and click on the airport you are interested in:
http://www.dot.state.mn.us/aero/avoffice/pdf/PublicAccessAirports.pdf

Airports in West Central Minnesota

Figure 3-13

Railroad Facilities

Overview

There are four rail lines serving WCI's planning area:

Class I railroads (over $378.8 Million Annual Gross Operating Revenue):
- Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF)
- Canadian Pacific (CP)

Class III railroads (less than $30.3 Million Annual Gross Operating Revenue):
- Ottertail Valley Railroad (OTVR)
- Red River Valley & Western Railroad Co. (RRVW)

There are no Class II railroads ($30.3-$378.8 Million Annual Gross Operating Revenue) serving the planning area.

The BNSF line through Becker, Clay and Otter Tail Counties is the most heavily used rail line in the state of Minnesota. This line serves as BNSF's main line connection from Chicago to the West Coast. BNSF has a second line in the southern portion of the planning area connecting the Twin Cities to Breckenridge and the RRVW. BNSF also has a branch line from Breckenridge to Perley along the Red River, which primarily serves fertilizer dealers and grain elevators, as well as a spur line in Clay County serving Ulen.

CP Rail's main line from Chicago to the Canadian West Coast passes through the southern counties of Region IV. CP has another line that connects Glenwood and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

RRVW has two miles of track in Breckenridge where it connects with the BNSF line to reach markets in the Twin Cities. The OTVR line connects Fergus Falls and Moorhead with a branch line to Foxhome.

Figure 3-14 shows the location of these rail lines in west central Minnesota, as well as rail line volumes in number of trains per day.

Rail Abandonments

In previous years, there have been several rail abandonments in the region. These have consisted mostly of short spur lines from the main Class I railroads. Efforts should be made to preserve these lines for alternative or future transportation purposes. Abandoned rail lines are often used for multi-use trail facilities. This can be a very appropriate re-use of an abandoned rail corridor.

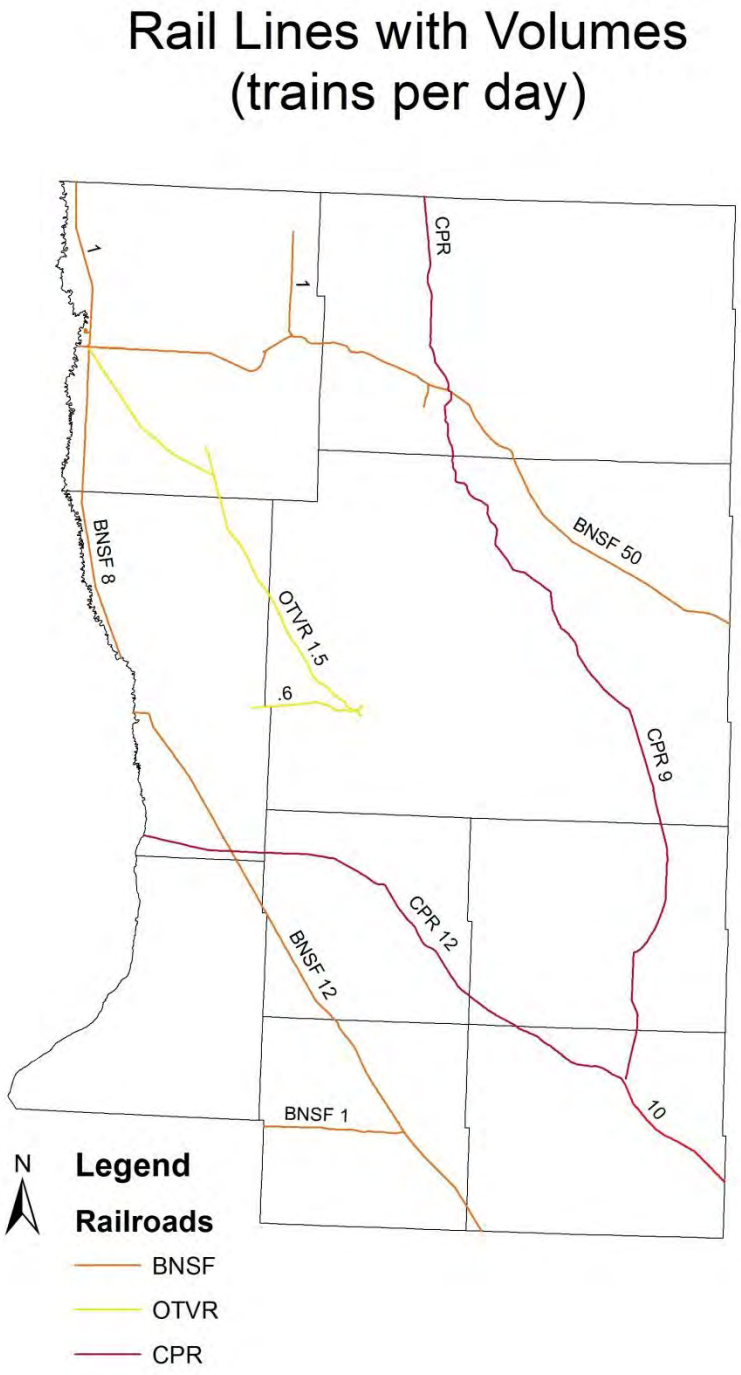

Rail Lines with Volumes
(trains per day)
1
1
CPR
BNSF 50
BNSF 8
OTVR 1.5
.6
CPR 9
CPR 12
BNSF 12
BNSF 1
10
N
Legend
Railroads
BNSF
OTVR
CPR

Figure 3-14

Freight Railroad Economic Development Study

MnDOT, in conjunction with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), is working on a Freight Rail Economic Development (FRED) plan, scheduled for completion in late 2013. This study was mandated by the Minnesota Legislature in 2012. According to the legislation, the intent of the plan is to "assess the economic impact of freight railroads in the state and identify opportunities to expand business development and enhance economic competitiveness through improved utilization of freight rail options."[xii]

In preliminary discussions, the Otter Tail Valley shortline railroad has been mentioned as a possible pilot location for the FRED planning process.

Railroad Safety

Safety at highway-railroad crossings is an important consideration in the regional transportation system. Recent efforts have been made to maximize the safety of the traveling public when crossing railroad tracks, and efforts are underway for future rail safety projects as well. The issue of railroad safety is a very timely discussion, given the substantial increase in freight rail traffic generated by the oil boom in western North Dakota.

A railroad "quiet zone" has been established in the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area. Establishment of the quiet zone, which included several safety improvements to the corridor, eliminated the need for trains to sound their horns when passing through the downtown areas of both communities. As part of the project, several rail crossings in Moorhead have been consolidated, lights and gates have been installed at remaining crossings, and decorative fencing separates the rail line from pedestrian traffic.

A 1999 study by MnDOT has resulted in the consolidation of railroad crossings along the BNSF mainline in Becker and Otter Tail Counties. According to MnDOT District 4, the study:

> . . . evaluated all railroad grade crossings on the 58 miles of BNSF railroad mainline. In all, 25 public and 13 private grade crossings were reviewed in Becker County and 36 public and 17 private grade crossings in Otter Tail County with the goal of developing a prioritized list of projects to improve grade crossing safety. Signing changes, signal additions, grade crossing closings, roadway geometric improvements, and grade separations are some of the considered improvements.[xiii]

As a result of this study, several rail crossing have been consolidated, improving the safety of both the highway and railroad corridors.

Another recent project in Becker County that is having a positive impact on railroad safety is the Trunk Highway 10 relocation project in Detroit Lakes. That project, which shifted the rail line to the north by approximately 100 feet, resulted in the elimination of a busy at-grade crossing at Roosevelt Avenue in the city of Detroit Lakes. The crossing at Lake Avenue was also closed, and consolidated with the crossing at Washington Avenue.

In other areas of the region, highway grade crossings of railroad tracks have been eliminated or proposed to be eliminated by installing grade-separated crossings. A rebuilt Highway 336 in Clay County included a bridge over both the BNSF mainline, as well as Trunk Highway 10. An interchange with Highway 10 was also included as part of the project.

Officials in Pope County and Glenwood have proposed the removal of an at-grade highway-rail crossing just north of Glenwood, near the intersection of Highways 29 and 55. The proposed project would create a grade-separated crossing, placing Highway 29 either over or under the CP rail line and Highway 55. Pope County and MnDOT are in the preliminary stages of discussion. It is unlikely that the project would take place in the foreseeable future without additional funding sources.

Freight Movement

Overview

The commercial trucking industry has expanded in the area with a shortage of freight cars and limited service by the railroad. These trucking companies provide a vital link between agricultural producers and national markets. Many grain farmers operate their own truck fleets to ship to markets. The oil boom in North Dakota is also having a significant impact on trucking in the region.

One issue that was identified in previous versions of this plan was the damage caused by overloaded and improperly loaded trucks on highways in the region. In response, the West Central Minnesota Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) formed a subcommittee to address the issue. The Truck Weight Sub-Committee issued its final report in May of 2001. The report recommended further study of the issue by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS). Issues in need of future study included:

- Examining ways to gain consistency between Minnesota's commercial vehicle code and those of surrounding states and provinces
- Consolidating all commercial vehicle services, such as permitting and weighing, into one facility and under the jurisdiction of one agency
- Consolidating enforcement into one Minnesota jurisdiction, relieving county sheriff's departments and city police departments of this duty
- Using MnROAD research and other data to determine the amount of damage caused to state trunk highways, county roads, city streets and township roads by overloaded and improperly loaded trucks
- Determining methods and prioritizing funding to overcome obstacles to enforcement

Many of these issues have been addressed in the Western Minnesota Regional Freight Plan, which was completed by MnDOT in 2009. The plan was done in conjunction with a Northern Minnesota Freight Plan. More information is available at: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/freightplan/northwest.html.

In addition to the *Truck Weight Subcommittee Final Report*, significant efforts have been made to educate shippers and haulers in regard to making sure that their trucks are legally and properly loaded. Northland Community College, in cooperation with MnDOT and DPS, developed the *Minnesota Truck Weight Education Project* to educate truckers on truck weight issues. The project has conducted a series of classes around the state, most of which have been filled to capacity.

Statewide Efforts

MnDOT has also developed a Statewide Freight Plan in 2005, which takes a comprehensive look at the movement of freight across the state of Minnesota. According to the MnDOT Office of Freight, Railroads and Waterways (OFRW), the freight plan is "multimodal in nature and includes highway (commercial vehicle operations), rail, waterways, intermodal and air cargo transportation."

Another previous MnDOT initiative involved the study of the 10-ton County State Aid Highway (CSAH) Route Network in Minnesota. According to the MnDOT State Aid for Local Transportation (SALT) Division, "the intent of the Local 10-ton CSAH Route Network Project is to capture information on the existing state's 10-ton route system and satisfy the need to designate and map the existing, as well as a potential future complementary local 10-ton route system." A preliminary proposed route map is shown in Figure 3-15.

The concept of a "Western Minnesota Truck Route" has also previously been discussed. The concept is for a north-south route that would traverse the entire

length of the state and allow for better connections for commercial vehicle traffic. Preliminary discussions indicated that improvements for such a route may include features such as removal (or re-orientation) of stop controls, the addition of passing lanes, reconfiguration of intersections, and possible bypass routes. While discussions on this topic have tapered off recently, the concept is still valid, and could significantly benefit the movement of goods in the region.

Figure 3-15. District 4 Proposed 10-ton CSAH Routes

Transportation Safety

Overview

A number of transportation safety initiatives, programs and designs have been developed in Minnesota in the past several years. This section will provide a brief overview of several of them.

Toward Zero Deaths

According to MnDOT:

> The Toward Zero Deaths approach is based on the belief that even one traffic-related death on our roads is unacceptable. This “zero deaths” idea was first adopted in Sweden in 1997 as "Vision Zero" and since then has evolved to several state DOTs, including Minnesota, that have identified zero deaths as a core objective in their Strategic Highway Safety Plans.
>
> TZD uses a data-driven, interdisciplinary approach that targets areas for improvement and employs proven countermeasures, integrating application of education, enforcement, engineering, and emergency medical and trauma services (the “4Es”). A combination of strategies from different focus areas is often most effective for solving a particular problem.[xiv]

MnDOT recently hired a TZD Coordinator for Districts 3 & 4, who has been working on the TZD program in the region. Recent activities have included the formation of a West Central Minnesota TZD Steering Committee, and a regional TZD workshop which was held in May, 2013. More info about TZD can be found at: http://www.minnesotatzd.org/initiatives/regions/westcentral/.

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Minnesota Strategic Highway Safety Plan

MnDOT is currently in the process of updating the Minnesota Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) in 2013. According to MnDOT, the purpose of the SHSP is:

- Update the Minnesota Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (PDF, 3.5 MB) to achieve compliance with requirements of Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users
- Provide an overview and coordination with other safety plans and programs within the state – including the Toward Zero Deaths program, Statewide Heavy Vehicle Safety Plan, Intelligent Transportation System Safety Plan, Central Safety Fund and the Highway Safety Plan

- Review the most recent crash data to confirm the critical emphasis areas as well as document progress towards Minnesota's safety goal
- Review and update the strategies in the CSHP to reflect new initiatives as well as program advances and achievements
- MnDOT Districts and Minnesota county highway departments with technical assistance in prioritization and deployment of safety countermeasures within their jurisdiction by completing a detailed crash analysis in each jurisdiction and with a focus on low-cost strategies that can be deployed proactively
- Define a process for updating, monitoring and reviewing the SHSP and the priorities established

More information is available at:
http://www.dot.state.mn.us/trafficeng/safety/shsp/index.html

Highway Safety Improvement Program

The Federal Highway Administration states that "MAP-21 continues the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) to achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads, including non-State-owned public roads and roads on tribal lands. The HSIP requires a data-driven, strategic approach to improving highway safety on all public roads that focuses on performance."

Examples of previous HSIP projects in District 4 include:

- Becker County - Pave gravel shoulders, add safety edge, epoxy rumble stripes, reflective delineators on curves greater than 3 degrees.
- ATP 4 (Multiple Counties) - Upgrade edgelines to 6 inch wide, install rumble stripes, and install chevrons.

More information on the HSIP program at the state level is available at:
http://www.dot.state.mn.us/stateaid/sa_traffic_safety.html

Center for Excellence in Rural Safety

The University of Minnesota founded the Center for Excellence in Rural Safety (CERS) to ". . . provide citizen-centered research, training, and outreach to enhance rural safety. . . "[xv]

In its first few years, the CERS has already completed several research projects that may have impacts on rural transportation safety.

While the CERS doesn't focus exclusively on rural Minnesota, our region has the advantage of close proximity to the research staff at CERS in Minneapolis. CERS research staff have attended a West Central Minnesota TAC meeting to present information about CERS, and additional presentations are possible in the future.

More information is available at:
http://www.ruralsafety.umn.edu/

[i] All measures of distance in the Regional Transportation Plan are in miles. It is recognized, however, that some state and federal agencies are converting to metric units of measure.

[ii] MnDOT Access Management web site: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/accessmanagement/

[iii] MnDOT Roundabouts web site: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roundabouts/

[iv] MnDOT Office of Environmental Services Scenic Byway web site: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/scenicbyways/index.html

[v] Intelligent Transportation Society of America web site: http://www.itsa.org/

[vi] Minnesota Guidestar web site: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/guidestar/

[vii] Minnesota Department of Transportation, *MnDOT District 4 ITS Scoping Study*, March 2004

[viii] Intelligent Transportation Society of Minnesota web site: http://www.itsmn.org/index.html

[ix] Minnesota Department of Transportation, *Minnesota Bicycle Transportation Planning and Design Guidelines*, June 1996

[x] Minnesota Department of Transportation, *2012 Annual Transit Report*
http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/reports/transitreports/12/index-2012.html

[xi] FTA Fact Sheet on Program Consolidation: http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/MAP-21_Fact_Sheet_-_Program_Consolidation.pdf

[xii] Sec. 44. Minnesota Statutes, Section 174.03, Subd. 1d. Freight Rail Economic Development Study.

[xiii] Minnesota Department of Transportation District 4 News Release, November 3, 1999:
http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d4/newsrels/991103rrcrossings.html

[xiv] http://www.minnesotatzd.org/whatistzd/

[xv] University of Minnesota – Center for Excellence in Rural Safety web site:
http://www.ruralsafety.umn.edu/about/index.html

CHAPTER FOUR

Goal Statements

Introduction

The goal statements in Chapter Four were originally formulated as part of the development of the first Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) in 1999. The goal statements are periodically reviewed and revised as part of the RTP update process. It is anticipated that the goal statements will undergo significant revision in the next update to the RTP, which will involve a more substantial update to the entire plan.

The goal statements in this chapter are consistent with the policy statements developed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) as part of the Minnesota Statewide Transportation Policy Plan: 2009-2028[i]. Those policy statements are as follows:

- Policy 1–Traveler Safety: Reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries for all travel modes.
- Policy 2–Infrastructure Preservation: Ensure the structural integrity of the transportation systems serving people and freight.
- Policy 3–Maintenance and Security: Maintain and operate the statewide transportation system in an efficient, cost-effective and secure manner.
- Policy 4–National and Global Connections: Maintain and strengthen Minnesota's strategic multimodal connections to the Upper Midwest, the nation and the world.
- Policy 5–Statewide Connections: Enhance the movement of people and freight between regional trade centers within Minnesota by providing efficient, multimodal transportation connections.
- Policy 6–Twin Cities Mobility: Provide mobility and address congestion in the Twin Cities by optimizing use of the existing system and making strategic capacity investments in both highways and transit.
- Policy 7–Greater Minnesota Metropolitan and Regional Mobility: Provide for the changing transportation needs of people and freight within Greater Minnesota regions and metropolitan areas by planning regionally for critical investments and improving coordination across modes and jurisdictions.
- Policy 8–Community Development and Transportation: Support local efforts to increase jobs, expand housing, and improve community livability through more coordinated planning, complementary design, and timely communication among land use and transportation authorities.
- Policy 9–Energy and the Environment: Improve the energy efficiency and environmental sustainability of Minnesota's transportation system.
- Policy 10–Accountability and Transparency: Strengthen accountability and transparency in the delivery of Minnesota's transportation system.

Goal Statements

- ***Document the need for additional transportation funding in west central Minnesota.*** (Funding)
- ***Provide a safe and efficient transportation system for all users.*** (System Performance and Preservation)
- ***Support west central Minnesota's agricultural, tourism and manufacturing economies.*** (Mobility and Access for People and Goods)
- ***Emphasize the movement of goods and people rather than the movement of vehicles.*** (Mobility and Access for People and Goods)
- ***Maintain the existing transportation system at state and national standards.*** (System Performance and Preservation)
- ***Coordinate transportation planning between all levels of government.*** (Coordination and Planning)
- ***Develop a transportation system that minimizes negative environmental and community impacts, while enhancing the quality of life.*** (Environment and Quality of Life)

Transportation Issue Categories

Category: Coordination and Planning

The fact that limited region-wide coordination and planning were taking place in the region was the reason that MnDOT contracted with WCI to implement a regional transportation planning program.

One of the primary goals of WCI's transportation planning program is to coordinate transportation planning between townships, cities, counties and the state (MnDOT). In the continuous work involved in achieving this goal, WCI facilitates meetings of the TAC, works with individual communities throughout the region, and prepares this RTP.

Coordination and Planning goal statement:

- *Coordinate transportation planning between all levels of government.*

Category: Environment and Quality of Life

Environmental issues continue to be important considerations in the development of the region's transportation system. In addition to the natural environment, the human environment and the built environment have also been identified as important elements of the overall planning process.

The concept of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) addresses many of the issues relating to how transportation projects impact communities. Both the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and MnDOT have CSS programs. According to the FHWA:

> "CSS is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility. CSS is an approach that considers the total context within which a transportation improvement project will exist. CSS principles include the employment of early, continuous and meaningful involvement of the public and all stakeholders throughout the project development process."

For more information visit the following web sites:

- MnDOT CSS: http://www.cts.umn.edu/contextsensitive/index.html
- FHWA CSS: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/context/index.cfm
- http://contextsensitivesolutions.org/

Environment and Quality of Life goal statement:

- *Develop a transportation system that minimizes negative environmental and community impacts, while enhancing the quality of life.*

Category: Funding

Transportation funding has always been a high priority and hotly debated item. In recent years, much debate has occurred at the state and federal levels concerning transportation funding.

At the state level, much of the discussion has focused on ways to increase the amount of funding available. Several years ago, legislation was passed that provides for an increase in the state gas tax, although transportation funding needs have continued to outpace the revenues from this increase.

Other discussions at the state level have centered on the funding distribution formulas. In 2006, a Constitutional Amendment was passed by voters, dedicating 100% of the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) to transportation purposes.

Despite the passage of the MVST amendment and increase in the gas tax, transportation professionals and advocates in the state caution that this is only part of the solution to statewide transportation funding deficits, which are

currently estimated at over $1 billion annually for the next ten years.[ii] Other funding sources will likely be discussed in the coming years, possibly including: mileage taxes, wheelage fees, toll roads, and other funding options.

At the federal level, the latest Federal transportation bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) was signed into law in July 2012. MAP-21 is a two-year bill, covering Federal Fiscal Years 2013-2014, and provides $105 billion for transportation projects. As this bill covers a two-year period vs. the traditional five years, it is anticipated that reauthorization discussions will begin in the near future.

Funding goal statement:

- *Document the need for additional transportation funding in west central Minnesota.*

Category: Mobility and Access for People and Goods

West central Minnesota has a variety of transportation system uses, including commuter traffic, tourist traffic, freight movement and agricultural commodity movement, to name a few. These, however, are the primary uses of the transportation system in the region.

In taking a more comprehensive look at transportation networks, the practice of transportation planning has moved beyond looking at how to accommodate increasing amounts of vehicles on highways. Instead, the current practice examines ways to more efficiently move the people and goods those vehicles are carrying, as well as accommodating the movement of people within urban environments.

In west central Minnesota, this means expanding options for the movement of people and goods by providing alternatives such as public transit and by continuing to support the use of rail for the movement of freight throughout the region. In addition, providing accommodations for pedestrian and bicycle transportation in urban areas (including small urban areas of even a few hundred people) is an important element of the overall transportation network.

Mobility and Access goal statements:

- *Support west central Minnesota's agricultural, tourism and manufacturing economies.*
- *Emphasize the movement of goods and people rather than the movement of vehicles.*

Category: System Performance and Preservation

Currently most jurisdictions in the planning area – including MnDOT, counties, cities and townships – are in a system preservation mode. While there is not as great a demand for major highway expansion projects as in the Twin Cities metro area, system performance is an issue in the region.

In general, the transportation network in west central Minnesota is in good shape, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for the above mentioned jurisdictions to maintain the increasing number of paved roads and highways in the region to the standards the citizens of the region would like.

Safety is also a primary consideration in all transportation projects. Maintaining our transportation system and meeting safety standards for transportation projects is a high priority.

System Performance and Preservation goal statements:

- *Provide a safe and efficient transportation system for all users.*
- *Maintain the existing transportation system at state and national standards.*

[i] http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/stateplan/download.html
[ii] Minnesota Transportation Alliance web site: http://www.transportationalliance.com

CHAPTER FIVE

Regional and Community Improvement Projects

Introduction

During the development of the 2004 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), several proposed future transportation improvements were identified as being necessary or desirable to accommodate the safe and efficient movement of people and goods in the region. The 2007 and 2009 updates of the RTP retained these proposed future improvements as a component of the long-range, regional nature of this plan.

For the 2013 RTP update, this list continues to remain an important part of the plan. The chapter has been renamed to more accurately reflect the nature of the improvements listed later in this chapter.

The proposed transportation Improvements listed in this chapter were identified through a variety of means over time, including a transportation survey distributed to cities, counties and townships; at public input meetings held throughout the region; and at Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings. Suggestions for improvements do not necessarily coincide with any plans or studies that are currently endorsed by the jurisdictions responsible for constructing such improvements. For instance, improvements identified for the MnDOT trunk highway system by someone outside of Mn/DOT may or may not be consistent with those projects that MnDOT has identified for future development.

Many of the proposed improvements listed in this section are not currently included in any jurisdiction's short or long-range transportation plans or capital improvement programs. However, the intent of the Regional Transportation Plan is not to supercede any existing plans or programs that have been developed by jurisdictions in the region. This plan is supportive of the comprehensive plans and transportation plans developed by the townships, cities and counties in the region, as well as the plans, projects and studies undertaken by MnDOT District 4. Proposed improvements that are known to be listed in publicly available or published plans may not be listed in this section.

The purpose of this section is to identify proposed transportation improvements that – if funding were readily available – might be representative of "major" transportation improvements that would provide important links in the regional transportation network. The proposed improvements listed here were compiled using a fiscally unconstrained budget. Therefore, it is unknown when or if these proposed improvements may be implemented.

While several proposed improvements are listed in this plan, the intent of the Regional Transportation Plan is to coordinate with other plans in the region. As such, any planning documents that are developed by jurisdictions within the

region – including townships, cities, counties and Mn/DOT – should be considered as part of the overall regional transportation network.

Regional and Community Improvement Projects

State Trunk Highway System

The following projects may or may not appear in MnDOT's current State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the Highway Improvement Plan or the District Long Range Plan.

It should also be noted that a number of safety and capacity projects have been completed, primarily consisting of turn lanes, passing lanes at intersections, and rumble stripes, roundabouts or other safety measures. For the purposes of this plan, those projects will not be listed as "completed" projects, but it is important to note that these improvements have significantly increased the safety and capacity issues of these highways.

Route:	TH 10
Location:	Current two-lane section in and near Wadena
Improvements:	Four lane expansion
Comments:	MnDOT and the City of Wadena are currently working on the Wadena Comprehensive & Transportation Plan. More information is available here: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d4/projects/wadena/index.html

Route:	TH 29
Location:	TH 55 at Glenwood to I-94 at Alexandria
Improvements:	Four lane expansion
Comments:	Discussions have taken place by officials in Douglas and Pope Counties regarding support for a study exploring the feasibility of expanding TH 29 from two to four lanes in the future. Currently, a four-lane expansion of TH 29 is planned for the area immediately south of Alexandria, extending to the intersection with County Roads 28/87. For more information visit: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d4/projects/alexi94hwy29/

Route:	TH 29
Location:	CSAH 42 in Alexandria to Parkers Prairie
Improvements:	Safety and capacity improvements including passing lanes and turn lanes
Comments:	Traffic counts do not justify a 4-lane design. A "super-2" design – which would include the improvements described above – would provide the necessary safety and capacity improvements for this highway.

Route:	TH 29
Location:	Intersection with TH 55 north of Glenwood
Improvements:	Railroad grade separation
Comments:	Conflicts occur between trains and vehicles at the Soo Line Railroad crossing located just north of the juncture of TH 29 and TH 55.

Route:	TH 34
Location:	TH 59 at Detroit Lakes to Becker/Hubbard County line (ultimately TH 200/371 at Walker)
Improvements:	Safety and capacity improvements including passing lanes and turn lanes
Comments:	TH 34 was the subject of a corridor study conducted in 2003. Suggested improvements included passing lanes and turn lanes at key intersections.

Route:	TH 55
Location:	TH 59 at Elbow Lake to TH 28 at Glenwood
Improvements:	Wider shoulders and turn lanes at intersections
Comments:	Traffic counts on TH 55 make it difficult to justify capacity improvements, but safety improvements are needed.

Route:	TH 59
Location:	Jct. TH 9 at Morris to Jct. TH 200 at Mahnomen
Jurisdiction responsible:	Mn/DOT
Improvements:	Safety and capacity improvements including passing lanes and turn lanes
Comments:	Traffic counts do not justify a 4-lane design. A "super-2" design – which would include the improvements described above – would provide the necessary safety and capacity improvements for this highway.

Route:	TH 75
Location:	Between 40th and 60th Avenues in and south of Moorhead
Improvements:	Four lane expansion
Comments:	Increasing traffic volumes due to development in south Moorhead may warrant expansion of TH 75 to four lanes in the future. A roundabout has been installed at the intersection of TH 75 and 60th Avenue.

Route:	TH 78
Location:	Near Otter Tail Lake
Improvements:	Frontage Road/Bypass
Comments:	Increasing traffic volumes and multiple access points have caused safety and capacity problems in the developed areas around Otter Tail Lake, south of the City of Ottertail. The proposed improvements would be designed to alleviate those safety and capacity issues.

Route:	I-94
Location:	Clay County CSAH 17 near Glyndon
Improvements:	New interchange
Comments:	A new interchange would provide more direct access to the City of Glyndon from I-94, relieving traffic on Hwy 336 and US 10.

Route:	I-94
Location:	TH 75 Interchange in Moorhead
Improvements:	Interchange safety and capacity improvements
Comments:	Increasing traffic volumes may warrant improvements to the I-94/TH 75 interchange in Moorhead. ***This project is planned for construction in 2015/16.**

Route:	TH 210
Location:	TH 75 at Breckenridge to TH 78 at Battle Lake
Improvements:	Safety and capacity improvements including passing lanes and turn lanes
Comments:	Traffic counts do not justify a 4-lane design. A "super-2" design – which would include the improvements described above – would provide the necessary safety and capacity improvements for this highway.

County Highway Systems

Most suggested county highway system improvements consisted of either spot improvements relating to one specific location along a highway, or were suggestions for paving or pavement reconditioning/resurfacing. Several comments related to the need, system-wide, for county highways to be upgraded to a 10-ton standard. See Chapter 3 for more information about current efforts being undertaken to study the 10-ton county highway network.

Municipal Street Systems

Suggestions for improvements to municipal street systems consisted of either spot improvements relating to one specific location or intersection (including traffic control devices such as stop/yield signs and traffic signals) or were suggestions for paving or pavement reconditioning/resurfacing.

Township Road System

Suggestions for improvements to township road systems consisted of either spot improvements relating to one specific location or intersection, or were suggestions for paving or pavement reconditioning/resurfacing. General comments were also made regarding the availability and cost of gravel.

Aviation Projects

Municipal airports throughout the region have made improvements to facilities and infrastructure (such as runway improvements) in the past five years. Overall, the condition of the aviation system in the region is very good. Specific improvements at individual airports, however, should still be pursued.

Facility:	Alexandria Municipal Airport (Chandler Field)
Location:	Alexandria area
Improvements:	Relocate airport
Comments:	The Alexandria Municipal Airport is land-locked in the middle of a rapidly developing area of Alexandria. The current location is surrounded by residential, commercial and industrial development. Future airport development at this location is not compatible with surrounding land uses. The Cities of Alexandria and Glenwood, along with Douglas and Pope Counties, had previously engaged in discussions about possible airport relocation and consolidation, however that process has concluded with no definitive next steps on possible airport relocation and consolidation. Thus, the project will remain in the RTP

as a placeholder.

Facility:	Detroit Lakes Airport (Wething Field)
Location:	Detroit Lakes
Improvements:	Runway expansion/airport relocation
Comments:	Preliminary discussions have taken place in recent years regarding the possibility of either expanding the main runway or relocating the airport entirely. The current airport location is in a developing area of Detroit Lakes, along U.S. Highway 10 on the west end of the city. A few years ago, an EIS was completed for a runway extension at the airport.

Facility:	Fergus Falls Municipal Airport (Einar Mickelson Field)
Location:	Fergus Falls
Improvements:	Re-institute scheduled air service
Comments:	Scheduled air service was slated to be re-instituted in Fergus Falls prior to the 9-11 terrorist attacks. Following the attacks, plans for scheduled air service were put on hold indefinitely.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects

Facility:	Heartland Trail
Location:	Park Rapids to Moorhead
Improvements:	New trail alignment
Comments:	An extension of the Heartland Trail between Park Rapids and Moorhead has been legislatively authorized. Currently routes are being identified for future trail alignment, with the first segment likely to be constructed between Frazee and Detroit Lakes.

Facility:	Central Lakes to Heartland trail connection
Location:	Otter Tail County
Improvements:	New trail alignment
Comments:	This is a currently developing concept in the early discussion phases. The initial concept consists of a trail connection between Pelican Rapids and Perham, linking to Maplewood State Park. Future phases would connect the on the west end to the Central Lakes Trail in Fergus Falls, and on the east end to the

Heartland Trail in Frazee.

Additional bicycle and pedestrian projects, along with all multi-use trails in the region, are listed in the 2007 Regional Multi-Use Trails Plan.

Corridor and Area Transportation Studies

Corridor and area transportation studies are important in developing areas to determine the best methods of preserving mobility in transportation corridors, while also providing for the healthy economic development of communities in the region. Several studies are currently underway or planned, including:

- 2014 Pelican Rapids Accessibility Project
- Alexandria Area Transportation Study
- Detroit Lakes Transportation Planning Study
- Lake Park Access Study
- Wadena Transportation and Comprehensive Plan

More information about these studies is available at:
http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d4/studies.html

Completed Projects

While several of the projects listed above and in previous versions of this plan have been partially addressed or completed, one project has been completed in its entirety:

Route:	TH 10
Location:	CSAH 34 in Perham
Improvements:	New Interchange
Comments:	The TH 10 / CSAH 34 interchange in Perham opened to traffic in 2012.

APPENDIX A

Transportation Survey & Survey Summary

Introduction

Appendix A contains the survey instrument and results for a transportation survey that was conducted in 2003 for the 2004 RTP update. It is being included in the 2013 RTP update as an archival document. It is anticipated that the survey will be updated during the next RTP update process.

West Central Minnesota Transportation Survey
April 2003

Local Planning Contact

Name: _____

Title: _____

Representing: _____

Street Address: _____

City/Zip: _____

Phone number: _____

Fax number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Current Local Planning Elements

(1) Does your jurisdiction (city/county/township) have a comprehensive plan?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, when was it last updated? _____

(2) Does your jurisdiction have a land use map?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, when was it last updated? _____

(3) Does your jurisdiction have a transportation plan?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, when was it last updated? _____

(4) Are significant planning and development issues prioritized locally?
☐ Yes ☐ No

(5) Are any updates to the local planning elements listed above proposed?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please describe:

_____

_____

_____

Future Transportation Investment Needs
(Please use additional sheets if necessary for any question)

(1) What roadway and other transportation investments should be considered in the update of the Regional Transportation Plan? These can include state, county and local transportation systems. Please prioritize:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(2) Identify any other issues with the regional transportation system (e.g. road condition, capacity, safety, load restrictions, functional classification, etc.).

_____

_____

_____

(3) Identify any issues with other transportation modes (bicycle, pedestrian, transit, freight, etc.).

_____

_____

_____

Access Management Issues

The goal of Access Management is to balance the needs of the motorist for safe, predictable travel with the access needs of local residents and businesses.

(1) Would your local review process benefit from the use of access management guidelines for roadway segments?
☐ Yes ☐ No

(2) Identify any significant access management issues or needs with state, county or local roadways.

_____

_____

_____

Public Involvement Process for Transportation Investments

(1) On a scale of 1 - 5, with **1** being the least important and **5** being the most important, please rate preferences for the following processes of obtaining public involvement in the transportation investment process.

(a) Utilizing focus groups for areas within the region	1	2	3	4	5
(b) Survey priority issues from community leaders	1	2	3	4	5
(c) Solicit issues from major employers and Economic Development Authorities	1	2	3	4	5
(d) Identify and solicit input from user groups and modal interests	1	2	3	4	5
(e) Provide open houses, advertised to the general public	1	2	3	4	5

(2) What other public involvement processes would you support? (Please identify):

_____

_____

_____

(3) Would your community assist in obtaining public input into the transportation investment process?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Local Outreach Options

On a scale of 1 - 5, with **1** being the least important and **5** being the most important, please rate the significance of the following existing or potential transportation planning outreach activities:

(1) Ongoing personal contacts with local planners/engineers	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Regional forums to meet with local planners/engineers	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Coordination of planning issues between cities, counties, townships and Mn/DOT	1	2	3	4	5
(4) WCI and/or Mn/DOT attendance at local planning and zoning meetings	1	2	3	4	5
(5) Surveys to obtain information about current planning issues	1	2	3	4	5
(6) Newsletters/updates on regional transportation projects	1	2	3	4	5
(7) Regional planning workshops and training for local planners	1	2	3	4	5
(8) A planning handbook identifying regional transportation services and contacts	1	2	3	4	5

Additional comments:

_____

_____

_____

Summary of Transportation Survey

In the spring of 2003, West Central Initiative sent out a transportation survey in order to elicit transportation infrastructure priorities and issues as well as gauge the level of planning within units of government and their response to WCI's role in the region. Surveys were sent to leaders of each level of government: township, municipal, and county officials. By surveying all levels of government and across geography, we have gained a cross-cut of sentiment representative of the region at large. The survey is organized according to a general five-part framework:

1. Contact information
2. Plan inventory
3. Transportation investment survey
4. Access management survey
5. Planning sentiment survey
    a. Public Involvement Process
    b. Local Outreach Options

Sample Statistics

The response from communities was adequate to give us a sample from which to derive some general observations. These sample statistics were taken into consideration when understanding the results of the survey. Basically the size of the sample dictates the accuracy of our survey: the larger the sample, the better the accuracy.

1. Overall response rate from units of government: 24.4%.
    a. Townships: 21.7% (52 township officials representing 52 townships)
    b. Municipalities: 27.7% (27 municipal officials representing 23 municipalities)
    c. Counties: 66.7% (7 county officials representing 6 counties)

Survey Results

Some results of the survey are inconclusive, that is, not statistically significant enough to register a clear positive or negative response. For example, some questions ranked on a 1-5 scale have a neutral mean/mode around 3. But some questions do register clear responses and present us with aggregate patterns of results.

One of the most important patterns is the disparity in planning between units and sizes of government as seen in the plan inventory. The survey indicates what planning tools, if any, units of government have in place: comprehensive plan, land use map, transportation plan, or local development priorities.

1. Overall local planning elements:
    a. 31% of respondents have a jurisdictional comprehensive plan
    b. 34% of respondents have a land use map
    c. 20% of respondents have a transportation plan
    d. 38% of respondents prioritize planning and development locally
    e. 22% of respondents have updates proposed to local planning elements
2. Position analysis
    a. Township officials
        - 14% have comprehensive plan
        - 14% have a land use map
        - 10% have a transportation plan
        - 17% prioritize development issues locally
        - 7% have proposed updates
    b. Municipal officials
        - 42% comprehensive plan
        - 58% land use map
        - 26% transportation plan
        - 48% issues locally prioritized
        - 24% updates proposed
    c. County officials
        - 100% comprehensive plan
        - 50% land use map
        - 71% transportation plan
        - 86% issues locally prioritized
        - 83% updates proposed
3. Municipal Size Analysis
    a. Towns under 1,000
        - 0% comprehensive plan
        - 23% land use map
        - 0% transportation plan
        - 31% issues locally prioritized
        - 0% updates proposed
    b. Towns 1,000 – 5,000
        - 67% comprehensive plan
        - 83% land use map
        - 33% transportation plan
        - 50% issues locally prioritized
        - 33% updates proposed
    c. Towns over 5,000
        - 100% comprehensive plan
        - 100% land use map
        - 100% transportation plan
        - 75% issues locally prioritized
        - 50% updates proposed

Looking at these statistics, two great disparities appear between the different levels of government and the size of municipalities. Basically those units of government with both the most resources and greatest development pressure have many more planning elements in place than those smaller units of government. This does not mean that these smaller units of government have no interest in planning but are currently not as involved in planning in their communities. On the contrary, planning sentiment survey results show interest is just as high amongst smaller units of government as larger ones, that is, those questions which gained high marks did so across the spectrum of government types.

1. Strongest positive responses (Mode = 5, Mean = 3.6 and above)
    a. Question 1: “Ongoing personal contacts with local planners/engineers”
    b. Question 3: “Coordination of planning issues between cities, counties, townships and Mn/DOT” *Highest
2. Strong positive responses (Mode = 4, Mean = above 3)
    a. Question 1b: “Survey priority issues from community leaders”
    b. Question 6: “Newsletters/updates on regional transportation projects”
    c. Question 7: “Regional planning workshops and training for local planners”
    d. Question 8: “A planning handbook identifying regional transportation services and contacts”
3. Strong negative response
    a. Question 1e: “Provide open houses, advertised to the general public”

Considering the planning sentiment survey stands across the spectrum of respondents, we must take our results as a representative mandate from those we serve in the region. Besides direction for some new ideas, the survey results also help define our role in the region. It is clear many see our role as coordinating between units of government, as this is clearly the highest scoring element in the survey. But there is also a strong sentiment that we need to keep open communication and personal contact with community leaders. Besides the direction given WCI and the inventory of planning in the region by this survey, the survey also elicited comments specific to transportation problems and issues, which will help guide the future upkeep and development of the regional transportation system.