



**New road construction in Leland Township**

## **Chapter 7**

# **TRANSPORTATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The daily pattern of nearly everyone's life demands the ability to get from one location to another, preferably in the shortest time possible. Whether it be for employment, recreation, schooling, or shopping, a comprehensive transportation network for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists has become a fundamental necessity. Specialized needs for bulk transport and air transportation are also important. The need for personal mobility is made especially notable by the fact that nearly half of employed residents commute outside of the County to their place of employment. Of equal significance is the role of the tourism industry in the County and the additional demands for efficiency and safety it places upon the County's transportation network.

The network directly impacts the efficiency of emergency services, available personal leisure time, the appropriateness of proposed future land use patterns, and the safety of motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. It also affects the rate of County's growth and development, and much more. The **Leelanau General Plan** recognizes the critical role transportation plays, and recognizes that improvements to the network must be strategically planned in coordination with the achievement of other key components of the County's life and its future.

### **ISSUES**

#### **Road Network**

Leelanau County faces a number of crucial challenges in the provision of an efficient and safe transportation network. See Map 7-1. The most fundamental challenge is maintaining the extensive road network that is already in place and where necessary, expanding the network to

**Nearly half of employed residents commute outside of the County to their place of employment.**

improve traffic flow, safety and efficiency. This challenge is greatly affected by the County's abundant natural resources, including its hillsides and lakes. Rolling topography and large inland lakes provide unmatched scenery and, at the same time, have resulted in a somewhat circuitous roadway network. As population increases, the result is experienced in an increase in travel times, automobile emissions, automobile and truck operation costs, and congestion in some places.

The existing roadway network is further challenged by the fact that it operates within a relatively limited hierarchy of road types. The challenging route location, with many 90 degree turning patterns and many limited sight distances greatly reduces the potential to move traffic safely and efficiently at normal highway speeds. As such, they provide less support for the system than roads built to comparable standards elsewhere.

The winding nature of the majority of the County's roads, resulting in limited sight distances, presents numerous safety hazards. Additional road use by residents and visitors will likely result in more traffic accidents. The often limited lane widths and, at places, absence of adequate shoulders increase the level of safety hazards still further. These conditions present equally unsafe conditions for pedestrians, bicyclists, and snowmobilers along the roadways. This is of particular significance as the County attracts some of the most extensive biking opportunities and biking tours in Michigan. On the other hand, these winding roads force slower speeds and provide opportunities for enjoying the unsurpassed beauty in the County.

### **Level of Service**

Adding to the complexity of the transportation challenges is the fact that County transportation is automobile dominant. Limited opportunities currently exist for alternative modes of transportation. Alternative modes might otherwise reduce the demand upon the County's roadway network, such as the Bay Area Transit Authority (BATA) which operates a bus service in the County, including regularly scheduled, fixed-route services, a summer route program, specialty service for the seniors, and a "dial-a-ride" door-to-door service. While bike/pedestrian lanes are being developed in some areas of the County, road segments specifically designed to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle traffic are limited. According to Michigan Public Act (PA) 135 of 2010, a Complete Street provides "appropriate access to all legal users in a manner that promotes safe and efficient movement of people and goods whether by car, truck, transit, assistive device, foot or bicycle." Complete Streets is an approach to transportation planning and design that considers appropriate access for all legal roadway users in the various phases of a transportation project. Local units of government may develop and adopt a local Complete Streets policy.

According to the 2018 Planning Questionnaire, 61% of responders felt bicycling and walking paths were an important quality in Leelanau County. Bike lanes have been added to M-22 between Leland and Northport. The Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail is a

17 mile trail (mostly off-road) running from Empire to County Road 669 in Cleveland Township, with another stretch to be developed between 669 and 651. The Leelanau Trail is a 17 mile long trail along former railroad corridors running from Greilickville and ending a few miles north of Suttons Bay. Airplane facilities are limited and rail service is no longer available.

The resultant overall level of service along roadways has declined over the years as the County has experienced growth and development. The ability of the County Road Commission to maintain or improve the level of service along the network, either through general maintenance, incremental improvements, or major construction projects, become increasingly difficult if available revenues don't keep up with needs. The most needed projects in the County (rebuilding some existing roads and solving a few congestion problems) are those which require massive amounts of expenditures.

**The most fundamental challenge is maintaining the extensive road network that is already in place and where necessary, expanding the network to improve traffic flow, safety and efficiency.**

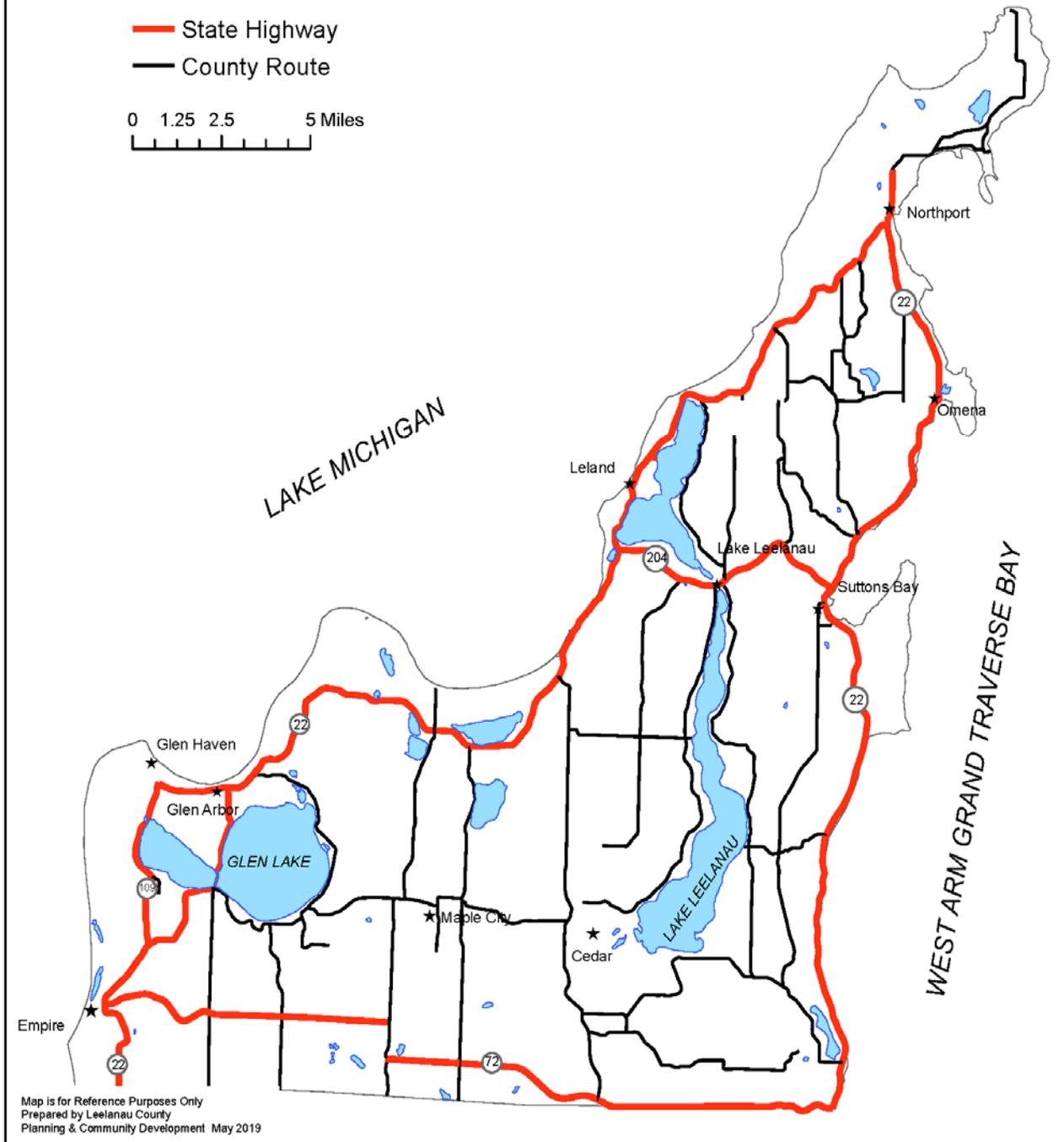
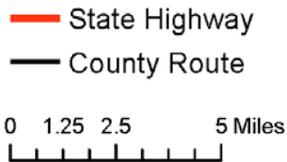
It can be expected that transportation conditions will worsen in the County if current trends and conditions continue. Growth and development will further increase the number of vehicles on the County's roads. These increasing demands on the roadway network will further challenge the network's level of service. Significant decreases in service may be unavoidable in some places. The resulting lower levels of service will be reflected in increased congestion, extended travel times, higher maintenance costs, higher rates of vehicular and non-vehicular accidents, and longer emergency response times.

Safety hazards along the roadways will not be a result of increased traffic levels alone, but will also be a result of the rise in the number of driveways, street intersections, and other new access points along major corridors resulting in hazardous turning patterns, stop and go traffic, and congestion. Land acquisition costs for widening road right-of-ways to accommodate road improvements will be more costly due to the high cost of land in the County as market trends boost property values. According to the 2018 Questionnaire, 80% of responders felt that the County Roads were well maintained, while 20% felt they were not.

While problems associated with population growth and development are the impetus behind many of the County's road improvements, some improvement projects sometimes fuel the development that causes these problems. Roads designed for a high volume of traffic may be viewed at times as an incentive to developers. Better roads are more attractive for development than those that are gravel or unimproved. This improvement of rural roads, and the development that typically follows, can have an impact on the County's rural character.

The road network in the County serves to get people from one place to another without the frequent delays common in urban areas. However, without improvement, some problems will worsen in the next decade.

# Map 7-1 Road Class



Map is for Reference Purposes Only  
Prepared by Leelanau County  
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## A FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE POLICY

The transportation issues facing the County today and projected for the future if current trends continue, dictate a far more proactive stance to assure transportation needs are met. It is the intent of the **General Plan** to provide the guidance for a proactive approach to comprehensive transportation planning throughout the County.

The Road Commission develops a list of needed improvement projects for primary roads and ranks these projects in order of priority. Road work also includes culverts, rumble strips, tree removal and safety improvements. Since 50 percent of the funding for many road improvements comes from local municipalities, the Road Commission is often reluctant to initiate road projects. Instead, the Road Commission responds to requests from the townships. The requests are usually for immediate improvements. Each year individual townships prioritize projects depending on the funds that they have available. When the Road Commission improves a road, it tries to include paving wider shoulders for pedestrians and bikes.

It is very desirable that all road improvement projects should recognize the scenic character of the County's roadway corridors and attempt to preserve the natural character elements. Classification of some roads as "scenic" or as "natural beauty roads" should be pursued based upon inventory data and long range plans.

This **General Plan** proposes far more substantive efforts directed at establishing a stronger multi-modal transportation network in the County than has previously been invested. This effort will minimize demands upon the County's roadway network and improve safety. Transportation planning should recognize multi-modal trends and include provisions for the respective safety of motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Programs to be established could include comprehensive County-wide bicycle systems and improved pedestrian systems in villages and other small



Bohemian Rd (Co Rd 669), Cleveland Township

settlements. These systems should be planned and designed to provide safe and functional linkages between existing villages and future settlement areas, shopping areas, recreational facilities and employment centers. New residential, commercial, and industrial land uses should be designed to provide continuity to existing and future pedestrian/bicycle systems. The systems would accommodate travel by the physically handicapped and, to the extent road right-of ways are used, should be afforded adequate shoulder and pavement construction. According to the 2018 Planning Questionnaire, 50.36% of responders (non-students) felt that bicycling and walking paths were very important and 37.15% felt they were important. And 40.87% of student respondents felt that bicycling and walking paths were very important and 46.83% felt they were important. 90.5% of respondents use a personal car to get from home to work and other activities, 30.8% walk, 10.2% bike on trails, 7.9% bike on roads, 5.4% carpool, and just 1.6% use BATA.

Minimizing demand upon the County's vehicular network should also maximize the utility of the Bay Area Transit Authority (BATA). BATA's current services and operations should be reviewed and evaluated to identify priority service areas and needs, the extent to which service needs are being met, and opportunities for improved and expanded service areas and daily schedules. Increased operations efficiency and new and alternative funding mechanisms should also be explored.

The future operations of BATA and other potential transit systems should consider linkages between neighborhoods providing affordable housing opportunities and centers providing employment to neighborhood residents. Multi-modal transportation planning should be expanded to include new opportunities for the transporting of goods. These expanded opportunities should be implemented only after careful evaluation of applicable County travel patterns including trip generation, origin-destination, and destination-location studies. Investigations should be encouraged by the private sector into ferry services for commuters and tourists. Employee transit programs should also be examined. Efforts should be directed to assure the long term continuation of commercial air services in close proximity to the County and protection of glide paths to and from existing airports.

The development of consistent County-wide private road regulations should be encouraged. Assuring adequate construction, operation, and maintenance of these roads is critical in protecting the safety and welfare of County residents and visitors and minimizing the road maintenance burden of existing residents. Access for emergency vehicles should be encouraged for private roads.

The **General Plan** recognizes that all of the transportation planning efforts within the County must occur under an umbrella of strong interjurisdictional coordination. This coordinated County-wide planning effort among local municipalities, the County Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners, the MDOT, the Road Commission, and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians must address the need for a County-wide functional circulation network that meets the needs of all users. Coordination of all capital improvements, and the scheduling thereof, should be pursued to better assure the acquisition of needed rights-of-way and minimize network disruptions.

## TRANSPORTATION POLICIES AND ACTION STATEMENTS

The following goals, objectives and action statements are intended to set up a blueprint for the **General Plan's** recommendations for the County's transportation system. All statements are intended as proposals, not directives.

**Goal:** Development of a long term road and multimodal transportation plan.

**Objective:**

The County Road Commission should continue to work on long-term planning for primary road improvements. Planning for long-range improvements to the local road system should be developed with significant input from each township.

**Action Statement:**

The County Road Commission should obtain significant input from each township to develop long-range, prioritized improvements to the local road system. Identify any new sources of funding for implementation.

**Action Statement:**

Work on meeting non-motorized needs, especially for an integrated network of bicycle lanes and of a pedestrian friendly sidewalk system in villages and other pedestrian areas. Plans should also be considered by the County Board, Planning Commission, townships, and villages to identify appropriate sources of funding to expand the existing network of independent non-motorized trails.

**Action Statement:**

Coordinate road improvement projects with neighboring counties.

**Goal:** Safe and adequate road network to accommodate motorized and non-motorized traffic.

**Objective:**

Identify and explore opportunities for safety on all roadways.

**Action Statement:**

MDOT and the Leelanau County Road Commission (LCRC) should commit to construction specifications including road shoulders of adequate width to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian traffic.



Parking problems in Leland have led to an assortment of parking regulations.

**Action Statement:**

Networks Northwest, BATA, and County and local governments should work together to investigate alternative transportation methods.

**Action Statement:**

The LCRC and local governments should assess the benefits of adopting local Complete Streets policy, per A 135 of 2010.

**Goal:** Identification and funding of the “Class A” (all-season) road network.

**Objective:**

The LCRC with the assistance of the County Board of Commissioners and all other municipal governments, should explore all funding sources to create and improve "Class A" (all-season) roads in the County.

**Action Statement:**

The LCRC should work with the Grand Traverse County Road Commission, the City of Traverse City, Traverse Transportation Coordinating Initiative (TTCI), and the Michigan Department of Transportation to review and establish the need for a beltline route around Traverse City to minimize summer traffic congestion, allow farm vehicles to travel around (rather than through) the city, and to route through traffic to avoid time delay and safety hazards associated with unnecessary trips through the center of the city.

**Objective:**

County government should work with the Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA) to be sure that public transportation needs are evaluated and accommodated efficiently and economically.

**Action Statement:**

Leelanau County and the LCRC should join with citizens and local governments to support the operations of the Bay Area Transportation Authority as the primary mechanism for meeting the needs of mass-transit dependent individuals in the County.

**Objective:**

MDOT and the County Board should work with the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians (GTB), the Traffic Safety Commission, and other organizations to fund safety improvements along the Traverse City - Northport Corridor.

**Action Statement:**

The GTB and MDOT should investigate ways to most efficiently move casino related traffic throughout the Traverse City - Northport corridor.

**Action Statement**

The GTB and MDOT should identify traffic hazards along the corridor, then prepare a program to correct the identified deficiencies.

**Action Statement:**

Support grant applications submitted by the Road Commission for road improvement projects.

**Goal:** Protect scenic quality of roads.

**Objective:**

A special effort should be made to protect the scenic character of roads when necessary road improvements are made.

**Action Statement:**

Road improvements should be undertaken with both the existing and expected future traffic volumes of the road in mind, in order to assure that design will function appropriately.

**Action Statement:**

The County should support the efforts on the part of local governments and citizen groups to inventory the scenic character of state and County roads, initiate scenic highway and/or natural beauty roads designation on key non-arterial roads or road segments and once designated as a scenic highway and/or natural beauty road, future road improvements should respect and/or enhance the scenic character of the road and immediate environs to the extent possible without compromising safety.

**Action Statement:**

Leelanau County governments should seek federal financial supplements for maintenance of roads within the vicinity of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.