VII. Transportation System Improvement Recommendations

Street and Highway System

The Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) has seen numerous major highway projects over the past 15 years, with the completion of USH 53 and STH 29 projects. The result is a network with relatively few capacity issues, now and looking forward to 2045. Model results show that, for the most part, future capacity concerns are in very small areas of the network, and are largely dependent upon local development decisions. Capacity expansion recommendations are more along the line of monitoring and further study with appropriate resulting actions, as warranted.

With few major capacity demands, the area will be able to concentrate efforts more in the areas of maintenance and preservation, safety, and transportation choices. Like most urbanized areas across the country, maintaining the system we have has become a challenge. Rising cost of asphalt and other materials, combined with hard winters and pinched budgets, have resulted in declining condition of our road surfaces. It is anticipated that a need to get on top of roadway maintenance and reconstruction of pavements that are in need will continue to dominate transportation funding discussions for at least the next decade. Increasing demands for alternative modes choices will also be heard, as Millennials and the aging Baby Boomers reduce the importance of auto use in their daily lives, with bicycling, transit, and rail options becoming more desired. The recommendations in this chapter are intended to meet the needs for some new infrastructure but more to maintain aging infrastructure and adapt existing infrastructure to accommodate all modes and address changing needs of our population.

All significant projects should be developed with community sensitive design (CSD), providing aesthetics that enhance the character of the project and represent a desired community image. A CSD process often involves the community in the identification of the corridor’s opportunities, constraints, and features, and develops the project based on the community’s historic, social, natural resource, cultural, economic, and visual qualities. While recent state action has put more of the responsibility for CSD on the local communities, the value of such treatments needs to be carefully considered during project design.

Serious consideration should also be given to the “Complete Streets” concept. Complete Streets are safe, comfortable, and convenient for travel via automobile, foot, bicycle, and transit, as well as accommodating the movement of autos. Accommodations to reach a comfort level for all modes can vary depending primarily upon the traffic volume and speed of the facility. For instance, a lower volume, lower speed, minor arterial may be comfortable for on-street bicycle lanes and sidewalks, but a high volume, high speed, major arterial would better accommodate bicycles and pedestrians with a multi-use trail. Often, right-of-way is a limiting factor, and efforts may
be needed to mitigate conflicts between design standards published in the state’s Facility Design Manual (FDM) and the intent of the Complete Streets concept. After the State of Wisconsin repealed its Complete Streets law, Trans 75, it is even more important for local governments to adopt their own Complete Streets policies.

The collective impact of the COMMITTED and PLANNED roadway improvement projects on reducing future traffic congestion and improving roadway safety within the planning area provides substantial support for the following street and highway system improvement recommendations:

Completed projects since last plan:
1. The reconstruction of the old STH 29/124 interchange to an at-grade two-lane roundabout.
2. The reconstruction of Park Avenue addressing capacity needs from Jeffers Street to Peterson Lane.
3. The reconstruction of Birch Street to four lanes from Starr Avenue to Pine Street.
4. The reconstruction of STH 37/85 to addressing capacity needs from the eastbound on-ramp of I-94 to Lowes Creek Road (the intersection of STH 37 and 85?).
5. The reconstruction of CTH “X” to address capacity needs from STH 29 to CTH K.
6. The construction of Chippewa Crossing Boulevard from E. South Avenue to old STH 29.
7. The reconstruction of CTH “T” to address heavy freight traffic from Alpine Road to old STH 29.

A. The identified COMMITTED projects, programmed to be implemented through the year 2020, should continue to be developed and completed within the programmed time frame. They are illustrated on Map 39 and include the following:

1. Spring Street Bridge over Duncan Creek: Turn bridge from two-way traffic to one-way, west-bound.
2. The reconstruction of Melby Street from Victor Street to 115th Street.
3. The reconstruction of Short Street from the Chippewa River Bridge to STH 37.
4. The reconstruction of Bartlett Avenue from 10th Street West to 7th Street West.
5. The reconstruction of CTH AA (Prill Road & Mayer Road) from House Road to USH 12.
6. The reconstruction of Park Avenue from Main Street to 0.75 miles west of Main Street.
7. The reconstruction of CTH S from USH 53 to 1640 feet east of USH 53.
8. The replacement of the Half Moon Lake Bridge on Grand Avenue.
9. The replacement of the Union Pacific Railroad Bridge on Eddy Street.
10. The replacement of the Paint Creek Bridge on 195th Street.
11. The replacement of the Otter Creek Bridge on CTH AA.
12. The replacement of two bridges on I-94 at Hobbs Road and CTH I (Otter Creek Road).
13. The installation of railroad crossing signals and gates at Kane Road.
14. The installation of lane signal heads on USH 12, STH 312, and STH 93 and flashing left turn arrows on USH 12 and STH 312.
15. The installation of traffic signals at the intersection of STH 312 and Riverview Drive.
B. The **PLANNED** projects, identified for implementation within the 2045 planning time frame, should receive priority for implementation as funding becomes available for them. The PLANNED projects will further improve traffic flow and safety, and add over 7 new lane miles of additional capacity to the urban road system. They are depicted on Map 39 and include the following:

1. The reconstruction of CTH “AA” to address capacity needs in commercial area by extending the four lane segment from Gateway Drive to House Road.
2. Reconstruct and address capacity needs on USH 12 by extending the four lane segment from Winchester Way to Elco Road.
3. The construction of Gateway Drive from Hamilton Avenue to 3rd Street East with a bridge over Otter Creek to address access between the commercial area near the CTH AA/USH 53 interchange and the Hillcrest development and USH 12.

Another potential project, currently classified as “requiring further study”: The construction of a frontage road west of and parallel to USH 53 from CTH S to CTH X/Business 29 to provide another access to the west side neighborhoods in Chippewa Falls, which currently experience congestion and occasional difficulty exiting the neighborhood. Also warranting further study is the need for a grade-separated connection between the developing area south of I-94 to the mall area development, just to the west of the I-94/USH53 interchange. This connection would ultimately include bicycle and pedestrian accommodations to bridge the barrier of I-94 to these modes.

C. The remaining projected **deficient** street and highway segments that have not been addressed by either committed or planned improvement projects should continue to be monitored and evaluated for the application of appropriate corrective measures to mitigate the capacity problems identified. Improvements for the identified segments may include actions ranging from on-street parking restrictions to access controls to capacity expansions. The remaining deficient roadway segments that warrant further consideration for improvement are depicted on Map 38 and include the following:

1. Continued monitoring is recommended in the vicinity of STH 124 and CTH OO, in the Village of Lake Hallie. This already busy commercial area, is projected to have significant commercial and retail, growth in the coming decades, which would likely result in congestion issues on the area corridors and intersections.
2. Business 53, Hastings Way, between STH 312 and Melby is shown in the model as LOS D and E in 2045. This is somewhat surprising, as this is not expected to be a high growth area. This segment should be monitored for safety and congestion issues between now and the next plan update.
3. Another area recommended for further study is USH 53 between River Prairie Drive and STH 312. This segment of highway, though it is not showing a deficiency in the current 2045 model, is a possible candidate for collector lanes to deal with short trips between interchanges and high urban levels of interchange use, which are expected to increase with continued rapid development USH 53 corridor.
4. USH 12, West Clairemont Avenue, from Vine Street to STH 312 should also be monitored. At Vine, USH 12 transitions from a 3-lane divided facility to two lanes, divided. Volume/capacity ratios are anticipated to be at moderately high levels in this area. Intersection improvements, currently programmed, will likely improve traffic flow,
but expansion to three lanes should be considered if congestion expectations increase beyond that currently modeled.

5. While the model considered capacity improvements on USH 12 as far east as Elco Rd., the 2045 model shows operation at LOS D from Elco Rd. east, implying that improvements should, perhaps, be extended further to the east, beyond Elco Rd.

6. STH 37 is showing some capacity issues (LOS D) in the 2045 model, from Silver Springs Dr., south of I-94 to STH 85. This is the segment of STH 37 that necks down from four lanes to two. Higher traffic volumes in this area are dependent upon the actual volume of development that occurs in this area and south. With the slow in suburban development since 2009, the levels of development in this area are difficult to predict at this time. This area should be monitored in terms of a move upward in volumes on STH 37.

All other deficiencies shown on Map 38 are very minor, mostly intersection related segments that would require very specific determination of deficiency and consideration of geometric or other solutions if improvements are deemed necessary. They are not the sort of corridor capacity issues that are best determined by the regional level traffic model, but could be determined to benefit from some of the management treatments shown below.

D. **Transportation System Management** actions to improve vehicle flow can be applied at selected locations to increase the safety and efficiency of the road system. These actions should be evaluated for their impact and applied where they are determined to improve traffic conditions at specific locations.

**Traffic signals** can be installed at intersections where heavy volumes of traffic exist in two conflicting directions or where there exists little or no gap between vehicles on a major roadway and vehicles cannot enter the major roadway. Although installation of a traffic signal at an appropriate location may decrease the capacity of a major arterial which has no stop at that intersection, it should increase the capacity of the intersecting street, and by reducing conflicts, increase the safety and efficiency of the entire network. Crossing accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists should be included.

**Roundabouts** are an increasingly acceptable form of traffic management at intersections. They incorporate safety features, while accommodating the continuous movement of traffic. Roundabouts move traffic safely and efficiently through an intersection because of lower speeds, fewer conflict points, and easier decision making for drivers. Currently, there are 13 roundabouts in the MPA and two more are planned. In the eastern areas of the State, WisDOT has included forty roundabouts into new interchanges and local connections along the USH 41 (now I-41) expansion project in Winnebago and Brown counties.

**Conversion to one-way streets** generally decreases the number of vehicular conflicts at intersections because there are no turning movements from the opposite lane. The capacity of one-way streets also is substantially greater than two-way streets. Use of one-way streets in appropriate areas can increase street capacity in congested areas and improve network efficiency. However, total vehicle miles may
also be increased because motorists must sometimes travel out of their way to reach their destinations.

Conversion to two-way streets is becoming more common in urban areas for a variety of reasons. Two-way streets can be considered safer due to lower vehicle speeds and greater driver attention. It is easier for drivers to navigate to their destination and vehicle miles traveled are reduced. Local businesses believe that two-way streets increase visibility. Two-way streets are better for pedestrians and bicyclists because cars are stopping more at intersections, allowing more opportunities for bike and pedestrian crossing. The City of Eau Claire converted Barstow Street and Graham Street from a one-way couplet back to two-way streets, and the City of Chippewa Falls has implemented a conversion of Bridge Street, in the downtown, to two-way traffic, as well.

Road Diets can be used to calm traffic and to improve bicycle, pedestrian, and transit safety and accessibility. As common road diet practice, a facility with 2 lanes in each direction is converted to one travel lane in each direction, with a center left turn lane, without much loss of capacity. The narrowing of lanes and/or reduction of the number of lanes will slow traffic and potentially allow room for bicycle lanes, widened sidewalks, pedestrian refuge islands, and/or street trees. The slowing of traffic can also be beneficial in downtown areas, where access to businesses and other healthy place activities can safely flourish. These measures can be successfully implemented on streets carrying as many as 20,000 vehicles per day.

Removal of on-street parking greatly increases the capacity of a street, thus improving traffic flow and improving safety in congested areas. However, unless adequate alternative parking or suitable transit service is available, removal of on-street parking may cause adverse reactions from affected local businesses and residents. On-street parking removal, even on one side, can often create enough space for bicycle lanes, when warranted, on arterials and collectors. However, on-street parking can help calm traffic by narrowing the travel lane.

Benefits of Road Diet installations may include:

- An overall crash reduction of 19 to 47 percent.
- Reduction of rear-end and left-turn crashes through the use of a dedicated left-turn lane.
- Fewer lanes for pedestrians to cross and an opportunity to install pedestrian refuge islands.
- The opportunity to install bicycle lanes when the cross-section width is reallocated.
- Reduced right-angle crashes as side street motorists must cross only three lanes of traffic instead of four.
- Traffic calming and reduced speed differential, which can decrease the number of crashes and reduce the severity of crashes if they occur.
- The opportunity to allocate the “leftover” roadway width for other purposes, such as on-street parking or transit stops.
- Encouraging a more community-focused, “Complete Streets” environment.
- Simplifying road scanning and gap selection for motorists (especially older and younger drivers) making left turns from or onto the mainline.

Varying the price and time limits of parking is also an important method of controlling traffic. For example, by increasing price and time limits for parking in a particular area, traffic may be reduced.

**Traffic channelization** involves using islands, pavement markings or other means to direct traffic onto specific paths on roadways. This technique increases roadway capacity and, at intersections, can be used to reduce turning conflicts. When used in combination with signalized turning arrows, traffic channelization is especially effective in facilitating turning movements and improving traffic flow.

**Turn restrictions** are a valuable method of improving traffic flow where turning movements impede through traffic and space limitations make individual turning lanes infeasible. Left turn restrictions are most effective when there are a larger number of left turns at an intersection or when through traffic is so heavy the left turns become hazardous or impede progress in the intersection. Right turn restrictions are often used to reduce vehicle/pedestrian conflicts. Turn restrictions could help reduce total road width by eliminating the need for a designated turn lane.

**Street reconstruction**, where narrow intersections or street segments constrict traffic flow, may be the only way to increase its capacity. Cost of reconstruction, however, generally exceeds what is considered a "low cost" improvement.

E. **Transportation Demand Management** actions to reduce peak period vehicular travel can be implemented, where feasible, to assist in reducing traffic congestion and improving air quality.

**Rearranging employee work hours** and student school hours so that they do not coincide with peak period traffic reduces traffic congestion in mornings and evenings and distributes it more evenly throughout the day. Work/school rescheduling is especially useful where large traffic generators are concentrated in a relatively small area. Flexible scheduling, however, often meets with employer or employee resistance and may inhibit carpooling.

**Ridesharing** usually takes the form of carpooling, where participants take turns using their own vehicles and/or pay the driver; and vanpooling, where the van is owned by an organization such as the employer and riders pay for the ride. Ridesharing is most effective when people travel from nearly the same origin to nearly the same destination.

Ridesharing reduces the number of vehicle miles traveled without greatly reducing mobility. With fewer vehicles on the highway system, traffic flow and parking demand are reduced. Fewer vehicle miles driven also mean less energy consumption and air pollution.

Communities can promote ridesharing by urging automobile drivers to carpool, informing employers of ways to encourage employees to carpool, and initiating a matching service for individuals wishing to carpool. Advances in technology have made such matching services much easier. The Student Office of Sustainability at
UW-Eau Claire utilizes an online application to assist prospective carpoolers in making connections with others of similar trip origin and time requirements. Such programs are encouraged at many universities, not only for environmental or traffic congestion reasons, but also to help address with parking issues common on and around campuses. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation manages a program called Wisconsin Rideshare that brings commuters together for carpooling and bicycle commuting.

Development and upgrading of bicycle and pedestrian facilities encourages increased use of these modes and decreases the number of motor vehicles on the road system. On-street and off-street bikeways can be signed or constructed, bicycle parking facilities can be installed near major trip generators, promotional campaigns stressing bicycling or walking as an alternative can be initiated, and pedestrian facilities such as walk lights, overpasses/underpasses, malls, and skywalks can be constructed where pedestrian traffic is heavy. Cities around the world are experiencing successful implementation of bike share programs that increase bicycle mode share and help riders make connections locally and with transit services.

Auto restricted zones discourage vehicles from traveling through specified zones, primarily in the central business district, and decrease congestion in the area by routing traffic around the congested area. If these zones are reconstructed with a pleasing appearance and pedestrian amenities, they can encourage pedestrian travel and improve the quality of the environment in the area. It is important to consider if the capacity of the surrounding roadway is insufficient to handle additional traffic.

Public Transit System

The Eau Claire Transit (ECT) System completed its latest Transit Development Plan in May 2014. The plan determined how well current transit services meet local needs and identified opportunities to improve the transit system. The project included three main tasks. These were:

1. Inventory Existing Conditions and Review Performance of Current Transit Services
2. Evaluate Service Options and Improvements
3. Develop Recommendations

The report includes the following topic areas:

- System Overview
- Peer System Analysis
- Stakeholder Input
- Transit System Observations
- Recommendations
- Partnership Strategies
- Implementation Plan
The report outlines several strategies for future development of the Eau Claire Transit System. The final section of the report outlines how each strategy should be prioritized for implementation over the next five years, as shown in Figure 38.

The “regional service” noted under the Full System Development recommendations of the TDP, refers to making or improving connections with neighboring communities, including improvements to Altoona service, and routes to Menomonie and Chippewa Falls. While service between Eau Claire and Menomonie was briefly attempted by Dunn County Transit, it is expected that a more serious attempt with adequate marketing and carefully designed routing and scheduling should be considered. Service between Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire, through and including the Village of Lake Hallie, is an important factor in providing a complete urban transit system, serving the whole urbanized area. This service was frequently suggested in public input opportunities, and is recommended for further study by the MPO, with cooperation from the cities of Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls, and the Village of Lake Hallie.

The previous Eau Claire Transit System Plan, completed in 2003, identified four service goals with supporting objectives and performance standards to guide both the development and implementation of the plan. The goals, while not specifically included in the 2014 TDP, are still worthy of pursuing. These goals direct the transit system to:

1. Provide safe, effective mobility options throughout the community.
2. Provide cost-efficient and effective transit service to the community.
3. Maintain a strong ridership base and look for opportunities to increase ridership.
4. Increase participation in and influence on planning decisions in Eau Claire.

Additional recommendations that have come through the regional comprehensive planning effort and through general recognition of capital needs, or potential need, by ECT are: (1) the need for a new transfer center, and (2) the possible need for adjustments to make the system work as a feeder system to future passenger rail service in Eau Claire.

The existing transfer center is well past its expected lifespan as a “temporary” structure. After approximately 30 years of use, it is in disrepair and is inadequate to serve the number of buses currently in the system. It is also deficient in terms of ADA accessibility, and provides glaringly few amenities for riders and drivers. The prospect of passenger rail service to the region provides an opportunity for the transit center to be a part of a larger multi-modal transportation center serving passenger rail, bus transit, taxis, intercity buses, airport shuttles, etc. This scenario would also provide for seamless transfers, providing the foundation for the transit system to function as a feeder system to the rail service. A site selection study for a new multi-use development to include a new transit center is currently underway. Early direction from the advisory committee is toward a multi-use building with the transit center as a part. Among other considerations, the benefits of a multi-modal transit/rail facility will be measured against need for the most suitable location for the bus transfer/multi-use facility. The site selection study should be completed early in 2016. In any case, a new transit center is a critical need for the transportation system. UW Eau Claire has also considered some space to meet the needs of their students on lower campus who ride ECT routes 9/19.
The Chippewa Falls Shared-Ride Taxi (SRT) System faces the same funding predicament as similar demand-response systems throughout the state. Unlike fixed route transit, where most increases in demand just add passengers to a bus that is already there, demand response systems see their costs increase as demand increases. The municipality typically reacts by increasing fares and/or limiting service to maintain budget constraints. These actions can often negatively impact the productivity of the system and reflect poorly on overall performance. Unfortunately, there are no simple solutions to address the cost-efficiency of providing demand-response public transportation. Limitations in federal and state public transit funding programs shift more
of the financial burden for municipal transit systems to local funding sources. A broadened base of local revenue support is needed to address local transit needs. In addition to the standard local sources of municipal funds and user fees, increased marketing efforts could be pursued to increase ridership and to develop public/private partnerships with local employers and retailers who recognize the community value of the transit system and are willing to participate in a cost sharing venture that contributes to community livability.

For all transit services, unstable federal and local support, and resulting fluctuations in local cost share levels, make it difficult to provide a stable and reliable service over time. Local budgets are typically constrained, making the maintenance of the current system challenging, much less meeting the increasing demands that are likely in future decades. This all leads to the recommendation for the establishment of a Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). An RTA would ideally take local transit funding off the cities’ general budget and provide a more reliable and dedicated source of funding through sales tax revenues in the RTA district. (This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.)

**Specialized Transportation**

The funding and programmatic limitations of specialized transportation services are not unique to the Chippewa-Eau Claire MPA. Special transportation providers statewide are seeking increased funding and efficiencies of service to try to accommodate the unmet needs of specialized transit users. Specialized transportation services within the planning area are coordinated through service contracts, cooperative agreements, and countywide transportation coordinating committee activities. Improved special transportation services will require increased levels of funding and increased efficiencies through improved cooperation and coordination between specialized transportation providers.

The last federal transportation act, MAP-21, followed by the current FAST Act in December 2015, requires the development of public transit/human services transportation plans to help ensure the coordination and efficient delivery of specialized transportation services. The WCWRPC transportation staff worked jointly with the Center for Independent Living of Western Wisconsin (CILWW) to assist the counties in completing these plans in 2013. Coordination plans have been developed through this partnership for the counties in the west central region, with the exception of Eau Claire County, which chose to develop the plan on their own, and outside the region where joint ADRC relationships warranted it. All of the county plans are available on the WisDOT website.

One shortcoming repeatedly heard at coordination meetings, is the need to simplify the system for riders, reducing confusion over multiple programs and encouraging mobility, both in the rural and the urban areas. It is recommended that further examination be made into the feasibility of establishing a single point of contact for trip information at least throughout the urbanized area. The single contact would have a good knowledge of all available programs and be able to give clear and concise direction to anyone
needing a ride in, and well beyond, the urbanized area. Like other models in the state, such as “Making the Ride Happen” in the Appleton area, this one-stop shop concept could evolve into a larger role, as appropriate, potentially becoming a centralized dispatching center for a fully-coordinated system of specialized transportation services in the Chippewa Valley and west central Wisconsin.

Another common need expressed in the coordination planning process is the need for more rural and cross-boundary services. Significant need has been shown specifically for medical trips to veterans’ medical facilities in the Twin Cities, general public transportation from rural areas of Eau Claire County into Eau Claire, and from Chippewa Falls to businesses in the Village of Lake Hallie.

The volunteer driver services coordinated by the Center for Independent Living of Western Wisconsin (CILWW) have provided a safety net for those persons who fall through the cracks of the other established programs, either due to eligibility issues or due to the nature or destination of their trip. This program cannot cover all of these needs, however, and further regional coordination is needed to determine how regional needs can be further met. The CILWW program, originally funded through the New Freedom Program (now under Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities - Section 5310) is also facilitating regional coordination meetings and, in this arena, intends to continue identifying gaps in services and shortcomings of the specialized transportation system.

**Bicycle Facilities**

The bicycle transportation recommendations for improvements to the proposed bikeway system would pave shoulders on the rural road network as reconstruction is needed, increase the capacity on urban streets to accommodate a wide curb lane/bike lane where possible as reconstruction is needed, and develop 35 additional miles of new bike paths throughout the planning area. Specific recommendations for improved roadway maintenance and the installation of bicycle-safe storm drainage grates and rubberized railroad crossings appear in the City of Eau Claire’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Additional recommended improvements to supporting facilities include adding bicycle parking facilities. A Chippewa Valley Bike Map has been developed to help bicycle commuters/riders select a safe and direct route to their destination, as recommended in the last long range transportation plan. That map has proved to be quite popular and can be found, in four sections, in Chapter IV of this document.

This plan supports the recommendations of the bicycle plans adopted by the cities of Eau Claire, Altoona, and Chippewa Falls, as well as the connections between the urban systems and to the trail system in the rural areas – these can be seen in the Chippewa Valley Bike Map sections in Chapter IV (Maps 22-25). Further, it is recommended that more regional bicycle planning efforts occur to link the communities, regionally, and to traverse barriers to bicycling within the urbanized area. Three specific recommendations along these lines include: (1) the completion of an urbanized area bicycle plan; (2) the closing of the gap in the Chippewa River Trail, an important link between Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls and the only gap in the approximately 65 mile stretch from Durand to

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Cornell; and (3) to pursue the potential for a grade separated crossing of Interstate 94 between the USH 53 and STH 93 interchanges. Significant development to the south of I-94 has created new demand for local trips of all modes, with particular barriers to bikes and pedestrians. (A local route for autos may also relieve pressure on the USH 53/Golf Road interchange.)

Public input comments regarding desired bicycle system improvements can be found in Appendix H. A number of general policy recommendations were suggested and warrant mention here. These recommendations include: (1) a policy that would require more and carefully-sited bicycle racks, particularly in the downtown areas – Eau Claire has such a policy and Chippewa Falls and Altoona would benefit from one; (2) the adoption of a “complete streets” policy by counties and municipalities in the planning area; (3) where traffic signals are activated by a vehicle being present, include a system that can be activated by a bicycle; (4) consider lowering speeds on arterials that pass through residential and other heavily-bicycled areas.

Other suggestions that have not been directly addressed in previous recommendations, but are expected to be addressed as a part of the recommended urbanized area bicycle plan include: (1) additional connections from the downtown and campus areas to the south side of Eau Claire; (2) attention to a grid pattern of bicycle routes to provide safe and direct access to all parts of the urbanized area; (3) attention to bicycling from a commuter perspective, in addition to recreational biking; and (4) a coordinated system of wayfinding throughout the urbanized area.

**Pedestrian Facilities**

Sidewalk improvements are normally incorporated with street and highway construction/reconstruction projects and, as such, should be planned for and financed as part of street projects. A more diligent adherence to municipal sidewalk policies is recommended to ensure the uniform installation and maintenance of sidewalks throughout the urbanized area. Particular attention should be focused on areas of high pedestrian/vehicular traffic to ensure that the appropriate pedestrian safety mechanisms are in place. These may include signed and marked walkways through areas of joint pedestrian/vehicle usage, adequate timing of walk lights and pedestrian signals with a countdown display feature at signalized intersections, and special pedestrian facilities such as bridges, overpasses, and underpasses at select locations where needed to safely facilitate pedestrian crossings.

Improvements to the rural road system to address vehicular safety and travel needs also provide an improved level of safety for joint usage by bicyclists and pedestrians. The same recommendations to widen travel lanes and add paved shoulders to improve road conditions for vehicular travel also improve the facility for use by bicyclists and pedestrians on lower traffic volume roads.

While many pedestrian and bicycle improvements should be an integral part of highway improvement projects, the MPO supports member municipalities in applications for funding to plan for and improve both pedestrian and bicycle safety and to increase
pedestrian and bicycle usage in the MPA. As mentioned earlier, the federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program has been a good source of funding for planning, infrastructure improvements, education, and enforcement aimed at safe bicycle and pedestrian activity in the vicinity of K-8 schools. Under MAP-21, SRTS funding was grouped into the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), along with Transportation Enhancements and Recreational Trails programs, and continues to fund SRTS plans throughout the urbanized area.

Planning for and improvement of bicycling and walking facilities in the urbanized area continues to be a driving force in the increase of these activities, with benefits far beyond the transportation system. Improved pedestrian and bicycle connections to create a continuous and seamless pedestrian system will help create a more walkable, bikeable, and healthy community.

**Intercity Passenger Transportation**

The impact of a broad range of economic and political forces has limited the modal options available to residents of the MPA for intercity travel. The lack of choices, as well as the convenience and accessibility of the automobile has made it the preferred choice to accommodate these travel needs. The intercity bus service currently available through Greyhound Bus Lines and Jefferson Lines meets the needs of some travelers, but proportionally few of those who have another option choose to use the service. While the change in Chippewa Valley Airport flight connections, from the Twin Cities to Chicago, has increased usage, air travel is still more appropriate for longer trips, typically over 500 miles.

The continued, though slowed, growth of automotive travel will place a greater emphasis on the safety and efficiency of the state's highway system. The state's highway system will continue to require increased efforts to preserve the system and provide the necessary improvements. Improved year-round maintenance activities and preservation treatments, along with added capacity where needed, are recommended for the statewide highway system. Major intercity corridors passing through the planning area that are recommended for improvement include I-94, USH 53, and USH 12.

Passenger rail is seeing a significant resurgence across the nation. While study continues on a high-speed rail route connecting Chicago and the Twin Cities, through La Crosse, the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition is hard at work to advance the Eau Claire corridor into service. Current efforts are in the development of a public/private partnership with the goal of providing passenger rail service between Eau Claire (and possibly Chippewa Falls) and the Twin Cities, noted as a high-priority route in the Minnesota State Rail Plan. It is recommended that the public private partnership model be further examined and implemented as deemed feasible. The ultimate goal still has Eau Claire on a Chicago-Twin Cities route, perhaps at speeds at or above 110 mph maximum currently being implemented in most areas of the country. This longer range goal should be pursued along this corridor in the future, a more favorable route for higher speed service, with straighter alignment, lower freight traffic, strong ridership base, and less environmental impact than the current Amtrak route through La Crosse.
This plan recommends that study continue and public/private funding options continue to be pursued to further this effort.

It is also recommended that the City of Eau Claire consider the likely need for a passenger rail station with a downtown location. A downtown train station should be either co-located with or linked with appropriate service to the recommended Eau Claire Transit transfer center. The careful linkage of these two modes, along with other regional transportation services could greatly advance the area toward many city and regional goals concerning the development of a higher density, vital, walkable environment in the downtown area.

The Chippewa Valley Regional Airport Authority has continued to pursue improvements to the airport in an effort to attract additional air passenger service. These efforts should be continued to expand upon intercity passenger travel options currently available to prospective air travelers.

**Access to Air Transportation Facilities**

The only problem affecting highway access to the Chippewa Valley Regional Airport in the past was alleviated with the completion of the USH 53 bypass and the extension of Melby Street. Congestion and safety problems on the former USH 53 alignment justified the need for the major highway improvement. The completion of this project in 2006 eliminated any potential problem with access to the airport resulting from traffic congestion on the old USH 53 alignment. The connecting arterial street system should continue to be maintained as conditions warrant. Bus service to the airport could also be improved with more frequency and better coordination with flight times.

Adjoining land use activities can have a significant impact on airport operations. Development activities around the airport should be regulated to maintain the operational effectiveness of the airport.

**Freight Rail Transportation**

The deficiencies identified for the freight rail system in the planning area revolve around the impacts of at-grade rail/street crossings on the safety and operational efficiency of both transportation systems. Of the six rail crossing crashes from 2004 through 2014, five occurred at locations with railroad crossing signals. This indicates that infrastructure inadequacy is not the sole culprit. Only one of the six crashes occurred at a crossing that only had stop signs.

In addition to the re-evaluation of the adequacy of railroad crossing warning devices, the preferred elimination of at-grade crossings, where warranted, would further contribute to the safety and operational efficiency of both the rail and road systems. The closure of crossings, however, needs to be carefully examined from both safety and access perspectives. Closures should not significantly isolate or divide neighborhoods, force overly circuitous routing for auto, bus, bicycle, or pedestrian travelers, or endanger residents by slowing response times for emergency vehicles.
Grade separation should be considered when warranted by roadway traffic volumes, train frequency or crossing disruption, or other site-specific safety concerns. The City of Eau Claire is considering a grade separation on Galloway Street, near Banbury Place to improve Galloway as a major entrance to the downtown. Land use planning and development activities play an important role in determining how well the transportation system functions. Development patterns influence transportation system usage and can conflict with the intended purpose of the transportation facility. Land uses that require rail service should be located within close proximity to existing rail lines to avoid costly and disruptive rail line extensions. To preserve the integrity of the existing rail system, and to accommodate potential new passenger rail service, new development should be planned and designed to avoid or minimize the need for additional at-grade street/rail line crossings.

**Freight Transportation - Truck**

The predominance of trucking in the freight shipping industry is reflected in the freight movement activities in the MPA. The importance of a sound street and highway system is vital to the efficiency of truck freight shipping. The street and highway improvement recommendations developed earlier in this chapter address the primary infrastructure needs of truck freight movement in the planning area. In addition to the recommended internal road improvements, intercity corridor improvements to I-94, USH 53, and USH 12 are essential to maintaining connectivity in the movement of freight throughout the state and country. The intercity infrastructure improvement recommendations apply to both the movement of people and goods.

An additional recommendation to improve freight movement within the planning area would be the designation and signing of truck routes to more efficiently guide truck shipments to destinations within the MPA. An intermodal facility established by Canadian National in Chippewa Falls has provided rail access to a number of area businesses and industries, particularly Menards, linking truck and rail freight shipments within the planning area to major transcontinental ports. The continuation and expanding use of this facility is recommended where the result is a reduction of trucks on the area highways.

**Land Use**

The connection between land use and the transportation system serving the metropolitan planning area is evident in the influence each has exerted in contributing to the expansion and development of the other. The development of either one serves as a catalyst for the growth of the other. The transportation system will continue to grow, although not at the same rate, as the urban area continues to expand.

The land use and growth management issues identified in Chapter III can also be viewed as a summary deficiency analysis for the negative effects of uncoordinated and uncontrolled development. The six overlapping growth management issues impacting both land use patterns and the transportation system are summarized there through the
discussions on urban sprawl, the cost-efficiency of providing public services, environmental protection, public safety, social equality, and jurisdictional rivalry.

It is appropriate at this point to reiterate the goal and objectives identified in Chapter VI of this report that address the land use/transportation connection and to recommend adherence to these guidelines for promoting effective land use planning and growth management in concert with an efficient transportation system.

**Goal III Practice and encourage the joint planning of transportation facilities and services with land use development plans and policies.**

**Objectives:**
A. Provide a transportation system which encourages growth patterns consistent with regional and local land use policies and plans.
B. Promote higher-density development in the urban core.
C. Promote infill and redevelopment in major transportation corridors and along transit routes.
D. Ensure that the design of new subdivisions, offices and commercial centers within the existing transit service area will include access for transit vehicles and accessible walkways from potential bus stops.
E. Preserve and protect the functional utility of the highway system by coordinating land use and the proper degree of access control.
F. Review and incorporate transportation plans and policies in the development and administration of zoning and subdivision regulations.
G. Encourage growth in those areas that can be served by existing or planned transportation facilities and discourage development that is not compatible with existing or planned transportation facilities.
H. Promote the development of concentrated commercial, industrial, and institutional employment areas that incorporate shared parking areas and appropriate access control.
I. Encourage the continuation of a coordinated and cooperative land use/transportation planning process between municipalities and governmental agencies participating in the MPO.
J. Facilitate the creation and adoption of land use/transportation planning policies which consider ecosystem sustainability and the protection of critical natural resources, in balance with the development needs of the community.

There are also a number of land use goals and objectives that are included in the West Central Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Plan, adopted on September 9, 2010, that are pertinent to this section and to the Metropolitan Planning Area. They are summarized in the following:
Goal I:  
(Regional Comp Plan, Land Use Element)

Our land use patterns will reflect: distinct urban centers of sustainable, mixed-use design, efficient and cost-effective infrastructure and services, and multi-modal transportation options; and rural areas where working lands, natural resources, and traditional rural character are preserved.

Objectives:
A. Land use practices should maximize economies of services and infrastructure; reduce negative impacts on the environment, economic activity, and society; promote community identity; and employ incentives to achieve desired land use patterns.
B. Organize land use around vital, efficient activity centers with effective multi-modal transportation connections and systems.
C. Promote pedestrian-oriented mixed uses, traditional neighborhood design, and infill development for urban areas.
D. Encourage growth in those areas that can be served by existing or planned transportation facilities and discourage development that is not compatible with existing or planned transportation facilities.
E. Promote the development of concentrated commercial, industrial and institutional employment areas that incorporate shared parking areas and appropriate access control.
F. Encourage the continuation of a coordinated and cooperative land use/transportation planning process between municipalities and governmental agencies participating in the MPO.
G. Facilitate the creation and adoption of land use/transportation planning policies which consider ecosystem sustainability and the protection of critical natural resources.

The following policy recommendations are also included in the Regional Comprehensive Plan land use element and are of particular relevance to the relationship between land use and transportation systems in the MPA:

West Central Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Plan
Land Use Element

Policy Recommendations
• Transportation systems impact land use, and vice versa. Land use and proposed transportation projects need to be planned concurrently.
• Coordination between different levels of government to enhance urban centers and develop multi-modal transportation potential.
• Optimize multi-modal connectivity within and between communities.
• Evaluate higher urban density potential to promote transportation alternatives, such as light rail and intercity transit.

Sustainability and Livability

There are a number of efforts underway at every level of government and engaging much of the private sector to promote and implement concepts and projects to make our communities more livable and environmentally sustainable. One large, multi-
departmental (HUD, DOT, and EPA), federal initiative, the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, was formed in 2009 with a mission to “...ensure that housing and transportation goals are met while simultaneously protecting the environment, promoting equitable development, and helping to address the challenges of climate change.” As is typically the case in such initiatives, transportation plays a major role in that mission.

Climate change is caused by greenhouse gases, and greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector primarily involve fossil fuels burned for road, rail, air, and marine transportation. Almost all (95%) of the world’s transportation energy comes from petroleum-based fuels, largely gasoline and diesel. In 2013, greenhouse gas emissions from transportation accounted for about 27% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, making it the second largest contributor of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions after the electricity sector. This plan recommends reducing transportation emissions, in large part through the improvement of alternative mode options to transfer auto trips to walking, bicycle, bus, and passenger rail. In order for them to be more broadly adopted by citizens, these alternative modes need to be safe, convenient, effective, and affordable. Other supportive recommendations, such as compact land use and economically healthy and active city centers help to make alternative modes viable. A recommendation for improving compact land use is reducing or eliminating required parking minimums, as parking takes up substantial space in urban areas. For perspective on emission reductions, scientists have determined that humanity needs to move to a zero-carbon society by 2050.

While many sustainability and livability programs address the environmental health of our communities and the residents of those communities, much of the popularity of “green” programs lies in the fact that communities have recognized that there are economic benefits to a green community. Livability is a key factor in the location decisions of young professionals, and it is therefore a key factor in attracting companies that will want to hire and retain the best young professionals. A number of transportation-related factors rank high in these important economic decisions, including a walkable and bikeable urban setting with good public transit. Both professionals and the companies that hire them are also showing an affinity for rail options for intercity trips, allowing the employee to be productive during their travel time to out of town meetings and on daily commutes.

The City of Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan and the West Central Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Plan both have elements addressing livability, sustainability, and/or energy that have been incorporated into the transportation and land use recommendations included in this plan. The implementation of these recommendations would take the Chippewa-Eau Claire MPA well down the road to being a more sustainable, livable, and desirable place for economic development and growth in the coming decades. The following is a selection of the recommendations in the two noted plans, as well as this plan, incorporating elements of sustainability and livability:
Environmental Justice Considerations

This Long Range Transportation Plan update and the transportation system improvement recommendations presented in this chapter, are in compliance with the environmental justice considerations enumerated in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, Section 109 (h) of Title 23 of NEPA; the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended; the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century; and other applicable U.S. DOT statutes and regulations. These regulations pertaining to environmental justice can be summarized in the following three fundamental environmental justice principles:

- To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations.
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially-affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.

Sustainability and Livability Recommendations

- Encourage growth in those areas that can be served by existing or planned transportation facilities and discourage development that is not compatible with existing or planned transportation facilities.
- Facilitate the creation and adoption of land use/transportation planning policies which consider ecosystem sustainability and the protection of critical natural resources.
- Evaluate higher urban density potential to promote transportation alternatives, such as light rail and intercity transit.
- Optimize multi-modal connectivity within and between communities.
- Inventory and coordinate park-and-ride lots and carpooling program development in appropriate locations and the revenue to support and maintain them.
- Coordinate a transit service system that interacts effectively region-wide, accommodating trips within and beyond the MPA.
- Continue development of regional bike facilities, both on and off road, for recreation and utilitarian trip purposes.
- Improve pedestrian connections to create a continuous and seamless pedestrian system, and enhance the pedestrian environment to create a more walkable community through human-scaled urban design, safe crossing signalization where appropriate, and traffic calming measures appropriate to urban arterial and collector corridors.
- Encourage Safe Routes to School planning and plan implementation in the MPA.
- Participate in efforts to implement passenger rail service connecting west central Wisconsin to the Twin Cities and southeastward to Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago.
- Determine locations for multi-modal transfer sites within the Region (e.g. bicycle, pedestrian, rail, auto, transit).
- Ensure consideration of all transportation modes in development review processes and ordinances.
- Promote best design, fiscal, and management practices for carbon negative energy, food, and transportation systems.
- Actively work with municipalities and counties to ensure existing and future urban and suburban development be designed in a way that does not solely require automobile dependency and that allows for accessible mass transit and non-motorized modes of transportation.
• To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

To ensure that the Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO is able to effectively adhere to these principles, the following actions have been taken to comply with the environmental justice considerations (refer to Environmental Justice Analysis on page 29 and accompanying Maps 6 through 9):

• The MPO has enhanced its analytical capabilities through the application of expanded census databases and geographic information systems (GIS) technology. In cooperation with urban area municipalities, the MPO is able to maintain more accurate and up-to-date land use information that is incorporated into the transportation planning process. The MPO, in cooperation with WisDOT, has updated and improved its traffic modeling capabilities to identify transportation system deficiencies and to evaluate the traffic impacts of improvement alternatives.

• By applying the improved analytical capabilities identified previously, the MPO is better able to identify the residential location of minority and low-income populations in relationship to places of employment, education, medical services, child care, shopping, public transit service, and the travel patterns of the urban population on the street and highway system. The mapping of the recommended transportation system improvement projects, as well as public transit routing, also enables the MPO to evaluate their potential impact on the minority and low-income populations in the urban area. The results of this evaluation provide the MPO with the confidence that the recommended transportation projects and services developed in the plan do not represent disproportionately high and adverse impacts on the urban area’s minority and low-income populations. In fact, the identified urban area-wide improvements to transportation-related air quality, safety, and mobility provided through the implementation of the plan’s recommendations indicate an overall benefit to the entire urban population.

• The MPO’s actions to facilitate a participatory public involvement process are addressed in detail in its Public Involvement Plan, which is reviewed annually and updated as necessary. In addition to the direct public involvement actions employed by the MPO in its planning and programming process, the MPO also relies on the public involvement processes of its member units of government and transportation providers and partners to ensure the public the opportunity for input into the transportation decision-making process.

With the minimal needs for capacity expansion, there is little likelihood for disproportionate impact on any protected populations in the urbanized area. Recommendations for improvements for bicycle, transit, and pedestrian facilities benefit all populations. Consultation with our environmental justice contacts will continue as projects progress through planning and development stages.

The following maps, 42-45 show environmental justice populations – minority, elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income – with future highway projects.
Chippewa - Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area 2015 - 2045

Chippewa County
Eau Claire County

Minority Population and Future Projects

Percent Minority Population of Block Group, 2013

- 0% - 4.99%
- 5% - 9.99%
- 10% - 14.99%
- 15% - 19.99%
- 20% - 25.23%

Future Projects
- Committed
- Planned
- Potential (further study required)

Committed Projects
1. Short St: Bridge to STH 37
2. CTH AA: House to USH 12
3. Bartlett: 10th to 7th
4. Melby - 1 15th to Victor
5. Park Ave: Main to 0.75 mi. west
6. CTH S: USH 53 east 1640 ft.
7. Half Moon Lake Bridge
8. UP RR Bridge: Eddy St
9. Paint Creek Bridge: 195th
10. Otter Creek Bridge: AA
11. Spring Street Bridge
12. I-94/Wobbs Rd

Planned Projects
13. Gateway Dr.
14. CTH AA: Gateway Dr. to House Rd.
15. USH 12: Winchester to Schultz
16. USH 12: 3rd to Winchester
17. Bike trail gap

Potential Projects
18. I-94 Interchange at CTH E
19. USH 53: River Prairie to STH 312
20. USH 53 Frontage road
21. Crossing of I-94

Source:
West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
U.S. Census American Community Survey 2013 5-year estimates
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
MPO Municipalities

City of Chippewa Falls Inset
City of Eau Claire Inset

Note: The map shows a detailed planning area with various projects and infrastructure improvements planned for the Chippewa - Eau Claire metropolitan area from 2015 to 2045. It includes information on minority population percentages and future projects categorized as committed, planned, and potential. The map also highlights specific areas such as Chippewa Falls, Chippewa County, Eau Claire County, Lake Wissota, and the Chippewa River, among others.
Chippewa - Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area 2015 - 2045

City of Chippewa Falls Inset

City of Eau Claire Inset

Map 43

Elderly Population and Future Projects

Percent Elderly Population of Block Group, 2013

- 0% - 4.99%
- 5% - 9.99%
- 10% - 14.99%
- 15% - 19.99%
- 20% - 25.95%

Future Projects

Committed Projects

1. Short St: Bridge to STH 37
2. CTH AA: House to USH 12
3. Bartlett: 10th to 7th
4. Melby - 1.15th to Victor
5. Park Ave: Main to 0.75 mi. west
6. CTH S: USH 53 east 1640 ft.
7. Half Moon Lake Bridge
8. UP RR Bridge: Eddy St
9. Paint Creek Bridge: 195th
10. Otter Creek Bridge: AA
11. Spring Street Bridge
12. I-94/Hobbs Rd

Planned Projects

13. Gateway Dr.
14. CTH AA: Gateway Dr. to House Rd.
15. USH 12: Winchester to Schultz
16. USH 12: 3rd to Winchester
17. Bike trail gap

Potential Projects

18. I-94 Interchange at CTH E
19. USH 53: River Prairie to STH 312
20. USH 53 Frontage road
21. Crossing of I-94

Source:
West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
U.S. Census American Community Survey 2013 5-year estimates
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
MPO Municipalities

City of Eau Claire Inset

Lake Wissota
Lake Altoona
Chippewa River
Half Moon Lake
Lake Hallie
Eau Claire
Chippewa County
Eau Claire County

Committed Projects

Planned Projects

Potential Projects
Map 44
Population of Persons with Disabilities and Future Projects

Percent Disabled Population (Ages 18 and over) of Block Group, 2013

- 0% - 4.99%
- 5% - 9.99%
- 10% - 14.99%
- 15% - 19.99%
- 20% - 24.99%
- 25% - 39.77%

Future Projects
Committed
Planned
Potential (further study required)

Committed Projects
1. Short St: Bridge to STH 37
2. CTH AA: House to USH 12
3. Bartlett: 10th to 7th
4. Melby - 1 15th to Victor
5. Park Ave: Main to 0.75 mi. west
6. CTH S: USH 53 east 1640 ft.
7. Half Moon Lake Bridge
8. UP RR Bridge: Eddy St
9. Paint Creek Bridge: 195th
10. Otter Creek Bridge: AA
11. Spring Street Bridge
12. 194/Hobbs Rd

Planned Projects
13. Gateway Dr.
14. CTH AA: Gateway Dr. to House Rd.
15. USH 12: Winchester to Schultz
16. USH 12: 3rd to Winchester
17. Bike trail gap

Potential Projects
18. I-94 Interchange at CTH E
19. USH 53: River Prairie to STH 312
20. USH 53 Frontage road
21. Crossing of I-94

Source:
West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
U.S. Census American Community Survey 2013 5-year estimates
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
MPO Municipalities
Low-Income Population and Future Projects
Percent Low-Income Households of Block Group, 2013

- 0% - 9.99%
- 10% - 19.99%
- 20% - 29.99%
- 30% - 39.99%
- 40% +

Future Projects
- Committed
- Planned
- Potential (further study required)

Committed Projects
1. Short St: Bridge to STH 37
2. CTH AA: House to USH 12
3. Bartlett: 10th to 7th
4. Melby - 115th to Victor
5. Park Ave: Main to 0.75 mi. west
6. CTH S: USH 53 east 1640 ft.
7. Half Moon Lake Bridge
8. LP RR Bridge: Eddy St
9. Paint Creek Bridge: 150th
10. Otter Creek Bridge: AA
11. Spring Street Bridge
12. I-94/Hobbs Rd

Planned Projects
13. Gateway Dr.
14. CTH AA: Gateway Dr. to House Rd.
15. USH 12: Winchester to Schulz
16. USH 12: 3rd to Winchester
17. Bike trail gap

Potential Projects
18. I-94 Interchange at CTH E
19. USH 53: River Prairie to STH 312
20. USH 53 Frontage road
21. Crossing of I-94

Source:
West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
U.S. Census American Community Survey 2013 5-year estimates
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
MPO Municipalities