

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

EXISTING TRANSPORTATION

Highways. Where railroads once interconnected all of the County's Cities and Villages and breathed life into virtually all of them except Austin, they have been almost replaced by highways, which do not always provide the economic development support that was once afforded by rail. Those cities that are fortunate enough to be located on a State highway have generally fared better economically than those that are located on lesser roadways.

While rail crisscrossed the County diagonally, taking the shortest distances between urban railheads, the highway system generally forms a gridiron pattern following section lines. Many of the County's roads and highways provide little more than local access while others carry relatively large volumes of traffic over longer distances. Essentially, County highways are farm to market roadways that are needed to get products to market.

Mower County has a number of major highways including Interstate 90, U.S. Trunk Highways 218 and 63 and State Trunk Highways 105, 56, 251 and 16. No immediate improvements are proposed to these major highways and none of them are operating at anything near capacity. All of the remainder of the County system (404.7 miles) is comprised of County Roads and County State Aid Highways (CSAH), which are also operating well within capacity. Most are paved (87%) two lane roadways having a surface width of 22 to 24 feet. Some of these carry between 500 and 1,000 cars per day but most carry much less traffic.

The only other categories of roads are those that are termed "local". These gravel Township roads primarily follow section lines, providing direct access to farmsteads.

According to a recent needs study promulgated by the Minnesota Department of Transportation State Aid Department, upgrading of the present County State Aid Highway System to nine ton capacity would cost \$66 million (1986 dollars not adjusted for inflation), excluding local County roads. Furthermore, all bridges are owned by the County and 75 are classified as deficient. The estimated cost to replace deficient bridges is another \$12 million.

These estimates are based on bringing the present system up to nine ton capacity but there are discussions in St. Paul to require a higher construction standard (10 ton) to accommodate larger trucks. MnDOT is also conducting a State-wide highway functional classification study to be followed by jurisdictional changes which may add up to 15 additional miles to the Mower County highway system via turnback. While generally improved before turnback, these system changes could add appreciable to County capital costs and may warrant the turnback of lesser County roads to the Townships.

Generally speaking, the county roadway system is not in need of expansion. It is in need of substantial rehabilitation and reconstruction at a cost that exceeds the County's available resources.

Aviation. The Austin Municipal Airport is classified as a General Utility Airport serving a variety of business and personal aircraft. It has a single runway 4,800 feet in length. A total of 52 aircraft are currently based at Austin, which accommodated 17,000 operations in 1991. There are no current plans for further airport expansion.

Though a tremendous asset, there are issues related to the Airport, most notable noise and safety. Some land uses are not compatible with take-off and landing zones. Obstructions to airspace are also of concern.

In January of 1978, an Airport Zoning Ordinance was adopted by the Austin-Mower County Joint Airport Zoning Board, which regulates obstructions to airspace and land use safety. It defines airspace zones for the purpose of airspace protection and land use safety zones within which land use is carefully regulated. Safety Zone A, for example, should have no structures and should not have uses, which cause an assembly of people. Permitted uses include such as agriculture, non-spectator recreation, wildlife habitat, cemeteries and automobile parking.

Safety Zone B, however, permits very low intensity uses while excluding places of assembly. There are relatively low intensity residential uses currently located within Airport Safety Zone A.

Rail. The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul, the Chicago Great Western, the Illinois Central, the Winona and Southwestern and the Southern Minnesota Railroads were their original names. They came in the 1860's and 1870's and they bred nodes of urban and economic activity that are today's Cities. Only Austin predated the rail (LeRoy moved to it). The Cities remain but their progenitor is all but gone. Just Austin and Lyle are currently served by rail, its name, the Soo Line.

First the automobile and then the truck began to compete with rail for passengers and product. Highways were subsidized by the Federal government during most of the 20th century much as rail had been favored during the late 19th century.

Since the 1930's, pipelines, aviation and telecommunications have also taken their toll on rail service. Due to increasing competition and diversity, poor management and limited flexibility (fixed route), rail has been relegated to a relatively minor transportation role, a role that seems destined to continue to shrink, given our preference for immediate and direct service via highways.

Can rail ever be resurrected as a major transportation system element? Probably not until priorities and tastes change. We have tasted the apple and have deemed it to be neither evil nor disposable. The auto and truck will continue to be the predominant mode of transit in the foreseeable future, especially in rural areas such as Mower County.

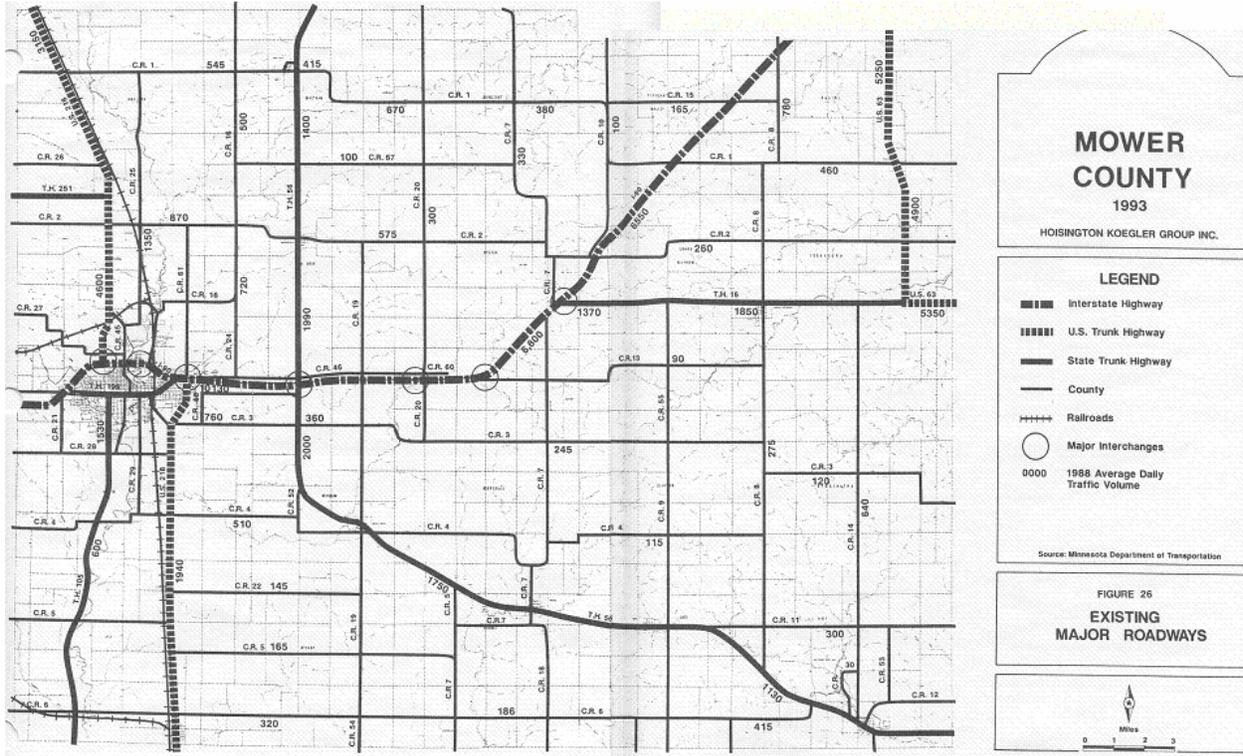
Public Transit. Only the City of Austin currently provides a circulator or fixed route bus service to its residents. Dial-A-Ride is provided to Austin and its environs between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. by the Senior Center. Volunteers in Motion and the Mower Council for the Handicapped cooperate to provide a limited transit service for handicapped residents. Mower County plays no current role in the delivery of public transit services. It does assist with the purchase of buses for senior citizens.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Objectives

1. Maintenance of a balanced transportation system comprised of highways, rail, aviation and limited public transit.
2. Establishment of a safe and efficient roadway system that provides for optimum accessibility throughout the County and to major activity centers in adjoining Counties and throughout the State.
3. Development of a County highway system that is appropriate and supportive of the rural lifestyle, the transport of agricultural products to market and economic development of the County's Cities.
4. Continuing maintenance and upgrading of the County highway system to protect the public's investment in infrastructure.
5. Support for improved mobility for all County residents including the transit dependent.
6. The maximum of aviation safety and efficiency.

EXISTING MAJOR ROADWAYS



Transportation Plan Elements

Roadway Plans

The roadways plan is a hierarchical system consisting of arterials, collectors and local roads and highways. Arterials and collectors comprise the major roadway system of State and County highways. The local road system includes every public road that is not classified as major. Major roadways are intended to be paved. Local roads are not, though they are intended to be maintained adequately at all times to facilitate access. Local roads are generally so low in traffic volume as not to warrant hard surfacing.

The roadway system is further broken down into principal arterials, arterials, major collectors, collectors and local roads as follows:

Principal Arterial. The County has only one highway classified as a principal arterial, that being Interstate 90. Interstate 90 is intended to be primarily for long distance rather than local travel. It is also intended to carry relatively high volumes of traffic at higher speeds and have few well-spaced, grade-separated intersections. This roadway classifications intended to be maintained by the State of Minnesota.

Arterials. These comprise the remainder of the arterial roadway system including trunk Highway 218, Trunk Highway 56, Trunk Highway 63 and Trunk Highway 16. They carry relatively higher volumes of traffic at higher speeds over relatively long distances. Access is intended to be carefully controlled and well spaced to maximize traffic safety and efficiency.

Major Collectors. These are moderate volume continuous roads that generally interconnect cities and carry traffic to or between arterial roadways. With some exceptions, they are County State Aid Highways and access is intended to be controlled and well spaced.

Collectors. These are or are intended to be paved County roads that carry moderate to low volumes of traffic to or between arterial and major collector roads.

Locals. These are primarily for direct service and access to farmsteads. They carry very low traffic volumes at low speeds relatively short distances between collector roadways. These comprise the entire Township system plus lesser County roads.

**TABLE 26
ROADWAYS FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION**

	PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL		MAJOR COLLECTOR		LOCAL
	ARTERIAL	ARTERIAL	COLLECTOR	COLLECTOR	LOCAL
Direct Land Access	None	Limited	Direct/Spaced	Direct	Direct
Traffic Volumes (ADT)	5-20,000	2-10,000	500-5,000	100-500	Under 100
Trip Length Performed	Over 20 mi	5-20 mi	5-10 mi	2-6 mi	2 mi
Place Connections	Interconnect Regions	Interconnect Major Cities	Interconnect Cities	Interconnect Subareas within County	Interconnect Farms/Residences
Spacing	N/A	N/A	4-6 mi	2-3 mi	1 mi or less
Intersections	Grade Separate	Signals/Signage	Signals/Signage	Signage	As needed
System Access	To Arterials & Collectors	To Collectors	To Collectors & Local	To Collectors & Local	To Collectors & Local
Access Spacing (same side of road)	Crossroads Only	Crossroads Only	0.25 mi	1,000 ft	N/A

**TABLE 27
ROADWAY DESIGN STANDARDS**

DESIGN ELEMENT	PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL				MAJOR COLLECTOR				LOCAL	
	ARTERIAL		ARTERIAL		COLLECTOR		COLLECTOR		LOCAL	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Number of Traffic Lanes	4	4	4	2-4	4	2-4	2-4	2	2	2
Traffic Lane Width (ft)	12	12	12	12	12	12	10-12	10-12	10	10
Minimum Surface Width (ft)	48	48	32-52	32	24	22	24	22	10	10
Shoulder Width (ft)	N/A	N/A	8-10	8	8	2	2-4	2	2	2
Minimum R-O-W Width (ft)	150to 300		100	100	80	66	66	66	66	66
Design Speed (mph)	Legal	Limit	40-50	50	35-40	50	35-40	40	30	30

**TABLE 28
PROPOSED COUNTY ROAD IMPROVEMENTS**

Road Segment	Description	Construction Schedule
CSAH 1	Base & Bituminous – 2.4 miles (TH 218 to CSAH 25)	2002
CSAH 6	Base & Bituminous – 2.0 miles (W. County Line to TH 105)	2002
CSAH 20	Base & Bituminous – 2.0 miles (I-90 to CSAH 3)	2002
CSAH 27	Reconstruction – TH 218 to CSAH 45	2002
CSAH 2	Cold Inplace Recycle – 7.5 miles (CSAH 7 to CSAH 8)	2003-2007
CSAH 14	Base & Bituminous – 13.5 miles (Leroy to TH 16)	2003-2007
CSAH 10/1	Base & Bituminous – 7.3 miles (CSAH 2 to N. County Line)	2003-2007
CSAH 36	Regrade – 3.0 miles (CSAH 26 to CSAH 1)	2003-2007
CSAH 12	Reconstruct/Strengthen – 0.5 mile (TH 56 to Iowa Line)	2003-2007
CSAH 46	Rubblize/Overlay – 1.5 miles (I-90 to W. County Line)	2003-2007
CSAH 36	Base & Bituminous – 3.0 miles (CSAH 26 to CSAH 1)	2003-2007
CSAH 45	Reconstruction – 1.7 miles (CSAH 27 to TH 218)	2003-2007
VARIOUS	Municipal State Aid Rehabilitation/Reconstruction	2003-2007

Aviation, Rail and Public Transit Plans

The County plays no role in the delivery of aviation services except to ensure the public's safety. As a member of the Austin-Mower County Joint Airport Zoning Board, it is responsible for the protection of airspace from obstructions and the maintenance of land use safety zones in a manner that minimizes conflicts. It intends no expansion of this limited aviation role. It does intend to cooperate with Freeborn County and the City of Albert Lea to provide improved or joint aviation services and facilities.

The market driven nature of rail versus automobile/truck/aviation will not be influenced by Mower County. The expansion of rail service, though perhaps desirable, will not likely be influenced by anything the County might elect to do. If rail service is to improve, it will be the result of a strong economic development program that will, itself, demand improved rail service.

As the population ages, there will be a growing need for expanded public transit services to rural residents. The County fully intends to cooperate with the agencies responsible for the delivery of such services.

Policies

The following are the County's policies for Transportation:

1. To develop a transportation system that reinforces economic development objectives and provides for the efficient flow of people and goods from farm to market.
2. To pave and maintain all roadways identified as major roadways by the Comprehensive Plan.
3. To employ increasingly environmentally responsible highway maintenance practices.
4. To protect abandoned rail rights-of-way for future public use.
5. To protect airspace from vertical obstructions and land use safety zones from incompatible development.
6. To support the expansion of the Austin Municipal Airport and/or consider cooperative alternative airport expansion models as appropriate to enhance the Mower County economic base.
7. To cooperate in the delivery of public transit services to transit dependent rural residents.
8. Continue to explore cooperative efforts between the County and other jurisdictions in planning, upgrading and constructing roadways.
9. Explore ways to increase service of the Heartland Express to outlying areas of the County.
10. Maintain and increase where possible funding for rural, low-volume roads and bridges.
11. Protect the airport from encroachment of incompatible residential or other land uses through appropriate zoning districts.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

