



## RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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### 3 Transportation

#### Overview

A well-designed and maintained transportation system provides efficient, reliable, and safe ways for residents to get to their businesses, places of work, homes, and schools. A community's transportation system plays an important role in the facilitation of an area's land use, economy and all-around development. This chapter brings an inventory of the existing transportation amenities in Rusk County, including a compilation of objectives, actions, goals, and programs to guide the future development and maintenance of the various transportation facilities in and around Rusk County.

#### 3.1 Modes of Transportation

People and freight fall into three basic categories for transportation. They are **land** (road, rail and pipelines), **air**, and **water** (shipping). Given that Rusk County does not have a port, only land and air will be addressed.

##### Highways/Roads

The road system is perhaps the most important aspect of Rusk County's transportation system, as it is the primary means of transporting people and goods in and through the County, linking it to surrounding areas and communities. Map 3.1 depicts the existing roadway system in Rusk County.

The State of Wisconsin has jurisdiction over 105 miles of state highway in Rusk County including USH 8 and STH 73, 40, 27. These highways serve as the backbone in serving local transportation needs. USH 8 is the main East-West corridor in the County, and STH 27 runs north-south bisecting the County. State Highway 40 runs north-south on the West side of the County (through Bruce), and STH 73 runs North-South and ends in Ingram. Through a contractual agreement with the State of Wisconsin, the Rusk County Highway Department is responsible for maintenance of state highways and right-of-ways.

A network of 255 miles of county highways serves Rusk County's rural areas. County trunk highways serve as major traffic collectors from rural areas and distribute traffic to higher



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volume STH roads. Major east-west highways include County D, P, and O. Major north-south routes include County F, M, E, and G. These and other county highways play an important role in linking the area's agricultural resources to the county's retail and commercial nodes.

Town roads are an important component of the countywide transportation system and serve local development, farming, forestry, and recreation areas. Towns in Rusk County are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of their individual town roads.

There are no designated Rustic Road in Rusk County at this time.

While there has not been any US/State highway bypasses constructed in Rusk County, the potential for a highway bypass within the City of Ladysmith has been mentioned. Concern about traffic congestion and continued land use development along USH 8 is driving the informal and formal discussion about a future bypass.

### **Transit and Transportation for Disabled**

Rusk County and the City of Ladysmith contract with the Indianhead Community Action Agency to provide transportation services for disabled and elderly. A handful of private providers also service the area. The ITS (Indianhead Transit Service) is available by appointment.

As the elderly population continues to grow over the next twenty years, proper planning and funding for countywide transit services will become increasingly important. Existing and future partnerships are critical to ensuring effective and available transit service to all segments of the population.

### **Air Transportation**

The primary airport (public) within the county is the Rusk County Airport. The Rusk County Airport is the only public airport in Rusk County. It has 4,000 and 3,200 ft. paved and lighted runways with a NDB non-precision approach. Services provided include: 100 low-lead and 80 Auto AV gas, 24-hour fuel service, large ramp/tie down area, hangar storage, and computerized weather briefing/flight planning service. The on-site FBO is Pederson Aviation. The airport is operated and available 24 hours a day, but does not have scheduled staffing. All runways are paved and in good condition.



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The Rusk County Airport is classified as a general aviation airport by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. General aviation airports are intended to serve recreational flyers with some air taxi and corporate service. Most small single and twin turbo prop airplanes can access the airport (including King Airs), and some small twin jet aircraft.

There is a Rusk County Airport Zoning Ordinance. The purpose of this ordinance is to regulate the use of property and to regulate and restrict the height of structures and objects of natural growth in the vicinity of the Rusk County Airport. Additionally the ordinance promotes public health, safety, convenience and general welfare to increase safety in the use of the airport and to protect persons and property within the airport affected area and zoning districts.

The closest airports providing scheduled passenger service is the Chippewa Valley Regional Airport (Chippewa County). Much of the airline service provided at Wisconsin's airports is designed to feed into the network of domestic and international destinations at major hubs located at airports such as the General Mitchell International (Milwaukee), Minneapolis-St. Paul International and O'Hare International.

### **Railroads**

Rail service within Rusk County is provided by Canadian National (CN) railroad. The main line runs northwest to southeast through the County, passing through Ladysmith, Conrath, and Sheldon. This line is one of the most active in the State with 25 plus unit trains daily. This line stretches from the West coast of Canada to Chicago and the East coast/Gulf of Mexico.

An additional rail segment crosses the County from east to west, generally parallel to Highway 8. This line too is owned by Canadian National. The segment of rail from Barron to Ladysmith has gone unused for the last 8 years and has been filed for abandonment previously—abandonment is not in progress at the present time. The track from Ladysmith east to Price County has been largely unutilized for the last few years.

### **Trails**

Trails in Rusk County accommodate a variety of uses including walking, biking, hiking, cycling, equestrian, snowmobiling, ATV, and cross-country skiing. These trails provide both recreational opportunities as well as an alternative mode of transportation for some people. Some major trails include: Blue Hills East & West side Trails, Sisters Farm Trails, Ice Age



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National Scenic Trail, and Reclaimed Flambeau Mine Trails.

### Freight Transportation

Freight transportation is available through the county and state highway system and the local road network. In the spring, depending on weather conditions, the Rusk County Highway Department, Wisconsin Department of Transportation and town road officials impose weight restrictions on local roads due to the heaving volatility caused by frost.

Rusk County posts most county trunk highways during spring breakup

### Biking and Pedestrian Transportation

The 2000 US Census data indicates that a miniscule percent of all trips to work in Rusk County were on a bicycle or by walking. This is not surprising, given that the County is rural in nature and the larger service areas do not always accommodate this mode of transportation.

There are however several bike and pedestrian trails in Rusk County for recreational purposes.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation has published and distributed maps through the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin that classify state and county roads throughout the state in terms of bicycling conditions. It also identifies bicycle trails and mountain bike facilities and provides contacts for local bicycle route information. Town roads are not rated for their bicycling conditions but are identified with their road names and surface type. WisDOT worked in partnership with the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin (BFW) to produce a 2005 update of the Wisconsin Bicycle Maps. The Rusk County bicycling conditions map can be viewed at <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/travel/bike-foot/docs/bikeRusk.pdf>

Pedestrian travel is available on a number of designated trails throughout Rusk County that accommodate a variety of uses including walking, biking, hiking, cross country skiing, snowmobiling, and ATV use. See Utilities and Community Facilities for information on trails.

## 3.2 Functional Road Classification

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) classifies roads as principal



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arterials, minor arterials, collectors, and local roads (Map 3.2). The classification system recognizes that roads perform specific functions and according to WisDOT serve two primary purposes: 1) to move vehicles (traffic mobility), and 2) to serve adjacent land (land access). Arterials accommodate the through-movement of vehicles, while collectors (major and minor) serve both local and through traffic by providing a connection between arterials and local roads. Local roads not classified as arterials or collectors are local functioning roads.

#### **Principal Arterials**

Principal arterial roads provide connections between cities or regions. They move large volumes of traffic on fairly direct routes. In Rusk County, U.S. Highway 8 are the designated principal arterial roadway.

#### **Minor Arterials**

Minor arterial roads connect to principal arterial roads. Like principal arterial roads, minor arterials carry large volumes of traffic to "activity" centers such as cities, but unlike principal arterials, allow more access to private property and residences. In Rusk County, State Highways 27, 40, and 73 are classified as minor arterials.

#### **Major Collectors**

Major collectors provide service to moderate sized communities and link to larger population centers or higher functional routes. In Rusk County, County F south of Highway 8 and north of County O, County D, County E, County O, County I south of Highway 8, County G, County M north of Highway 8, County P between County's E and G, County V, and County A are classified as major collectors.

#### **Minor Collectors**

Minor collectors collect traffic from local roads and provide links to all remaining smaller communities. In Rusk County, all or parts of County F north of Highway 8 to County O, County W south of Highway 8, County H, County J, County I north of Highway 8, County M south of Highway 8, County B, County X, County P east of County G, County F south of County D, River Rd. (T. of Cedar Rapids), Flambeau Rd. (T. of Big Falls), Sawdust Rd. (T. of Thornapple and Washington), Thornapple Rd. (T. of Thornapple), Cemetery Rd. (T. of Marshall) are classified as minor collectors.



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### Local Roads

Local roads carry the least amount of traffic volume and provide access to adjacent land and residential developments. In Rusk County, these roads provide for travel over relatively short distances and are mostly all town roads.

### Certified Mileage

This mileage data is certified by the local community, WisDOT District Local Road Coordinator and the WisDOT Statewide Local Road Coordinator. The mileage is stored in the Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR). These roadways link Rusk County to other major transportation linkages. From the county seat, Highway 53 is 45 miles away and Highway 94 is 60 miles away.

## 3.3 Traffic Volume

An analysis of past and present traffic volumes is beneficial in determining the traffic conditions in a community. Traffic volumes are usually presented as an Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) figure, and are calculated for a particular intersection or stretch of roadway. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation, as part of its traffic count program, provides highway traffic volumes for selected roads on a rotating basis every three years. For Rusk County, traffic volumes were last published in 2002.

## 3.4 Means of Transportation & Commuting

### Patterns

In Rusk County, the most common form of transportation is by individual vehicular trips. Of the 7,700 workers 16 years and older in 2000, the Census reports 6,975 (71.9%) drove alone, 1,117 (11.5) carpooled, and 1,044 (10.7%) worked out of their home. As is evident in Table 3.1, the largest percentage of commuter traffic is done in Barron, Chippewa, Eau Claire, and Price Counties.



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**Table 3.1: Rusk County Commuting Patterns**

	Rusk Co. residents commuting to listed county	Residents of listed county commuting into Rusk County	Net gain or loss of workers
Barron County, WI	534	112	-422
Chippewa County, WI	242	387	145
Eau Claire County, WI	76	12	-64
Price County, WI	68	246	178
Sawyer County, WI	32	166	134
Taylor County, WI	31	134	103
Hennepin County, MN	26	Not available	Not available
Dunn County, WI	24	3	-21
Lincoln County, WI	19	5	-14
St. Croix County, WI	15	Not available	Not available
Elsewhere	163	154	-9

### 3.5 Road Improvements

#### Rusk County Highway Department

The Highway Commissioner is the administrator of the Highway Department and is responsible for construction and maintenance of highways under the direction of the Highway Committee. Duties include the responsibility for the necessary engineering studies, surveys, plans and cost estimates for highway construction; care and maintenance of county road equipment and supplies; recording all expenditures; plan and supervise highway maintenance and construction work on the county trunk highway system; maintenance of county and town bridges, and provide the general maintenance of the state highways. The department currently maintains 255 miles of county highways and 105 centerline miles of state highways, and as of September 2009, the department had 21 full-time employees and one part-time employee. The Rusk County Highway Department has verbal agreements with Towns on a year by year basis for grading/snowplowing. The department also contracts with towns for assorted jobs as warranted.

The principal highway shop is located in the City of Ladysmith with satellite facilities located in the Village of Weyerhaeuser. The highway shops are used for the storage and



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maintenance of county-owned equipment. The Rusk County highway department has a large amount of equipment to maintain and store.

The Rusk County Highway Department maintains a five-year road plan for future improvement projects on county highways. With no discretionary funding in the foreseeable future, steadily increasing fuel and material costs, virtually unrestricted loading by the timber industry, and zero increases in the budget, it will be difficult for the department to maintain the current level of service in upcoming years. A five-year road plan is maintained by the Rusk County Highway Department and is available upon request.

The five-year road improvement plan is subject to change and in all likelihood will change over time. These changes are precipitated based on many factors, including:

- **PAVEMENT FAILURE** Safety considerations will move a failed pavement section to a top priority;
- **BUDGET CONSTRAINTS** To stay within an appropriate budget, projects may be moved within the program depending upon actual winter maintenance costs;
- **FUTURE FUNDING POSSIBILITIES** High priority sections of highway may be allowed to deteriorate further if there is a good chance that this will enable us to acquire discretionary federal or state funding;
- **ASPHALT AVAILABILITY** Projects may be moved dependent upon when an asphalt plant is available in the area;
- **LONGER PROJECTS** Since longer projects are more cost effective to construct, small sections may be advanced as a priority if they are contiguous to a larger project; and
- **COORDINATION WITH OTHER PROJECTS** Projects may be moved to accommodate large state paving projects or bridge replacements.

### **Wisconsin Transportation Regions**

Rusk County is one of twenty counties located within Wisconsin's Northwest Region, with the regional office located in Eau Claire. The Northwest Region annually prepares a six-



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year highway improvement program for road improvements including bridge rehabilitation, bridge replacement, pavement replacement, reconditioning, reconstruction, resurfacing and general roadway maintenance.

#### **Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR)**

The Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR) is an Internet-accessible system that helps local governments manage local road data to improve decision-making, and to meet state statute requirements. The Rusk County Highway Department uses the Pavement Surface Evaluation Rating (PASER) system for conducting annual reports on the condition of all county truck highways. Every odd numbered year, these pavement ratings must be submitted to WisDOT by mid-December. These ratings, used in conjunction with other factors, determine annual construction projects for the county. These other factors include (1) proximity of road projects to scheduled state or bridge projects, (2) availability of hot mix asphalt plants in the area, (3) cost effectiveness of resurfacing larger projects and (4) the possibility of alternate funding (STP, CHIP-D, PLH).

### **3.6 Applicable State, Regional, & Local Transportation Plans**

Some state, regional, and county agencies have developed transportation related plans and/or studies for roadways or infrastructure under their responsibility. It is imperative that Rusk County and these agencies communicate on proposed activities. What follows is a listing of applicable state, regional, and county plans/studies to this chapter. A regional transportation plan has not been developed.

- Wisconsin State Highway Plan
- Corridors 2020
- Connections 2030  
(under development by WisDOT)
- Rusk County Highway Improvement Program (pg. 8)
- 6-Year Highway Improvement Program (pg. 9)
- Translinks 21
- Wisconsin State Airport System Plan 2020
- Wisconsin Bicycle Transportation Plan 2020
- Wisconsin Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020
- Transportation Planning Resource Guide



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Federal legislation in 2005 contained in SAFETEA-LU requires all state and county governments to develop and maintain a Public Transit Human Service Transportation Plan. Generally, the plan requires current and future recommendations pertaining to transit system coordination throughout the county. Additionally, known applications for 5310, JARC, and NEW FREEDOM must be included in the plan to be considered for federal funding assistance.

## 3.7 Programs & Implementation Tools

### Funding and Technical Assistance Programs

The following section identifies the agencies as well as programs established and administered by those agencies to provide financial and technical support for the operation, maintenance and planning of the county's transportation system.

#### Wisconsin Department of Transportation

##### **General Transportation Aid (GTA)**

General Transportation Aids (GTA) is the second largest program in WisDOT's budget and returns to local governments roughly 30% of all state-collected transportation revenues (fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees) - helping offset the cost of county and municipal road construction, maintenance, traffic and other transportation-related costs. County road improvements, construction, and maintenance are funded, in part, through the state's disbursement of general transportation aids. The state provides a payment to each county and municipality in the state that pays a portion of local governments' costs for such activities as road construction, snow removal, and grading. The statutory "rate per mile" for town, villages and cities was \$1,862 in 2006. The 2007 rate is \$1,899. Counties aid reimbursement is not based on "rate per mile". In 2006 Rusk County received \$630,004.76 under the general transportation reimbursement program.

##### **Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP)**



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The Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP) was established in 1991 to assist local units of government in improving seriously deteriorating county highways, town roads, and municipal streets in cities and villages under the authority of the local unit of government. LRIP is a reimbursement program and pays up to 50% of the total eligible project costs, with the balance matched by the local unit of government. All LRIP projects are locally let and are reimbursed by WisDOT upon project completion.

#### **Local Bridge Program**

The Local Bridge Improvement Assistance program helps rehabilitate and replace, on a cost-shared basis, the most seriously deficient existing local bridges on Wisconsin's local highway systems. Counties, cities, villages, and towns are eligible for rehabilitation funding on bridges with sufficiency ratings less than 80, and replacement funding on bridges with sufficiency ratings less than 50. The Rusk County Bridge Program project lists 10 design and/or construction projects between 2006 and 2008. The approved statewide project list 2007-2009 lists sixteen bridges slated for either bridge rehabilitation or replacement in Rusk County.

#### **Flood Damage Aids**

Flood Damage Aids assist local governments with improving or replacing roads and roadway structures that have sustained major damage from flooding. The program provides and helps defray costs of repairing major flood damage to any public highway, street, alley or bridge not located on the State Trunk Highway System.

#### **County Forest Road Aids**

County Forest Road Aids help defray county costs for the improvement and maintenance of public roads within county forests. To qualify, roads must meet minimum design standards of a 16-foot surface width and a 20-foot roadway width, be located within county forests, must be open and used for travel, and cannot be town roads or county or state trunk highways.

#### **Surface Transportation Program-Rural**

The Surface Transportation Program Rural (STP-R) allocates federal funds to complete a variety of improvements to rural highways (primarily county highways). The objective of the STP-R is to improve federal aid eligible highways outside of urban areas. Projects must meet federal and state requirements. Communities are eligible for funding on roads classified higher than rural minor collectors.

#### **Traffic Signing and Marking Enhancement Grants Program**



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The Traffic Signing and Marking Enhancement Grants Program provides funds to local units of government for the installation of traffic signing and roadway marking enhancements, with the goal of improving visibility to assist elderly drivers and pedestrians. The program will distribute approximately \$3.8 million in state funding for 2005 and 2006. All Wisconsin counties, cities, villages, and towns are eligible to be project sponsors. The program can pay up to 75% of total eligible project costs, with the local government contributing matching funds equal to at least 25% of the total eligible costs to the limit of the award.

### **3.8 Survey Data Summary**

According to the Rusk County Comprehensive Planning Survey, respondents selected State, County, and Town/Village/City roads at the most important transportation assets. They also ranked these items as having the highest level of satisfaction. State and County roads exceeded a 75% satisfaction rating, and local roads received a 68%. Other transportation items like bicycle/pedestrian trails, public transit, motorized trails, air, and rail, received moderate rankings in importance, and meet moderate levels of satisfaction or respondents had no opinion on these assets.

When people travel to work a quarter of the population do not travel more than 10 miles. Another quarter no more than 10-25 miles. Only 7.4% claim they travel 76-150 miles.



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### **3.9 Summary – Goals & Objectives**

When coordination of local land use planning and provision of transportation facilities is accomplished, money and time can be saved over the short-and long-term. Each transportation decision impacts economic development, community development, land use, and the natural and built environment. Although transportation decisions can directly influence Rusk County's growth, it is more beneficial to the County's future that it be used as a tool to accommodate planned growth. Lands in Rusk County will be used more efficiently when land is developed in proximity to other development and to transportation facilities.

**Goal:** Strive for a safe, maintained, and adequate transportation system that supports a variety of users that supports and grows the economy of the County.

**Objectives:**

1. Support the maintenance and improvement of existing transportation assets.
2. Promote a variety of transportation methods.
3. Encourage the development and growth of State and Federal transportation corridors in the County.

**Actions:**

- A. Identify State and Federal funds to develop, maintain, and/or expand various transportation systems
- B. Develop a maintenance and reinvestment plan for transportation assets.
- C. Monitor the population's transportation needs.
- D. Communicate with the appropriate State and Regional entities to ensure that Rusk County's transportation system is coordinated with surrounding transportation systems.