

Chapter 5:

Transportation

A community's transportation system consists of a variety of roads; some are owned and maintained by local officials, others are part of the county or state road systems. In addition to roads, the transportation system includes separate facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, railroads, airports, and public transit. This section describes the transportation system in the Town of Saratoga and related improvements or issues affecting the system.

PREVIOUS PLANS AND STUDIES RELATED TO TRANSPORTATION

Connections 2050

Connections 2050 is the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) long-range transportation plan for the state. Adopted recently, the plan addresses all forms of transportation over a 20-year planning horizon: highways, local roads, air, water, rail, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit. WisDOT is currently updating several of the modal plans.

State Trails Network Plan

This 2003 document clarifies the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) role and strategy in the provision of all types of trails. The plan identifies a series of potential trail corridors that would link existing trails, public lands, natural features, and communities. This statewide network of interconnected trails would be owned and maintained by municipalities, private entities, and partnerships of the two. Preserving transportation corridors, such as old rail lines, is specifically discussed as a very important strategy in the creation of recreational and alternative transportation corridors.

Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, 2018

This plan is a region-wide effort to improve bicycling and walking across communities within North Central Wisconsin. The plan assesses existing conditions related to bicycling and walking, identifies other potential trail and route user groups, identifies routes, and describes policies and programs to assist local governments in improving bicycling and walking to promote connectivity between communities and destinations throughout North Central Wisconsin.

Regional Livability Plan, 2015

Transportation is one of four elements included in the Regional Livability Plan (RLP), adopted by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in 2015. The Transportation Assessment Report, a component of the plan, looks in detail at the transportation network throughout the ten-county region and identifies trends and issues facing transportation.

The Regional Livability Plan addresses three issues: the modes of transportation to work, the age of drivers in the region, and the high transportation maintenance cost. The three transportation goals of the RLP are as follows:

- Provide and improve transportation access to people of all ages and abilities to ensure lifelong mobility and accessibility.
- Fund the maintenance and expansion of the transportation system.
- Enhance the regional economy by supporting airports and freight rail.

Wood County Coordinated Public Transit – Human Service Transportation Plan, 2019

Wood County developed this five-year plan that was facilitated by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. The plan analyzes service gaps and needs in public transit and human services transportation and proposes strategies to address the gaps and needs. This plan will be updated later this year.

Wood County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

This plan is currently under development to guide the development of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, recommendations, and policy that will create a safe and accessible network across Wood County's various communities.

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act)

This current federal transportation program authorizes up to \$108 billion to support federal public transportation programs, including \$91 billion in guaranteed funding. It also reauthorizes surface transportation programs for FY 2022-2026 and provides advance appropriations for certain programs. Major goals include improving safety, modernizing aging transit infrastructure and fleets, investing in cleaner transportation, and improving equity in communities with limited transportation access. These funds will be distributed via formulas and grants to the states. Local units will be able to access the funds through various grant programs.

ROAD NETWORK

Road Classification

Functional

A functionally classified road system is one in which street and highways are grouped into classes according to the character of service they provide, ranging from a high degree of travel mobility to land access functions. At the upper limit of the system (i.e. principal arterials), are facilities that emphasize traffic mobility (long, uninterrupted travel), while at the lower limits are local roads and streets that emphasize access over speed and efficiency.

The functional classifications are generally defined as:

- Principal Arterials serve corridor movements having trip length and travel density characteristics of an interstate of interregional nature. These routes generally serve all urban areas greater than 5,000 population or connect major centers of activity and the highest traffic volumes and the longest trip desires.

- Minor Arterials, in conjunction with principal arterials, serve cities, large communities, and other major traffic generators, providing intracommunity continuity and service to trips of moderate length, with more emphasis on land access than principal arterials.
- Collectors provide both land access service and traffic circulation within residential neighborhoods, commercial areas, and industrial areas. The collector system distributes trips from the local streets and channel it onto the arterial system.
- Local Streets comprise all facilities not on one of the higher systems. They serve primarily to provide direct access to abutting land and access to the higher order of systems. Local streets offer the highest level of access, but the lowest level of mobility for automobiles.

Jurisdictional

Roads are commonly classified in one of two ways: by ownership or by purpose. Jurisdictional responsibility refers to ownership of a particular road, while functional classification, as described above, identifies the road by the level of service it provides.

Jurisdiction refers to government ownership, not necessarily responsibility. For example, some state-owned roads are maintained by local jurisdictions. Additionally, the designation of a public road as a “federal-aid highway” does not alter its ownership or jurisdiction as a state or local road, only that its service value and importance have made that road eligible for federal-aid construction and rehabilitation funds.

Ownership is divided among the federal, state, and local governments. States own over 20 percent of the national road network. The federal government has responsibility for about 5 percent, primarily in national parks, forests, and Indian reservations. Over 75 percent of the road system is locally controlled.

In some cases, local municipalities are responsible for conducting routine maintenance and minor repairs on state and federal highways within their jurisdictional boundaries. In return, the state generally provides financing to those jurisdictions. However, major repairs and reconstruction are generally still the responsibility of the State Department of Transportation.

Road Facilities

The road system within the Town of Saratoga is a network of state highways, county highways and local roads. The jurisdictional and functional breakdown is shown in Table 17.

Jurisdiction	Arterial	Collector	Local	Totals
Federal	0	0	0	0
State	16.09	0.00	0.00	16.09
County	2.30	7.48	0.00	9.78
Town	0.00	17.63	76.35	93.98
Totals	18.39	25.11	76.35	119.85

Source: WisDOT

Following is a brief description of the major road facilities located in the Town of Saratoga. All major roads are summarized by functional classification, jurisdiction, and annual average daily traffic (AADT), when available. Map 4 Transportation provides detailed transportation information for the Town.

Examining AADT information over time can provide some insight into roads that may need upgrading or increased maintenance in the future. At the points with multiple collection periods, the AADT count on most roads within the Town has decreased substantially. The most significant decreases have been on state highways including a 67.8 percent decrease on Ranger Road west of STH 13, a 45.0 percent decrease on STH 13 south of STH 73 between Tower Rd and Evergreen Ave, and a 36.0 percent decrease on CTH Z south of STH 73.

Table 18: Road Network AADT

Location	2011 AADT	2021 AADT	2011-2021 % Change
CTH Z North of Ranger Road	3,200	3,300	3.1%
CTH Z north of STH 73.	2,700	2,000	-25.9%
CTH Z south of STH 73	2,500	1,600	-36.0%
STH 73 at Wisconsin River Bridge	8,800	7,700	-12.5%
STH 73 Between Church Ave & CTH Z	7,600	6,500	-14.5%
STH 73 1.0 mile west of CTH Z	6,700	5,700	-14.9%
STH 73 west of STH 13	6,000	4,800	-20.0%
STH 73 northwest of CTH U	2,500	2,000	-20.0%
STH 13 north of STH 73	11,700	9,900	-15.4%
STH 13 south of STH 73 between Hasa Ave and Nature's Way	10,000	5,500	-45.0%
STH 13 south of STH 73 between Tower Rd and Evergreen Ave	6,300	5,900	-6.3%
STH 13 between Larry Ave and Townline Rd	13,100	11,200	-14.5%
Ranger Rd west of STH 13	590	190	-67.8%
Ranger Rd east of STH 13	860	700	-18.6%

Source: WisDOT

State Highway 13

State Highway 13 is a minor arterial that runs north and south, bisecting the Town and serving as the Town's busiest road and main gateway into Wisconsin Rapids. Four different AADT locations are recorded in Table 18, with a considerable AADT decrease in all locations ranging from 6.3 percent to 45 percent between 2011 and 2021.

State Highway 73

State Highway 73 is a minor arterial that runs from the Wisconsin River at the City of Nekoosa eastward to the center of the Town where it intersects STH 13 where it begins to angle towards the southeast corner of the Town. Five AADT locations are recorded in Table 18, all of which decreased between 12.5 percent and 20.0 percent from 2011 to 2021.

County Highway Z

County Highway Z is a major collector that runs north and south along the eastern border of Petenwell Lake, a flowage on the Wisconsin River, connecting Nekoosa and Port Edwards to the Town of Rome. Another segment runs parallel to STH 13 in the northern half of the Town, with the two segments being connected by STH 73. Three AADT locations are recorded in Table 18, with a slight increase in AADT of 3.1 percent at the northernmost location, but considerable decreases of 25.9 percent and 36 percent closer to STH 73.

Ranger Road

Ranger Road is an east-west major connector, but it features traffic volumes much lower than the Town's state and county highways. Two AADT locations are recorded, both having a decreased AADT between 2011 and 2021, with the western portion having the greatest decrease in AADT for all roads in Table 18 (67.8 percent).

It should be noted that some of these 2021 counts were impacted by the covid pandemic. There has been an increase in local traffic due to major construction in the Town of Rome to the south, including but not limited to the Sand Valley destination golf course and general population increase in that area. In addition, traffic was impacted during the construction of the solar fields in the Town as well as new housing starts. In general, traffic generated and attracted by any new land use can increase congestion on the roadway system. Even without creating new access points, changes in land uses can alter the capacity of the roadway. Uncontrolled division of land tends to affect highways by increasing the amount of turning traffic into and out from intersecting driveways, therefore impairing safety and impeding traffic movements. Though Saratoga's population has declined slightly since the 2000 Census, an increase in housing units may result in increased AADTs in the future, especially as people return to work following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Road Maintenance

The Town of Saratoga uses the Pavement Surface Evaluation Rating (PASER) system, which was designed by the Transportation Information Center of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The PASER system is the rating system used by most Wisconsin communities. The PASER system rates road surfaces of a scale of 1 to 10.

- "1" and "2" = very poor condition
- "3" = poor condition
- "4" and "5" = fair condition
- "6" and "7" = good condition
- "8" = very good condition
- "9" and "10" = excellent condition

Table 19 shows a summary of Town road pavement conditions in the Town of Saratoga. Note that these totals only include local roads, so County and State Highways are excluded. Town roads exhibiting a surface condition rating at or below "fair" must be examined to determine what type of reconstruction or strengthening is necessary. The roads that display a surface rating of "good" or better will only require minimal preventative maintenance to promote safe travel conditions. Most Town roads are in relatively good condition, as less than one percent of roads rate as "Poor" or "Very

Poor” and about 99 percent of roads rate as “Fair” or better. However, with over half of roads rated “Fair,” there will likely need to be several significant road projects in the coming years.

Table 19: Summary of Pavement Conditions, 2021	
Surface Type	Miles
Unimproved	3.46
Gravel	0.16
Sealcoat	8.70
Asphalt	81.64
Surface Rating	Miles
Very Poor	0.08
Poor	0.46
Fair	51.43
Good	23.45
Very Good	13.17
Excellent	5.13
No Rating	0.24
Total	93.97

Source: WisDOT

Trucking

STH 73 and STH 13 are long truck routes within the Town as designated by WisDOT. Local truck routes often branch out from these major corridors to link local industry with the main truck routes as well as for the distribution of commodities within the local area. Local issues such as safety, weight restrictions, and noise impacts play significant roles in the designation of local truck routes.

Rail

There is freight rail service available across the Wisconsin River from the Town. According to the 2021 DOT Wisconsin Railroads and Harbors Map, Canadian National owns all rail tracks through the Cities of Nekoosa, Port Edwards, and Wisconsin Rapids.

Air Transportation

Two airports serve the Town. The South Wood County Airport – Alexander Field is managed by the City of Wisconsin Rapids and jointly owned by South Wood County Airport Commission, the City of Wisconsin Rapids, Town of Grand Rapids, Village of Port Edwards, and the City of Nekoosa. The airport has three runways and there is no commercial service. The Central Wisconsin Airport in Mosinee provides commercial air service to the area. Currently, three airlines have daily scheduled flights from the facility. There is one known private, unpaved airport in the Town of Saratoga.

Transportation Services for Specialized Populations

The Aging and Disability Resource Center provides information on transportation services for those that are elderly and for those with disabilities including the Wood County Transportation Program.

The Wood County Elderly and Disabled Transportation program provides rides to persons over the age of 55, and people who have a disability that prevents them from driving. Rides are provided for shopping, medical appointments, or to other locations as needed. Bus transportation is provided on weekdays and is equipped with a wheelchair lift.

Bicycling and Walking

All roads in the Town are available for bicycle and pedestrian travel. Currently there are some designated trails in the Town, as part of the Heart Trail System coordinated within the Wisconsin Rapids area. Wood County coordinates trail planning throughout the county and is in the process of developing a county bike plan. See the Transportation Map.

Recreational Vehicles

There is an extensive snowmobile trail system throughout Wood County that includes the Town of Saratoga. There is also an extensive ATV system throughout Wood County. The Town allows the use of ATV/UTVs on Town roads.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Goal:

1. Maintain the Town's transportation network at a level of service desired by Town residents and businesses.

Objectives:

1. Provide for a safe, efficient, multi-modal, and well-maintained transportation network for all modes of transportation.
2. Manage access to the transportation network in order to effectively maintain the safe and functional integrity of town roads.
3. Coordinate major transportation projects with neighboring communities and WisDOT.

Policies:

1. Transportation Alternatives for Disabled Residents – Collaborate with neighboring urban areas and regional programs to provide transportation access for disabled residents.
2. Coordination of Bicycle and ATV/UTV Planning – Ensure that the Town has an active role in providing any input on bicycle routes through the Town planned by Wood County, WIDNR, the City of Nekoosa, Village of Port Edwards, Towns of Grand Rapids and Rome, or local organizations.
3. Incorporation of Pedestrian & Bicycle Planning – Require that developments and road construction/maintenance address the necessity of adequate walking & bicycling areas and routes in both residential and commercial areas. Bicycle and pedestrian trails within developments shall be designed to connect to any adjacent existing or planned pedestrian or bicycle facility.
4. Designation of Truck Routes – Continue to designate weight restrictions and truck routes as needed.
5. Protection of Town Roads – Encourage traffic patterns that do not increase traffic on Town Roads unnecessarily and require intergovernmental agreements that define the responsibilities of the Town, the developer and the neighboring community regarding any required improvements to Town roads and funding of such improvements.
6. Coordination of Improvements to County Highways – Stay apprised of Wood County's efforts to maintain and improve County roads. Coordinate bicycle and pedestrian upgrades when these roads are scheduled for improvement.

7. Continue Implementation of Town Driveway Ordinance – Continue to implement the Town driveway ordinance to minimize the amount of access points onto Town roads and to ensure adequate sight distances.
8. Maintain Condition Standards for Town Roadways – Maintain an average PASER rating of 7 for all Town Roads, and establish and prioritize future road projects based on the applicable PASER scores and ADT data.
9. Joint Planning of Roads that Cross Jurisdictions – Work with neighboring municipalities to plan, construct and maintain those roadways that affect both jurisdictions, including cost sharing where appropriate.
10. New Development Proposals – Development proposals shall address the impacts to transportation systems including:
 - a. Traffic flow and volume,
 - b. Road conditions, construction, and maintenance,
 - c. Emergency vehicle access,
 - d. Safe ingress and egress,
 - e. Future connectivity to surrounding properties,
 - f. Transportation of students (e.g. bus turn-arounds),
 - g. Pedestrian and bicycle improvements.
11. Future Cooperation and Planning – The Town may consider participating in planning for public transit, public air transportation or water transportation in the Town should these alternatives become feasible in the future.