Chapter 5

Transportation

Transportation is necessary for the effective movement of people and goods within the community. It is also essential to connect those within Eagle River with connections outside of the City. Transportation is also critical to development and land use. This chapter provides an inventory of the existing transportation facilities and services within the City of Eagle River. The **Transportation Map** identifies the transportation infrastructure within the City of Eagle River.

Transportation is a crucial component of livability and provides a basis for the formulation of policy to coordinate transportation facilities within a sustainable pattern of development. The existing network, from roads to rails needs to be coordinated to maximize efficiency for the overall system. The connection between home and work is an important part of any transportation system. A range of transportation alternatives should be supported, including walkability whenever possible.

Previous Plans and Studies

Regional Comprehensive Plan, 2025
The 2025 Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP), written by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, addresses issues of livability in the areas of housing, transportation, economic development, and land use. The RCP identifies the following issues facing transportation within the Region:

- A need for bicycle and pedestrian improvements
- Dispersed population in rural areas
- Weight limits on roads
- Rail and roadway conflicts
- Funding transportation maintenance and improvements
- An aging populations's ability to continue depending on driving
- Transporting students as school enrollment declines and school facilities consolidate

Connections 2030
This is Wisconsin's latest long-range, statewide, multimodal transportation plan. It identifies a series of system-level priority corridors that are critical to Wisconsin's travel patterns and the state economy.

Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

This 2018 plan is a region-wide effort to improve bicycling and walking across the communities. The plan assesses existing conditions related to bicycling and walking, identifying other potential trail and route user groups, identifying routes and describing policies and programs to assist local governments in improving bicycling and walking to promote connectivity between communities and destinations throughout north central Wisconsin.

State Trails Network Plan

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) created this plan in 2001, to identify a statewide network of trails and to provide guidance to the DNR for land acquisition and development. Many existing trails are developed and operated in partnership with counties. By agreement the DNR acquires the corridor and the county government(s) develop, operate, and maintain the trail.

Vilas County Countywide Bike/Ped Route and Trail Plan, 2011

This plan is intended to guide the development of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, recommendations, and policy that will create a safe and accessible network across Vilas County's various communities. It was prepared by the Vilas Area Silent Sports Association (VASSA) along with the NCWRPC.

Vilas County Countywide Shared Use Route & Trail Study, 2018

This study provides guidance to assist governmental entities, route & trail interest groups and individual trail users within Vilas County in working together to plan, develop and maintain a comprehensive and sustainable route and trail network for diverse outdoor recreation.

Locally Developed, Coordinated Public Transit – Human Service Transportation Plan, 2024-2028

Oneida and Vilas Counties 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.

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. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation will likely be the agency administering these funds.

Road Network

The road network provides for the movement of people and products within the City with connections to county, state and federal highways. US Highway 45 and State Highways 17 & 70 are the primary roads in the City, along with the numerous City streets. The jurisdictional and functional breakdown of the City of Eagle River road network is shown in **Table 16**.

Table 16: Road Mileage by Jurisdictional and Functional Class				
Jurisdiction	**Functional Classification**			**Totals**
	Arterial	**Collector**	**Local**	
State*	3.33	0.00	0.00	3.33
County	0.00	0.17	0.00	0.17
City	0.00	5.92	18.76	24.68
Totals	3.33	6.09	18.76	28.18

Source: WisDOT & NCWRPC.

* WisDOT has jurisdiction over interstate and federal highways.

Functional Classification

A functionally classified road system is one in which streets and highways are grouped into classes according to the character of the services they provide, ranging from a high degree of travel mobility to land access functions. At the upper limit of the system (principal arterials, for example), are those facilities that emphasize traffic mobility (long, uninterrupted travel), whereas at the lower limits are those local roads and streets that emphasize access. The functional classifications are generally defined as:

- **Principal Arterials** serve corridor movements having trip length and travel density characteristics of an interstate or interregional nature. These routes generally serve all urban areas with populations greater than 5,000 or connect major centers of activity. They carry the highest traffic volumes and are designed to accommodate longer trips.

- **Minor Arterials**, like principal arterials, minor arterials also serve cities, large communities, and other major traffic generators, providing intra-community continuity and service for 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 arterials through the area to the local streets. The collectors also collect traffic from the local streets and channel it into 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 higher order systems. Local streets offer the lowest level of mobility and high volume through-traffic movement on these streets is usually discouraged.

Jurisdiction

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, identified the road by the level of service it provides.

Jurisdiction refers to governmental 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.

As previously noted, these functional classifications are generally equated with the jurisdictional divisions. In the more developed larger urban communities, this relationship may not be as rigid, whereas the local community constructs and maintains all classes of the roadway system. However, in the typical rural transportation system the jurisdictional and the functional classifications maintain a closer relationship. The greatest emphasis of traffic in rural areas is generally on non-local efficient movement, whereas local access is secondary due to relatively low population densities.

Functional classification and jurisdiction are summarized below for all major roads within the City of Eagle River.

- US Highway 45 is classified as a Primary Arterial
- State Highways 17 and 70 are classified as Minor Arterials
- County Highway G is classified as a Major Collector
- S Loon Lake Rd, Silver Lake Rd, and Illinois St are classified as Minor Collectors
- All other roads within the City are classified as local roads.

Road Maintenance

The City of Eagle River 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 on a scale of 1 to 10. This scale is broken down as follows:

- "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 17 shows a summary of pavement conditions in the City of Eagle River. 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. About eight miles of local roadways within the City are currently in need of improvement. Less than a mile of roadways in the City are gravel or unimproved roads. Asphalt roads account for the vast majority of roadways within the City.

| Table 17: Summary of Pavement Conditions, 2025		
	Miles	**Percent of Total Mileage**
Very Poor	3.39	13.8%
Poor	0.76	3.1%
Fair	3.88	15.8%
Good	7.52	30.6%
Very Good	5.02	20.5%
Excellent	3.99	16.2%
Total	24.55	100.0%

Source: WisDOT 2025

Other Modes of Transportation

Bicycle and Pedestrian

All roads except freeways are available for bicycle and pedestrian travel. The Wisconsin DOT has determined bicycling conditions on all county and state highways. Under current conditions, the entire length of US Highway 45 and State Highways 17 & 70 are considered undesirable for biking. County Highway G was identified as containing best conditions for bicycling. Additionally, the City has a sidewalk network providing better walking conditions for pedestrians.

There are some trails that have been developed in the Eagle River area, with efforts underway to create a trail segment that would connect the City to the Heart of Vilas County Bike Trail System. As part of these efforts, the City of Eagle River and Towns of Cloverland and St. Germain have formed a multi-jurisdictional commission to head up development of the River Trail, a proposed 10-mile-long trail connecting to the nationally recognized Heart of Vilas County Bike Trail System. This new trail would provide a safe alternative for those currently walking and riding along Highway 70.
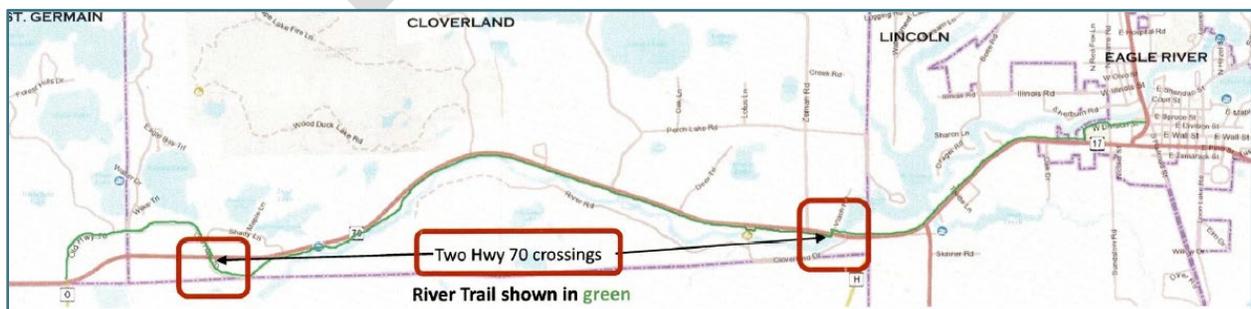
Closeup view of the planned route for the River Trail, which would run parallel to Highway 70. Source: GHTF

City of Eagle River Comprehensive Plan

Airport

Air passenger services available to Eagle River residents include the facilities in Eagle River, Land O'Lakes, and Rhinelander.

The Eagle River Regional Airport is located approximately in the northwest portion of the City. This facility provides charter services, and facilities for private and corporate air transportation. This facility is an "all-weather" facility and has a commuter service to Chicagoland Airport in Illinois.

The King's Land O' Lakes Airport (LNL) in Land O' Lakes is a general utility (GU) airport that is designed to accommodate virtually all small general aviation aircraft. Typically, these aircraft are used for business and charter flying, or for personal use.

Scheduled passenger service is available nearby from one airport located in Rhinelander, WI. This airport serves scheduled, nonstop, airline markets and routes of less than 500 miles. Delta Connection Airline now provides two daily flights between the Rhinelander-Oneida County Airport and the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, and a third flight from Minneapolis-St. Paul in the evening in route to Ford Airport in Iron Mountain Michigan. United Express Airline offers summer seasonal service to Chicago O'Hare International Airport.

Public Transportation

Northwoods Transit Connections provides public transportation in Oneida and Vilas Counties with on-demand service 5 days per week from 8:00am - 5:00pm. The Vilas County Department on Aging coordinates volunteer driver-escort service to residents of Vilas County, which includes Eagle River. Escort drivers provide transportation to elderly and disabled residents of Vilas County that qualify as a priority trip purpose such as medical appointments and grocery shopping. For rides or other info call the Vilas County Department on Aging.

Vilas County also has a local chapter of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) that coordinates free transportation services for veterans in the area, offering free rides for veterans to the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain, Michigan.

Trucking

US Highway 45 and State Highways 17 & 70 are long truck routes designated by WisDOT that serve the City. This corresponds with their role as Corridors 2030 connecting routes, linking to the Backbone highway system, and facilitating the movement of goods between Vilas County and the rest of the state/nation.

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 with the local area. Mapping these local routes is beyond the scope of this study, and local issues such as safety, weight restrictions, and noise impacts play significant roles in the designation of local truck routes.

Transportation Programs

Below is a listing of programs that may be of assistance to the City with regard to the development of the local transportation system. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation is the primary provider of programs to assist local transportation systems. A wide variety of programs are available to serve the gamut of jurisdictions from county down to the smallest town. The programs most likely to be utilized by communities such as Eagle River include:

- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)
- Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP)
- General Transportation Aids
- Surface Transportation Program – Local (STP-L)
- Surface Transportation Program – Rural (STP-R)
- Surface Transportation Program – Urban (STP-U)
- Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)
- Connecting Highway Aids
- Disaster Damage Aids
- Transportation Economic Assistance Program (TEA)
- Airport Improvement Program (AIP)
- Local Bridge Improvement Assistance
- Local Small Structure Improvement Program (LSSIP)
- Signals and ITS Standalone Program (SISP)

More information on these programs can be obtained by contacting the WisDOT region office in Rhinelander or at https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/local-gov/astnce-pgms/default.aspx.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goal: Provide and maintain a safe, reliable transportation network.

Objectives:

1. Utilize road standards for public and private roads in accordance with existing City standards.

2. Consider access controls in accordance with specific planned uses along roadways.

3. Develop and maintain a road plan to address long-term needs for road upgrades and new roads, including where possible parallel pathways for alternative forms of transportation, e.g., bicycle, pedestrian, snowmobile, slow moving vehicles, and transportation for the disabled.

4. Promote the development of multi-use trails, trail linkages, and sidewalks or wide shoulders on roads as part of new developments or road projects.

5. Reserve adequate right-of-way for future road linkage.

6. Identify roads and highways by function.

7. Assess and integrate local, state, and regional road or transportation plans.

8. Participate in the review for public transportation with on-going regional efforts.

9. Maintain airport safety standards in accordance with Federal Airport Administration and Department of Transportation regulations.