

CHAPTER EIGHT: TRANSPORTATION

INTRODUCTION

Transportation allows for the movement of people and goods within and outside an area. It is vital to the economy and development of an area and central to land use patterns.

Roads and other transportation systems have been largely influenced by physical barriers present such as rivers, lakes, swamps and rugged terrain. Therefore, transportation routes generally were established where physical features offered the least resistance.

An inventory of existing transportation facilities in Burt Township is presented in this chapter. According to data from the Michigan Department of Transportation, there are about 622 miles of public roadway in Alger County with an additional 235 miles of federal roads.

ROAD SYSTEM

Michigan Act 51 of 1951 requires that all counties and incorporated cities and villages establish and maintain road systems under their jurisdiction, as distinct from state jurisdiction. Roads within the Township, classified under Act 51, are identified on Map 8-1.

Counties, cities and villages receive approximately 61 percent of the funding allocated through Act 51 for local roads. State highways under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation receive the remaining 39 percent. Road funding allocations are determined by a formula that includes mileages.

The five roads for roads categorized by Act 51 include, state trunkline, county primary, county local, city/village major, and city/village minor.

A description of the categories applicable to roads within Burt Township follows.

State Trunkline Highway

Road prefixes "M" and "US" denote state and federal highways respectively and are included in this category. State trunklines provide the highest level of traffic mobility for the public. While the highway system carries more than half the total statewide traffic, it is only 9 percent of the Michigan roadway network length. State and federal highways are designed by the prefixes "M" and "US" respectively. State highway M-77 extends north-south through the eastern portion of the Township, for a distance of approximately 13 miles. M-77 runs from US-2 near Blaney Park in Schoolcraft County to Grand Marais in the north. The highway borders the Seney National Wildlife Refuge. The northern half has been designated as a Scenic Spur of the Lake Superior Circle Tour. A major east-west highway, M-28, across the Upper Peninsula lies to the south of the Township.

County Road System

County roads are classified as either primary or local. Primary roads facilitate the movement of traffic from areas of smaller population to larger population centers within a county not served by state trunklines. The primary system also serves as an important supportive road network to the state trunkline system.

The designation of roads by name or number serves two purposes. It permits the highway department or road commission to identify roads, and it serves the travelling public. Included in this second purpose are, for example, street names which serve as postal addresses, and highway numbers which help the tourist find their way. The national system of highway numbers came into use early in the century; in 1970, the County Road Association of Michigan, in cooperation with the Department of State Highways, inaugurated a system for numbering Michigan county primary roads. Under this system, the State is divided by its major highways into eight zones, each designated by a letter of the alphabet. Within each zone, east-west roads are given even numbers (starting at the south of the zone), and north-south roads are given odd numbers (starting at the west of the zone). The Upper Peninsula is divided into two zones, G to the west and H to the east of U.S. 41 from Rapid River to Marquette. Alger County is almost entirely in the H zone.

Within Alger County there are 197.15 miles of county primary roads, with 50.7 miles located within Burt Township. County primary roads in the Township include portions of Canal Street, Grand Marais Truck Trail, H-58, and Randolph Street.

Roads not classified as primary are considered local. Local roads comprise the most miles in the county system, but have the lowest level of traffic. The roads in this system are often referred to as "township roads," though the county road commission maintains jurisdiction of those roads. There are a total of 294.3 local roads within Alger County, with 56.6 miles being in Burt Township. In addition to the county roads, the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore has access roads serving attractions at the Log Slide and Au Sable Point Lighthouse.

County roads, both primary and local, are certified by the County Road Commissions for approval by the State. Under Michigan law, existence of a certified and approved road is evidence of a right-of-way available for land access and public use. A legal right-of-way does not necessarily contain a traversable road, however. A few of those which are not maintained year-round are not passable even with a four-wheel drive vehicle.

Many roads which are passable and maintained in season only serve cabins, camps, and other seasonal uses. Development of year-round residents on these local roads impose a heavy burden on the Road Commission's limited resources while providing benefits to a very small group of individuals. This problem can be corrected only by measures designed to discourage this year-round development or by legally relieving the Road Commission of its present obligations to provide year-round maintenance of all county roads.

There are differences between the county road network and the functional classification system discussed below. To discuss all of the differences would be cumbersome and confusing. The county road network is set up by Michigan Act 51 of 1951 and must be either primary or local. Act 51 also distributes road dollars based on this system. The federal classification system identifies only certain of the county primary roads (most important) and all state trunk lines. Additional federal dollars are available to maintain and improve those roads.

The State of Michigan has established a Heritage Route System. The Heritage System designates certain trunklines to emphasize and protect their unique scenic, historical or recreational values. There has been some discussion by the Michigan Department of Transportation of so designating H-58 and making it a specially classified trunkline.

NATURAL BEAUTY ROADS

Act 150 of 1970 created the Natural Beauty Roads Act. This Act provides local communities the opportunity to work with the Road Commission to designate certain roads as natural beauty roads. The goals of the Natural Beauty Roads program are to identify and preserve in a natural, essentially undisturbed condition, certain county-local roads having unusual or outstanding natural beauty by virtue of native vegetation or other natural features within or associated with the right-of-way, for the use and enjoyment of local residents and the public in general. Residents in the Township petitioned the Burt Township Board to designate three local roads as natural beauty roads. A public hearing was held and the roads were so designated. The three roads are: the Old Seney Road, from H-58 to M-77; the School Forest Road; and McCloud Road from Old Seney Road easterly to the Township line. The designation as Natural Beauty Roads restricts what can be done to the road and keeps it in a natural condition.

H-58

H-58 runs through Burt Township and is the main access road for the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. In a bill passed by the U.S. Congress in 1998, the National Park Service is able to contribute federal funds for the upkeep and maintenance of roads travelling through national parks, of which the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore is one. H-58 northeast of Melstrand had been deteriorating for many years, and in the late-1990s the Alger County Road Commission had removed the paved surface on several miles of the route leaving only an intermittent gravel surface. In 1998 and 1999, the route of H-58 underwent improvements from Melstrand northeasterly to Buck Hill, with the part that had been previously paved prior to the mid-1990s completely rebuilt and hard-surfaced again.

Alger County Road Commission officials worked with MDOT and the National Park Service to develop a five-phase reconstruction project for the remaining unpaved segments of H-58 between Melstrand and Grand Marais in the early 2000s. Improvement projects were listed in the Park's 2004 Management Plan. The first four-mile stretch, referred to as Phase I, was completed in 2004 from Grand Sable Lake westerly to the Log Slide Overlook turnoff. Phase II, a 3.8 mile long stretch from the Log Slide Overlook westerly to just east of the Upper Hurricane River Campground was completely reconstructed in 2006 and carried a price tag of \$2.1 million.

The horizontal alignment of the road was changed in most places and some of the extremely tight curves were straightened out.

Funding to complete the reconstruction and paving on the remaining portions, Phases III, IV and V, was announced in mid-2006. Reconstruction and paving of the 7.9 miles of roadway from Buck Hill to Kingston Corner, then on to Twelvemile Beach and the construction of a new bridge over the Hurricane River was completed in 2010. The 3.4-mile section of H-58 between Twelvemile Beach Campground and Hurricane River Campground has been reconstructed and repaved. This work concluded five years of construction that paved 19 miles of H-58, completing the route between Munising and Grand Marais.

The project was 80 percent funded by Federal High Priority Funds, and 20 percent from the Michigan Local Jobs Today program. Local Jobs Today included more than \$6 million in local match dollars for the Upper Peninsula and leveraged nearly \$36.3 million in investments in the region, bringing with it 654 local jobs.

After decades as a sand and gravel road then five years of construction, Alger County H-58 between Grand Marais and Munising is now completely paved, creating one of the most beautiful drives in the Great Lakes region. With this newly completed road project, Pictured Rocks staff anticipates additional traffic with bicycles, tour buses, larger motor homes and fifth-wheel trailers and motorcycles. The road has been engineered as a slow speed, scenic drive through the Lakeshore, accessing such popular sites as Sable Falls, Log Slide, Hurricane River and Twelvemile Beach. The road was designed for travel speeds of 40 mph to maintain the nature of the road and the park setting.

ROAD CONDITION EVALUATION

The Alger County Road Commission evaluates the condition of county roads every other year using the PASER (PAVement Surface and Evaluation and Rating) system. A survey team drives the roads to inventory surface type and condition. Segments of road are rated on a scale from one to ten based on factors such as surface distress, pavement strength, and deflection. A rating of "10" indicates the pavement surface is in excellent condition, displaying no visible signs of distress, and having a quality rating of "new construction". A roadway given the rating of "1" represents a failed roadway condition with extensive loss of surface integrity.

PASER ratings are often classified into three asset management strategies which are listed and described in Table 8-1. The three strategies are color-coded with red being "poor", blue being "good", and purple being "excellent" condition. The asset management approach shifts from the traditional "worst first" approach to one that incorporates a "mix of fixes." Investing smaller amounts of money in roads that are in "good" condition extends the life of the road.

Surface condition ratings (asphalt surface type) from 2011 have been analyzed. Unless improvements have been made to roads in the township, the condition of the road system has likely deteriorated since the evaluation took place. Map 8-2 displays the ratings by segment. Based on the survey results, 6.5 percent of the miles rated were considered as new construction (H-58), while approximately 16.8 percent were in excellent/good condition, less than one percent of rated roads were in fair condition, while 3.0 percent were in poor condition. Approximately 73 percent of the road network was not rated.

Table 8-1 Asset Management Strategies			
PASER Ratings	Strategy	Description/ maintenance technique	
1-4 	Structural Improvement	Total reconstruction, resurfacing, gravel resurfacing, patching with major overlay	
5-7 	Capital Preventive Maintenance	Crack sealing, asphalt overlay, chip seal	
8-10 	Routine Maintenance	Street sweeping, shoulder maintenance	

FINANCING

Local Funding

The County Road Commission has the responsibility of construction and maintenance on both the primary and local road systems. The Road Commission must finance all the construction on the primary system. The Township must contribute 50 percent of the cost of construction on the local road system. The Road Commission provides financing for maintenance on both the primary and local systems. The Township levies one mil for road improvements and one project is planned annually. Burt Township, between 1989 and 1990, spent \$20,000 on local road improvements and in 1991 spent almost \$48,000.

Michigan Transportation Fund

The Alger County Road Commission bears the major responsibility for construction and maintenance of all county roads in the Township. The bulk of their funding comes from the Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF). Revenues collected from fuel taxes and motor vehicle registration fees are distributed to county road commissions, cities, and villages by formula through the Michigan Transportation Fund, established under PA 51 of 1951. Road classification, road mileage, and population are factored into a formula to distribute funds to all the county road commissions. A percentage of the funding received by each road commission is also set aside for engineering, snow removal, and urban roads. For 2011, the Alger County Road Commission was allocated a total of \$2,006,480 from the Michigan Transportation Fund, compared to \$2,154,434 received in 2005, a decrease of 6.8 percent in funding.

Michigan Transportation Economic Development Fund (TEDF)

The establishment of this fund in 1987 set forth a mission “to enhance the ability of the state to compete in an international economy, to serve as a catalyst for economic growth of the state,

and to improve the quality of life in the state.” Investing in highway, road and street projects necessary to support economic expansion is the purpose of the TEDF. The six funding categories of the TEDF are as follows:

1. Category A-target industries
2. Category B-state trunkline takeover
3. Category C-urban congestion
4. Category D-rural primary
5. Category E-forest road
6. Category F - urban area

A portion of this fund allocates revenues to Alger County based on acres of commercial forest and National Park or Lakeshore land and to help create a network of all-season roads. In addition there is a competitive category that counties can apply to where projects are related to economic development opportunities in areas such as tourism, forestry, manufacturing, etc. Alger County has applied to this latter program to help improve H-58.

Other

Federal assistance for state highways is supported mainly through motor fuel taxes. Construction and repair costs associated with state trunkline systems are generated from these taxes. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, and its reauthorization as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), has resulted in allocation changes that have benefitted Michigan. Under the concept of “intermodalism,” transportation planning is supposed to engender cooperation among the different transportation modes that interconnect at shared hubs, or intermodals.

Ten percent of each state’s Surface Transportation Program (STP) funding is set aside for transportation enhancement projects. Enhancement activities are meant to be such things as landscaping, bicycle paths, historic preservation, storm water runoff mitigation and other quality-of-life projects. A formal process of application has been established by the Michigan Department of Transportation to afford local and state jurisdictions an opportunity to pursue this funding.

Another funding source available to the Road Commission is through the new federal legislation enacted in 1991. Alger County has an allocation from the federal ISTEA program. In addition to their allocation, the county, because of the National Lakeshore and Hiawatha National Forest, can apply for additional funds through other programs, such as the Public Lands Highway Program. The recent reorganization of various federal programs has made it difficult to completely sort out. There are a few county roads, such as H-58 and Federal Forest Highway 13 that are eligible. Alger County has in the past applied for these funds and in 1991 received an allocation to improve two miles of H-58 near Sable Falls in the Township.

In spite of the amount of funds made available to the Road Commission from these different sources, they are continuing to fall further behind needs. The percentage of all roads in Alger County characterized as "fair, good or excellent" is diminishing. Inflation increases the County's costs while revenues have been fairly stagnant. It is a safe assumption that road needs will

exceed available resources for the foreseeable future unless more funds are made available for this purpose.

ADDITIONAL TRANSPORTATION MODES

In Burt Township, as in Alger County, highways and roads are the major form of transportation for both people and goods. In addition, the community has a small craft harbor, an airport, and some bicycle paths.

The airport is located approximately three miles southeast of town and consists of a grass runway. The airport is closed during the winter months. It was built in 1947 by Trans-Canada Airways as an emergency landing field which operated until 1959. Now operated by the Township, it annually hosts a fly-in which attracts approximately 250 people each summer. If opportunities arise to improve the airport with grant or other funds, the township should pursue its development.

Burt Township has a bicycle path along Coast Guard Point. There is also interest in developing additional bicycle paths in the Township.

There also has been some concern over conflicts between different modes of transportation. One of the ways to help alleviate this concern is to develop separate trails for off-road transportation.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The Township Board and the Planning Commission should continue to work with the Alger County Road Commission and MDOT to ensure that transportation deficiencies are not impediments to investment in the Township.
- Burt Township will continue to prioritize local road improvement projects and work with the Alger County Road Commission to schedule these projects as local and road commission funds become available. The Township has an excellent working relationship with the Alger County Road Commission.
- The Township should continue to encourage the construction of private roads that are built up to County Road Commission specifications, to ensure that emergency services can be provided to these residents.
- The aging of the local population could result in future needs for additional transportation services for the elderly and/or disabled.
- After decades as a sand and gravel road then five years of construction, Alger County H-58 between Grand Marais and Munising is now completely paved, creating one of the most beautiful drives in the Great Lakes region. With this newly completed road project, Pictured Rocks staff anticipates additional traffic with bicycles, tour buses, larger motor homes and fifth-wheel trailers and motorcycles.