

# Chapter 4

## Transportation

### Introduction

Transportation planning is multi-faceted. A community must balance a transportation system that allows for the free movement of automobiles and trucks yet allows for safe travel of bicyclists and pedestrians. It also must take into account the needs of citizens who are disabled or do not drive.

Like the other chapters in this Plan, transportation is not “stand alone” and is interconnected to other aspects of the community, especially with land use. The Town of Wheaton’s transportation system is largely focused on vehicular travel but more residents wish for options that allow them to safely walk or bike in the Town.

### Modes of Transportation

The movement of people and goods is accomplished through a variety of transportation modes. These modes include car, truck, rail, public transportation, ship, air, bicycle and sidewalks/paths. For the most part, each mode fits a particular need. Automobiles function as the dominant mode for the movement of people. Trucks provide for the rapid movement of goods and products over the highway network. Air travel helps to move people and lightweight products quickly over long distances. The railroad functions primarily for the movement of bulk commodities over long distances, while bicycle paths and sidewalks provide for the movement of people.

### Local Roads and Highways

Roads can be generally classified into three categories:

1. Arterials
2. Collectors
3. Local Roads

A road’s classification is determined by the type of service it provides. Typically, arterials provide the least amount of access and highest level of mobility while local streets provide the most access and lowest level of mobility. Collector roads provide a combination of access and mobility. Map 4-1 shows the road network in the Town of Wheaton, functional classification, and average daily traffic counts for county, state, and U.S. highways.

The Town of Wheaton is served by approximately 115 miles of roads under County (34 miles) and local (81 miles) jurisdictions. The Town is served by three major highway: S.T.H. 29 running east and west through the middle of the Town, U.S.H. 53 running north and south on the eastern edge of the Town, and U.S.H 12, which crosses the southwest corner of the Town. S.T.H. 29 and U.S.H. 53 are classified as backbone routes in the Wisconsin Department of Transportation’s (WisDOT) Corridors 2020 Plan. The backbone system is a collection of



multilane highways, including the interstate system and much of the state trunk highway system that serve longer, interregional trips within and beyond the State of Wisconsin.

S.T.H. 29 and U.S.H. 53 are classified as arterial routes since they are designed to provide a high level of mobility between communities. Approximately 35 miles of roads within the Town are under Chippewa County jurisdiction. About 2.2 miles of C.T.H. T from the southern Town border to S.T.H. 29, are classified as arterial routes.

About 23 miles, including the remainder of C.T.H. T, C.T.H.s M, N, and F, as well as U.S.H. 12, 20th Street, and Business Highway 29 are collector routes. The remaining 77 miles of roads under County and Town jurisdiction are classified as local routes.

U.S.H. 53 averages about 18,900 vehicles per day but only a short portion of the highway is in the Town of Wheaton. U.S.H. 12 averages about 3,300 vehicles a day through the southwest corner of the Town. S.T.H. 29 averages about 14,100 vehicles a day and travels the entire width of the Town. Because of the high number of vehicles and importance of this principal arterial, the long-range plan for S.T.H. 29 through the Town of Wheaton is to convert it to a freeway. The plan includes the closure of public road at-grade intersections via either a cul-de-sac or grade separated crossings. Grade separated crossings are planned for 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 40<sup>th</sup> Street. WisDOT does not currently have scheduled projects that would complete the freeway conversion and it would likely be accomplished through several projects. Existing at-grade intersections are monitored and evaluated for safety and addressed individually as needed. Currently no specific intersections have seen significant increases in crashes that would trigger a safety project.

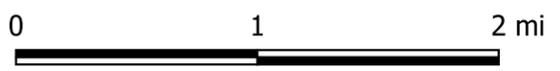
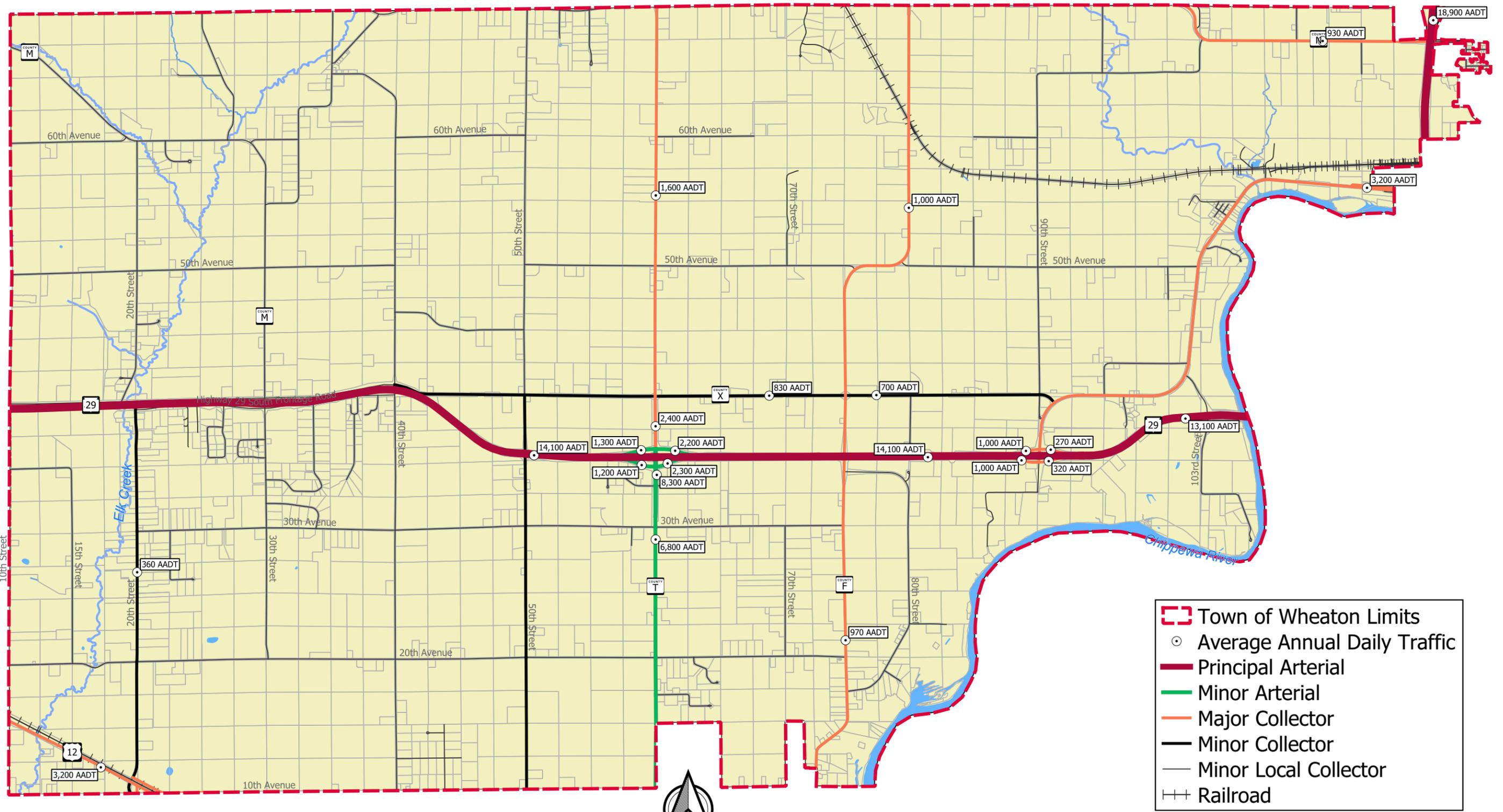
Since most long range transportation planning pertains to high traffic roads under the jurisdiction of federal, state, or county government, the Town of Wheaton can also explore Town development policies that effect the flow of traffic on local roads such as identifying through-corridors and limiting the number of cul-de-sacs.

## **Bridges**

According to WisDOT, the Town of Wheaton is responsible for the maintenance of eight bridges. State and local bridges are inspected at least once every two years. WisDOT is responsible for all inspections of bridges along the state highway system. Municipalities complete the inspections for bridges along the local roadway. Bridges are rated and categorized in terms of their functional and structural condition. A functionally obsolete bridge is typically older and no longer meets geometric standards, such as having narrow lanes or shoulders. However, this classification does not mean the bridge is unsafe. A structurally deficient bridge generally has an element that needs attention, such as potholes or rust.

One bridge in the Town of Wheaton is rated as structurally deficient. Chippewa County owns the bridge on C.T.H. X over Elk Creek. This structure was built in 1937 and is rated now as structurally deficient.





Chippewa County Land Records Division. Tax Parcels. 2019.  
 OSM WI Rail Data. 2018.  
 OSM. WI Road Data. 2018.  
 WI DOA. Municipal Borders. 2019.  
 WDNR. Surface Water Features. 2019.

December 01, 2020  
 I:\Clients-Memo\W\W3984 Town of Wheaton\005 Comprehensive Plan Update\GIS\Map Files\Transportation.qgz

# Road Classifications and Average Annual Daily Traffic Counts

Town of Wheaton  
 Chippewa County, WI



## Map 4-1

Measured Nitrate Levels

The WisDOT Local Bridge Program helps cost share when rehabilitating or replacing the most seriously deteriorating existing local bridges on Wisconsin's local highway and road systems. Typically, the Town of Wheaton would be responsible for 20% of these costs.

## Transit

The Town of Wheaton does not operate any public transportation systems.

The Chippewa County Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) can arrange transportation opportunities if a resident meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Over the Age of 60
- An adult with a temporary or permanent disability
- Must reside at home
- No access to transportation
- No funding sources to provide transportation

Transportation services are available for medical appointments. Rides can also be provided for shopping and social and personal business purposes based on available funding. The ADRC of Chippewa County contracts with various transportation agencies to help meet transportation needs based on eligibility.

The Chippewa County Department of Human Services: Transportation Program has a Volunteer Caregiver Transportation Program which serves all of Chippewa County. The Volunteer Caregiver Program provides volunteers with a number of service opportunities including transportation to needed medical appointments.

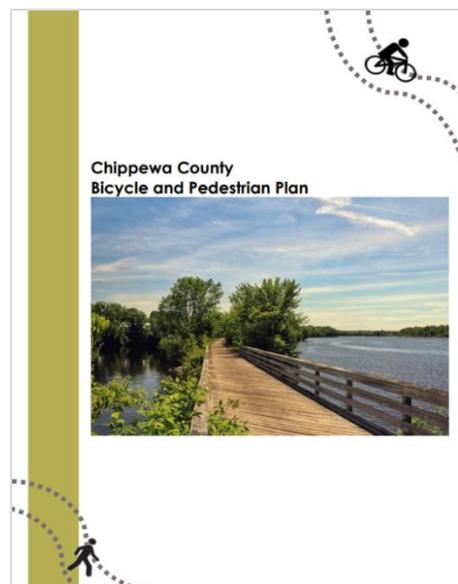
Taxi services can change frequently but Town of Wheaton residents can contact them to see if service is available.

## Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

There is one bicycle and pedestrian path in the Town of Wheaton. There is an approximately 1,300' of paved trail on the north side of S.T.H. 29 from the Chippewa River to 103<sup>rd</sup> Street in the Town.

In 2019, West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission worked with Dunn County, Chippewa County, and Eau Claire County to create individual Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans that connects the three counties.

Generally, it is more difficult for rural areas to provide off-road paths and trails because they are cost prohibitive. Figure 4-1 shows the recommended bicycle routes through



the Town of Wheaton identified in the Chippewa County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

The Wheaton Town Park also has 1.5 miles of walking/hiking/running trails for the public.

**Figure 4-1: Recommended Bicycle Routes**



Source: Chippewa County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

## **Railroads**

There are two railroads that travel through portions of the Town of Wheaton. Canadian National operates a freight rail line running through the Town of Wheaton's northeast corner. This line travels through New Richmond, Chippewa Falls, and Stanley and provides rail access to Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, and beyond.

Union Pacific operates a freight rail line running through the Town of Wheaton's southwest corner. This line travels through Eau Claire, Elk Mound, and Hudson. This line provides rail access to the Twin Cities area and Chicago.

## **Air Transportation**

Chippewa County has two publicly owned airports. A Basic Utility-A (BU-A) airport is located in Cornell, approximately 36 miles northwest of Wheaton. This type of airport is designed to accommodate aircraft of less than 12,500 pounds in gross weight, with approach speeds below 121 knots and wingspans of less than 49 feet.

The Chippewa Valley Regional Airport, located in the City of Eau Claire, provides scheduled passenger and freight air transit to Chicago twice a day via United Airlines. This airport is rated



as an Air Carrier/Cargo (AC/C), meaning it is designed to accommodate virtually all aircraft, up to and including wide body jets and large military transports.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport is the nearest international airport and is approximately 90 miles from the Town of Wheaton.

### **Truck Transportation**

According to the WisDOT Wisconsin Long Truck Operator's Map, S.T.H. 29 traveling east and west through Wheaton, U.S.H. 12 crossing Wheaton's southwest corner, and U.S.H. 53 crossing the northeast corner of Wheaton are designated long truck routes. These are routes that are safe to operate vehicles and combinations of vehicles with overall lengths that cannot be limited.

### **Water Transportation**

The nearest multi-modal ports are in Superior, Wisconsin on Lake Superior (144 miles away) and La Crosse, Wisconsin on the Mississippi River (100 miles away).

The Town and the WDNR provide a public boat landing on the Chippewa River for recreational purposes. The Town is responsible for the maintenance of this boat landing.

### **Snowmobile and ATV Trails**

There are nearly 20 miles of snowmobile trails throughout the Town of Wheaton. Map 4-2 shows the existing state snowmobile corridors and locally maintained trails in the Town of Wheaton. Snowmobile clubs work with property owners to gain access to land for trails. These connect to a greater network throughout the area. In 2018, the Wheaton Town Board voted against establishing ATV routes in the Town in part due to the challenges to the Chippewa County Sheriff's Department of enforcing regulations for operator age, speed, complaints, and hours of operation.

### **Relationship to State and Regional Transportation Plans**

Several state and regional organizations and agencies have developed plans and programs for the management and systematic update of transportation facilities in the area. The Town of Wheaton Comprehensive Plan 2020-2040 supports or does not contradict the goals in these transportation related plans or organizations.

- State Highway Plan 2020
- State Airport System Plan 2030
- Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020
- Bicycle Transportation Plan 2020
- Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020
- Rail Plan 2030
- State Freight Plan
- Connections 2050



- West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition
- Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Improvement Plan 2020-2024
- Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Organization Long Range Transportation Improvement Plan 2015-2045

### **Transportation Expenditure Planning**

Transportation infrastructure eventually needs to be maintained or expanded. A sound transportation system plan should attempt to foresee and plan for future upgrades and improvements. Two ways of doing this is by developing a road improvements plan and maintaining and monitoring PASER ratings.

A Five-Year Capital improvement Plan includes identified transportation infrastructure projects, priorities, and estimated costs. It can be updated yearly.

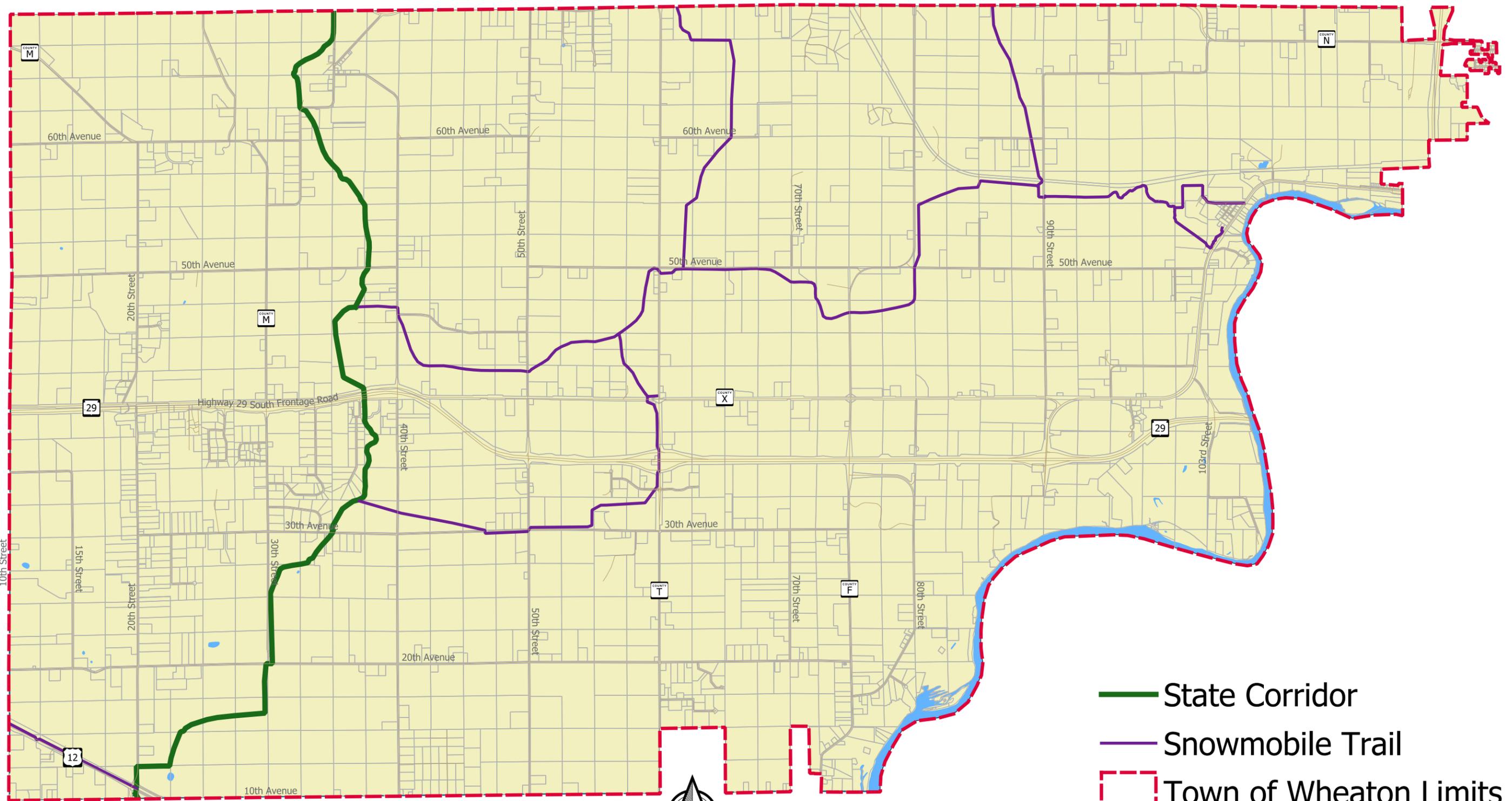
Pavement ratings can be used for planning maintenance and budgets for local roadways. Municipalities and counties are required to assess the physical pavement condition of their local roads. A required method of doing this is referred to as Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating or PASER. PASER rates roadways from Failed (needs total reconstruction) to Excellent (no visible stress). PASER allows for better allocation of resources, a better understanding of pavement conditions, and allows for long term planning. PASER ratings are updated every two years by Town staff.

### **Other Sources of Transportation Funding**

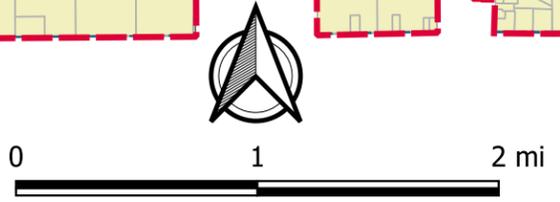
Local multi-modal transportation projects can be funded through different sources. Some of the most common sources that are or could be used are:

- State Shared Revenue
- Local General Funds
- Community Development Block Grants
- WDNR Stewardship Grants
- WDOT Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) Grants
- Private Foundations
- Corporate Foundations





- State Corridor
- Snowmobile Trail
- Town of Wheaton Limits



Chippewa County Land Records Division. Tax Parcels. 2019.  
 OSM WI Rail Data. 2018.  
 OSM. WI Road Data. 2018.  
 WI DOA. Municipal Borders. 2019.  
 WDNR. Surface Water Features. 2019.

December 01, 2020  
 I:\Clients-Memo\W\W3984 Town of Wheaton\005 Comprehensive Plan Update\GIS\Map Files\Recreation.ggz

# Official Snowmobile Trails

Town of Wheaton  
 Chippewa County, WI



Map 4-2  
 Official Snowmobile Trails

### Survey Results Related to Transportation

The Town of Wheaton Comprehensive Planning Public Opinion Report, 2019 contained three groups of questions that included or focused on transportation options in the Town of Wheaton.

As shown in Table 4-1, of those with an opinion (excluding the “no opinion” responses), snowmobile trails received the highest rating and was rated excellent or good by 85% of respondents. Ratings for bike trails were relatively low (32% good or excellent). Males were slightly more satisfied with bike trails (35% excellent/good ratings vs. 27% for female respondents). Respondents could write-in other recreation facilities and topics. “Other” responses included ATV trails.

**Table 4-1: Opinions About Recreation Facilities and Trails**

	No Opinion	# With Opinion	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Park and Recreation Facilities	21%	450	22%	57%	16%	4%
Snowmobile trails	43%	324	22%	63%	13%	2%
Boating and River Facilities Access	39%	348	6%	57%	30%	7%
Bike trails	56%	254	4%	28%	34%	34%

A section of the survey asked respondents two groups of questions regarding transportation issues in the Town of Wheaton (see Table 4-2). The first questions asked about road conditions and maintenance. Of those with an opinion (excluding the “no opinion” responses), Town of Wheaton residents are largely satisfied with the overall road network in the Town (90% strongly agree/agree that the condition of local roads and streets in the Town are adequate for intended uses). Nearly every respondent had an opinion about the condition of the Town’s roads and streets.

A high percentage (87%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are satisfied with snow removal on Town of Wheaton roads. While survey respondents were generally satisfied with local roads and streets and snow removal in the Town, they were much less willing to pay more taxes for such services.

Although nearly one-half of survey respondents believe that biking and walking are important modes of transportation in the Town (55% strongly agree/agree), a lower percentage (43% agree/strongly agree) see a need for more biking and walking lanes along public roadways in the Town of Wheaton.



**Table 4-2: Opinions About Transportation Issues**

	No Opinion	# With Opinion	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Satisfied w/snow removal on Town roads	4%	555	22%	65%	11%	3%
Condition of local roads/streets in the Town is adequate for intended uses	1%	564	16%	74%	7%	2%
Should be more biking/walking lanes along public roadways in the Town	15%	486	16%	27%	40%	17%
Biking/walking are important modes of transportation in the Town	14%	496	12%	43%	35%	9%
Willing to pay more taxes for snow removal/road maintenance in the Town	9%	520	3%	24%	49%	24%

The second set of questions related to transportation asked respondents to rate railroads and shared ride van services in the Town of Wheaton (see Table 4-3). Many respondents said they had no opinion about these two services. Of those with an opinion (excluding the “no opinion” responses), a substantial majority of respondents (74% out of 255 respondents with an opinion) rated railroads as good or excellent, and 66 percent out of 128 respondents with an opinion rated shared ride van services as fair or poor. Respondents could write-in and rate other transportation issues. “Other” responses included park n’ rides, and truck routes.

**Table 4-3: Opinions About Railroads and Shared Ride Van Services**

	No Opinion	# With Opinion	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Railroads	55%	255	11%	63%	22%	3%
Shared Ride Van Services	78%	128	4%	30%	36%	30%

## Goals, Objectives and Recommendations

**Goal 1:** The Town of Wheaton will guide the development, maintenance, and improvement of local transportation systems to meet the needs of the Town’s residents and businesses with regard to safety, accessibility, traffic flow, and maintenance costs.

### Objectives:

1. Increase transportation options for residents.
2. Increase vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian education and awareness.
3. Reduce the cost of transportation infrastructure maintenance and improvements.

### Recommendations:

1. Continue to coordinate bicycle and pedestrian planning and improvements with the City of Chippewa Falls, Village of Lake Hallie, City of Eau Claire, Chippewa County and Eau Claire County.
2. Evaluate future Town, County and State road projects to incorporate bicycle and pedestrian improvements such as expanded or paved shoulders, striping or adding safe areas at grade separated highway crossings based on the County’s or Town’s plans.



3. Explore grants and other sources of funding to improve and increase bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure when feasible.
4. Consider developing a process to evaluate new roads when site plans incorporate cul-de-sacs. The process could take into account adjacent future land uses, natural and other barriers, and development density that would limit the ability to extend a road in the future.
5. Consider developing a policy that would evaluate proposed roads and could require a developer to plat an area for a future right-of-way so a road could be expanded in the future to maintain/improve vehicular traffic flow in the Town.
6. Continue to utilize the Town road PASER reports and Capital Improvement Planning to prioritize road maintenance projects and align possible grants to offset costs.
7. Continue to work with the Chippewa County Sheriff's Department to maintain/improve traffic safety and traffic ordinance enforcement.
8. As development occurs, identify locations for park-n-ride areas.
9. Evaluate the need for additional types of safe transportation options and related infrastructure as the demand develops.
10. Continue to apply for grants to offset the cost of road and trail improvements.

DRAFT