

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Transportation facilities and services in any county vary according to a number of factors, including population levels and distribution, topography, land usage and geographic location. The livelihood of the residents of York County and each of the municipalities in the County is, to a large extent, dependent on convenient and efficient access to regional, national and international markets for the products produced in the County, as well as efficient circulation of people and goods within the County. Transportation planning is thus an important consideration in the development of the County and this Comprehensive Plan.

Given the location of York County in the non-metropolitan portion of Nebraska, the population levels and densities in the rural areas of the County are declining and thus the financial ability to maintain existing transportation facilities and services will become more of an issue during the planning period. The most important and most used mode of transportation in the County is the motor vehicle and thus the roadway system in and serving the County comprises a major transportation planning component.

EXISTING ROADWAY SYSTEM

The highways, roads and streets in York County are provided and maintained by four different governmental entities. The highways serving the County, including Interstate 80, U. S. Highways 81 and 34, Nebraska Highway 69 and the various spur highways extending from Interstate 80 to the municipalities in the County are developed and maintained by the State of Nebraska with financial support from the federal government. The other rural roadways are roadways provided and maintained by York County and the streets within the municipalities are provided and maintained by each incorporated municipality.

The roadways in the rural areas of the County are classified as to level of use and function not only by the County, but by the Federal and State governments. The classification system used by the County varies slightly from that of the Federal and State governments with regard to terminology. The overall identification of the major roadways is basically the same in either classification system.

The County roadway classification system consists of four types of roadway functions, including:

- **State and Federal Highways:** Those roadways in the County, provided and maintained by the State of Nebraska, which provide inter-county travel and link the County to regional and national roadway systems.
- **County Primary Roads:** Those roadways provided and maintained by York County which serve the intra-county traffic movement needs. These roadways may be either hard-surfaced or gravel roadways.
- **County Secondary Roads:** Those roadways provided and maintained by York County which connect with the County Primary roads or State or Federal highways within the County.
- **Local Roads:** Those roadways, provided and maintained by York County, other than primary or secondary roadways which provide access to local properties. These roadways are typically less traveled roads.

The Nebraska Department of Roads, through guidelines set forth by the Federal Highway and Transportation Department, classifies the roadways in York County as follows:

- **Interstate Highway:** The federally designated National System of Interstate and Defense Highways.
- **Expressway:** A group of highways following major traffic patterns in the State which are typically developed as multiple-lane, divided highways.
- **Major Arterial:** The balance of highway routes serving major statewide interests for highway transportation which are characterized by high speed and relatively long distance travel.
- **Other Arterial:** Other highways consisting of those highways in the State which do not function as an expressway or major arterial, but which serve through traffic routes. These arterials also provide access to smaller urban areas and recreation areas in the State.
- **Collector:** Those roadways which pick up (collect) traffic from the local roadways and deliver such traffic to other arterial roadways or to urban centers. Collector roads are often referred to as “farm-to-market” roads.
- **Local:** All other roadways under the higher functional classification. The primary function of these roads is to provide access to abutting properties.

As indicated in Figure 4, the existing Functional Classification of roads in York County, the major roadways in the County consists of Interstate 80, other major and minor arterial highways and major and minor collector roads.

This functional classification system represents roadway usage which has developed over time. The existing roadway system provides a level of transportation service which is compatible with current travel patterns and levels of usage.

The primary issue related to the existing roadway system is not the classification or the location of major roadways, but rather the on-going cost of maintenance of these roadways and the culverts and bridges that are part of the County roadway system.

A major issue that York County will face during the planning period and beyond is the ever-increasing cost of maintaining the County roads, culverts and bridges. This issue has resulted in a more detailed analysis of the County road system. The findings of this detailed analysis revealed several critical issues regarding the County road system including the following:

- Even though there has been a substantial decline in the rural population of the County in the last 30 years, a 20% decline, and even though the number of farms in the County has declined by nearly half (48%) since 1982, the

number of miles of roads maintained by the County has remained the same. In fact, the number of improved roadways in the County has actually increased during this same time period.

- With the notable declines in the rural population and the number of farms in the County, the number of roadways on which there are no interior properties and on which there are no residences has increased substantially. This begs the questions of whether these roads are needed and whether the County taxpayers can afford to maintain these roads in the future.
- The detailed analysis indicates that, not including county roadways on the perimeter of the County, there are currently 128½ miles of maintained County roads on which no one resides and which have no interior properties under separate ownership. This is in addition to the 53 miles of minimum maintenance and earthen roads. Of these a total of 26½ miles of such roads are included in the functional classification system as county collector roads. The need for and thus the need to maintain the remaining 102 miles of such maintained roads (see Figure 5) is an important question as, given the current direct maintenance cost of

approximately \$1,500 per mile, the annual cost of maintaining these roads exceeds \$153,000. It is imperative to note that this cost does NOT include the cost of maintaining the 136 steel culverts, 3 box culverts and 20 bridges which occur on these roads nor does it include the administrative costs associated with operating the County Roads Department. It is reasonable to assume that these added costs could equal or exceed the direct cost of maintaining the road surfaces.

- These costs also do not include the cost of maintaining, on a limited basis, the 53 miles of minimum maintenance roads.
- Each mile of County road has a 66' wide right-of-way, thus each mile of County road right-of-way contains 7.95 acres of land. If a mile of existing road were to be vacated and thus become taxable, it would add \$40,545 to the tax base. The amount is based upon an average assessed value of \$5,100 per acre for rural agricultural land. If all 155 miles of underutilized and minimum maintenance roads were to be vacated, the result would add \$6,284,000 to the tax base and result in an additional \$108,000 in property tax revenue to local taxing entities.

- Possible vacation of these underutilized roads could add 7.95 acres per mile vacated to crop production. If all 120 miles of such roads were to be vacated, local farmers who own property along such roads would gain a total of 911 of land that could be used for crop production.
- Vacation of any County road would result in a decline in state aid payments to the County for roadway maintenance. At the current reimbursement rate of \$238 per mile, the County would incur a decline in revenue of \$238 per mile vacated. If all 155 miles of such roads were to be vacated, the state aid revenue would decline by a total of \$36,890. This potential loss of state-aid revenue would be more than offset by the estimated \$153,000 saved, in just direct cost, by not maintaining these roads and the additional property tax that would be generated.
- It is interesting to note that the distribution of these underutilized roads is quite equal throughout the rural areas of the County. With few exceptions, no property owner would experience more than one mile additional travel distance to other major roadways and the urban areas of the County if such roadways were vacated.

- The relatively even distribution of these underutilized and minimum maintenance roads would, if these roads were vacated, make it potentially feasible to reconfigure the road maintenance patrol districts and, as each current patrol district contains approximately 100 miles of road, a reduction in the number of patrols and thus manpower and equipment needs could also be reduced.

Based on the analysis of the roadway transportation system in York County, this plan provides two recommendations. These include:

- Modify the functional classification of County Road 5 between County Roads B and E and of County Road E between County Roads 3 and 5 to be identified as a minor collector road in place of a major collector road. With the improvement of County Road 3, there is little reason to have two major collector roads within two miles of each other.
- The County should consider the vacation of some or all of the underutilized roadways identified in Figure 5 as a means of reducing road maintenance cost and as a means to make the remaining roadway system more efficient as well as adding to the tax base and allowing the vacated rights-

of-way to be used for increased crop production or other agricultural uses.

OTHER TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

As discussed in this Comprehensive Plan, there are two important trends that have and are occurring with regard to the population of the County. The first is that the per capita and family incomes have not kept pace with the rate of inflation, resulting in less real income for persons in the County, particularly among those residing in the urban areas of the County. This trend, combined with the aging of the overall population of the County indicates that during the planning period there will be a larger number of persons reaching retirement age and beyond. This implies that such persons may have restricted incomes and that there will be an increase in single person households as deaths occur in these older age groups.

The combination of restricted incomes and aging will result in increased demands for transportation services by persons with limited incomes or who can no longer provide or operate their own vehicles for transportation.

In York County this need for transportation services has been recognized and public transportation services are provided through the York County Transportation Service agency. To a lesser extent, transportation services to clients are provided through the York General Health

Care Systems which operate nursing home and assisted living facilities in the City of York.

This agency offers fee based transportation services to residents of York County. The fees charged are income based to allow primary transportation services to those most in need of such services. The transportation services are also subsidized through funds from federal and state governments with local match funding from the City of York and York County. Currently, 75% of the subsidy is derived from federal and state sources with local funding by the City of York (\$7,500 annually), York County (\$25,000 in the current fiscal year) and by fund raising by the agency.

The agency currently operates 3 vehicles with one full-time and two part-time drivers. These vehicles are used to provide first-come, first-serve transportation.

During the last year, the agency served an estimated 4,835 riders with 9,671 one-way boardings. The number of one-way boardings averages approximately 700 per month.

Currently, due to budget restrictions and lack of volunteers, the agency is denying transportation services to an average of 5 riders per day. Due to increased travel times and costs, a majority of these denials of service are to rural residents of the County.

There is thus a need to expand the transportation services offered by the agency, particularly for rural residents of the County. This expansion would be in the form of at least an additional part-time driver. The funding to address the added cost of this expansion could be provided through slightly increased rider fees and, because the most underserved portion of the population in need of transportation services resides in the rural areas of the County, through increased funding by the County. The County should consider utilizing a portion of the costs saved by reducing the number of maintained roads to provide this increased transportation funding need.