

05

TRANSPORTATION

Chapter highlights

- Overview
- The Roadway System
- Goals & Objectives



INTRODUCTION

The Transportation chapter of the Comprehensive Plan will show existing conditions and guide the City of Albert Lea and existing and future landowners in preparing for future growth and development. This section provides the framework for making decisions about existing and future transportation infrastructure. It will also help establish policies, standards, and guidelines to aid in major transportation projects and policy decisions.

Transportation is a critical element within the Comprehensive Plan. Transportation by various modes is needed for the movement of goods and people, which keeps a community vibrant and economically sound. However, Transportation can also be a source of concern, specifically in the form of traffic safety, volume, dust, noise, and access.

Chapter Overview

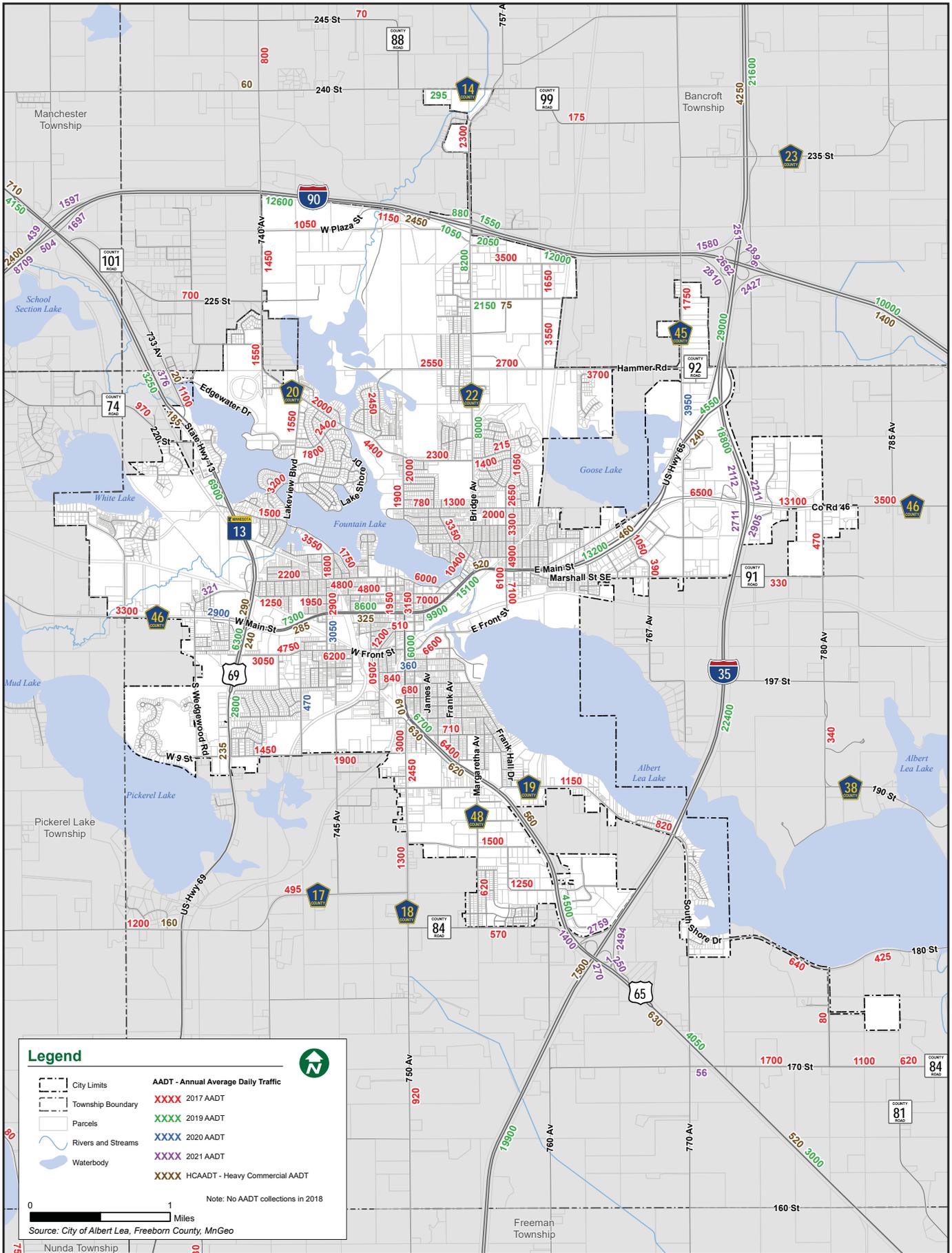
- Current Traffic Volumes
- Roadway Jurisdiction
- Functional Classification
- Safety
- Transit Service
- Non-Motorized Transportation
- Aviation

THE ROADWAY SYSTEM

Current Traffic Volumes

One of the most basic ways to assess a roadway system is to look at the traffic volumes. Figure 5-1 shows the existing Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) volumes on roads in Albert Lea.

FIGURE 5-1 CURRENT TRAFFIC VOLUMES



Current Traffic Volumes

Main Street acts as a major corridor for vehicle trips in Albert Lea. Highway 65 and Highway 69 carry the majority of heavy commercial AADT. Consistent traffic nodes include the exits along Interstate 35 and highway intersections with Main Street. AADT tends to decrease from Main Street moving north and south; the outermost sections of Albert Lea tend to have fewer trips than centrally located sections. Commercial and industrial nodes typically have higher AADTs than the residential areas of the city.

Albert Lea's AADT Map emphasizes the corridors that are used most often by travelers. Identifying the scale of traffic flow can aid Albert Lea in assessing road capacity and road longevity while planning for new roads or road maintenance in the future.



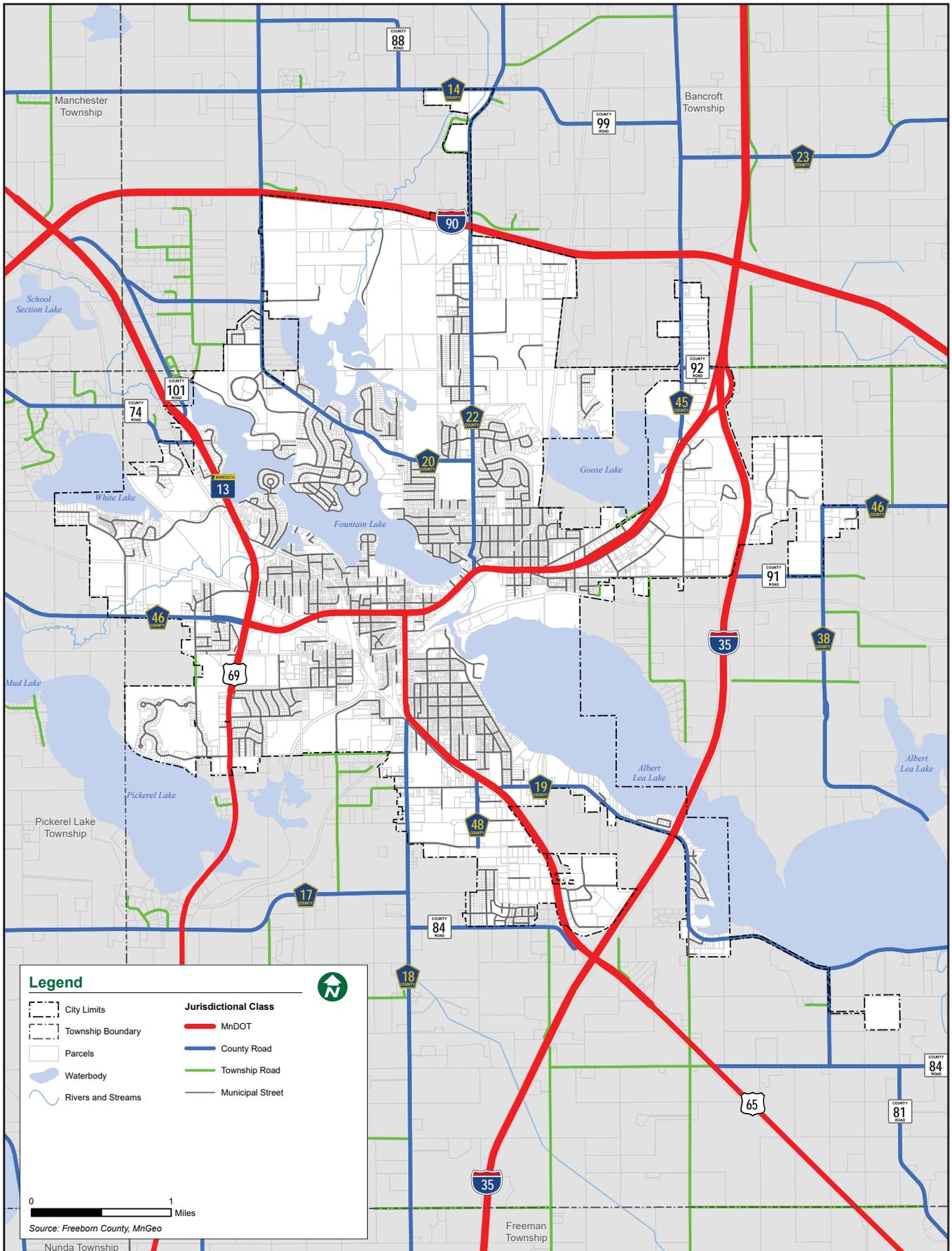
Roadway Jurisdiction

Roadways can be owned by different levels of government and are classified by their ownership. Roadways in Albert Lea fall under one of three jurisdictions: MnDOT, Freeborn County, or the City of Albert Lea.

Generally, roadways with higher mobility functions (such as arterials) should fall under the jurisdiction of a regional level of government. Roadway jurisdiction directly relates to the functional classification of roadways. Recognizing that these roadways serve greater areas resulting in longer trips and higher volumes, the jurisdiction of major roadways, including Principal Arterials and Minor Arterials, should fall under the jurisdiction of the state and county, respectively. Similarly, roadways with more emphasis on local circulation and access (such as collectors and local roads) should fall under the jurisdiction of the local government unit. These roadways serve more localized areas and result in shorter trip lengths and lower volumes.

The jurisdictional map can be seen in Figure 5-2. As described in the previous paragraph, many of the highest-volume roads are owned by MnDOT, while other higher volume roads are under the jurisdiction of Freeborn County. The City of Albert Lea owns most of the local streets throughout the city.

FIGURE 5-2 ROADWAY JURISDICTIONAL MAP



Functional Classification

The functional classification system helps designate how the roadway network handles traffic. Roads are categorized based on how they provide access to the adjacent land uses and whether they are designed more for access or mobility through the system. For example, Interstates have very high mobility but low amounts of access, while local streets have poor mobility but high levels of accessibility. Functional Classification is a cornerstone of transportation planning, allowing roads to be appropriately designed to handle the traffic upon them.

In Albert Lea, there are currently five types of existing roadway classifications as shown in Figure 5-3:

- Interstate Highway
- Minor Arterial
- Major Collector
- Minor Collector
- Local Street



Interstate Highways

Interstate highways are the highest classification of roadways in the United States. Interstate highways are built to handle the highest speeds and provide the greatest mobility over long distances. Interstates are limited access, divided highways that link major metro areas across the United States. Roadways in this category are officially designated as such by the Secretary of Transportation.

Albert Lea is adjacent to two interstates: Interstate 90 is located along the north boundary and Interstate 35 is located along the east side of the city. Interstate 90 runs east to west, connecting to Albert Lea to other regional cities including Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and La Crosse, Wisconsin. Interstate 35 runs south to north, connecting Albert Lea to destinations such as the Twin Cities and Des Moines, Iowa.

Minor Arterials

Roadways of this classification typically link urban areas and rural principal arterials to larger towns and other major traffic generators capable of attracting trips over similarly long distances. Minor arterials service medium-length trips, and their emphasis is on mobility as opposed to access in urban areas. They connect with principal arterials, other minor arterials, and collector streets. Connections to local streets should be avoided if possible. Minor arterials are responsible for accommodating thru-trips, as well as trips beginning or ending outside the Albert Lea area. Minor arterial roadways are typically spaced approximately ½ to 1 mile in developed areas and approximately 1 to 2 miles in developing areas.

Major Collectors

Roadways of this classification typically link neighborhoods together within a city or they link neighborhoods to business concentrations. A balance between mobility and access is desired. Major collector street connections are predominant to minor arterials, but they can be connected to any of the other four roadway functional classes. Local access to major collectors should be provided via public streets and individual property access should be avoided. Generally, major collector streets are predominantly responsible for providing circulation within a city. Major collectors are typically spaced approximately ¼ to ¾ mile in developed areas and approximately ½ to 1 mile in developing areas.

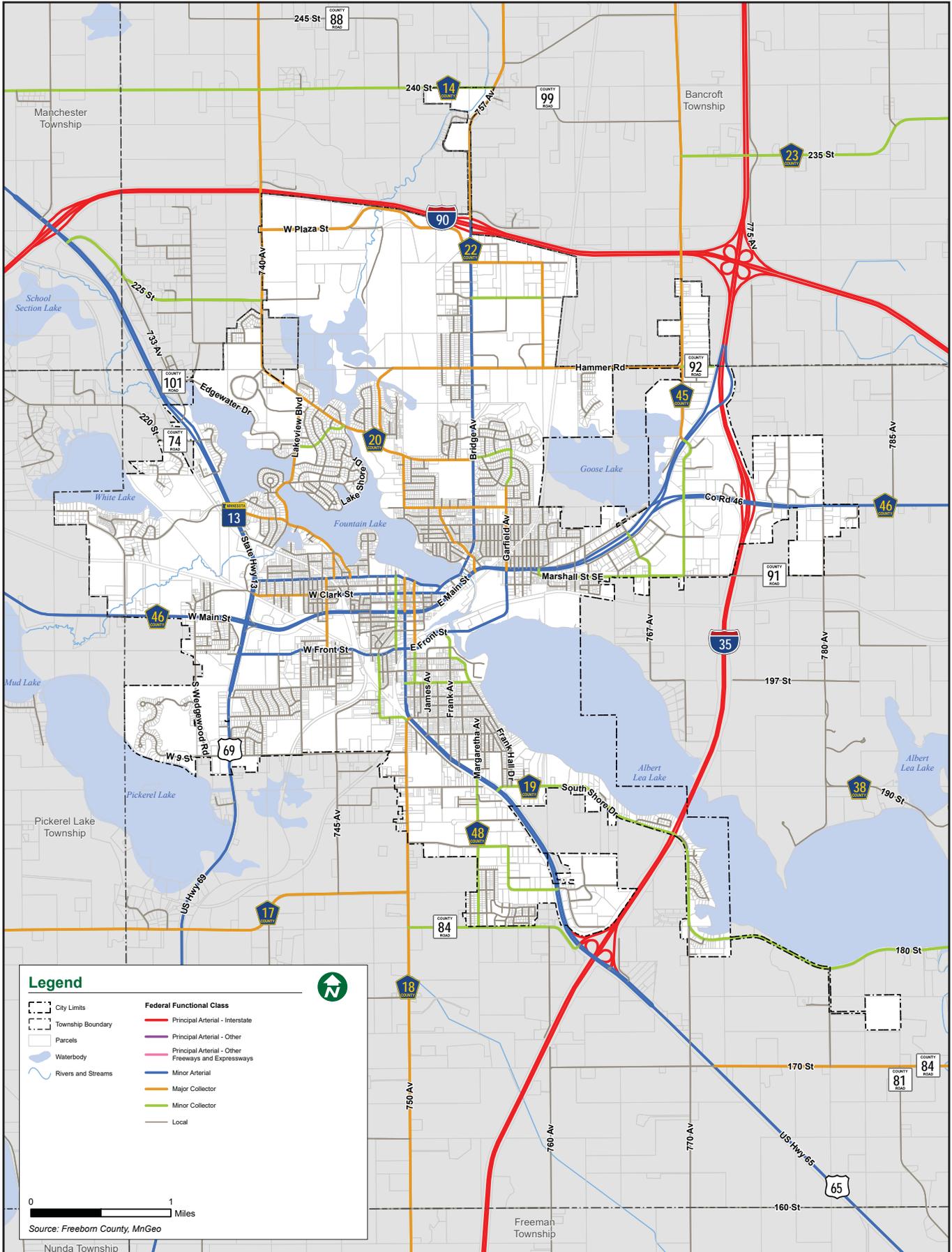
Minor Collectors

Roadways of this classification typically include city streets and rural township roadways, which facilitate the collection of local traffic and convey it to major collectors and minor arterials. Minor collector streets serve short trips at relatively low speeds. Their emphasis is focused on access rather than mobility. Minor collectors are responsible for providing connections between neighborhoods and the major collector/minor arterial roadways. These roadways should be designed to discourage short-cut trips through the neighborhood by creating jogs or other traffic slowing measures, in the roadway.

Local Streets

Roadways of this classification are those streets not classified as arterial or collector. Like minor collector streets, local streets typically include neighborhood city streets which provide direct access to individual residences and businesses and convey traffic to minor collectors, major collectors, and minor arterials. As with minor collectors, local streets serve short trips at relatively low speeds and their emphasis is increasingly focused on access rather than mobility. Accordingly, local streets do not include through traffic movements. As with many communities, many of the roadways within the City of Albert Lea are classified as local streets.

FIGURE 5-3 ROADWAY CLASSIFICATION MAP



Safety

The intersections with the highest number of crashes include the Interstate 35 connections, Main Street and Garfield Avenue, Bridge Avenue and Hammer Road, and Main Street and Broadway Avenue. Main Street and the Interstate 35 corridors include the highest number of crashes, likely due to the capacity and frequency of trips along those corridors.

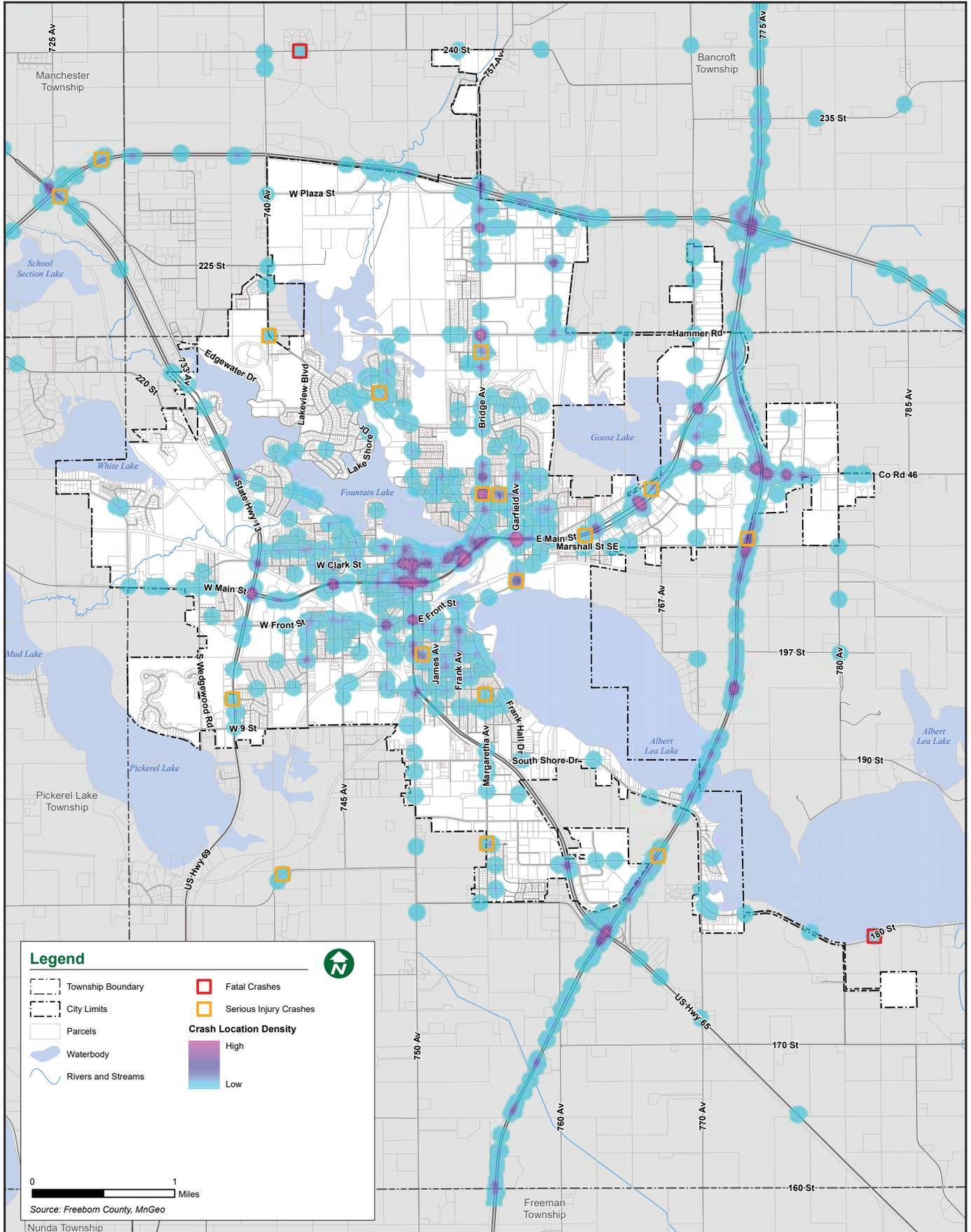


Roadway System Needs

A well-developed roadway system plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of a city. Good connectivity links students to schools, workers to jobs, and neighbors to each other. The state and county roads provide an established network of east-west and north-south connections throughout the city. Recent and continued updates to these roads continue to improve connectivity. As a result of this established system, the only gaps or deficiencies in the Albert Lea system are found in local road connections, either to the state and county roads or to local roads.

The expansion of the local road system generally occurs with new development. As development occurs, the city must evaluate the need for future road connections and extensions to ensure continued connectivity of neighborhoods to schools, shopping centers, business centers, or downtown; collector and local roads to arterial roads; and neighborhoods to other neighborhoods. The goal is to enhance the efficiency and safety the overall system.

FIGURE 5-4 FOUR YEAR CRASH SUMMARY (JUNE 2018 - JUNE 2022)



Transit Service

SMART: Southern Minnesota Area Rural Transit

Fixed route transit service in Albert Lea is operated by Southern Minnesota Area Rural Transit (SMART). As of Summer 2022, the bus operates between 7:00 AM and 9:00 PM Monday through Friday. The bus runs in a loop through the city and has 10 fixed stations and 6 by-request stops, which can be requested via a toll-free telephone number. The bus runs once per hour. Figure 5-5 has a map of the route and the schedule of when the bus picks up at each bus stop.

Demand response service is also available on a first come, first served basis. This service is available between 5:00 AM and 6:00 PM Monday – Friday, as well as from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM on Saturday and from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM on Sunday. While 24-hour advanced notice is encouraged by the agency, reservations may be requested at any time.

FIGURE 5-5 SMART ROUTE MAP



Hospital Shuttle Between Albert Lea and Austin

An additional service operated by SMART is the Hospital shuttle between Albert Lea and Austin, Minnesota. This service runs between the Mayo Clinic Health System buildings in Austin and Albert Lea. There are three trips on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and five trips on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The trip takes approximately 30 minutes. This service is not for emergency transportation and does not act as an ambulance.



Non-Motorized Transportation

Designated Bike Lanes

There are two on-street painted bike lanes in Albert Lea, on Broadway Avenue and Front Street. The Broadway Avenue bike lane runs from Main Street in the center of the city to 7th Street South, a distance of 0.8 miles. The Front Street bike lane runs east-west for 1.6 miles between US Highway 69 and Albert Lea Lake, just past Frank Street East. The end of the bike lane coincides with the western edge of the Blazing Star State Trail, allowing for a seamless transition between the two. Both lanes are painted and have on-street pavement marking denoting their use as bike lanes.

Blazing Star State Trail

This trail is paved and runs for 6 miles and runs from Albert Lea Lake to Myre-Big Island State Park. The accessible trail allows for walking, biking, inline skating, and electric wheelchairs. Much of the trail runs through the Myre-Big Island State Park, which has amenities such as hiking trails, picnic areas, and a campground.

Blue Zones Walkway Around Fountain Lake

The Blue Zones Walkway is a 4.35 mile path of paved sidewalks and trails around Fountain Lake. The path is also popular for biking. In addition to the paved sections, Lakeshore Drive is a gravel road that hugs the shoreline and is also used extensively by pedestrians. See the map of the Blue Zones walkway on the City website: <https://cityofalbertlea.org/blue-zones-walkway/>.

Wayfinding

Community wayfinding signage is generally a system of signs intended to direct visitors and other users to key civic, cultural, recreational attractions, as well as other destinations, within a city. Wayfinding can be city-wide or specific to a specific district, like a downtown area. These signs can be designed and intended for use by both pedestrian and vehicular traffic, with sizing and design varying depending on the intended user group. Often, people think of directional sign panels when they think of wayfinding, but other components of a comprehensive wayfinding package may include entrance signs, gateway monuments, trail signage, parking signs, informational kiosks, interpretive signage, banners, park signs, and more. Figure 5-6 depicts an example of various wayfinding signs.

FIGURE 5-6 EXAMPLE WAYFINDING SYSTEM FROM WACONIA



Aviation

The Albert Lea Municipal Airport (AEL) is a public airport owned by the City of Albert Lea. Located approximately 2.5 miles north of Downtown Albert Lea, the airport is located just south of Interstate 90. There are two asphalt runways, one 5,000 feet long and the other 2,898 feet long. While no commercial flights arrive at or depart from AEL, private flights are common. The Albert Lea Municipal Airport has Airport Safety Zone Boundaries set forth by the Minnesota Department of Transportation Aeronautics to protect against hazards to air navigation and to limit population and building density in the runway approach areas to protect life and property in case of an accident. These are located beyond each end of both runways. While there is no development in three of the four Airport Safety Zones, the southern Safety Zone from Runway 17/35 does encompass the Green Lea Golf Course, most of the Freeborn County Fairgrounds, and many of the surrounding houses.

The closest airport that has scheduled commercial flights is the Mason City Municipal Airport in Iowa, located 37 miles south of Albert Lea. Larger commercial airports with more regular service accessible from Albert Lea include the Rochester International Airport, 55 miles to the northeast, and the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, 91 miles north of the city.





GOALS & ACTIONS

Goal 1: Maintain and leverage the existing transportation infrastructure for potential development.

Objective 1.1. Plan future development around existing streets and access points.

Objective 1.2. Evaluate the quality of roads within Albert Lea.

Objective 1.3. Identify potential connection points within the existing transportation system.

Goal 2: Enhance the multimodal and connective transportation system.

Objective 2.1. Encourage connective routes for all transportation options.

Objective 2.2. Encourage high intensity uses near high intensity traffic roads.

Objective 2.3. Incorporate multimodal design into existing and new transportation systems.

Goal 3: Provide a holistic aesthetic transportation system for residents and visitors.

Objective 3.1. Incorporate Albert Lea branding into wayfinding signs and street design.

Objective 3.2. Integrate landscaping and lighting to enhance roadway design.

Objective 3.3. Create a balance of signage, structural elements, and environmental features.