



Asset Management: Rating the Roads in the Region

Throughout the summer, WMSRDC has been collecting data for the annual Asset Management Program. Asset management is a planning tool that is based on an inventory of each local road network within the region. It provides data that will allow transportation officials to monitor, plan, and strategically improve the road network.

In 2002, the Michigan Transportation Commission formed an Asset Management Council (AMC) and enacted the Asset Management Program. The goal of the AMC is to inventory all 39,000 miles of roads eligible for federal transportation funding within the State of Michigan, and according to the data collected, determine future distribution of ACT 51 transportation funds.

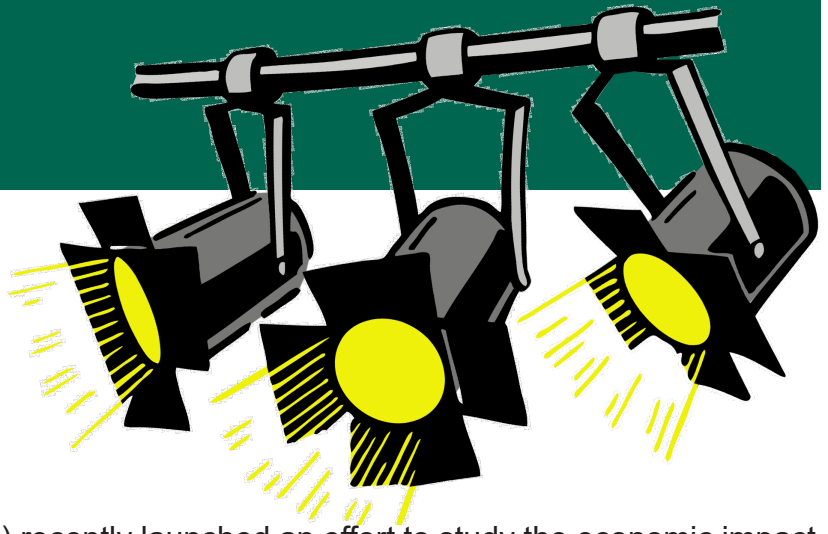
In a typical year, WMSRDC staff, along with a Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and a county road commission employee, collect this data for approximately half of all the federal aid roads within the WMSRDC region (Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties). The data collection effort requires the collection of three items: road condition rating, surface type, and the number of lanes. The road rating assessment system allows for the rating of the road surface condition for a given segment on a scale of 1-10. Ten being a brand new, reconstructed road, and one being a road in the lowest possible rating condition. Due to COVID-19, MDOT opted not to participate in road ratings again in 2022 in the WMSRDC region, but did provide a vehicle for WMSRDC staff to utilize for rating the counties in the region.

At the date of this writing, federal aid data collection had been completed for the counties of Lake, Mason, Oceana, and northern Ottawa. Data collection for Muskegon County and Newaygo County will take place in September.

In addition to federal aid data collection, WMSRDC will often rate local roads upon request or reimburse the road agencies if they decide to rate their own local roads. The Muskegon County Road Commission (MCRC) undertook their own local road ratings in 2022. WMSRDC staff completed local road ratings for the cities of Grand Haven, Roosevelt Park, Montague, and Whitehall.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

White River Economic Impact Assessment



The White River Watershed Collaborative (WRWC) recently launched an effort to study the economic impact of the White River in Newaygo, Oceana, and Muskegon counties. The study is intended to develop a baseline to gauge progress in the communities along the White River. The study will be conducted over a 12-month period to evaluate the economic impact of the White River on local communities through river-based recreation and property values. Information gathered will be leveraged to target opportunities to both capitalize on and improve the quality of the White River.

Since 2019, the WRWC has focused on environmental and economic opportunities of the White River. WRWC is led by Jake Lemon from Trout Unlimited and involves stakeholders from over 40 local, state and federal organizations. The WRWC Economic Opportunity sub-committee, led by Newaygo County's Economic Development Director, Julie Burrell, identified the opportunity to conduct an economic impact study of the White River.

Recognizing the potential value of this study, WMSRDC stepped up to serve as fiduciary on behalf of the WRWC. WMSRDC was able to successfully apply for and receive funding from the Community Foundation for Muskegon County, the Community Foundation for Oceana County, and the Fremont Area Community Foundation. Additional funding partners include Schrems West Michigan Trout Unlimited and Free the White River group. One hundred percent of funds raised will be dedicated to contracting with Grand Valley State University (GVSU) to conduct the study.

After months of planning, organization and fundraising, a contract was signed with GVSU in July. The project hit the ground running, with river user intercept surveys beginning immediately. The project will also include business surveys, a river communities survey, and an analysis of White River property values. Simply put, this information will be compiled into models to estimate the economic impact of the river in terms of commerce generated and property values.

Surveys are expected to continue through June 2023 to capture all seasons and varieties of river usage. The project is expected to be completed in July 2023. For additional information, please go to the project page on the WMSRDC website at: <http://wmsrdc.org/project/white-river-impact/>.



White River at Pines Point in Oceana County.



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Transportation Improvement Program Update

The new FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) was approved at the WestPlan Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) level in June. The last step for the MPO in the approval process was amending the new TIP project list into JobNet, the Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) project database, which was completed in August. The MPO is now awaiting final approval from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Once the new TIP is approved by FHWA, WestPlan will begin to work under the guidelines of the new TIP and retire the FY2020-2023 TIP document. It is expected that the new TIP will be active at the beginning of the new fiscal year which starts on October 1. Development of the new TIP was a yearlong process that included many meetings with MPO committees that were open to the public. These meetings, and the process undertaken within them, helped to develop the new TIP, which is a short-range guide for transportation projects in the Muskegon and Northern Ottawa county MPO area.

Transit Study Update

WMSRDC has been busy working with the consulting team from SRF on the development of the West Michigan Regional Transit Systems Governance and Organizational Transitional Study (Regional Transit Study). The focus of the study is to look at collaboration, and consensus-building efforts and to determine if public transportation services provided by the Muskegon Area Transit System in the Muskegon area and the Harbor Transit service area in northern Ottawa County can be more efficiently delivered.

Several meetings have taken place over the spring and summer with leaders from local municipalities and agencies. Recently, SRF has analyzed census data and is developing potential scenarios that show how the structure may look with an authority-based transit agency. It is still very early in the process and the stakeholders will continue to meet and discuss potential options. Once a way forward is developed and agreed upon, a legal team will provide guidance on how to move the process forward.

Staff Attends Training

Staff attended the one day technical training on July 26, the day prior to attending the Michigan Transportation Planning Association's Annual Conference in Flint. During the training sessions, staff learned about ways to incorporate natural hazard resilience into transportation planning and project design.

Experts spoke on and demonstrated ways to incorporate climate changes into the project design process. Staff also learned how to assess vulnerabilities in the transportation networks such as bridges, culverts, mass transit, rail lines and roads. Also discussed were socio-economic and environmental justice vulnerabilities and how to incorporate these aspects and populations into planning projects.

Planners ran through scenarios to determine the best, most efficient ways to consider planning factors while also addressing climate change. These training activities were highly informative and helped to demonstrate a myriad of possible factors that go into transportation and community planning.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Broadband Update

The issues of broadband, namely access, adoption, and use, are front and center in the minds of citizens and communities across the country. On August 17, WMSRDC staff attended a broadband panel at The Stream in the City of Newaygo. The event was initiated by Senator Gary Peters and hosted by The Right Place to bring information to local communities to keep moving connectivity forward. The panel consisted of participants from Connected Michigan and internet service providers Tri-County Electric Co-op, Point Broadband and Charter Communications.

According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the term “broadband” commonly refers to high-speed Internet access that is always on and faster than the traditional dial-up access. Broadband includes several high-speed transmission technologies such as: digital subscriber line (DSL), cable modem, fiber, wireless, satellite, and broadband over powerlines

For communities seeking to improve connectivity in their area, unfortunately, there is no “one size fits all” solution for broadband. It is a complex issue, to say the least. However, the panel discussed a few proactive steps communities can take:

- Establish a relationship with ISPs in your area.
- Improving broadband infrastructure in a small community or township may not make financial sense for an ISP. Banding together with other communities, or as a county, can be helpful towards making a business case for investment over a larger area.
- When working with an ISP, it may be helpful to share 911 data to facilitate discussions.
- Right-of-way permitting can be time consuming and expensive. Have local policies in place that make the process simple and cost-effective for ISPs to install broadband infrastructure.

Additional broadband tips and resources are available through Connected Nation Michigan which is working with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to provide guidance and assistance to communities. <https://connectednation.org/michigan/>

Economic Development District Update

WMSRDC hosted the summer CEDS Strategy Committee meeting on July 29 via Microsoft Teams, with several new faces in attendance. Highlights of the meeting include the following:

- US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding programs are accepting applications. Although there is no deadline to apply, it would be advantageous in the near-term to apply by early September. Please contact WMSRDC to discuss potential EDA project applications.
- The WMSRDC Pandemic Response and Recovery Plan is complete and is available at wmsrdc.org.
- Oceana County was awarded an EDA planning grant to study workforce, economic diversification, and feasibility for a skilled trades center. Local match provided by Oceana County, Trinity Health (by way of the Community Foundation for Oceana County), West Shore Community College, Muskegon Community College, and West Shore Educational Service District. An RFP is out now, with consultant to be selected by September.
- The next CEDS committee meeting is scheduled for October 28. If interested, please contact Stephen Carlson at scarlson@wmsrdc.org for more information.

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ENVIRONMENTAL

Color Me Clean

WMSRDC and Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership (MLWP) are thrilled to present “Muskegon Lake: Color Me Clean” a coloring book to celebrate the clean-up and restoration efforts of Muskegon Lake. Illustrated by local artist Evan Pesch, this exciting new educational tool will be used to re-engage the public with the lake and to share the benefits of the lake and environmental restoration with the youth. Directed towards youth ages 3-13, the coloring book will be given out at events to celebrate the restoration activities and delisting of Muskegon Lake as an Area of Concern (AOC). Contact Fallon Chabala, Program Manager, at (231) 722-7878 ext. 130 to request additional copies of the coloring book.

The coloring book will also be used as an education tool to provide information on how everyone can help keep Muskegon Lake clean. Delisting Muskegon Lake as an AOC will be a huge accomplishment to be celebrated. However, that does not mean the lake is perfect. Continued community support and best management practices will still be necessary for the health of the lake.

Funding for “Muskegon Lake Color Me Clean” was made possible by Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) under Michigan Areas of Concern Program for Public Advisory Council Support and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.



The cover of Muskegon Lake: Color Me Clean.

Student and Community Led Watershed Planning

As a partnering member of the MLWP, WMSRDC has been awarded funding for Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership Student & Neighborhood Engagement from EGLE under Watershed Council Support. The project will include partnering with schools and neighborhood associations in the Ryerson and Four Mile Creek watersheds to implement a student-led tree planting and water resources improvement for Muskegon Lake Watershed. The project area is home to four schools, four neighborhood associations, and many churches. Ryerson and Four Mile Creek’s natural riparian corridors offer special opportunities for urban neighborhood residents and students to interact with the creek within walking distance of homes, churches, playgrounds, and schools.

MLWP and WMSRDC will collaborate to provide classroom visits and guided watershed land use walks and creek corridor explorations to inspire, inform, and educate teachers and students about the watershed’s natural resources and benefits. Students will lead tree mapping with input by watershed landowners, neighborhood associations, churches, city, and township in the development of an urban tree planting map to restore tree canopy in an urban, residential watershed area.

The funding will also provide for “Know Your Watershed” signage and supplies for the Muskegon Conservation District to plant 15 trees, which will prevent 885 gallons of urban stormwater runoff from entering storm drains that lead to Ryerson and Four Mile creeks.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Local Government Services Update

WMSRDC has agreed to work with Oceana County and Newaygo County to update local plans in the coming months. Oceana County requested assistance with updating the county's master plan and recreation plan, concurrently. This effort begins with the Oceana Parks Opinion survey, which opened in August and will remain open through at least September. It may stay open longer if additional participation is needed. Scan the QR code to the right, or visit <https://srvy.pro/28UG6P9> to participate. The next major step will be to schedule a public meeting in the fall to gather perspectives and ideas from community members. The master plan and recreation plan updates are expected to be completed by this time next year.

SCAN THE
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THE OCEANA
COUNTY PARKS
OPINION
SURVEY NOW.
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The Newaygo County Recreation Plan update also began in August, and like Oceana County, leads with an online survey. The Newaygo County Parks Survey will remain open from August 29 through September 30. Scan the QR code, or visit <https://srvy.pro/2NX3HZ7> to participate. A public engagement meeting will be hosted by the Newaygo County Parks and Recreation Commission on October 4th to offer another means for gathering the public input regarding county-owned parks. The Newaygo County Recreation Plan is expected to be completed in January 2023.

SCAN THE
CODE TO TAKE
THE NEWAYGO
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The mission of the WMSRDC Local Government Services program is to support local communities by providing technical assistance to communities that do not have planning expertise in-house, or the resources necessary to hire a private consultant. Each year, WMSRDC agrees to assist a small number of communities with creating or updating local plans. In a nutshell, a master plan outlines a community's vision for the next 5 to 20 years and supports decisions and ordinances made at the local level. A recreation plan is required for a community to apply for certain types of recreation grants offered through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Recreation plan updates must be submitted to the DNR by February 1 if the community intends to apply for a grant that same year.

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Looking Ahead:

- WMSRDC is considering a hybrid in-person and virtual slate of quarterly CEDS committee meetings in 2023.
- This fall, WMSRDC will participate in a facilitated peer review of its economic development program and begin the process of renewing its 3-year planning grant through the EDA.
- Over the next year, WMSRDC will be leaning on the CEDS committee to participate with the 5-year update of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Perspective and opinions from a variety of sectors are essential during this process.



GIS AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

Got Maps?

The WMSRDC GIS team has been hard at work this summer mapping three cemeteries in Mason County; Maple Grove Cemetery in Free Soil Township and two cemeteries in Riverton Township. WMSRDC is digitizing each cemetery's records and creating maps of the various sections, lots and graves. Pictures will be taken of the headstones and an online map will be created and made available for use by the public and township officials. The online map will be searchable by name and location within each cemetery. These projects will not only help the townships with record keeping and maintenance, but will safeguard important historical documents and records.

Another project the GIS team has been working on is the mapping of the drains and drain districts

for the Oceana County Drain Commission. When completed, this project will provide comprehensive drain data for the drain commission to be able to fulfill required maintenance, assess taxes more accurately, and add efficiency to daily operations.

WMSRDC's GIS program staff has also completed such projects as the mapping of bridge safety data and wildfire histories in Mason County, 911 emergency calls and response times in Lake County, and the walkway and tree memorial markers in the Veteran's Memorial Park in Muskegon County.

If you would like more information about cemetery mapping or other mapping projects, please contact Jamie Way, GIS Technician at (231) 722-7878 ext 150.

Muskegon County Environmental Coordinating Council

The Muskegon County Environmental Coordinating Council (MCECC) was formed in 1991 to promote cooperation between government, community groups, regulators, and local business throughout Muskegon County. The MCECC achieved 501C(3) status in 1998. Over the years, the MCECC has played, and continues to play, an important role in the promotion of environmental health education and pollution prevention throughout the West Michigan region.

Highlights of past MCECC activities and projects include the origination of a county-wide tire recycling project and computer recycling project in conjunction with the County of Muskegon, the creation of the Environmental Excellence Awards banquet at which superior environmental efforts are recognized, development of a comprehensive recycling directory for Muskegon County residents, and the successful completion of an Environmental Protection Agency Community Action for a Renewed Environment Demonstration Site Grant.

Amy Haack, program manager at WMSRDC, has been serving as president of the MCECC since December 2017. The MCECC meets quarterly, on a virtual basis since the pandemic, and typically visits an outside site each summer for an on-site visit. In August, the MCECC was treated to a tour of Muskegon County's new Dune Harbor Park Muskegon County by Bob Lukens, Muskegon County Community Development Director.



The MCECC group with Bob Lukens (second from the right) while touring Dune Harbor Park Muskegon County.



The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission is a federal and state designated regional planning and development agency serving 120 local governments in Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties. WMSRDC is also the planning agency for the metropolitan transportation planning (MPO) program for Muskegon and northern Ottawa counties.

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Ron Christians, Oceana County Commissioner
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