

Commission Quarterly

2023 Transportation Asset Management

Transportation staff recently began the process of collecting data for its annual transportation asset management program. Staff rate federal aid eligible roads in all five counties within the region, as well as northern Ottawa County. Federal aid eligible roads are the more heavily traveled roads that are designated to receive federal funding for maintenance and repair. Asset management is a planning tool that is based on an inventory of each local road network within the region. It provides data that allows transportation officials to monitor, plan, and strategically improve the road network.

In 2002, the Michigan Transportation Commission formed an Asset Management Council and enacted the Asset Management Program. Its goal is to inventory all 39,000

miles of federal aid eligible roads within the State of Michigan annually, and according to the data collected, determine future distribution of ACT 51 transportation funds.

In a typical year, WMSRDC staff, along with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and a county road commission employee, collect this data for at least half of all the federal aid roads within the WMSRDC five county region. The data collection effort required the collection of three items: road condition rating, surface type, and the number of lanes. The Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER) scale is utilized to assess the road surface condition for a given segment on a scale of 1-10.

So far this summer, federal aid data collection has been

completed for Mason County and Lake County. Data collection for Oceana County will take place in June, with Muskegon and Newaygo counties scheduled for July.

In addition to federal aid data collection, WMSRDC will often rate agencies' local roads, or reimburses them if they decide to rate their own local roads. WMSRDC staff will be rating local roads for the City of Muskegon, the City of Ludington, and Newaygo County this summer.



Inventory
39,000
miles of federal aid eligible roads in Michigan annually



Road Construction in Northern Ottawa County

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Commission Operations: Welcome Robert Johnson!

On May 1, 2023, Robert Johnson joined the WMSRDC staff as a full-time Transportation Planner. Previously, Robert served as an intern supporting both the Economic Development and Transportation programs starting in December 2021. While interning, Robert worked on completing a Bachelor of Arts in Geography from Grand Valley State University, graduating in April 2023. WMSRDC is excited to welcome Robert as a permanent member of the transportation staff where he will take the lead in supporting the Air Quality program, and provide vital assistance in all aspects of WMSRDC's transportation program.

Robert Johnson on his first day in his cubicle decorated by Commission staff



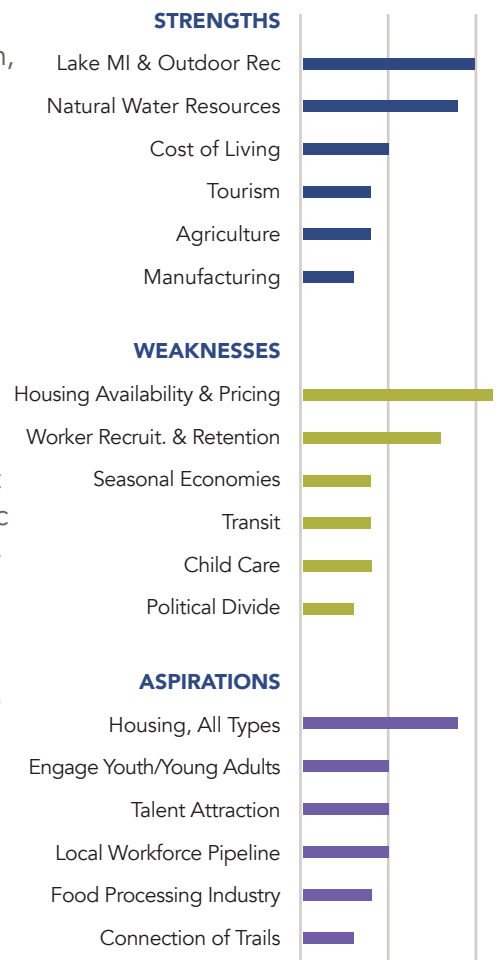
Economic Development: CEDS SWOT Analysis Results

The WMSRDC economic development program exists to promote and foster regional prosperity and economic resilience through the preparation, maintenance, and implementation of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). WMSRDC is currently performing an important part of the CEDS: the 5-year update.

From December 2022 through March 2023, WMSRDC conducted a series of economic development focus groups across the region to conduct a "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats" (SWOT) analysis. Online SWOT questionnaires were also made available to reach economic development stakeholders that may not have been able or interested to join a focus group in person. This input-gathering phase resulted in the collection of hundreds of unique comments regarding the region's economic strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations. All input will be categorized and aggregated to provide a region-wide economic snapshot. This information will then be combined with factual economic data to help shape and support development of regional economic goals and strategies.

In March 2023, staff held an economic development focus group with the WMSRDC governing board. Members were presented with a list of common topics which had been distilled from prior SWOT focus groups. Members were asked to choose their top three regional strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations. The results of this exercise are shown in the adjacent graphs.

WMSRDC will continue to update the region's CEDS through the summer, with assistance and oversight of the CEDS Strategy Committee. The updated CEDS document will include a complete SWOT analysis summary report for the region, as well as for each county of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. The CEDS document is expected to be completed in October 2023.



Economic Development: EDA Projects in the Region

A core component of the WMSRDC economic development program is to provide technical assistance to local communities within the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. This includes helping communities navigate the U.S. Department of Commerce,

Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant application process; from vetting ideas, to crafting applications, to accepting and managing grants. Over the past year, WMSRDC assisted numerous communities in applying for and receiving EDA funding assistance. These are the current

EDA-funded projects within the WMSRDC region:

- **City of Muskegon Heights**
 - Industrial Parks Master Plan
- **Oceana County**
 - Workforce & Economic Diversification Study
- **City of Hart**
 - Wastewater System Improvements
- **Lake County**
 - Economic Diversification Initiative

EDA offers many funding opportunities, which may be researched at <https://www.eda.gov/funding/funding-opportunities>. Please contact WMSRDC early and often to discuss your community's economic development ideas, find the right funding program, and make your application to EDA a success!



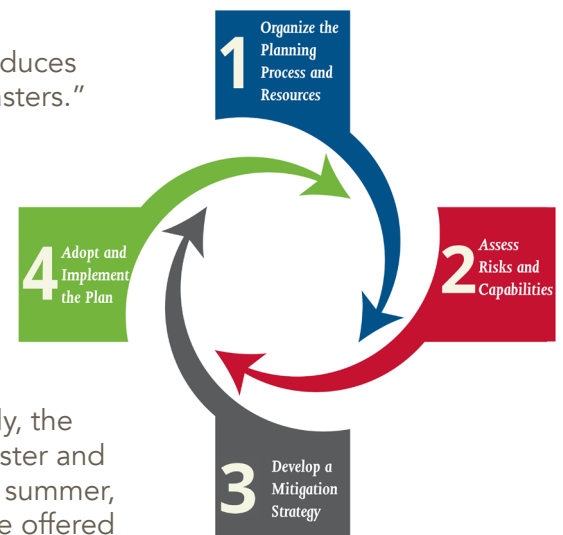
Orchard in Oceana County that will be impacted by the multiple EDA grants currently ongoing in the county

Local Government Services: Hazard Mitigation Update

The definition of hazard mitigation is “any sustainable action that reduces or eliminates long-term risk to people and property from future disasters.” Mitigation planning seeks to break the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage and includes long-term solutions that reduce the impact of disasters in the future.

WMSRDC is currently helping the counties of Lake, Mason, and Oceana update their respective countywide hazard mitigation plans. Each plan and planning process is designed to be “multi-jurisdictional,” meaning those local communities participate in the planning process. Once the plan is approved by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and adopted locally, the countywide plan will become eligible to apply to FEMA for pre-disaster and post-disaster hazard mitigation funding. Throughout the spring and summer, communities within the counties of Lake, Mason, and Oceana will be offered opportunities to participate in the hazard mitigation planning process.

In addition, there will be an announced review period near the end of the summer to offer the public an opportunity to review the proposed draft hazard mitigation plans. The plans are anticipated to be completed and adopted by each county before the end of calendar year 2023.



Environmental: Student Tree Plantings

Under the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership Student & Neighborhood Engagement Project funded by EGLE Watershed Council Support, WMSRDC has been working with three Orchard View Middle School classrooms to implement a student-led tree planting and water resources improvement for Muskegon Lake Watershed. After education from WMSRDC staff, Muskegon Community College, and Muskegon Area Intermediate School District on the importance of trees to a watershed and guidance on considerations when choosing planting locations from the City of Muskegon's Arborist and Orchard View's grounds keeper, the students determined the best locations for new trees on the Orchard View campus. Then on May 23, with help from Muskegon Conservation District, the students planted five oak trees and ten maple trees. In addition to the tree plantings,

the participating middle school classrooms will work towards other ways to improve the 4-Mile Creek watershed, such as preventing litter on campus by making trash collection fun.

Additionally, under funds from the DTE Energy Foundation Tree Planting Grant Program, WMSRDC provided 50 trees of differing species to replace the trees that were damaged by high water levels at the Muskegon State Park Channel Campground. This project was initiated by Rebecca Sandee and her Reeths Puffer classroom, who raised funds for student and volunteer transportation, waterbags, tree protection and support materials, mulch, and other related costs. The project culminated on May 31, as roughly 50 students planted all 50 trees under the guidance of DNR staff, Reeths Puffer teachers, and parent volunteers.

Transportation: Clean Air Action Days and Air Quality Update

Summer has arrived! With the hot, dry weather in late May and early June, West Michigan has experienced an increase in the calling of Clean Air Action days. West Michigan also saw its first ever Clean Air Action Day for particulate matter concentrations due to the Canadian wildfires. Along with the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC), WMSRDC is collaborating with local news and radio stations to educate the public on voluntary actions that will support cleaner air for the region. Starting June 1, the Clean Air Action campaign kicked off with television and radio ads airing on local stations. The newest television commercial was filmed with meteorologists from the three major news stations coming together to "do your share for cleaner air!"

WMSRDC is a partner of the WMCAC, which recently hosted their annual clean air lunch. Held at Johnson Park in Walker, Michigan, this luncheon brings agencies together to recap the year in air quality, hear presentations from experts, and learn from metrologists and members of the community. Experts from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) as well as meteorologists from the local news stations were on hand to provide expertise and information regarding air quality and other relevant information.



DNR staff providing tree planting instructions to Reeths Puffer students (photo credit Rebecca Sandee – Reeths Puffer Teacher)

Environmental: Little Cedar Creek Culvert Replacement

Little Cedar Creek is a cold-water tributary to the Muskegon River. It is a designated trout stream that supports brook and brown trout, in addition to possibly supporting populations of migratory salmonids, including steelhead and coho salmon. In 2019, both Michillinda Road and Sweeter Road crossings at Little Cedar Creek were impeding fish passage and had severe ratings

by the State of Michigan stream crossing inventory.

Under funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), WMSRDC is pleased to announce construction to replace the crossing at Sweeter Road is currently underway by the Muskegon County Road Commission (MCRC). MCRC is

anticipating completing the work at Sweeter Road early summer and following with construction at Michillinda Road later this summer. Once complete, 3.5 miles of cold-water stream will be reconnected with 3.7 miles of warm water habitat, providing fish passage from the headwater lakes to the Muskegon River floodplain.

Transportation: West MI Regional Transit Systems Governance & Organizational Transitional Study (Regional Transit Study)

The contract has been completed for the Regional Transit Study, and a final report will be available soon. SRF Consultants completed the study with assistance facilitated by WMSRDC staff. The study recommends changes to the existing governance of the Muskegon Area Transit System (MATS) currently owned and operated by Muskegon County. A group representing the cities of Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, Norton Shores, Roosevelt Park, and North Muskegon, as well as Muskegon and Fruitport Townships, and Muskegon County will continue to meet and move forward past the grant cycle with implementation of the study findings. Even though the grant has been completed, much work remains before any organizational change takes place with the MATS Agency.



Construction activities at Sweeter Road and Little Cedar Creek crossing on June 6, 2023.



Additional construction activities, at Sweeter Road and Little Cedar Creek crossing on June 6, 2023.

Special Projects: MIC Champions Update

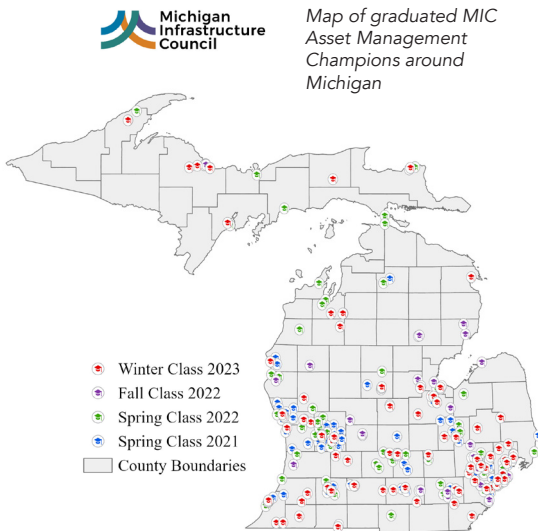
The Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC) is welcoming a new cohort of infrastructure leaders into the Asset Management Champion Program. The

interactive training program combines asynchronous education, facilitated discussions, and industry learning into a professional certificate from MIC. The upcoming champion program will run from August 1 - November 1, 2023, and requires about 25 hours to complete. The program is entirely funded by MIC and is **free** for participants.

overwhelming success and positive feedback received from previous classes, MIC is committed to welcoming a new class that will continue to build and deepen their asset management awareness and knowledge, as well as establish a community of champions across the state.

MIC welcomes all local, regional, or state government employees, public-sector asset owners or leaders from industry organizations into the program. The deadline to apply is July 26, 2023. Visit <https://www.michigan.gov/mic/am-champions> to submit an application!

So far, over 300 Michiganders have graduated from the program as Asset Management Champions. Ninety-eight percent of participants feel they are now able to be successful Asset Management Champions within their organizations. Due to the



Transportation: MPO and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Updates

The Fiscal Year 2024 Unified Work Program (UWP) was approved by the WestPlan Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Policy Committee at their May meeting. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are currently reviewing the document for final approval, which is expected in July. The UWP outlines the budget and activities for the MPO for the next fiscal year. Budget estimates for the UWP are provided by MDOT and are allocated to several different program areas for the MPO.

The UWP is a federally required document reviewed and approved by the MPO Policy Committee on an annual basis. Some of the responsibilities outlined in the

UWP include the development and maintenance of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). These documents are the short- and long-range planning documents required to receive federal transportation funding. Other tasks outlined in the UWP include Transit, Asset Management, Air Quality, Non-Motorized, and Performance Based Planning. All these plans and tasks will be completed by MPO staff with assistance from the MPO Policy and Technical Committees, along with opportunities for public involvement, during the upcoming fiscal year.

The WestPlan MPO Technical and Policy Committees acted in June to amend the FY2023-2026

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The amendment is the ninth adjustment to the TIP document that was originally approved in October 2022. Projects in the TIP are adjusted regularly throughout the four-year life of the document. The addition of new projects, or changes, that impact the cost or scope of existing projects require an amendment and must follow the MPO public involvement procedures. Minor changes such as typos or minor description changes are allowed to be changed administratively by MPO staff. Any changes to the TIP document are discussed at the monthly MPO committee meetings. The TIP and other MPO documents can be viewed on the transportation page of the WMSRDC website.

Special Projects: MIO Technical Assistance

In 2022, the Michigan Legislature appropriated funding to establish a “technical assistance program” within the Michigan Infrastructure Office (MIO). The purpose of the program is to provide technical assistance, planning, and matching grants to local units of government and planning organizations to help leverage federal infrastructure money to Michigan communities. This program is intended to assist communities in applying for funding made available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), now more commonly referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).

The MIO Technical Assistance program allows eligible recipients to directly contract with their Regional Planning Agency (RPA),

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), or Economic Development District (EDD) to receive technical assistance, grant writing, and applicable consultant services on a fast-track, as-needed basis. Funds will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis by MIO through RPAs for qualifying projects and activities.

As Region 14’s RPA, MPO, and EDD, WMSRDC will work with MIO to provide funding for project planning, grant identification, grant application writing and submittal, project implementation, grant administration, grant reporting, project close-out, and reasonably associated activities. In addition to the technical assistance dollars, MIO has an additional pot of funding available to be utilized as matching dollars



to federal grants awarded. This will allow communities more flexibility in seeking grant opportunities where they would not be able to otherwise due to matching constraints.

For more information regarding this program or to request technical assistance, please contact Erin Kuhn, WMSRDC Executive Director, at ekuhn@wmsrdc.org or by calling 231-722-7878 extension 180. More information can also be found on the MIO website at <https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/issues/michigan-infrastructure-office/michigan-infrastructure-technical-assistance-center>.

GIS Mapping: Maple Grove Cemetery Mapping in Free Soil, Michigan

WMSRDC’s GIS program is wrapping up a cemetery mapping project for Maple Grove Cemetery in Free Soil Township, Mason County. This cemetery has roughly 2,500 plots over its 5.5 acres. The township experienced a fire in the early 1980s and much of the cemetery records were lost. Those in charge of the cemetery at that time recreated as much of the data as they could from existing headstones and paper documents and maps that were not destroyed in the fire. Since then, a database of death certificates has been maintained in chronological order with paper data typed into a Microsoft Excel

database and maps of the cemetery’s additions, lots, and graves were recreated. The information and locations of the graves within the cemetery were verified by WMSRDC staff and pictures were taken of all the existing headstones and monuments. This data was then compiled, and an online map was created for both township officials and the public to utilize in easily locating friends and family, or to research genealogy in the Free Soil area. The number one concern of township officials was the preservation of cemetery records and accuracy of the grave data and locations. To access the

Free Soil Cemetery online map, visit the GIS page of WMSRDC’s website.

For more information about digital cemetery mapping, please contact the WMSRDC GIS department at 231-722-7878, extension 150 or email info@wmsrdc.org.



Headstone in Maple Grove Cemetery, Free Soil, MI



316 Morris Avenue, Suite 340
Muskegon, MI 49440

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WMSRDC staff

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director
Amanda Snyder, Finance Manager
Syndi Copeland, Office Manager

**Economic Development,
Community Development and
Local Government Services**
Stephen Carlson, Program Manager

Transportation Planning
Joel Fitzpatrick, Planning Director
Robert Johnson, Planner
Brian Mulnix, Program Manager
Jamie Way, GIS Specialist

Environmental Planning
Fallon Chabala, Program Manager
Gale Nobes, Planner

231-722-7878
WMSRDC.org

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