

Transportation Policy Analysis

For the Cities of Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena

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Introduction

The following document analyzes Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena city policies relating to transportation. This document is one piece of a larger analysis that addresses the five cities' policies regarding topics of land use, transportation, housing, economic development, parks, trails, open space, and recreation, water and natural resources, intergovernmental coordination, and healthcare. To ensure clarity, each topic is analyzed separately in its own document. Research and analysis was undertaken to provide the Region Five Development Consortium with a clearer understanding of how current policies relate and differ from each other across the cities. The following analysis will be helpful for workgroups to develop regional policies and recommendations, which will be adopted by the full consortium to guide the future growth and development of Region Five in a sustainable manner.

Methodology

The following policies were taken from the most recent comprehensive plans from the cities of Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena. This document addresses the similarities, differences, and potential conflicts between city policies regarding transportation. Due to the uniqueness of each plan, not all cities addressed similar issues around the topic at hand. For this reason, policies were only included if at least two of the five cities addressed the issue. Additionally, each city's policies are written at a different level of specificity making it difficult to compare/contrast a detailed policy with a vague policy. For the purpose of this analysis, policies were considered similar to each other even when they differ on the level of detail.

For this analysis, sub-topics were created to guide the reader throughout the document. For example, this document contains sub-topics of safety and efficiency, access management, transportation system needs, and so forth. Under each sub-topic, similarities, differences, and conflicts between city policies on an issue were analyzed and grouped into categories. Categories are listed as follows: Very Similar, Similar, Somewhat Similar, Unique/Potentially Conflicting, and Unique. Policies in the Very Similar category are ones that relate to each other at a clear level of specificity; policies under the Similar category are ones that relate in vision but not in detail; policies under the Somewhat Similar category relate to each other more similarly than uniquely; policies under Unique/Potentially Conflicting category are in potential disagreement with other policies pertaining to the same issue; and policies that are considered unique have some relationship to the issue at hand but are not similar to each other. Due to policies relating to more than one sub-topic, it is possible that the same policy will be included across sub-topics and categories. It is also possible that not all categories were used in this document, depending on how city policies relate to each other.

To make it clear to understand, each policy has been assigned a color that corresponds with a city. The county color code can be seen in the footer of each page. Additionally, text that is

bolded and highlighted signifies the relationship between policies under a category. Furthermore, a sources list is included below in this methodology section to provide readers with links to each county's most updated comprehensive plan.

Sources

1) Long Prairie 1999 Comprehensive Plan:

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/100569548/Long%20Prairie%20Comprehensive%20Plan.pdf>

2) Little Falls Comprehensive Plan 2006-2020

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/101701381/Little%20Falls%20Comp%20Plan0001.pdf>

3) Walker Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2010)

http://www.communitygrowth.com/_asset/ldkjz5/Walker-Plan_Final_050310.pdf

4) Brainerd Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2004)

<http://www.ci.brainerd.mn.us/planning/docs/compplan.pdf>

5) City of Wadena Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1986)

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/101701382/Wadena%20Comp%20Plan.pdf>

Findings

I. Safety and Efficiency

All cities make reference to safety and efficiency in their respective comprehensive plans. Plans for Long Prairie, Walker, and Brainerd all use very similar terminology in their goals, as they seek to provide safe and efficient transportation systems, although Long Prairie's policy is the only one which makes reference to maintaining said safety and efficiency. Policies for Little Falls and Wadena were similar to the others, yet varied slightly in word choice. Little Falls' policy seeks to promote a harmonious system which allows for the safe flow of traffic, while the first Wadena policy makes no mention of safety, and seeks only to establish an "efficient" transportation system. A second Wadena policy does address this issue and seeks to increase safety and convenience. This is only somewhat similar, however, as safety and efficiency are not addressed together within the same Wadena policies.

II. Coordination with Land Use Policies

Brainerd and Wadena are the only cities overtly mentioning coordination of the transportation system with land use policies in their comprehensive plans. Brainerd clearly states that they wish to coordinate transportation with land use planning, while Wadena seeks to provide a transportation system that reflects adjoining land use. Although these policies are similar in the topics they address, the terminology is slightly unique. Therefore, they were categorized as somewhat similar to each other.

Brainerd continues to elaborate on the coordination with land use policies, stating that it aims to analyze how proposed land uses will affect traffic generation. This clear mentioning of land use coordination makes it slightly similar to the aforementioned policies. However, Brainerd's plan is unique in that it addresses the idea of orderly development, stating that it seeks to support transportation systems supporting compact and orderly development of the city *and* region.

III. Access Management

Access management is not widely discussed in the city plans. Brainerd is the only city to overtly mention the desired use of access management guidelines. However, both Brainerd and Little Falls have unique policies on subdivision access. Little Falls seeks to prevent lots from having direct access to major collector streets, whereas Brainerd's policy seeks to use subdivision regulations to require that all properties have safe and adequate access.

IV. Airport

Airports are only mentioned in the goals and policies sections of two comprehensive plans. Little Falls' comprehensive plan promotes upgrading and maintaining the airport. Brainerd's policy, however, promotes continued coordination with the regional airport. This is addressed again in the intergovernmental coordination section of the transportation policy analysis (see XVC).

V. Transportation System Needs

Little Falls and Brainerd are the only cities with plans mentioning the needs which a transportation system should address. Little Falls' policy states that the city should establish a balanced transportation system that seeks to address the needs of various modes of transportation, including but not limited to pedestrian, automobile, and rail. Similarly, Brainerd's policy makes mention of balancing mobility needs, but it is unique in that it addresses the idea of balancing said mobility needs with access needs.

VI. Multi-Modal Transportation Use

All cities address the subject of multi-modal transportation. Long Prairie and Brainerd use very similar terminology in linking pedestrian use with safe driving speeds. Both policies seek to design local or neighborhood streets so as to encourage safe driving speeds and promote pedestrian use. No other policies directly link safe driving speeds and pedestrian use. However, Little Falls, Walker, and Brainerd all have similar policies relating to the subject of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, seeking to improve streets to provide for pedestrians, establish pedestrian connections, or incorporate pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and safety standards into maintenance and improvement plans. Wadena's policy focuses on reducing pedestrian conflict and increasing safety.

A second sub-topic under the umbrella of multi-modal transportation is transit and rail systems. Little Falls, Brainerd, and Wadena make reference to rail systems in their plans. Little Falls' policy focuses on monitoring the need for transit or rail service, but does not designate whether these services are to be encouraged. Brainerd, however, seeks to promote the use of transit and rail systems. Also addressed in the Brainerd comprehensive plan is a policy stating that the city should continue to work with appropriate agencies if and when rail is discussed. Wadena's policy is repeated as unique as it focuses on reducing conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians, and rail systems.

VII. Cultural Impacts

Within the policy analysis, the topic of cultural impacts is addressed primarily through goals and policies relating to the protection of residential neighborhoods. Long Prairie includes a policy seeking to avoid truck traffic in residential areas while Wadena's policy is slightly broader in that it aims to avoid excessive traffic in these areas. Brainerd's policy on protection of residential areas follows a similar trend as the others in that it seeks to consider how transportation system development or upgrades will impact neighborhoods.

VIII. Protection of Natural Resources

Although the protection of natural resources is only explicitly mentioned in Brainerd's comprehensive plan, it was decided that this was an important topic to address. Therefore, the policies outlined in the Brainerd comprehensive plan are included under this topic as unique. The first of Brainerd's policies states that transportation systems should be designed to avoid wetlands or other environmentally sensitive areas where possible. The second policy relating to the protection of natural resources states that the city will identify and consider the cost of lost environmental benefits when transportation projects are proposed. As stated above, these both directly relate to protecting natural resources and are unique to the Brainerd plan.

IX. Sidewalks and Trails

Four of the cities address sidewalk and trail development. Both Long Prairie and Brainerd's policies address the development of sidewalks along arterial and collector streets. The policies differ, however, in that Long Prairie focuses on drafting and implementing a sidewalk system plan requiring this sidewalk development, while Brainerd's policy simply seeks to encourage this development. The cities of Walker and Brainerd both encourage the establishment and development of pedestrian connections or sidewalks and trails.

There are two unique policies addressing the topic of sidewalks and trails. The city of Little Falls states that it will require subdividers to establish and construct walks and trails in new developments. Brainerd's plan wishes to incorporate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in the planning and maintenance of sidewalks and paths. Both of these policies address unique aspects of the sidewalks and trails topic that are not mentioned in the other comprehensive plans.

X. Transportation System Maintenance

Four of the comprehensive plans mention transportation system maintenance. Both Long Prairie and Brainerd use somewhat similar terminology, both stating that they seek to maintain aspects of their transportation system (Long Prairie seeking to maintain safety, convenience, and efficiency, Brainerd seeking to maintain coordination and cost-effectiveness). Policies outlined in the Little Falls and Wadena plans also relate to the topic of maintenance. Little Falls is slightly more specific, stating that it will maintain all transportation facilities in good repair and keep them free from dirt, snow, and ice buildup, particularly in downtown and school routes. Wadena's is significantly broader, only stating that the city should maintain street surfaces in good condition.

XI. Transportation System Functionality

Both Long Prairie and Little Falls use very similar policies to address the topic of functionality and aesthetics. Both plans specifically mention improving the transportation networks or streets functionally and aesthetically. The city of Wadena also seeks to provide a functional roadway system. Both Brainerd and Wadena address the use or development of a roadway classification system. Brainerd's policy focuses on using the classification system, while Wadena seeks to develop a classification system. Brainerd's plan is the only one to address the sub-topic of connectivity to current infrastructure by stating that streets in developing areas should connect to the existing network of streets to reflect character and design.

XII. River Crossings

Both Little Falls and Brainerd address the topic of river crossings. The policies are similar, as both seek to provide an additional river crossing within the city. According to the policies, Little

Falls' crossing would be located at the railroad, while Brainerd will actively pursue an additional crossing upstream of the Mississippi River dam.

XIII. Capital Improvements Plan/Funding

While both Walker and Long Prairie make mention of capital improvement programs in their strategies and implementation sections respectively, Brainerd's plan is the only one which includes a policy or goal directed at scheduling transportation projects in a capital improvement program, and, therefore, is the only one included in the analysis.

Walker, however, does address the topic of funding in a more money-conscious manner. Two goals within the Walker comprehensive plan relate specifically to funding and reducing the cost to the city. The first goal states that all new publicly maintained infrastructure should serve development that will generate city revenue to sufficiently cover the full cost of its maintenance. The second goal is broader, stating that the city should look at ways to reduce the long-term cost of maintaining municipal infrastructure. All of the policies included within this topic are categorized as unique, for, while they all relate to the topic of funding, each policy outlines a very distinct approach/goal.

XIV. Traffic Flow Downtown

The cities of Little Falls and Brainerd both address the flow of traffic in the downtown area. Little Falls' policy is far more specific in that it seeks to reduce or stabilize traffic delays on a specific roadway (Broadway) caused by the "at grade intersection with the railroad." Brainerd's policy is significantly broader, as it seeks to evaluate and recommend improvements to pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow in the downtown area. While both of these relate to transportation, these goals and policies were found in specific downtown or downtown commerce portions of the comprehensive plans.

XV. Intergovernmental Coordination

Intergovernmental coordination does not appear to be addressed as in-depth within the city plans as it is in the county plans, however there are several policies addressing the topic.

Both Long Prairie and Brainerd have somewhat similar goals and policies relating to coordination with county, township, state, and federal agencies. Long Prairie specifically mentions continued coordination with its respective county (Todd County) and its respective township (Long Prairie Township) as well as other agencies to provide the most effective transportation system. Brainerd's goal is not so specific, seeking to continue coordination with surrounding jurisdictions, state, and federal agencies. The policy is repeated in the next sub-topic, as Long Prairie is the only plan to specifically address the topic of coordination with the Minnesota Department of Transportation within the portions of the comprehensive plan analyzed.

Finally, an additional sub-topic not included in the policy analysis of county plans is coordination in providing multi-modal transportation. This sub-topic was included to include a series of goals outlined within the Brainerd comprehensive plan. These goals are unique and focus on coordination specifically relating to multi-modal transportation, including working with the Brainerd and Crow Wing County transit system, continuing coordination with the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport, working with appropriate agencies if and when rail is discussed, and promoting connectivity of multi-modal transportation to community and recreational facilities. Each of these policies uniquely address intergovernmental coordination, but all relate to promoting multi-modal transportation in the Brainerd area.

Policy Analysis

I. Safety and Efficiency

A. Safety and Efficiency

1. Very Similar

- a) **Provide and maintain a safe, convenient, and efficient local transportation system** for the movement of people and goods.
- b) **The City of Walker should provide for safe and efficient transportation systems** that add value to the neighborhoods they serve.
- c) **Provide a safe, efficient and adequate transportation system** that serves and balances both access and mobility needs.

2. Similar to Above (IA1)

- a) **Promote a harmonious system which allows safe, free flowing traffic movement** for all modes of transportation, serving pedestrians, cyclists, automobiles, trucks, rail, air and navigation on the Mississippi River.
- b) **To provide an efficient, functional roadway system** that reflects street usage, trip length, traffic volume, and adjoining land use.

3. Somewhat Similar to Above (IA1)

- a) **To decrease traffic congestion; decrease vehicular, rail and pedestrian conflict; and increase safety and convenience.**

II. Coordination with Land Use Policies

A. Coordination with Land Use Policies

1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Coordinate transportation with land use planning** and environmental protection.
- c) **To provide an** efficient, functional **roadway system that reflects** street usage, trip length, traffic volume, and **adjoining land use**.

2. Somewhat Similar to Above (IIA1)

- a) **Analyze the traffic generation characteristics of proposed land uses** to avoid exceeding the capacity of local, county and regional roadways.

3. Unique

- a) **Support transportation projects that support the compact, orderly development of the city and region and are supportive of the preferred development pattern emerging from this Plan.**

III. Access Management

A. Access Management

1. Unique

- a) **Develop and utilize access management guidelines.**

B. Subdivision Access

1. Unique

- a) **Require plats to be laid out to prevent lots from having direct access onto major collector streets.**
- b) **Require the provision of safe and adequate access to all properties through the implementation of subdivision regulations.**

IV. Airport

A. Airport

1. Unique

- a) **Promote upgrading, maintenance and operations of the airport** as a viable regional facility contributing to the full services offered by Little Falls.
- b) **Continue to work with the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport** to provide air travel services.

V. Transportation System Needs

A. Transportation System Needs

1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Establish a balanced and complete transportation system by addressing the needs of pedestrians, automobiles, bicycles, trucks, air transportation, railroads, river navigation and, in the future, perhaps transit.**
- b) **Provide a safe, efficient and adequate transportation system that serves and balances both access and mobility needs.**

VI. Multi-Modal Transportation

A. Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure and Safe Speeds

1. Very Similar

- a) **Design neighborhood streets to encourage pedestrian use along with safe speeds.**
- b) **Design local streets to discourage driving at unsafe speeds and promote pedestrian and bicycle use.**

2. Similar to Above (VIA1)

- a) **Improve the streets** functionally and aesthetically to carry traffic, provide access to property and **to provide for pedestrians.**
- b) **The City of Walker should seek to establish pedestrian connections** throughout and between all neighborhoods.

c) **Incorporate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure** when planning changes, additions, or maintenance to roads, sidewalks, bridges, paths or other public facilities.

d) **Integrate bike safety standards into planned transportation improvements.**

3. Somewhat Similar to Above (VIA1)

a) **To decrease traffic congestion; decrease vehicular, rail and pedestrian conflict; and increase safety** and convenience.

B. Public Transit/Rail Systems

1. Somewhat Similar

a) **Monitor the need /potential for transit and commuter rail.**

b) **Promote alternative transportation such as** bicycling, walking, **transit and rail.**

2. Similar to Above (VIB1)

a) **Work with the appropriate agencies if and when commuter rail is discussed.**

b) **Continue to work with the Brainerd and Crow Wing County transit system to provide safe, efficient public transit.**

3. Unique

a) **To decrease traffic congestion; decrease vehicular, rail and pedestrian conflict; and increase safety and convenience.**

VII. Cultural Impacts

A. Protection of Residential Neighborhoods

1. Somewhat Similar

a) **Design and locate industrial and commercial developments to avoid truck traffic through residential areas.**

b) **To protect neighborhood residential areas from unsafe and excessive traffic.**

2. Similar to Above (VIIA1)

- a) **Consider the impacts to neighborhoods when planning new or upgrading existing roadways.**

VIII. Protection of Natural Resources

A. Protection of Natural Resources

1. Unique

- a) **Design transportation systems to avoid, where possible, wetlands or other environmentally sensitive areas.**
- b) **Identify and consider the costs of lost environmental benefits for proposed transportation projects.**

IX. Sidewalks and Trails

A. Sidewalk and Trail Development

1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Draft and implement a comprehensive sidewalk system plan requiring installation and providing for maintenance along major arterial and collectors streets** in the City.
- b) **Encourage sidewalks and separated pathways along all arterial and collector streets** in developing residential and commercial areas through the city's subdivision regulations.

2. Similar to Above (IXA1)

- a) **The City of Walker should seek to establish pedestrian connections throughout and between all neighborhoods.**
- b) **Continue to maintain and seek ways to expand the existing network of bicycle and pedestrian trails throughout the city.**

3. Unique

- a) **Require subdividers to establish and construct local streets, walks and trails in new developments.**

- b) **Incorporate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure when planning changes, additions, or maintenance to roads, sidewalks, bridges, paths or other public facilities.**

X. Transportation System Maintenance

A. Maintaining Existing Transportation System

1. Somewhat Similar

- a) Provide and **maintain a safe, convenient, and efficient local transportation system** for the movement of people and goods.
- b) **Maintain a transportation system that is coordinated and cost-effective.**

2. Somewhat Similar to Above (XA1)

- a) **Maintain all transportation facilities** (roads, walks and trails) **in good repair and keep facilities free from a buildup of dirt, snow and ice, especially downtown and on school routes.**
- b) **To maintain street surfaces in good condition.**

XI. Transportation System Functionality

A. Transportation System Functionality and Aesthetics

1. Very Similar

- a) **Enhance the aesthetic character and functional qualities of the transportation networks within the City.**
- b) **Improve the streets functionally and aesthetically** to carry traffic, provide access to property and to provide for pedestrians.

2. Similar to Above (XIA1)

- a) To **provide an** efficient, **functional roadway system** that reflects street usage, trip length, traffic volume, and adjoining land use.

B. Roadway Classification Systems

1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Use the functional classification system to define and plan roadways.**
- b) **The City will develop a thoroughfare classification system to allow for future planning of** efficient and safe traffic flow and **access needs.**

C. Connectivity to Current Infrastructure

1. Unique

- a) **Streets in developing areas shall connect to the existing network of streets and reflect its character and design.**

XII. River Crossings

A. River Crossings

1. Similar

- a) **Provide another river crossing** with a grade separation at the railroad.
- b) **Actively pursue another river crossing** upstream of the Mississippi River dam.

XIII. Capital Improvements Plan/Funding

A. Capital Improvements Plan/Funding

1. Unique

- a) **Schedule transportation projects in a capital improvement program.**
- b) **Work to have all new infrastructure that is to be publicly maintained serve development that generates city revenue sufficient to cover the full cost of its maintenance.**
- c) **Seek ways to reduce the long-term cost of maintaining municipal infrastructure systems.**

XIV. Traffic Flow Downtown

A. Traffic Flow Downtown

1. Unique

- a) **Reduce or stabilize traffic delays on Broadway caused by the at grade intersection with the railroad.**
- b) **Evaluate and recommend improvements to Downtown pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow.**

XV. Intergovernmental Coordination

A. General Coordination with County, Township, State and Federal Agencies

1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Continue to cooperate with Todd County, Long Prairie Township, MnDOT, and other agencies involved in transportation planning, to provide the most effective transportation system for Long Prairie.**
- b) **Continue to work with surrounding jurisdictions, state and federal agencies to ensure an integrated regional transportation system.**

B. Coordination with Minnesota Department of Transportation

1. Unique

- a) **Continue to cooperate with Todd County, Long Prairie Township, MnDOT, and other agencies involved in transportation planning, to provide the most effective transportation system for Long Prairie.**

C. Coordination in Providing Multi-Modal Transportation

1. Unique

- a) **Continue to work with the Brainerd and Crow Wing County transit system to provide safe, efficient public transit.**
- b) **Continue to work with the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport to provide air travel services.**
- c) **Work with the appropriate agencies if and when commuter rail is discussed.**

- d) Promote the connectivity of alternative transportation systems and have such transportation systems connect efficiently to community and recreational facilities.**