

Chapter 5

Transportation

A. OVERVIEW

Simply stated transportation is the movement of people and goods, however modern day transportation systems have evolved into intricate inter-modal networks that provide multi dimensional service. Transportation contributes to the value-added of goods and services, facilitates economies of scale, influences land (real estate) value. Transportation provides links between regions, economic activities, and populations, which makes it one of the most important of all human activities. Transportation and its infrastructure is an indispensable component of the economy and can stimulate growth and development. Consequently, transportation systems have a strong influence on the growth patterns and urban form of a city. Therefore careful consideration is needed in the transportation planning process.

Located in Marion County, Fairmont is approximately midway between Morgantown, West Virginia and Bridgeport, West Virginia. Interstate 79 abuts the eastern edge of the City of Fairmont. West Virginia Route 310 and U.S. Route 250 are the major access points into the City. The B&O Railroad passes through the area with some at-grade crossings.

Fairmont is in a unique location due to the City's direct access to 1-79. Fairmont's location and proximity to the Interstate will provide ample opportunities to expand its role as the population and employment center of north central West Virginia. The anticipated growth of the area around Fairmont, in combination with the fact that an interchange along 1-79 serves the City, places heavy demand on the road network. Therefore, safe traffic flow continues to be a major concern to Fairmont.

The transportation plan for the City of Fairmont while encompassing a variety of modes of transportation, places the most emphasis on planning for major thoroughfares. The goal of developing an efficient street system, consisting of a few major thoroughfares designed to carry the majority of traffic, has been an essential element of planning for Fairmont since the earliest planning efforts. An added benefit of efficient handling of traffic on major thoroughfares is the ability to free local streets from the objectionable aspects of heavy traffic.

Fairmont has immediate interstate access to the major metropolitan areas of Pittsburgh, Columbus, Charleston, and Washington, D.C.

The transportation plan identifies the location, character, and capacity of transportation facilities which are compatible with the planned land uses in the study area. Road and street plans should encourage optimal community development while allowing for transit in a safe, fast, and efficient manner. The transportation network must accommodate the planned pattern of employment, shipping, and institutional related facilities. At the same time, transportation improvements should not be constructed which produce severe and lasting impacts on the Fairmont area's stable residential and commercial areas. Each street improvement should be given careful design attention to ensure compatibility with the scale and quality of Fairmont and its environs.

Public awareness and acceptance of a major transportation plan also promotes a more satisfactory

neighborhood environment. Heavy through-traffic can be a nuisance and a distraction from an otherwise quiet and safe neighborhood. Advance knowledge of the designation and location of major traffic arteries can result in greater neighborhood stability in which residents have the assurance that traffic conditions will remain relatively consistent in future years.

Early knowledge of planned major streets and their locations permits the proper arrangement of other elements of the Comprehensive Plan. This includes the prescription of the land uses and provision of public facilities such as schools, parks, and utility improvements. Thus, the public sector and private developers must know the future location of streets and highways in order to proceed intelligently with individual project plans.

B. GOALS AND ACTIONS

The intent of the goal and actions pertaining to Transportation is to ensure that a safe and efficient transportation and circulation system will be developed to maximize accessibility into and throughout the study area.

Goal:

Ensure that the transportation network moves people and goods through Fairmont in the most efficient manner

Actions:

- Identify areas of pedestrian/vehicular conflicts and ensure that automobile and pedestrian circulation is accommodated within the context of the existing physical constraints.
- Provide choices for transportation to the residents of Fairmont. (Pedestrian/Bicycle paths, public transportation)
- Identify areas within the city where parking is a problem
- Define and develop the City's gateways.
- Develop and implement road and street designs which are of appropriate scale and capacity to serve long-range traffic demands.
- Encourage adequate and accessible transportation for all residents who are disadvantaged (i.e. elderly, handicapped, and those of low income).

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

A good transportation system will: 1) optimize mobility, safety, and compatibility with the environmental and developmental patterns of Fairmont; 2) link compatible land uses; and 3) serve as a

buffer to separate incompatible uses. The City of Fairmont is presently served by a broad transportation network which consists of: 1) thoroughfare system (streets and highways); 2) bus service (local and inter-regional); 3) rail service; 4) air service; and 5) water navigation. Each of these will be examined in the following section. Although the City is generally well served with transportation options, travelers to and through the City face difficulties in terms of circulation and access. These problems stem from the fact that Fairmont is in the heart of the most rapidly growing region in the State of West Virginia (the 1-79 Corridor). The Fairmont area is older and largely developed as compared with newer communities on the 1-79 Corridor (such as Bridgeport).

Roads

This section is comprised of the following four topics: a) functional classification of streets; b) existing street patterns; c) existing sidewalk conditions; and d) parking.

Functional Classification

For planning and design purposes, highways are most effectively classified by function. Highways have two functions: 1) to provide mobility; and 2) to provide land access. From a design standpoint these functions are incompatible. For mobility, high or continued speeds are desirable and variable or low speeds are undesirable; for land access, low speeds are desirable and high speeds are undesirable. For example, freeways provide a high degree of mobility with access provided only at spaced interchanges to preserve the high-speed, high volume characteristics of the facility. If low-speed, land access traffic were permitted on these roads extremely hazardous conditions would be created. The opposite is true for local, low speed roads that must provide access to the adjacent land areas. Between these extremes are highways that comprise the bulk of existing highway mileage and are the most difficult to classify: those that must provide both mobility and land access.

Given a functional classification, design criteria can be applied to encourage the use of the road as intended. Design features that can convey the level of functional classification to the driver include width of roadway, continuity of alignment, spacing of intersections, frequency of driveways, building setbacks, alignment and grade standards, and traffic controls.

Although there are many ways to classify highways functionally, four road classifications have been developed for the purposes of analysis in this Comprehensive Plan Update. These classifications are: 1) freeways; 2) arterial streets and highways; 3) local collectors; and 4) local residential streets. There are many other methods of defining and categorizing transportation systems, however, for the purposes of transportation planning, this four-tiered classification system was used to provide an understanding of road hierarchy.

Freeways/Expressways

The freeway (also referred to as a major arterial or urban expressway) is a multi-lane highway facility with either partial or complete control of access and medians separating opposing traffic streams. The section of Interstate 79, from U.S. Route 250 to U.S. Route 310, is the Fairmont Region's only interstate which meets the physical definition of this roadway classification. The principal objective of

the freeway is to move traffic and provide little or no service to directly abutting land. In essence, the intent of the freeway is to connect widespread geographical areas, reduce travel time, and divert through-trips from other principal thoroughfares which provide direct service to major traffic generators.

Arterial Streets/Highways

The second classification in the transportation hierarchy are arterial streets and highways. Arterial streets and highways focus on systems to serve traffic to, and from, expressways or freeways. The urban arterial is intended to handle trips between major traffic generators and to accommodate internal traffic movements (collection and distribution) within a defined urban area. Although their primary function is to move traffic in a relatively unimpeded fashion, arterial streets also give access to adjacent lands to the extent compatible with the requirements of through-urban traffic movements. U.S. Route 250 (from Mary Lou Retton Drive to Odell Street) and U.S. Route 310 (from Fairmont Avenue to Route 73) are examples of the City's major arterial thoroughfares. Route 19 (Locust Avenue), from Goose Run Road to Orchard Drive, and the Route 19 spur (Country Club Road), from Route 19 to Route 250, are minor arterials within the City.

Local Collectors/Major Residential Streets

Local collector streets in Fairmont serve to distribute traffic between arterial streets and activity centers. While their primary function is to collect relatively high volumes of local residential traffic, the local collector (or major residential street) can normally sustain the demands of minor retail, office, employment generators, or other commercial establishments along its alignment. Collector streets are traditionally constructed as two-lane undivided sections, with the relatively unrestricted spacing and configuration of access entrances, governed by local development ordinances and design criteria. The nominal capacity and intended function of residential collectors is realized when system traffic loadings are in the range of 1,000 to 4,000 trips per day.

Minor Residential Streets

These residential streets are often further categorized into sub-collectors, lanes, and cul de-sacs. A residential sub-collector provides access to places and lanes while directing traffic to community activity centers or collectors and arterials. It may be a loop street which connects with one collector or arterial street at two points.

A lane and cul-de-sac represent two subordinate levels of short residential streets with the primary purpose of conveying traffic to and from residences to other streets within a residential subdivision. While a sub-collector may experience traffic levels up to 1,000 vehicles per day, a lane or cul-de-sac rarely serves more than 100 to 500 vehicles per day. .

Existing Street Patterns

Presently, the City street system features two major road patterns. The area between Coleman Avenue and Virginia Avenue and 1st and 10th Streets is an adaptation of the traditional grid pattern forming uniform blocks and intersecting streets at regular intervals. A modified grid pattern is evident in the area directly south of East Park Avenue (Route 310) and east of Fairmont East Junior High School. The

prominent street pattern in the Fairmont State College area and south of Route 19 near Fairmont Senior High School and the area between Route 250 and Route 19 (north of the downtown) is the curvilinear, cul-de-sac design.

The overall adequacy of the system depends on the planning and utilization of the streets in accordance with the aforementioned and clearly defined functional hierarchy. Without proper organization the functional uses of the streets evolve merely from commuting patterns established by users without considering the street's proper use.

Several older parts of Fairmont are confronted with problems stemming from heavy traffic congestion. This is due to the fact that the existing street system was not designed to accommodate the type or volume of traffic presently being placed on it.

Airports

There are three air facilities in the vicinity of Fairmont: 1) Benedum Airport (Bridgeport); 2) Morgantown Municipal Airport; and 3) Fairmont Municipal Airport. While the Benedum Airport and the Morgantown Airport serve major airlines, the Fairmont Airport primarily serves as a local cargo, flight instruction, and small air hanger facility. Most regional passenger and cargo services, to and from areas outside the State, occur at the airports in Bridgeport and Morgantown. Benelux Airport provides regular commercial flights to Washington, D.C. and Pittsburgh. All three airports operate well; have well-lit runways, and good instrument landing systems.

Fairmont Municipal Airport is located three miles south of the City at an altitude of 1028 feet. It is a fixed-base operation with limited hangar maintenance. Flight training facilities are available. It has a lighted runway with dimensions of 2,856 feet in length and seventy-five feet in width. It also has sixteen "T" hangars.

Public Transportation

The Fairmont/Marion County Transit Authority, a curb to curb service provider, is located on Quincy Street, and was established in 1973. The Transit Authority also serves the areas of Morgantown, Clarksburg, White Hall, and Pleasant Valley. The Transit Authority has twenty-three handicap accessible buses on the premises and twenty-six full-time employees. The bus system has a yearly ridership of approximately 100,000 people, with an average daily ridership of approximately 305 people. The Transit Authority has one of the finest para-transit operations for the physically challenged riders. The Transit Authority receives funding from a variety of sources. The Federal Government contributes approximately \$335,000, while city and county taxes account for \$765,000. The bus fares from patrons provide the remaining \$50,000 for operating costs.

The Marion County Senior Center owns 5 buses that are used to transport their patrons.

Two Taxi Services currently serve Fairmont.

Rail

The railroad system serving Fairmont is for freight service exclusively. This railroad line is owned and operated by CSX (Baltimore and Ohio Railroad). The nearest passenger service is available in Connellsville, Pennsylvania or Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

River

A series of locks and dams provide a minimum of navigable water depth of nine feet through the entire length of the Monongahela River for 128 miles from Fairmont to Pittsburgh. Most of the navigation structures were constructed in the 1930's. Modernization of these structures has only occurred in the upper portion of the river. Some land acquisition and facility rehabilitation is underway. There are no navigable waters below the confluence of the West Fork River and the Tygart Valley River with the Monongahela River.

Pedestrian /Bike

The City of Fairmont is requesting funding from the WVDOT Recreational Trails, and Transportation Enhancement Grants Programs to begin the property acquisition, design and construction of the first leg of the trail that will eventually connect the West Fork River Trail and the Mon River Trail by way of the Marion County Parks and Recreation Commission MCTRAIL. Presently the West Fork River Trail and the Mon River Trail are not connected, however upon completion of this multi-phased proposal the trails will be connected by a trail through the City of Fairmont.

The southern end of Phase 1 of the Fairmont Trail project will start in the vicinity of the terminus of the West Fork Trail near the Watson Bridge. The trail will follow the abandoned rail line northerly along the bank of the West Fork River for approximately .6 miles until it meets with the existing CSX Line just north of the confluence of the West Fork and Tygart Valley Rivers (forming the Monongahela River). The trail will then leave the CSX right of way and follow 12th Street extension northwest to Minor Avenue. Subsequent phases will then follow Minor Avenue to abandoned CSX right of way in the vicinity of Ninth Street. The trail will then follow CSX right of way (the former Beltline) to the vicinity of the Mid City Parking Lot near downtown Fairmont. The total length of trail on the west side of the river is approximately 2 miles.

As part of the overall plan but, not part of Phase 1, a proposed bicycle pedestrian bridge that will replace the low level bridge will extend the trail into Palatine Park on the east bank of the Monongahela River.

The East Fairmont connection will be established as a future phase of the project and will require the property acquisition and trail development from the vicinity of Palatine Park to the vicinity of Winfield Street where Marion County Parks and Recreation Commission has completed a Trail Head development to serve the MCTRAIL.

While the goal is to connect the West Fork River Trail and the Mon River Trail via MCTRAIL there are some obstacles that will necessitate multiple phases, and multiple funding awards for the completion of the trail.

D. BASIC ISSUES

Transportation

The following section consists of a summary of the major concerns raised in regards to Transportation. These issues have been categorized under: 1) Gateways; 2) Highways; 3) Traffic circulation; 4) Bridges; 5) Transit; 6) Other services; and 7) Sidewalks.

Gateways

Currently there are only two routes to the Interstate and two main arteries into the City of Fairmont. The “Gateway Connector” project when completed will serve as the main access gateway to downtown. The finished road will have decorative period lighting, landscaping , pedestrian/bike paths and signage.

Highways

Interstate 79, a modern four-lane highway, links Charleston to Pittsburgh. There are four interchanges off I-79 in the Fairmont area. The design and construction of these interchanges have preceded local planning and zoning.

Routes 19 and Route 250 pass through the downtown and serve as major arteries from other communities in Marion County (i.e., Mannington, Rivesville, Monongah, and Worthington). The most convenient way for residents of these communities to reach I-79 is by passing through the City of Fairmont. As a result of this traffic pattern, the City experiences significant traffic congestion in the downtown during peak traffic flows.

The Fairmont Marion County Multi Modal Transportation Plan was completed and adopted in 2000. The top priority project that resulted from the plan is the “Fairmont Gateway Connector”. The “connector is a four lane, 1½ mile direct connection from I-79 to Downtown Fairmont, that features design elements such as:

- Landscaped Medians
- Two roundabouts
- Historic period lighting
- Pedestrian walkways and bike paths

Completion of the connector will require twelve construction contracts. Many utilities have been moved in anticipation of road construction, and the estimated completion date is 2007.

Traffic Circulation

Traffic circulation, congestion, and parking are major problems in the downtown. The area lacks an efficient traffic pattern within the downtown. The traffic flow is slow and the streets lack the capacity to accommodate and convey traffic to and from the downtown. This is a disincentive for people who would like to shop and eat in the downtown. Upon completion the Gateway Connector will provide direct access to downtown Fairmont reducing travel time from the interstate. This should provide an incentive for developers to consider downtown Fairmont and Merchant Street as a good location for development.

The bridges in the City have a strong presence and should be addressed in the City's revitalization efforts.



The deteriorating bridges present an unsightly image and are visually unsettling. Bridges should be addressed in all efforts to revitalize the City.

Until recently, three bridges carried a total Average Daily Traffic of 23,000 through the downtown and across the Monongahela River. The three bridges were: 1) The Robert H. Mollohan Jefferson Street Bridge; 2) Low Level Bridge; and 3) David Morgan Memorial . (Third Street) Bridge.

Robert H. Mollohan Jefferson Street Bridge

The Robert H. Mollohan Jefferson Street Bridge carries Jefferson Street (Route 19/73) over Water Street, the Monongahela River, CSX Railroad, and Cleveland Avenue. The Bridge was constructed in 1921 and is owned by the West Virginia Department of Transportation. The High Level Bridge is a historically significant structure that contributes to the character of the downtown.

In 1921, the Jefferson Street Bridge was constructed as a four-lane structure. The bridge was designed to relieve traffic congestion in the City and provide a link between the east and west portions of the City (since the structure was constructed above the railroad on both sides of the Monongahela River). A full historic restoration from original specifications was completed in the late summer early fall of 2000. The Bridge was renamed the Robert H. Mollohan Jefferson Street Bridge in the winter of 2002.

Low Level Bridge

The Low Level Bridge has been out of service for over a decade and is slated for demolition. The abutments and center pier will be saved and used to carry the proposed pedestrian bicycle bridge for the Fairmont Rail Trail across the Monongahela River to connect downtown with Palatine Park.

The Low Level Bridge carries Madison Street over the Monongahela River and the CSX Railroad. It was built in 1908 and rehabilitated in 1956. An inspection was done in 1989 and the structure was found to be in poor condition and closed to all vehicular traffic. Further repair was not recommended due to the extent of its structural problems.

Other bridges in the area include the Fourth Street Bridge and the Everest Drive Bridge. Both of these bridges span Coal Run Hollow and link the downtown to South Fairmont.

Everest Drive Bridge

Everest Drive Bridge carries Everest Drive over Coal Run Hollow and an unnamed access road. The structure was built in 1956 and owned by the City of Fairmont. The structure is in poor condition (deck drainage, excessively rotated rocker bearings, and main supporting members). A commitment by previous state administration to take the Everest Drive Bridge into the State Highway System will allow the bridge to be maintained and replaced using Federal Highways Administration as a funding source. This will require matching funds by the City of Fairmont.

Fourth Street Bridge

The Fourth Street Bridge was originally constructed about 1930. The bridge is a four span continuous, cast-in-place, concrete rigid frame with a steel reinforced concrete deck. The bridge's length is 250' and the clear traveled way width is 20' with 5' sidewalks. The bridge is perpendicular to Coal Run and Benoni Avenue. The 2001 average daily traffic (ADT) was 4,800 vehicles per day (VPD). Currently, Fourth

Street north and south of the bridge is 28' wide curb to curb with sidewalks on both sides. The bridge is classified and used as a two-lane bridge with a three-ton posting (no truck or school bus traffic). The posted speed limit is 25 miles per hour (mph) and sight distance is satisfactory. The clear traveled width makes the bridge functionally deficient and the three-ton posting and overall deteriorated condition signifies structural deficiency that must be addressed that will need to be addressed in the near future. The City of Fairmont and the West Virginia Department of Transportation are investigating alternatives for the replacement of this bridge.

Transit

Public transportation service needs to be expanded; however, the region lacks the critical population mass to support it. What public transportation is available, residents are not using it, thus increasing the automobile traffic and parking problems within the City. Public transportation is unavailable to children after school hours.

Air service

Benedum Airport is the only commercial airport located in the study area. It occupies approximately 544 acres in land area and 290 acres in restrictive easements. It also provides a primary runway 7,000 feet in length. Commercial, industrial, and agricultural land uses are encouraged in the vicinity of the airport.

Fairmont Municipal Airport is located near I-79 and is primarily a small craft airport, that offers flight school and limited freight service.

Sidewalks

While sidewalk maintenance is the responsibility of the adjoining property owners, and City Code requires owners to keep them in good repair, there is no fair and equitable way to enforce this provision of the code. Many of the side walks within the city are in poor condition. In some neighborhoods sidewalks were not required as a condition of the approval of the subdivision, therefore residents are for the most part limited to using motor vehicles.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

Short Range (2005-2008)

- A subcommittee should be formed to continue to evaluate the City transportation system, and to develop a needs assessment for the State when a new city/county plan is developed.
- The subcommittee should recommend upgrades to problem intersections and suggest road widening that would alleviate congestion at problem locations.
- The City should work with the WV DOH to expedite the widening of Locust Avenue and the replacement of the 4th Street Bridge.
- The City should advocate public transit and other alternative forms of transportation to reduce

traffic. Public transit is a well-traveled and needed mode of transportation by students in the area. The City should investigate the feasibility of a bus system for both students and adults. Residents should be made aware and educated on the different routes and scheduling of public transit. Efforts should be made to develop brochures or pamphlets to provide users with relevant information.

- The city should continue to seek funding to develop the Rail Trail through Fairmont to connect the West Fork river Trail to the Mon River Trail by way of MCTRAIL at Winfield Street.
- The City should focus on developing true entrances and defining gateways.
- The City should investigate the feasibility of converting certain two way streets to one way as a means of improving circulation. Virginia Avenue and Gaston Avenue have been suggested as well as Walnut and Benoni.

Medium Range (2008-2011)

- The City should determine the feasibility of a sidewalks assessment program. The City should prepare a detailed sidewalk plan to prioritize areas to improve when funds become available.
- The City should consider establishing joint public/private programs for landscape enhancements of existing roads. This action will create a consistent landscape design image, especially in strip commercial areas.
- Route 250 South (from the Watson Bridge to I-79) should be expanded into at least a three-lane lighted highway.
- Consideration should be given for signage and information to direct visitors who arrive to Fairmont by boat as part of the Riverfront development plan.

Long Range (2011-2015)

- The City should reduce through-traffic and truck traffic on residential streets through a comprehensive Program of arterial street widenings, street reconfiguration, and traffic management. These activities should all be coordinated with transit planning recommendations.
- A bypass for heavy truck traffic and for travelers who do not want to drive through downtown should be developed.