

CHAPTER EIGHT - RURAL JURISDICTIONS STREET AND ROAD SYSTEM EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a brief review of the status of street and road systems for each jurisdiction in the rural portion of the RTPO.

REGIONAL LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

The Benton-Franklin Council of Governments set uniform urban and rural area Level of Service (LOS) standards for the three-county region. For urban areas over 5,000 in population the uniform LOS is “D”. For rural areas and small cities under 5,000 in population the uniform LOS is “C”. The regional cities and counties have adopted the regional LOS “C”.

EVALUATION OF RURAL JURISDICTIONS

Rural Benton County

In large measure, road access for rural and agricultural areas in rural Benton County is good and improving. However, the road system may be considered to provide less than convenient access to some of the outlying rural areas.

Congestion challenges are absent on county roads serving rural or agricultural areas; existing LOS is “B” or higher. Generally, principle road concerns in rural areas are “all weather” access for agricultural product transport, and more direct farm-to-market routes for agricultural products. The need for road improvements is primarily based on pavement condition; substandard widths; the need for all-weather surfacing on roadways subject to seasonal closures or weight restrictions; the need for hard surfacing of gravel roads; and safety.

Benton City

All of Benton City’s functionally classified streets are predicted to operate at LOS A or B in the Year 2030, with one exception. State Route (SR) 225, which is contiguous with components of the Benton City street system from the Yakima River north to SR 240, is forecast to operate at LOS D by 2020. This is a situation which Benton City and WSDOT should monitor over time.

Prosser

Most segments of the Prosser street system currently operate at LOS B or better. Projected volumes based on traffic count data suggest the downtown area south of the railroad tracks is the area of town most prone to future congestion. Because increased downtown business activity would lead to increased congestion, Prosser’s 2011 Comprehensive Plan reduces the downtown LOS threshold to “D” in order to accommodate the City’s vision for a more robust downtown. The remainder of Prosser’s street system has an LOS threshold of “C”.

Higher traffic volumes are also projected north of the Yakima River on Wine Country Road. Recent improvements on Wine Country Road were designed to accommodate these higher traffic volumes. However, continued intensification of growth accessing the intersections at

the I-82 interchange and Merlot Drive in the north part of the city will require a major street improvement project at some point during the planning period.

Rural Franklin County

Most of Franklin County's functionally classified rural roads currently operate at LOS A or B. A few segments operate at LOS C, the regionally adopted standard. In 20 years, segments of Road 68 North and Taylor Flats Road may degrade to LOS D and merit future monitoring. These segments constitute a very small percentage of the classified rural road system. As such, traffic congestion is generally not a problem in rural Franklin County.

The need for road improvements therefore, is primarily based on pavement conditions; substandard widths; the need for all-weather surfacing on roadways subject to seasonal closures or weight restrictions; the need for hard surfacing on gravel roads; replacement of obsolete bridges; and safety.

Connell

Calculations based on traffic counts performed prior to completion of the Coyote Ridge Correctional Facility expansion show all of Connell's functionally classified streets operating at Level of Service (LOS) "A" or "B" through the Year 2030 except for portions of Columbia Avenue north of Elm Street where higher traffic volumes may occur. Traffic flow, operating speeds, and maneuverability on most of the street system is expected to be at acceptable levels through the planning period. The need to widen Columbia Avenue beyond the current three lanes would be near the end of the 20-year horizon of the Plan.

The population impact of the Coyote Ridge expansion has been estimated at 600 persons, or a 20 percent increase. Post-expansion employment at the facility is estimated to be around 700 persons total rotating through three shifts. The effects of the expansion population growth and employment-related trips need to be more closely examined.

Coyote Ridge is located on the northeast edge of Connell on North Columbia Avenue and adjacent to US 395. Many of the employees utilize the highway rather than the Connell street system for their work trip. The intersection of North Columbia Avenue and US 395 is at-grade and experiences heavy usage during shift changes. In 2004, Connell, Franklin County, WSDOT and the BFCG partnered in a study to define a footprint for a potential interchange in this area.

Kahlotus

All of Kahlotus' functionally classified streets, including State Routes 21, 260, and 263, are projected to operate at LOS A in the Year 2030. Anticipated need is likely to be in the form of street maintenance and the necessity for wider streets with curbs, gutters, and sidewalks.

Mesa

All of Mesa's functionally classified streets are projected to still operate at LOS A during the life of the Plan. Therefore, projects are generally triggered by pavement condition and the need for wider streets with curbs, gutters, and sidewalks.

Rural Walla Walla County

Overall, traffic congestion is not a problem on Walla Walla County's rural roads. All of the County's roads currently operate at LOS A or B, and population growth in the rural County has

been slow - less than one percent/year between 2000 and 2010. None of the County-controlled roadways are projected to exceed their level of service standard by the year 2030.

The need for road improvements on rural County roads is primarily based on pavement condition; substandard widths; the need for all-weather surfacing of roadways subject to seasonal closures or weight restrictions; the need for hard surfacing of gravel roads; replacement of obsolete bridges; and safety.

Prescott

All of Prescott's streets, including SR 124, are predicted to operate at LOS A or B throughout the 20-year planning period. Therefore, projects are generally triggered by pavement condition and the need for wider streets with curbs and sidewalks. The city's ability to finance such improvements relies upon securing state and/or federal funding.

Waitsburg

The City of Waitsburg is unique in that the two principal arterials in town are actually State highways: State Route 12 (Coppei Avenue) and State Route 124 (Preston Avenue), which are maintained by the State Department of Transportation. Calculations indicate a segment of SR 12, which passes through Waitsburg from the east city limits to the junction with SR 124, is projected to operate at LOS C by 2030. The rest of the state system is projected to operate at LOS A or B, as are all of Waitsburg's remaining streets.

Routine maintenance and preservation activities will be necessary on the state system. This would consist of asphalt overlays with safety restoration.

THE WALLA WALLA/COLLEGE PLACE TRAFFIC CIRCULATION STUDY

In May 2004, the BFCG completed a traffic circulation study for the Walla Walla/College Place urban area. Both jurisdictions cited the Study in their latest comprehensive plans while discussing their street systems. Due to the passage of time, and the construction of significant regional transportation improvements, the data and conclusions in the Study are no longer valid.

Two projects completed in 2010: the Myra Road Extension from Poplar Street to US 12; and the Frenchtown Vicinity to Walla Walla project which relocated US 12 and widened it to four lanes have altered travel patterns in the urban area.

EVALUATION OF THE WALLA WALLA URBAN AREA

Urban Walla Walla County

Capacity deficiencies may develop on urban area roads currently under county jurisdiction over the twenty-year life of the Plan. Growth in Walla Walla and College Place, and the expansion of city limits could encompass those areas within that time frame.

College Place

Most federally-classified streets in College Place currently operate at acceptable levels of service. Several deficiencies were identified in the 2004 Traffic Circulation Study; however, The above noted changes to the regional transportation network have occurred since then, altering conditions defined in that report.

Improvements to the local transportation network are also underway. The City of College Place is also reconstructing and improving roughly a mile of Whitman Drive from Larch to Academy Drive with completion anticipated by November 2011. Additionally, the City is planning the reconstruction of Rose Avenue, a primary east-west arterial from Myra Road through College Avenue, a primary north-south arterial.

Walla Walla

Streets in Walla Walla generally operate at acceptable levels of service. As noted with College Place, deficiencies were identified in the 2004 Walla Walla/College Place Traffic Circulation Study. Regional changes to the urban area traffic system since the Study are noted above.

Changes to the City's transportation network have occurred since that time. A project to reconstruct 13th Avenue from Abadie Street to Cherry Street to minor arterial standard is scheduled for construction. Additionally, the Myra Road - SR 125 to Garrison Creek project, which includes a grade separated intersection, is being studied.

WSDOT - RTPO

Analysis of state routes in the rural RTPO region has determined that very few potential capacity challenges exist over the 20-year life of the plan. In 2006, WSDOT South Central Region Headquarters generated a spreadsheet that forecasts LOS for every segment of the state highway system in RTPO. Forecast data in the table, which includes the years 2015 and 2025, shows all segments of the Non-HSS state system operating at LOS C or above.

SR 125 through Walla Walla functions as a city street with numerous intersections, traffic signals and commercial activities. The inherent congestion and delay are not conducive to through travel. There have been discussions between urban area jurisdictions and WSDOT to transfer jurisdictional responsibilities for the existing SR 125 and the new Myra Road, which would become the new SR 125.

SR 225 extends from Interstate 82 through Benton City to SR 240 at Horn Rapids, serving as Benton City's main street. Hanford commuters dominate peak volumes on this two-lane roadway and the route should be monitored for capacity problems.