

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Background

The Alpena County Intergovernmental Road Subcommittee is comprised of representatives of the Alpena County Board of Commissioners, the Alpena County Road Commission, the City of Alpena, Alpena Township, Alpena Public Schools, and the Board of Township Supervisors. It was formed in 1998 to address the increasingly critical needs of the County-wide transportation infrastructure. The Subcommittee had perceived that increased commercial and industrial development was causing major changes in traffic patterns within the community, and that it was causing significant traffic congestion on some roads and streets with high traffic volumes. It was perceived that transportation safety was being compromised, that growth & development was occurring without regard to the well-being of the transportation system, and that future growth, if not planned for, will only exacerbate these problems. Each jurisdiction had attempted at various times to fix certain inadequacies of the transportation system. However, these were short-term, and could not address the long-range needs of the transportation infrastructure. Time and resources were expended only to have the same transportation problems recur a short time later. It became clear that a long-term plan was needed to help guide future decisions for development and transportation issues in the Community of Alpena.

On behalf of the Subcommittee, the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG) submitted a request for \$68,000 in funding to the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Bureau of Transportation Planning, to complete an 18-month study that would lead to an Alpena area-wide transportation plan. Five entities on the Subcommittee, through resolution, pledged an additional \$2,400 each in matching funds: Alpena County, the City of Alpena, Alpena Township, Alpena Public Schools, and the Alpena County Road Commission. MDOT funding was approved to begin on October 1, 2001.

Study Area

Urban land uses are generally expanding outward from the City of Alpena west along M-32, and the tendency is toward strip commercial development. High numbers of access points, large unconnected parking lots, above ground utilities and a lack of street trees and landscaping present an unattractive appearance to this segment of the corridor. Heavy traffic volumes associated with local business activity, residential trip generation, and area-wide tourism activity result in traffic safety problems, and is most apparent during peak hours of the day.

There is also a great deal of traffic movement between the north and south areas of the City of Alpena. To the north of the Thunder Bay River, there are several major trucking facilities, the Alpena Community College, many major industrial employers, the General Hospital and other medical facilities, elementary schools, a golf course, and several large residential areas. To the south of the Thunder Bay River, there are sizable residential areas, a school bus facility and several schools including the high school and junior high school, many large retail commercial centers, a transit facility, the County Road Commission, City and County government buildings, and office buildings.

The study area involves five local units of governments including: Alpena County, the City of Alpena, and the Townships of Alpena, Maple Ridge, and Wilson. For study purposes, the boundary is defined as a rectangle encompassing an area that lies just beyond the Alpena Regional Airport to the west, approximately ¼ mile north of Hamilton Road, Wessel Road to the east, then south- just past Bare Point Road. Where appropriate, land use activity outside the

study area was considered, however, the primary focus of the study is in the area within the above described boundary. **Figure 1.1** depicts the boundary of the study area.

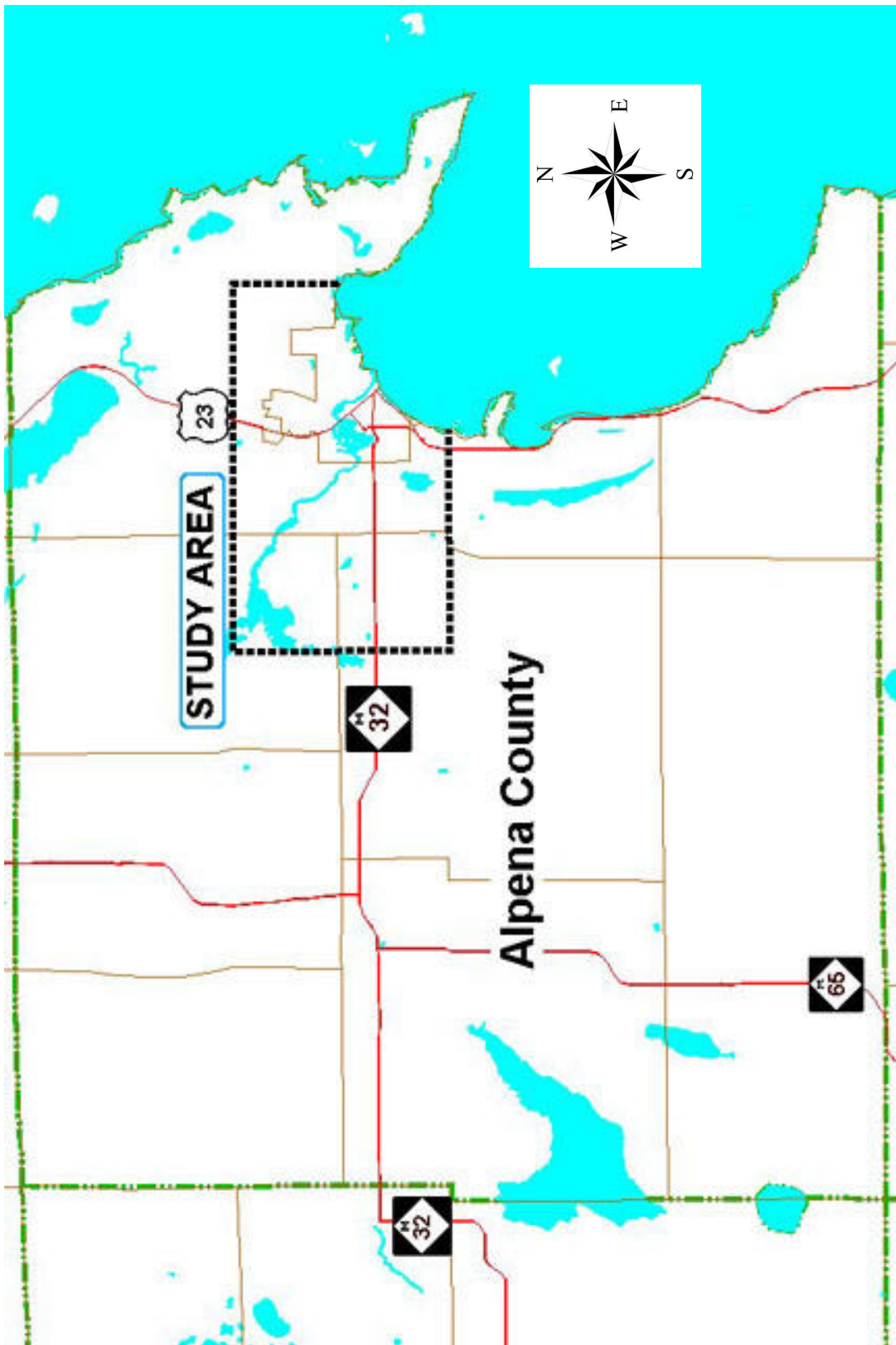


Figure 1.1, Study Area

Purpose of the Planning Process

The objective of this project was to develop a comprehensive plan to address both the short-term and long-range transportation needs of the Alpena area. In order to develop a plan that would be supported by the entire community, the transportation planning committee comprised Intergovernmental Road Subcommittee members as well as representatives of: the business community, Alpena General Hospital, the transit authority, the law enforcement community, MDOT, NEMCOG, the Citizens Against a Residential Bypass, the Citizens for Bypass Issues, and the Townships of Long Rapids, Maple Ridge, Sanborn, and Wilson.

A coordinated approach that combines land use planning and transportation planning was used to address the issues in this Plan. Local communities have recognized the need to develop new policies and guidelines to alleviate future negative impacts to the transportation system, that are associated with on-going development. It is essential that proactive and remedial measures be incorporated at the local level to prevent further traffic congestion, to address safety issues, and to provide for the long-term sustainability of the area's local economy.

The results of this study from October 1, 2001 to May 31, 2003 have been compiled into a Plan that includes existing conditions, projected future conditions, access management standards that address land use compatibility and development issues, and community goals and objectives. Adoption of the plan as a master plan amendment will serve as the legal foundation for regulating land use activity in the communities, through their respective zoning ordinances. Model zoning ordinance language for access management, billboards, signs, stormwater management and aesthetics are included as an appendix.

It was the intent of this planning process to develop policies and guidelines to facilitate a coordinated approach to land use and transportation planning. Information that was generated showed current transportation system conditions (both assets and deficiencies), predicted future conditions, and provided direction on how to handle future demands upon the system. The Plan includes community goals & objectives, and contains short-term, intermediate, and long-term recommendations that can be implemented toward attaining these goals. Partnerships between local units of government, MDOT, public agencies, and private interests are being maintained in order to pool resources toward these goals.

The Recommendations listed numerically in Chapter 8 of the Plan have been located on a 24" x 36" Community Map. This Map summarizes the results of the Plan, and is available for general distribution to assist each community with its efforts to attain a better transportation system.