

4.4 TRANSPORTATION

4.4.1 Highways

A. Traffic Characteristics

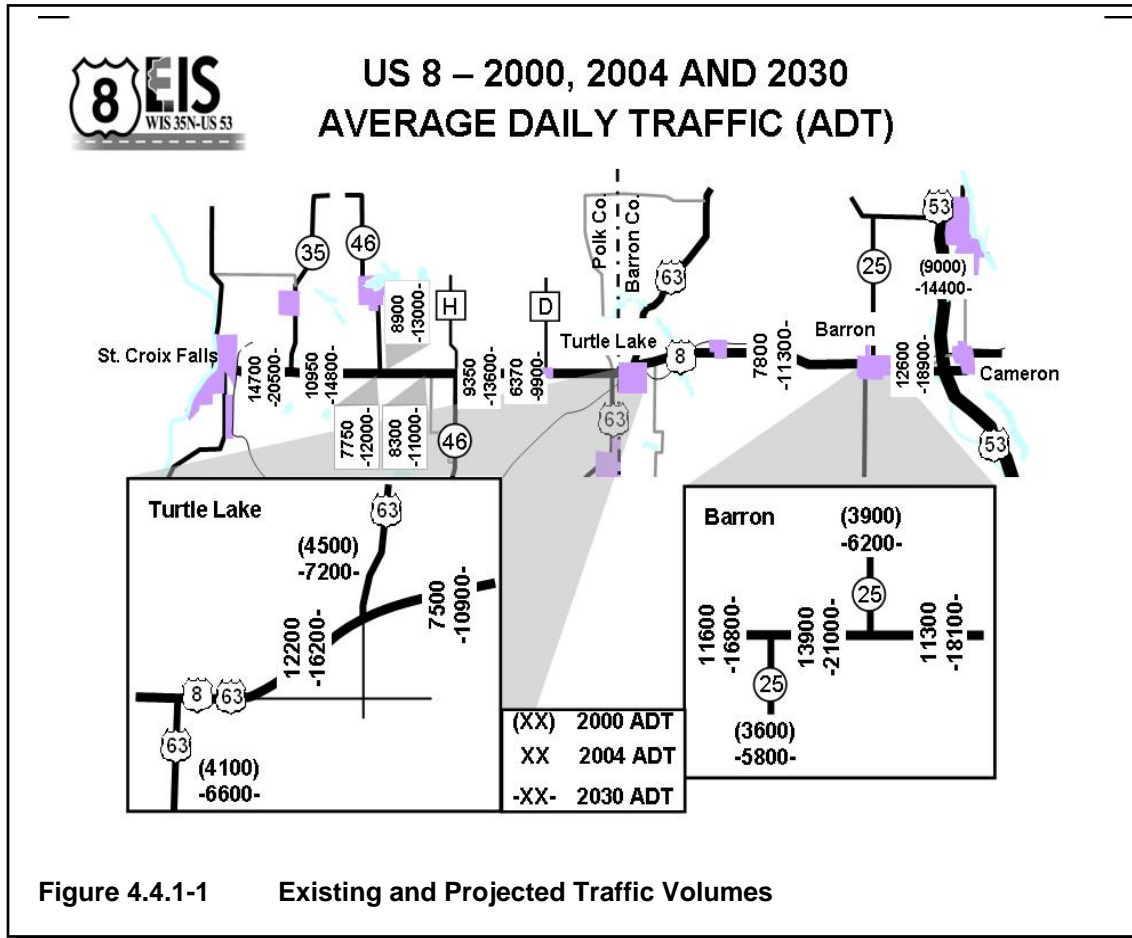
Section 3.3.4.1 in this document reviews the existing highway transportation corridor with regard to traffic composition, traffic characteristics, and existing and projected traffic volumes. In brief, US 8 traffic on the corridor is made up of three types of traffic: regional, local, and tourist traffic.

US 8 serves regional and interregional traffic as it directly links the Twin Cities metropolitan area with much of northern Wisconsin. As such, much of the traffic that passes through the study corridor has origins and destinations outside the study limits. This regional traffic would likely bypass corridor communities if possible. Within the study limits of the corridor, US 8 provides mobility to adjacent communities for the residents, industry, farmers, and businesses of Range, Turtle Lake, Almena, Poskin, and Barron. The corridor area is also home to many tourist attractions that range from outdoor recreation associated with the abundant lakes and rivers to indoor gaming at the St. Croix Casino.

B. Traffic Projections for Project Alternatives

As described in Section 3.3.4.1, the Traffic Forecasting Section of the Bureau of State Highway Programs projected future traffic volumes for the year 2030 along the US 8 corridor. These projections were made assuming no major construction or expansion of the corridor. For the non-bypass alternatives (No-build, Passing Lane, and On-alignment Four-Lane Alternatives), traffic for 2030 is assumed to remain similar to the projections by the Traffic Forecasting Section (see Figure 4.4.1-1).

To estimate how much traffic would use a bypass if one were provided under the various project bypass alternatives, WisDOT conducted Origin-Destination (OD) studies within and around the village of Turtle Lake and the city of Barron. These OD studies are included in Appendix A. The OD studies indicated that about a third of the traffic through each of these communities would utilize a bypass route if one were provided. For Turtle Lake, about 34 percent of the total traffic would be projected to use a north bypass. That proportion of traffic includes 42 percent of the total truck traffic. Similarly, 33 percent of total traffic would be projected to use a south bypass of Turtle Lake, and that includes 40 percent of the total truck traffic. For Barron, a north bypass would draw 34 percent of total traffic and 48 percent of trucks, while a south bypass would draw 35 percent of total traffic and 48 percent of truck traffic.



4.4.2 Other Travel Modes

As described in Section 3.3.4.2, alternative transportation modes that serve the project study area are somewhat limited, with the single occupant vehicle being the primary mode of passenger transportation. The following sections will discuss the effects to alternative travel modes as a result of the various study alternatives.

A. Transit Service

Transit is currently only available for the elderly and handicapped through Polk County Transportation for the Disabled and Elderly, Inc. The Polk County Council on Aging also provides a volunteer drive service. The only public transit available in Barron County is the Rice Lake bus system serving city residents. None of the study alternatives is anticipated to have an effect on the frequency or routes of the transit service. Study alternatives that increase the corridor capacity or construct a bypass to divert regional traffic will decrease congestion and therefore increase transit travel speeds. The No-build Alternative may result in slower speeds for transit because of increasing traffic and congestion.

B. Rail Transportation

Section 3.3.4.2 describes the various freight rail lines throughout Polk and Barron Counties. Wisconsin Central Limited Railroad provides service to the city of Barron one train per day, four days per week. There is no passenger rail service within the corridor area. An improved highway facility may minimally affect revenues of freight rail service by increasing the attraction of highway travel on a less congested facility. Area industry may choose to transport goods via highways rather than rail. The No-build Alternative is not anticipated to affect freight rail in the corridor.

Polk County is experiencing a trend of decreasing access to rail service, and the trend is expected to continue. US 8 could see an increase in truck traffic as rail service declines in the area.

C. Air Transportation

There are several publicly owned airports serving the corridor area as described in Section 3.3.4.2. None of the study alternatives will directly affect airport land, although the north bypass of Barron could be located within two miles of the Barron Municipal Airport (9Y7) requiring coordination with the WisDOT Bureau of Aeronautics (BOA).

WisDOT BOA reviewed the Barron alternatives and determined that Alternatives A, B, and D would have no aeronautical effect on the airport. Alternative D (North Bypass) has some potential to affect air navigation into and out of the airport as the corridor passes under one corner of the visual approach trapezoid for runway 27 to the airport. However, an object 225 feet (66 m) tall would be needed to penetrate the trapezoid. As a result of this unlikely occurrence, it was determined that Alternative D will have no aeronautical effect on the airport.

D. Bicycle

Currently, there are no designated bicycle lanes along the existing US 8 corridor, though bicyclists do use the highway and county roads as bicycle routes. Through the city of Barron, US 8 is a planned state highway bikeway but the remainder of the US 8 corridor is classified as “undesirable conditions” for bicyclists. Motorists’ concerns regarding safety while traveling on or attempting to cross US 8 are shared by bicyclists. The No-build Alternative would likely increase congestion causing an uncomfortable environment for motorists and nonmotorists. With alternatives that improve the existing US 8 corridor, roadway shoulders within the Village of Turtle Lake and the City of Barron would be constructed to accommodate bicycles. In rural sections, bicycles would continue to be permitted on the roadway shoulder as they are currently. A divided roadway with a median would provide more gaps in traffic for safer crossing by bicyclists. Realignment and bypass alternatives that result in conversion of existing US 8 to a local road that would be used by local bicyclists would be a benefit. Bypass alternatives would reduce the amount of traffic through Turtle Lake and Barron and this would result in improved access and safety for bicyclists within these communities. Bicycle traffic would not be permitted on a bypass portion of US 8 and would need to use local roads.