

## Chapter 2: Plan Process & Development

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### Coulee Vision 2040

*Coulee Vision 2040* was the culmination of two planning efforts that began in 2012: 1) *Coulee Vision 2050*, whose purpose was to create a long-range vision for transportation and land use in the region; and 2) *Coulee Vision 2050 Implementation Plan*, whose process focused on four main implementation tasks, not the least of which was facilitating intermunicipal boundary agreements between our member communities.

Because CV 2040 was generated from an intensive public input process that included a broad range of public outreach to the general public, modal interests, local communities, and the LAPC, the vision and the goals and guiding principles are adopted into *Beyond Coulee Vision 2040*, the 2020 MTP update to CV 2040. The vision and the goals and guiding principles are copied below.

### Coulee Vision 2050 Vision, Goals, and Guiding Principles

#### Vision Statement

As reported in *Coulee Vision 2050*—the long-range vision for the improvement of transportation systems in the La Crosse-La Crescent region—the intention of the vision is to help inform future planning efforts by the LAPC and individual communities within the region. It attempts to anticipate the needs and wants of area residents in the future so that local communities can align long-term land use and transportation decisions with those interests.

The vision statement summarizes the overall *Coulee Vision 2050* process and establishes the foundation for how the region will grow over the next 40 years:

*“Coulee Vision 2050 is a long-range vision for the improvement of transportation systems in the La Crosse-La Crescent region. The region’s towns, villages, and cities each recognize the vital link between land use decisions and transportation outcomes and will collaborate with each other over the coming decades to encourage infill development, limit urban sprawl, and increase mobility options for all users across the region. By incorporating the guiding principles of Coulee Vision 2050 into local plans and policies, and through sustained, proactive local leadership, our communities will improve quality of life for all residents, strengthen the region’s economic competitiveness, and preserve the unique coulee landscape.”*

## Goals and Guiding Principles

The purpose of the guiding principles is to lay the foundation for encouraging development in an efficient manner. They are intended to be used by local, county, and state agencies to shape future policy, land use, infrastructure and transportation decisions throughout the region.

### Land Use

- ⇒ Housing and neighborhoods in the City of La Crosse will attract new investment and more residents, especially through renovation and enhancement of existing housing stock.
- ⇒ Senior housing options will continue to expand, and new housing intended for residents who remain mobile and active should be located within a 10-minute walk of retail and services.
- ⇒ New housing will continue to include a range of housing types and lot sizes, including a priority on single family lots smaller than 1/2-acre.
- ⇒ The region places a high priority on infill development to enhance the utilization of existing urban infrastructure and enhance the concentration of uses so that more residents are within a 10-minute walk of their daily retail needs.
- ⇒ New buildings and development areas will often include a mix of uses.
- ⇒ Towns, villages and cities will pursue and approve boundary agreements that allow some growth in unincorporated areas.

### Transportation

- ⇒ New roads for the primary purpose of facilitating regional commuter traffic will generally be avoided – community preference is for expansion of existing roads and transit enhancements instead.
- ⇒ Road projects will be designed to improve the safety and mobility of all users, with emphasis placed on maintaining neighborhood connections and cohesiveness.
- ⇒ The region will have a flexible and fully interconnected grid of streets and highways.
- ⇒ A Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) will be created to fund and maintain transportation systems.
- ⇒ Transit use will increase among all age groups.
- ⇒ Fixed-route regional transit, such as Bus Rapid Transit, should be actively studied and pursued. Routes should be identified and necessary right-of-way protected (or gradually acquired) until implementation becomes feasible.

- ⇒ Intelligent transportation systems and mass data gathering technologies will be utilized to the extent practicable to improve the safety and mobility of our transportation networks.
- ⇒ Growth will be accommodated without a significant increase in congestion through the use of many strategies, including road and highway improvements, traffic signal timing improvements, new/enhanced transit services, enhanced and expanded bike and pedestrian facilities, scheduling adjustments by major employers, and other approaches.
- ⇒ Truck routes in the region will be efficient and clearly identified, especially including those through the City of La Crosse.
- ⇒ Mississippi River locks and dams will be upgraded to accommodate modern shipping requirements.
- ⇒ Interstate passenger rail service to Minneapolis and Milwaukee/Chicago will increase in frequency and reliability.
- ⇒ Public and private landowners will reduce their subsidy of automobile use through a mix of strategies.
- ⇒ Bike and pedestrian facilities will be present everywhere.

### Coulee Region Transportation Study

One of the requirements for the development and content of the metropolitan transportation plan is to identify “operational and management strategies to improve the performance of the existing transportation facilities to relieve vehicular congestion and maximize the safety and mobility of people and goods.”

In 2014, the *Coulee Region Transportation Study* (CRTS)—a Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) study—was initiated by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to re-study and streamline previous attempts to address mobility issues in the La Crosse area. Its purpose was to identify strategies that addressed safety, infrastructure deterioration, congestion, multimodal deficiencies, and the environment, and to support economic development and livability in the Coulee Region. The CRTS was to be the informative phase of the larger transportation improvement program projects [243-06-012](#) and [243-06-013](#).

The PEL public process began in January 2015 with an overview of the process presented to the LAPC Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Policy Board and continued with technical advisory group meetings and public involvement meetings over the course of the year. The timeline for the study involved data collection, analysis of existing and future conditions, development of broad strategies, and public information meetings in the spring

of 2015; evaluation of strategies during the summer and a public information meeting in September (CV 2040 was approved on September 15); refinement of strategies and a public information meeting by November; and a final report to be completed that winter. The goal was to have the results of the CRTS inform the update of the MTP, but the study had only just gotten underway and was not able to inform the 2015 MTP before its approval.

Although a final report has yet to be made available, additional study reports, summaries of and comments from the public outreach activities, and descriptions of the strategies and strategy packages have since been made available and can be found on the [Coulee Region Transportation Study](#) website.

## Beyond Coulee Vision 2040

*Beyond Coulee Vision 2040* (BCV 2040) continues where CV 2040 left off by incorporating the results of the activities that began during the CV 2040 process and are active yet today. The two main activities that impacted both CV 2040 and BCV 2040 are the intermunicipal boundary agreements and the CRTS. Other state and local plans and efforts have informed the BCV 2040 process also and are referenced where appropriate.

### Intermunicipal Boundary Agreements

One of the action steps in CV 2040 is to “facilitate/support adoption of boundary agreements among member jurisdictions.” Immediately after approval of CV 2040 in the fall of 2015, LAPC staff initiated a project to develop agreements between some of the incorporated municipalities and their neighboring towns. The overarching goal for developing the agreements was to define where annexations and their associated development activities would occur. This would not only help communities plan for municipal services but would also help support other planning efforts like identifying the appropriate transportation demand management (TDM) strategies to employ locally.

The project involved facilitating boundary discussions for La Crescent (city)/La Crescent (township), La Crosse (city)/Shelby (town), and Onalaska (city)/Medary (town). The facilitation of discussions between Onalaska and Medary was eventually led by Onalaska.

Agreements for Holmen (village)/Holland (town), Holmen/Onalaska (city), and Holmen/Onalaska (city)/Onalaska (town) occurred independently. Several meetings were held between the city and township of La Crescent but they were unable to reach an agreement that was satisfactory to both. To date the only agreements that have been finalized are for Holmen/Onalaska (city) (2015), Holmen/Onalaska (city)/Onalaska (town) (2016), and Holmen/Holland (2017). Discussions between La Crosse and Shelby began in 2016 and are still ongoing.

The town of Campbell and the city of La Crosse entered into a boundary agreement in 2004 after Campbell tried to incorporate. This agreement will terminate on January 1, 2025.

### **Coulee Region Transportation Study Continues**

As the CRTS continued, 18 strategy packages were developed and then whittled down to 8 and then 6. The final six strategy packages combined expansion strategies with policy-based strategy “H,”<sup>1</sup> which was one of the eight standalone strategies before further refinement reduced the strategies to six. ([Appendix A](#) describes the refined strategies and the strategy packages determined to move forward in the Study.)

On March 16, 2016, a resolution supporting advancing the six strategies of the CRTS for further study was presented to and rejected by the LAPC Policy Board. The [resolution](#) was amended and subsequently approved by the Policy Board to include strategy “H” as a standalone strategy in the list of strategy packages to go forward for further study. WisDOT’s response to the resolution was that strategy “H” did not satisfy the goals of the CRTS and would not be going forward as a standalone strategy. WisDOT requested that the Policy Board meet to discuss transportation demand management (TDM), transportation system management and operations (TSMO), and other activities that would move “H” forward. (See *Regional Mobility Framework Workshop* below.) Meanwhile, WisDOT suspended its next steps in the Study process.

With four years having passed and no local support forthcoming, WisDOT is now planning to update the traffic data, safety analysis, highway capacity, and infrastructure condition from the Study process in fall/winter 2020-2021 to aid in its next steps. The impact of COVID-19 on traffic volumes, however, has challenged the ability to obtain representative data.

### **Transportation Demand Management Discussions**

#### ***Regional Mobility Framework Workshops***

Workshops to identify TDM strategies to move strategy “H” forward began with the TAC in October 2016 and ended with the Policy Board in November 2016. The Policy Board decided to pursue land use and policy, parking, and transit strategies for implementation in 2017.

#### ***Facilitated TDM Discussions***

Facilitated discussions with the LAPC Policy Board occurred in February, March, and April of 2017. The goal was to identify actions that each community could commit to work on to

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<sup>1</sup> This strategy looks at utilizing improved bike, pedestrian and transit facilities and implementing better Travel Demand Management (TDM), Transportation System Management & Operations (TSMO) and policy/legislation to avoid the expansion or creation of roadways.

achieve the goals of CV 2040 and to encourage growth patterns that support TDM. Policy Board members reported on land use and development, parking, and transit policies and actions they were currently engaged in and those they could engage in within the next two years. Information obtained during the facilitated sessions was summarized ([Appendix B](#)) and presented to the Policy Board at its May 2017 and July 2017 meetings.

## Other Considerations in Plan Development

### State and Transit Agency Plans

As required by 23 CFR 450.324, the metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) should integrate the priorities, goals, countermeasures, strategies, or projects for the planning area that are contained in the Highway Safety Improvement Program, including the Strategic Highway Safety Plan, and the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP).

The CFR requires public transit agencies to have their PTASPs approved by July 20, 2020; however, the impacts of the COVID19 pandemic on all aspects of doing business have resulted in the Federal Transit Administration delaying enforcement of the deadline to December 31, 2020.<sup>2</sup> MPOs will have 180 days after approval of the PTASP to incorporate the established performance targets into their transportation improvement programs (TIPs).

The La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility (MTU) participated in a workgroup organized by the WisDOT to develop a draft plan template that will be personalized by each agency to reflect their own goals and performance targets. Each agency will use the template to develop its own plan and submit it to WisDOT for certification.

The first consideration of the PTASP will occur in the 2022-2025 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

The MTP may also incorporate or reference applicable emergency relief and disaster preparedness plans and strategies and policies that support homeland security, as appropriate.

The agency plans reviewed for the 2020 MTP include but are not limited to the:

- ⇒ Draft *La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan*, July 2020.
- ⇒ [Draft Minnesota Strategic Highway Safety Plan 2020-2024](#), February 2020
- ⇒ [District 6 10-Year Capital Highway Investment Plan \(2020-2029\)](#), November 2019
- ⇒ [10-Year Capital Highway Investment Plan 2020-2029](#), October 2019

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<sup>2</sup> As posted on the Federal Transit Administration website: “In light of the extraordinary operational challenges presented by the COVID-19 public health emergency, FTA issued a [Notice of Enforcement Discretion](#) effectively extending the PTASP compliance deadline from July 20, 2020 to December 31, 2020.”

- ⇒ Wisconsin Department of Transportation [2020-2029 TAMP Transportation Asset Management Plan](#), September 3, 2019
- ⇒ MnDOT [Transportation Asset Management Plan](#), September 2019
- ⇒ Wisconsin Department of Transportation *Transit Asset Management Plan*, October 2018 (not published online)
- ⇒ [Wisconsin State Freight Plan](#), April 2018
- ⇒ [Minnesota Statewide Freight System and Investment Plan](#), January 2018
- ⇒ [Wisconsin Strategic Highway Safety Plan 2017-2020](#), November 2017
- ⇒ [Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan](#), March 2017
- ⇒ [Minnesota Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan](#), January 2017
- ⇒ [Minnesota State Highway Investment Plan: 2018-2037](#), January 2017
- ⇒ [Minnesota Statewide Bicycle System Plan](#), August 2016
- ⇒ [Minnesota State Rail Plan](#), March 2015
- ⇒ [Minnesota Statewide Ports & Waterways Plan](#), September 2014
- ⇒ [Minnesota State Aviation System Plan](#), 2012

### Survey of Local Comprehensive Plans

LAPC staff conducted an analysis of the transportation and land use goals identified in the local comprehensive plans of LAPC planning area communities and compared them to those adopted by the LAPC policy Board in its approval of *Coulee Vision 2040* (CV2040)—the metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) for the region.

Although the review identified many local transportation and land uses goals inconsistent with those approved in CV2040 (most of the comprehensive plans were approved prior to CV2040), several of the communities are planning updates, which will provide an opportunity for cooperative development of a framework for incorporating community goals into the MTP process.

The plan process for the 2025 MTP update will include a review and update of its goals and guiding principles to consider both the urbanized area and the less densely developed rural and lightly urbanizing (i.e. town centers) areas of the planning area.

A detailed summary of the analysis can be found in [Appendix C](#).

### Local Plans and Studies

Additional local plans and studies helped inform this MTP update, including several that were completed by LAPC staff:

- ⇒ [Natural and Cultural Resource Inventory: A Supplement to Beyond Coulee Vision 2040](#), May 2020.
- ⇒ [Weathering Climate Change: A Vulnerability Assessment of Road, Bridge, and Rail Infrastructure](#), December 2018.
- ⇒ [South Ave Multimodal Assessment](#), February 2018.
- ⇒ [Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Study](#), May 2017.
- ⇒ [Grand River Transit Service Enhancement & Policy Plan](#), May 2015.
- ⇒ [La Crosse Transportation Vision](#), February 2015.

### Consultation

In compliance with federal requirements, LAPC staff consulted with State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation. Staff compared the MTP with State conservation plans and maps and with the most recent inventories of natural, agricultural, cultural, recreational, and historic resources. The following resource and oversight agencies were contacted to review MTP projects mapped against the inventoried resources:

- ⇒ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- ⇒ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- ⇒ U.S. Department of Agriculture
- ⇒ Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office
- ⇒ Wisconsin State Historical Society
- ⇒ Ho-Chunk Nation
- ⇒ Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources
- ⇒ National Parks Service
- ⇒ Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection
- ⇒ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- ⇒ Local historic preservation organizations

The consultation process and substantive comments received are documented in [Appendix E](#).