Chapter 8
TRANSPORTATION

Access Management

Preserving the traffic carrying capacity of a roadway helps to avoid costly improvements and safety problems. Transportation studies have consistently shown that the number, design, and location of driveways along major roadways has a direct effect on traffic flow, ease of driving and accident potential. Because of the negative effects of driveway proliferation on traffic flow and capacity, every effort should be made to limit the number of driveways and to encourage access from side streets, service drives, frontage roads, and shared driveways.

The most effective means of ensuring proper access management is the site plan review process, enforced through the zoning ordinance. However, in order to properly administer site plan review, the Township should ensure that Future Land Use along major corridors adequately considers the function of the adjacent roadways.

A common misconception is that local communities have no input on driveway locations if the state or county has jurisdiction over the roadway. Although local regulation cannot conflict with the road authority (i.e. be less restrictive), it can control driveway locations through the site plan review process. Communication and coordination with the road authority is important but through this process local governments do have authority to control the placement and spacing of curb cuts as long as they are not less restrictive than the road authority.

Lots on Arterial Streets

Lots that have frontage on major streets often have no other means of access. This can have troublesome effects particularly if interior lands are not part of the initial lot's development and subsequent interior development is allowed to have its own distinct access point within the original frontage area. This creates a high number of individual driveways along streets that often carry high speed traffic and results in significant traffic hazards.

When the interior of a property is being developed, flag lots with narrow frontage should be prohibited. In commercial and industrial settings, shared access is the desired alternative and in both business and residential settings appropriately spaced series of perpendicular interior streets can be one of the required solutions. Where appropriate, connection of these streets with

streets or common easements parallel to the major street should be required and as many lots as possible should be required to gain access from these interior streets and.

In rural areas rather than lining a major street directly with residential lots, a frontage street or a marginal access interior street should be created and the lots should back up to the major street. Additional landscaping or fencing may be provided for the back yard areas of these lots if homes are involved.

Driveway Spacing

Speed along many major roads is a significant concern, spacing between driveways must be carefully considered. Increasing the distance between each driveway provides a measure of safety by ensuring that drivers are not confused as to the location of driveways, since they may be separated by a wide distance. This also allows for a sufficient distance to slow down to enter the driveway.

The Zoning Ordinance may call for a minimum frontage on major roadways that will be developed for more intensive land uses. Proper spacing will help ease traffic conflicts between driveways and vehicles on the street. Driveway spacing (and lot frontages) will be less on those streets that are developed with land uses that generate less traffic.

Driveway controls are especially important when considering commercial and other nonresidential development. Spacing of drives should be as far from the intersection of public streets as possible. Sharing of drives for adjacent properties should also be required, where feasible. Limiting access points clearly helps provide an added measure of safety for uses that generate higher volumes of traffic.

Future Roadway Improvements

Over the next twenty years, even with the predominantly rural residential character of the township, new growth in some areas of Heath Township may make necessary for major improvements to some existing roadways. In addition, continuing maintenance of existing road surfaces, including resurfacing, shoulder, and drainage improvements will also be necessary. In most instances however, where low intensity land uses are planned, resurfacing may be needed but even the major arteries should not need major improvements such as widening. Some major intersections may require upgrading as traffic increases, but those improvements should be relatively minor.

Unpaved Roads

Outside of the seasonal road system there are at this time only 11.5 miles of unpaved county roadway in the Township. They include 4 miles of 38th Street, 4 miles of 127th Avenue, 1.2 miles of 41st. Street, one mile of 125th Avenue and two, one half mile stretches of 44th Street. All of these gravel roads are either within or are surrounded by the Allegan State Game Area. With the exception of 38th St. which is a county primary road all of these street segments are discontinuous and do not support through traffic. While it may be desirable to eventually improve the unpaved streets, the advantages of paving be evaluated by the residents and land owners in the area and a policy decision made as to whether or not paving will occur. Maintaining gravel roads, while expensive, does tend to slow traffic and some residents will perceive this as contributing to their overall quality of life.

Others may view unpaved streets as a nuisance, with the problems of dust control, potholes, poor driving conditions in bad weather, and other difficulties. The Township should work closely with the ACRC in determining which streets should be paved and when based on a on a priority system. Some of the factors that should be used to evaluate the paving priorities include:

- Resident desires
- Drainage
- Traffic Volumes
- Roadway use type
- Roadway condition
- Adjacent land uses
- Maintenance expenditures
- Function of roadway in the
- township's street network

Major Road Improvements

Traffic operations are typically evaluated by the extent to which motorists are delayed in their travel. Future traffic operations are evaluated by comparing projected traffic volumes to the capacity or the road network. Roadway capacity is defined as the number of vehicles that can travel through an intersection or roadway segment during a specified time period. Generally, traffic operations and capacity analysis is evaluated for the peak hours of traffic.

Compared to many communities in West Michigan, Heath Township's traffic conditions are generally manageable. Traffic volumes on most streets are relatively low, with comparatively

few accident problems, reflecting its low density development and lack of major traffic generators, such as shopping centers. The heaviest volumes occur during the morning and afternoon peak hours, since the trips taken by these vehicles are primarily work oriented. An average two-land, rural roadway has the ability to safely accommodate up to 16,000 vehicles per day. Apart from M-40, even the heavily traveled roadways are under their capacity and will not require major widening.

Interconnected Street Networks/New Roadways

As the township develops, opportunities may present themselves through various development proposals for the extension of existing segments of section line streets or the development of new streets to collect and channel traffic to existing major streets.

As new subdivisions, site condominium, or other residential projects are evaluated by the Planning Commission, it is important to work toward the creation of an interconnected network street network. Interconnection ensures that adequate circulation is provided between abutting development projects. Rather than having each development provide access to only the major public street, stub streets to vacant properties that will be available for future development should be required. These street networks improve overall traffic flow by allowing residents to access nearby residential areas without traveling on the main streets of the community. In addition, circulation between projects improves access for emergency vehicles. Finally, maintenance and snow removal costs are reduced and efficiency.