

DRAFT METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN 2050



PREPARED BY
GVMC
GRAND VALLEY METRO COUNCIL

Adopted June (), 2024

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Disclaimer

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- Freight Committee
- Metropolitan Transportation Plan Steering Committee
- Nonmotorized Committee
- Policy Committee
- Safety Committee
- Technical Committee
- Transportation Programming Study Group

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For more information on this document, visit www.gvmc.org/mtp.

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Executive Summary

The Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Kent and eastern Ottawa Counties, is responsible for the development of a multi-modal long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The purpose of the MTP is to ensure that transportation investments in our area enhance the movement of people and freight efficiently, effectively, and safely over the next 20+ years. Without an MTP, federal transportation funding could not be allocated in the region. The MTP must be financially constrained (meaning costs don't exceed expected resources), project specific, take into consideration public input as well as plans and feedback from stakeholder agencies, meet established air quality standards, and ensure that no people groups are adversely impacted by the projects in this document through our environmental justice (EJ) process. This MTP has a 27-year horizon, balancing transportation investments through the year 2050.

Public Survey

One of the first steps in the development of the MTP was conducting a public survey. This survey was an enhanced version of the survey we used for our 2040 and 2045 MTPs. Prior to launching the survey, GVMC staff contracted with Grand Valley State University (GVSU) to review our previous survey and provide recommendations for updates. Part of the contract also included GVSU providing GVMC a list of locations where we could post information about the survey to reach low income and ethnic minority groups.

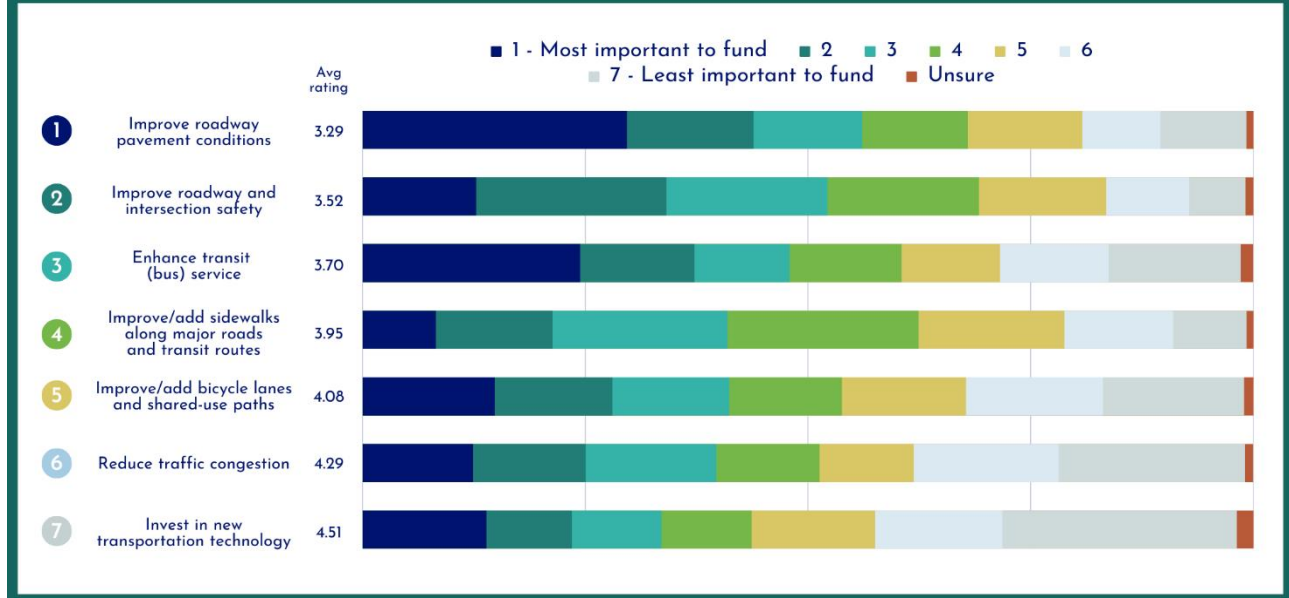
The revised survey asked the public eight questions about the transportation system, including their thoughts on pavement condition, safety, congestion, public transportation, nonmotorized transportation, air and rail, emerging transportation issues, options to increase transportation funding, and where they would like to see transportation dollars invested. In addition, the public was given the opportunity to provide additional comments or concerns about our transportation system. Seven demographic questions were included on the survey that asked the responder to provide their zip code; the city, township, or village they live in; their ethnicity; gender; age; yearly household income; and number of people in their household. Upon completion, GVMC translated the survey and corresponding advertising into Spanish. The survey received 1,109 responses, and 595 respondents provided comments.



Construction project on E Fulton in Grand Rapids

The chart on the following page shows the public's top transportation investment priorities. The public's top investment priority, to improve roadway pavement condition, was also the top priority for the previous two MTP surveys. However, the second and third priorities have shifted, with reducing traffic congestion, the second priority in the previous survey, falling to sixth place, improving roadway and intersection safety rising from fifth to second, and enhance transit (bus) service rising from fourth place to third.

In your opinion, which services should receive the most transportation funding? Choose a number, from most important to fund (1) to least important to fund (7)



Student Poster Contest

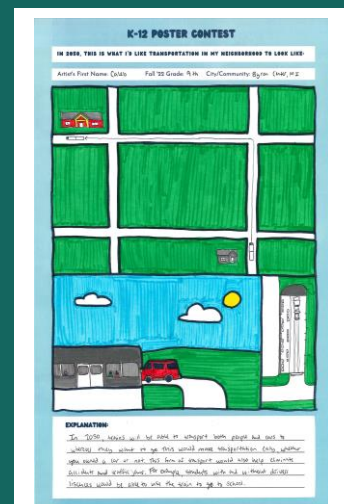
To involve the area's children and young adults in the survey, GVMC invited students in grades K-12 to participate in a poster contest that included drawing a picture of what they'd like transportation to look like in their neighborhood in 2050 and providing an explanation. Poster contest templates were available at every library in Kent and eastern Ottawa Counties as well as a handful of local businesses. GVMC received approximately 120 completed templates, and entries were grouped in three age cohorts: high school (grades 9-12), middle school (grades 5-8), and elementary (grades K-4). More information on the student poster contest is included in Appendix I. The MTP Steering Committee selected winners and used the drawings for inspiration when developing the vision statement, goals, and objectives for the document. Top prize-winning entries are below:



Avyaan, Grade 4



Anvi, Grade 5



Caleb, Grade 9

Vision Statement

The MTP Steering Committee developed the vision statement as well as the corresponding goals and objectives, discussed in Chapter 3, for this document. These key elements of the MTP were later brought through our Committee structure outlined on page 21 for additional discussion, revision, and approval. To develop the vision statement, goals and objectives, the MTP Steering Committee took into consideration these items from the previous MTP, public survey and student poster contest data, and federal planning factors. The resulting vision statement for this document is:

Through cooperation and collaboration with our members, regional stakeholders, and the public, GVMC will continue to enhance a sustainable and resilient multimodal transportation system that is accessible, safe, reliable, environmentally sound, socially equitable, economically viable and adaptable for future growth, maximizing the use of available resources.

GVMC will achieve this vision within the framework of federal performance measures and available resources, which align with our goals and objectives for this plan.

Needs Analyses

Considering the vision statement, goals and objectives, public survey results, and available data, GVMC staff worked with several committees to develop a list of needs by mode for the transportation system. Staff also conducted a deficiency analysis for pavement and bridge condition, safety, and congestion to determine where the system was operating below acceptable standards. Issues related to the condition of the pavement and bridges, to the reliability of travel times, to the convenience of the local transit system, to the availability of alternate means of transportation and the efficiency of moving freight throughout the system were all analyzed. Upon completion, GVMC brought these items to the public for feedback and developed an interactive Bingo game to enhance engagement. These analyses provided a basic vision of what we collectively would like our transportation system to be in the year 2050 and how the system could achieve optimal performance. While some needs varied based on the deficiency or mode that were being analyzed, one need was universal: **more funding**.

These needs, which total \$3.68 billion dollars, represent a **minimum** investment estimate needed to address **local** roadway and transit needs. *Please note that needs that do not have identified costs are not included in this figure, and some needs between now and 2050 are currently unknown.*

Financial Analysis

After the needs and deficiencies were identified, GVMC conducted a financial analysis to determine the amount of federal, state, and local funding reasonably expected to be available over the life of the plan to meet the identified needs and deficiencies. The results are below:

- (1) Approximately \$648 million in federal funding for local programs over the life of the plan, which rises to approximately \$777.6 million with the addition of a federally required 20% local match
- (2) Approximately \$3 billion in transit funding from all fund sources over the life of the plan (which leaves \$737M in unfunded needs)
- (3) Approximately \$2.9 billion in state funding for MDOT projects over the life of the plan

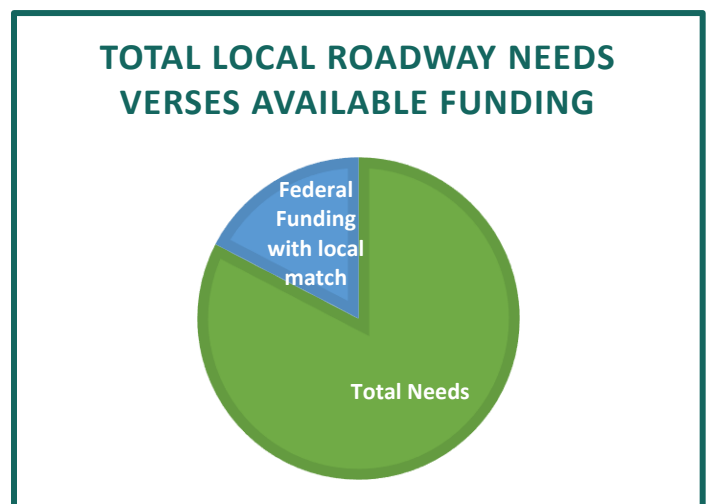


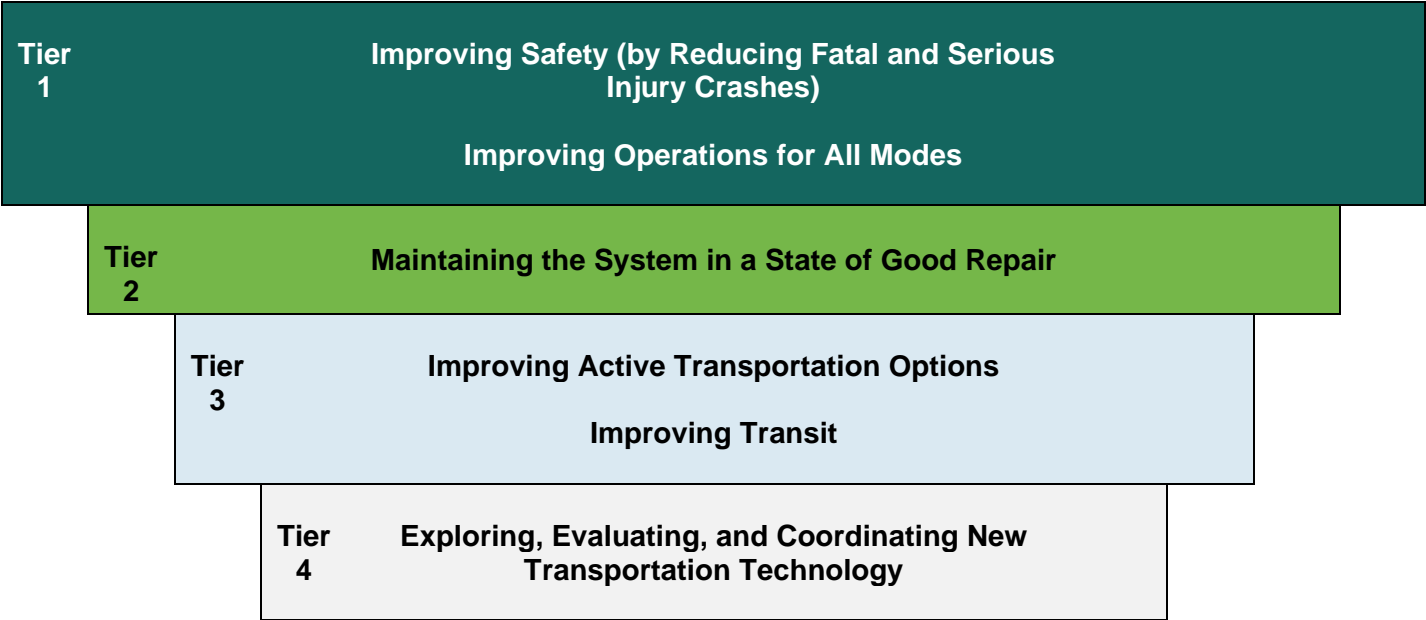
Figure 1: Local Needs Compared to Available Federal Funding

The cost of addressing the identified needs far exceeds the funding expected to be available over the life of the 2050 MTP.

Investment Priorities

After the financial analysis was completed, the MTP Steering Committee met to determine an investment strategy, or more simply, how we would prioritize transportation system improvements and investments based on limited federal funding. These priorities identify areas where future available transportation funds should be allocated and influence the projects that are selected to meet desired outcomes.

This discussion again took into consideration public input through our survey data, the vision statement for the plan, along with the goals and objectives, and the needs analysis. After a lengthy discussion, the MTP Steering Committee developed a tier-based strategy for investing in the transportation system, with the highest priorities at the top of the scale. GVMC then brought this strategy through our Committee approval process outlined on page 21 for additional discussion, revision, and approval. Public input was sought at both the Technical and Policy Committee meetings, as both are open to the public.



MPOs may use federal funds for local programs to fund projects deemed to be the highest priorities for the region. These projects must be deficient according to our Policies and Practices for Programming Projects document. Please note that all safety improvements are considered during the design phase for all projects, which must follow AASHTO design standards.

The Project List

The MTP project list was developed to address the deficiencies identified in the plan and reflect investment priorities. It is constrained by available revenues, meaning that the costs of the projects selected do not exceed anticipated revenues. The first four years (2023–2026) of the MTP project list are equivalent to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) project list and demonstrate the short-term transportation projects identified for funding in this region. Other individual projects listed in the MTP project list reflect projected transportation capacity and/or operational deficiencies with recommended alternatives identified. Projects not selected for funding are included in the illustrative lists of projects in Appendix J.

Future Funding

Gretchen Whitmer was elected governor in 2018 with a campaign promise to fix the roads, and in March of 2019, she proposed a 45-cent-per-gallon gas tax increase to be phased in over one year which would raise over \$2 billion to fix Michigan roads. In the fall of 2019, the state budget moved forward without Whitmer's 45-cent-per-gallon increase. During her 2020 State of the State address, Governor Whitmer unveiled a bonding plan called Rebuilding Michigan, which allows the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to borrow \$3.5 billion to rebuild highways and bridges across the state. The borrowed funds plus interest must be paid back by MDOT. The Rebuilding Michigan plan is ONLY for improvement projects on state roads (US, I, M- roads), not roads under county, city or village jurisdiction. Additional discussion about how to fund Michigan's infrastructure continues without a clear path forward at this time.

Recommendations

As GVMC worked to develop this document, numerous needs emerged throughout our analyses of the transportation system, and more were voiced by public users of the transportation system and various members of our committees. Several of these needs have risen to the highest level of importance for our area, becoming recommendations that will be addressed through the action steps before the development of our next MTP. These recommendations include:

- (1) Recommendation 1: Work to increase transportation funding in GVMC's MPO area
- (2) Recommendation 2: Work to improve safety for all users of the transportation system
- (3) Recommendation 3: Work to improve the condition and operation of the existing transportation system.
- (4) Recommendation 4: Work to create a mode shift from single occupancy vehicles (SOVs) to more active forms of transportation

Please refer to Chapter 11 to view the corresponding action steps. These recommendations and action steps enhance the goals and objectives of this document, and by following the recommendations, we will work toward creating positive change within our area.

Story Map

To view the Executive Summary as a story map, please visit <https://arcg.is/zTrT9>.

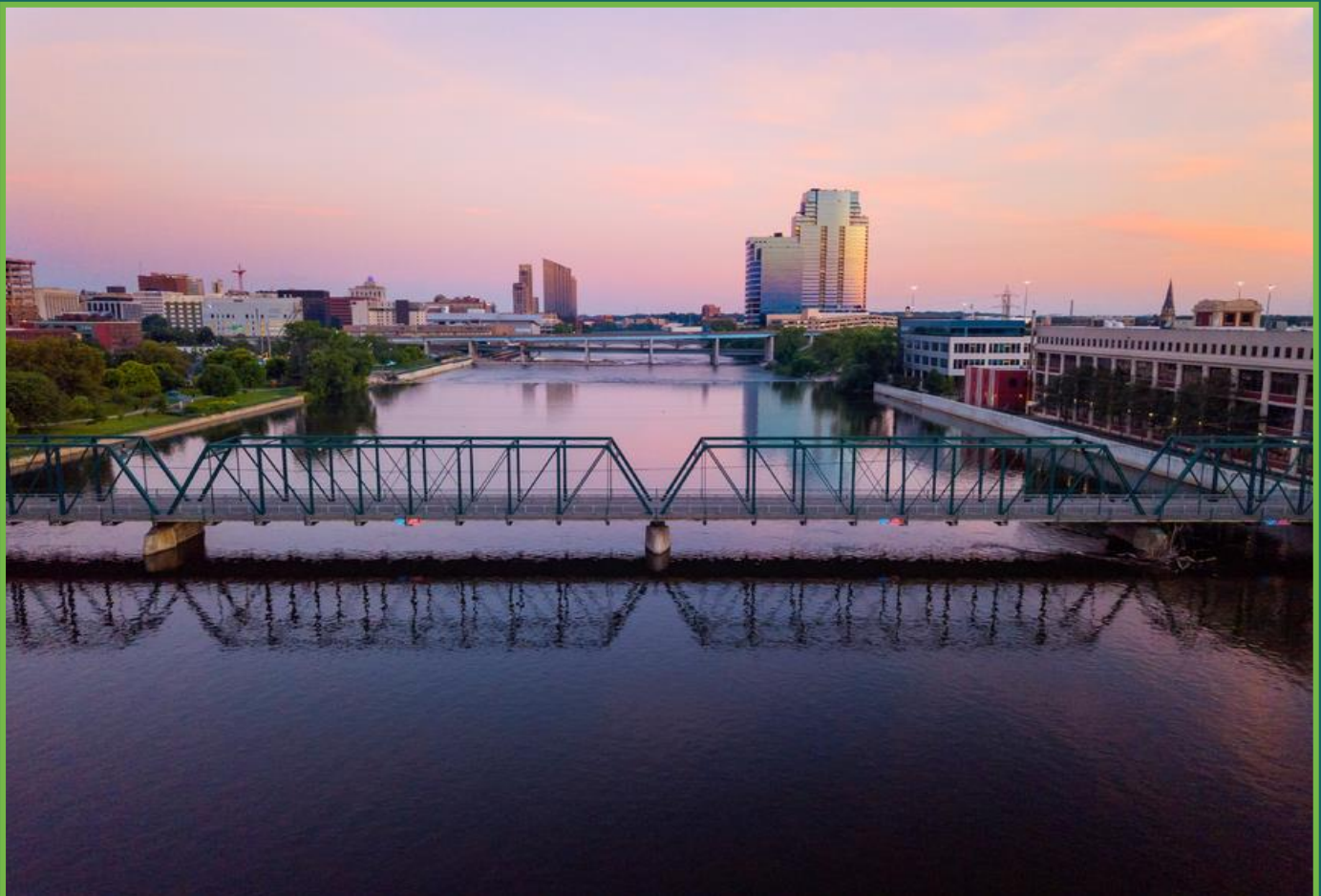


Chapter 1: Introduction

Who We Are and What We Do

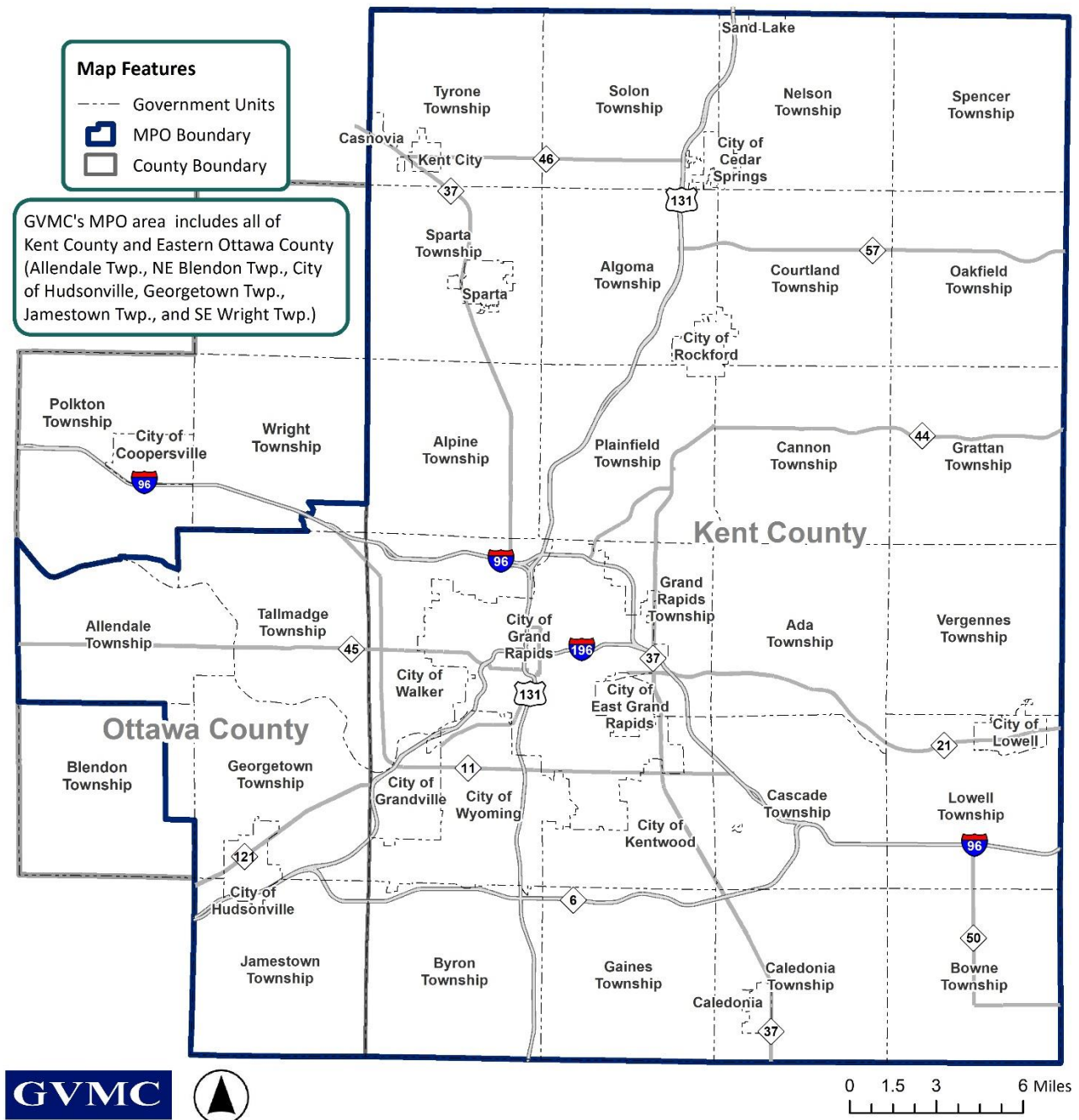
Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC) is an alliance of governmental units in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, metropolitan area appointed to plan for growth and development, improve the quality of life in communities, and coordinate governmental services. GVMC is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Kent County and eastern Ottawa County, including the City of Hudsonville and the townships of Allendale, Georgetown, Jamestown, and Tallmadge in Ottawa County. A map of GVMC's MPO area is on page 7.

GVMC is responsible for carrying out all regional transportation-related planning activities for the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area. These duties include developing and maintaining both a short-term planning document, the [Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#), which lists road, transit and nonmotorized projects that communities and agencies plan to implement over a four-year period within GVMC's MPO area, and a long-range planning document, the [Metropolitan Transportation Plan \(MTP\)](#).



Grand Rapids Skyline from Sixth Street Bridge; Photo courtesy of Experience GR

GVMC MPO Boundary Map



Map 1: MPO and Urban Area Boundary

Introduction to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan

As our region changes over time, transportation infrastructure needs to adapt. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) establishes a long-range vision for maintaining and improving our region’s transportation system and ensures that transportation investments in our area enhance the movement of people and freight efficiently, effectively, and safely. The MTP must be financially constrained (meaning costs don’t exceed anticipated revenue), informed by public input as well as plans and feedback from stakeholder agencies; consider the environment; meet established air quality standards; and ensure that improvements are fair and equitable through our environmental justice (EJ) process. Without an MTP, our area would not be eligible to receive federal transportation funding. The document must also adhere to federal transportation legislation. This MTP begins with a 27-year horizon, balancing transportation investments through the year 2050.



This document discusses the state of our transportation system, identifies current and future needs for the system to function optimally, and determines priorities, investment strategies, and projects to meet these needs. To make these determinations, GVMC investigated and analyzed the most recent data for:



Employment



Financial Forecasts



Nonmotorized Counts



Number and rate of fatalities and serious injuries on the transportation system



Pavement Condition



Population



Traffic Volumes



Transit Ridership

The MTP also explores challenges that could slow or inhibit improvements to our transportation system, reflects on successes we have achieved since the adoption of the 2045 MTP in 2020, and makes recommendations that will keep this document alive as we work to achieve them over the next several years. The 2050 MTP replaces the 2045 MTP.

History of Long-Range Planning

Since the inception of the Kent County Planning Commission in 1961, officials in the Grand Rapids area have been committed to developing and maintaining a comprehensive transportation planning process that includes long-range planning for transportation infrastructure. Below is a list of long-range plans that have been completed to date:

- In 1974, Grand Rapids and Environs Transportation Study (GRETS), a precursor organization to GVMC, completed a comprehensive long-range transportation plan with a terminal year of 1990.
- Between 1974 and 1988, no long-range plans were completed.
- In the fall of 1989, GRETS approved the 2010 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)
- Subsequently, there have been plans developed for 2015, 2020, 2025, 2030, 2035, 2040, 2045, and 2050.

Please see Appendix A for additional information on the history of transportation planning in our MPO area.

Connection to the 2045 MTP

Like this MTP, GVMC's previous MTP also established a basic vision of what we would like our transportation system to be in the year 2045 and how it could achieve optimal performance. Issues related to pavement condition, reliability of travel times, the convenience of the local transit system, and the availability of alternate means of transportation and the efficiency of moving freight were all analyzed. Highest priority transportation system needs and investment priorities were determined using data and input from various Committees, stakeholders, and the public.

The five investment priorities over the life of the 2045 MTP included:

- Congestion management
- Maintaining the system in a state of good repair
- Nonmotorized
- Safety
- Transit

These priorities, of equal importance, identified areas where future available transportation funds should be allocated and influence the projects that are selected to meet desired outcomes. Staff determined the amount of federal, state, and local funding reasonably expected to be available over the life of the plan through a financial analysis. This analysis showed **a shortfall of 1.5 billion** in meeting transportation needs.

The 2045 MTP ended with four recommendations with corresponding action steps that GVMC committed to performing before the next MTP was approved. The purpose of these recommendations was to keep the plan alive between development cycles, give GVMC an additional way to measure plan effectiveness, and to add areas of focus into our planning efforts. These recommendations, and the successes for each, include:

Recommendation 1: Work to increase transportation funding in GVMC's MPO area

Key Successes



New Grants

GVMC has received \$240,000 from a Safe Streets for All (SS4A) grant and \$1,000,000 from a Climate Pollution Reduction Grant



Identified Needs and Funding Gaps

GVMC has continued to work with local transportation agencies, units of government, and partner organizations to encourage providing more federal, state, and local funding for transportation in the GVMC MPO area to address identified needs.



Investment in the System

\$516.6 million invested in regional transportation projects through GVMC's 2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program.

Recommendation 2: Work to improve safety for all users of the transportation system

Key Successes



New Safety Committee

In 2023, GVMC developed and convened a Safety Committee to assist with determining safety needs for the 2050 MTP. This committee is also directing the development of GVMC's regional Safety Action Plan.



Identification of High Crash Locations and Corridors

GVMC has performed a safety analysis for this plan to identify high crash locations and corridors.



Safety Education and Outreach Program and Expansion

During the summer of 2020, GVMC launched a [Safety Education and Outreach Program](#). Through this program, we have given out nearly 21,000 bike lights, 11,000 reflective wristbands, and 6,000 reflective belts to date. In addition to distributing these FREE safety items, GVMC also coordinates media campaigns around PSAs that speak to the importance of using a bike light, wearing light or reflective gear when walking in the dark, and not texting and driving.



Near-Miss and Locations of Concern Application

During the summer of 2023, GVMC launched a [tool](#) to anonymously report traffic safety concerns. The collected information supplements existing safety data and helps us better identify and understand traffic safety issues in the region.

Recommendation 3: Work to improve the condition and operation of the existing transportation system

Key Successes



Airport Access Study

During FY2022-2023, GVMC conducted an [Airport Access Study](#) to determine ways to improve access to and around the Grand Rapids Airport.



Investment in the System

GVMC invested \$128.3 million in rehab, resurface, and preventative maintenance projects in our region between FY2020-2023. That number rises to \$306.8 million when including reconstruction projects.



GVMC Freight Assessment

GVMC recently completed a freight assessment that takes into consideration available freight data, feedback from the Freight Committee provided during the development of the 2045 MTP, and results of a public survey gauging the public's experiences and perceptions about the movement of goods within Kent and eastern Ottawa County. This is the first step toward the development of a regional freight plan.



The Rapid's Comprehensive Operations Analysis

In 2019, The Rapid initiated a Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA). The purpose was to take an in-depth look at the ridership market, operating characteristics, ridership, and growth opportunities. The COA is intended to serve as a roadmap for the next five years to position the agency for continued financial and operational success.

Recommendation 4: Work to create a mode shift from single occupancy vehicles (SOVs) to more active forms of transportation

Key Successes



Transportation Demand Management Study

During 2023, GVMC developed a regional [Transportation Demand Management Plan](#) to investigate ways to reduce vehicle demand on our transportation system and provide access to more mobility options.



New Nonmotorized Trail Projects

\$9.9 million spent on nonmotorized projects through GVMC's 2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program.



New Transit Projects

\$30.2 million spent on transit projects through GVMC's FY2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program.

GVMC will continue to build upon the success we have accomplished since the approval of the 2045 MTP. Recommendations for this plan are included in Chapter 11.