

## X. TRANSPORTATION

Any assessment of the transportation system within the City of Cortland must be considered from two perspectives. First, logistical information identifying exactly what the system is, roads, railroad, trails, and sidewalks; who has jurisdiction over these elements, County, State, or City; and who uses them, private or public. Second, the condition of each component must be considered and evaluated.

### STREETS AND HIGHWAYS

The City of Cortland has a network of streets that are primarily under the jurisdiction of the City of Cortland, except where there are New York State routes passing through its boundaries. There are no roads which belong to Cortland County. There are over 70 miles of City streets that are owned by the City and for which they have sole responsibility. NYS routes within the City have two main categories of jurisdiction and responsibility which apply. State Route 215 (Owego Street) and Routes 11/41 (from the Church Street/Clinton Avenue intersection going north to the City boundary), are considered “Touring Routes” and New York State has no jurisdiction and responsibility for maintenance or other activities. They are solely under the jurisdiction of the City of Cortland. This same delineation of responsibility also applies to a short portion of NYS Route 281 where it briefly enters the City limits along the western boundary (just north of Madison Street to just north of Wheeler Avenue). For all the other State highways passing through Cortland (Route 13: Tompkins, Port Watson, Church and Clinton; Routes 41/11: Port Watson, Church up to Clinton; Route 222: Groton Avenue west of Clinton Street), the roles and responsibility are shared. Under a standard agreement, New York State has all regulatory authority relative to permitting, major projects, etc., but the City is responsible (and is reimbursed) for routine maintenance such as plowing, pothole repair, signage, etc.



Nearly all of the streets are typical of any small city in upstate New York: two-way with a single lane in each direction. The one key exception to this is the “downtown” portion of Main Street which is one-way with two lanes beginning at Groton Avenue and ending at Tompkins Street. There are a number of other minor streets that are also one-way, as well as several streets that are three or four lanes wide, such as parts of Church Street and Homer Avenue.

The overall condition of NYS routes and local streets within the City is satisfactory with few serious problems. Several NYS routes have been upgraded or repaved in recent years, including South Main Street, Port Watson Street, Tompkins Street, and Clinton Avenue. The



Clinton Avenue Bridge near Interstate 81 was replaced in 2008. Phase 2 of the Route 281 upgrade and widening will impact the portion of that roadway that lies within the City's northwest corner. That project is slated to get underway sometime within the next five years. Although the project is not yet fully designed, there has been discussions about "dead-ending" some City streets in that area that currently intersect with Route 281. These streets primarily serve their residents, and dead-ending them will have little impact on the City's overall transportation system. The City should remain cognizant of the concerns and desires of these residents

As a particular road begins to deteriorate, it is slated for an upgrade such as milling, resurfacing, and new shoulders. Every attempt is made to also include other infrastructure improvements such as water or sewer main replacement. If other types of construction projects for roads are anticipated, other than routine maintenance, it is strongly recommended that they be evaluated for improvements to the drainage and shoulders of the area to be impacted including installation or replacement of curbing, and to determine whether buried utilities such as sewer and water need replacement.

A general concern relative to the transportation system in and around the City of Cortland is the traffic volume. While the City's street system currently accommodates the present level of traffic, traffic volume has increased over the years as more college students have cars, more families have multiple cars, and as goods and services are located further from neighborhoods, requiring additional vehicle trips. It is important for the City of Cortland to remain on top of transportation issues. As traffic volume increases in the future, it may strain the ability of the roadway network to accommodate it. Western Groton Avenue is already seeing the strain of heavy traffic volume, partly due to the lack of convenient east-west routes through the City. Road widening is expensive, and it can detract from the character of the City and its individual neighborhoods. Adding additional lanes to accommodate traffic growth should be avoided, and other options considered, such as alternate transportation methods and better accommodations for pedestrians. The City needs to work with the NYS DOT and make sure that all street improvements are pedestrian friendly and include amenities such as crosswalks, walk signals, sidewalks, and bicycle access.

As detailed in the City's East End Strategic Plan, residents of the East End have been very concerned about truck traffic serving industries in the neighborhood. The City has attempted to address concerns by establishing preferred truck routes. It is unclear if this effort has mitigated the problem. Nevertheless, the City should continue to monitor the situation and work to resolve issues in a manner mutually agreeable to the needs and concerns of all parties. The reader is referenced to the East End Strategic Plan for a more in-depth analysis of this issue.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

**Bus** - The City is served by the Cortland Transit Company bus service which operates a variety of routes in and around the Cortland area. Cortland Transit operates Monday through Friday from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM with all routes originating at the County Office Building on Central



Avenue. There are numerous routes which serve various areas of the City and several also serve other nearby locations (Town of Cortlandville and Village of Homer, for example). Two of the routes extend to the more rural areas of the County (Marathon, Cinncinatus, McGraw, etc.) and to Dryden/Tompkins-Cortland Community College and Cornell University. In addition, the company operates a Dial-A-Ride system whereby the public can arrange for transportation to any location. With a limited schedule, the bus service is not a reliable and convenient mode of transportation for most people. At times there have been discussions regarding expanding the services offered and this trend will likely continue as a trend as gas prices increase and public transportation becomes a more attractive alternative. Enhancing the public transportation system, perhaps through a closer relationship with TCAT, Tompkins County's bus system, should be considered, particularly in light of the number of persons that commute between Cortland, Dryden, and Ithaca daily.

There are also private transportation companies, as well as the College, that provide transportation services to SUNY Cortland students.

Trailways and Greyhound bus services provided long-distance bus service to the community. There is no bus station, and both companies pick up and drop off passengers on Central Avenue near the County Office building. Tickets are purchased directly from the bus driver. Trailways offers bus service three times daily, Monday through Thursday, and five times daily, Friday through Sunday. Greyhound provides services up to seven times daily. The bus stop has moved several times in recent years, for a number of reasons. The current location is a bus stop, not a bus station. Riders must wait outside for the bus or under an open unheated shelter, and there are no restroom or telephones available, other than those in the County Office Building. The community should consider developing a more appropriate bus station in order to encourage use of alternate forms of transportation and create a more welcoming atmosphere.

**Rail** - The City of Cortland has long been served by railway, with two major routes bisecting the City. In recent years the service has been primarily limited to freight. The rail lines are owned by the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway Company, with the primary line being the north-south route which generally parallels I-81 and enters the City in the southeast corner. It continues northerly, leaving the City near the County Highway Department off Homer Avenue. The other track is a spur off the main line. It leaves the main track in the southeast corner of the City and continues southwesterly through the City until terminating in the Town of Cortlandville near McLean Road. This line serves several businesses and industries in the City and Town. At some time in the past, this line continued northeast to Truxton. A small spur separates from the main line near South Franklin Street and serves industries east of the City near Polkville. The vast majority of the City's industrial sites, including the Noss Technology Park, have active rail service.



There is no regular passenger/commuter rail service in the City except for the special passenger service that has been available during the annual Marathon Maple Festival in early April, although this was discontinued in 2010. Some proponents of rail service want to see high-speed rail linking Central New York to New York City. Other rail service proponents would like to see expanded Amtrak service in Central New York, and in particular, a service linking Syracuse and Binghamton, which could include a stop in the City of Cortland. Although the federal government has directed billions of dollars to transportation initiatives, including expanded intercity rail service, expanded passenger rail service in Central New York is presently being studied, but no implementation plans have been made.

Students at SUNY Cortland conducted a federally funded study that was completed in July 2008 that examined the prospect of expanding tourist rail service on the New York, Susquehanna, & Western Railway between Cortland and Binghamton. The study focused on passenger preferences and the passenger experience riding the train to and from Cortland to the Central New York Maple Festival in Marathon. The study concluded that passenger interest in a tourist rail service between Cortland and Binghamton is very high and that expanding the service to include other community events is supported.

Additional discussions related to rail service can be found in Section XIV. *Land Use and Zoning*.

## **SIDEWALKS, TRAILS, AND BICYCLE FACILITIES**

**Sidewalks** – The City has a well-connected and complete network of sidewalks that serves most of the City. There are certain neighborhoods that developed later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Hickory Park, that are not served by sidewalks. There are also small sections of streets scattered about the City that do not have sidewalks on one or both sides of the street.

Overall, the condition of the sidewalks is satisfactory. The City has maintenance and replacement responsibility for only those sidewalks that are located along municipally-owned City properties. The remainder of the sidewalks in the City is the responsibility of the landowners along whose frontage the sidewalk is located. In certain instances, this causes problems when a homeowner allows the walk to deteriorate, becoming unsafe, impassible, and in severe cases, encouraging people to walk in the roadway. The City does have a Sidewalk Program to assist homeowners in replacing deteriorated walks. The 2009 program paid 50% of the cost up to a maximum of \$700. The City needs to be vigilant in enforcing its maintenance requirements to ensure safe pedestrian facilities. In the winter, the City needs to continue its policy related to timely snow removal.

There are still intersections where the sidewalk does not adequately provide full handicapped



accessibility. In some cases there is a full curb still in place, while in others the slope between the pavement and walk is too severe. When street and roadway projects undertaken, these accessibility issues should be addressed.

Serious consideration should always be given to incorporating sidewalk improvements into any infrastructure and roadway type projects. Relative to the connectivity of the sidewalks within the City, it would be a clear improvement to extend and fully connect the sidewalks in the City to any and all recreational trails and parks. To a large extent, these connections are already in place.

**Trails** – With the exception of walkways in City parks, there are no trails located within the City. The long anticipated multi-use Tioughnioga River Trail, being developed under the auspices of Cortland County, is still in its planning stages. Despite over \$1.7M in funding secured for the project, its future is uncertain. When, and if completed, the Trail will begin at Yaman Park and generally follow the West Branch of the Tioughnioga River northward towards Homer. The City should consider trail development as a component of its transportation system rather than a recreational facility. Off-street trails provide an alternate method of travel, encourage pedestrian and bicycle use, and increase property values.

**Bicycle** - There is one officially designated “Bike Route” along City streets created through the Cortland County Bicycle Coalition. The route, known as the Millennium Trail, starts at Yaman Park and follows City streets from east to west heading towards the Lime Hollow Center for Culture and the Environment west of the City (see also Section VIII. *Parks and Recreation*). There are no off-road trails specifically for bicycle use, other than pathways in City parks.

The provision of bike routes, bike trails, and bike facilities, such as racks, is important in order to promote the use of bicycles and other alternate transportation alternatives. The City should work to accommodate and promote bicycle use in the community as an alternative form of transportation. A full description of Bike Rack ordinances is fully detailed in Section XIV. *Land Use and Zoning*.

## GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

**GOAL 50:** Maintain, enhance, and encourage pedestrian and bicycle routes, which promote connectivity and good health while reducing our reliance on vehicles.

### IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Identify gaps within the City’s existing sidewalk, trail, and bikeway system that could serve as key links to destinations in and around the City (parks, schools, shopping, downtown, jobs, etc.) and develop and expand such a system to close gaps.
- B) Promote and support the completion of the proposed Tioughnioga River Trail to link Cortland and Homer.



- C) Include requirements, as part of the Site Plan Review, for all new projects to incorporate pedestrian and bicycle routes and facilities as part of the new development, as may be appropriate (see also Section XIV. *Land Use and Zoning*).
- D) Pursue capital improvement programs that increase opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle usage and safety.
- E) Develop informational brochure for public distribution that details the health and environmental benefits of using non-motorized forms of transportation.

**GOAL 51:** Improve and promote the use of public transportation.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Improve and expand service and provide incentives to increase the use of existing public transportation system. Ensure the system is user friendly and convenient, particularly for the disabled and elderly.
- B) Examine consolidation/coordination of Cortland Transit and SUNY bus system, and provide public transportation between the College and downtown.
- C) Examine consolidation of public transit systems of Cortland and Tompkins Counties to provide greater connectivity between the two communities.
- D) Consider an express bus route between Cortland and Ithaca specifically for the working public.
- E) Work with appropriate transportation providers to install bus shelters at key locations in the City, and to establish an indoor bus station open during regular business hours.
- F) Support development of commuter rail service or other public transportation linking Syracuse, Cortland and Binghamton.
- G) Develop public/private partnerships to develop a suitable indoor bus facility.

**GOAL 52:** As part of overall capital improvements program, continue to target existing streets in need of repair.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Pursue capital improvements that remedy storm water flooding; and address infrastructure repair and replacement.



- B) Identify streets and locations where improvements/maintenance are most needed.
- C) Evaluate flooding at streets and railroad crossings.
- D) When applicable, coordinate designs with other agencies that are involved (DOT) that meet the needs of the City.
- E) Seek outside financial assistance to funding needed capital improvements.
- F) Ensure that sidewalks and trails within the City are well maintained.
- G) Adopt a Road Usage Law to ensure that City streets and other City infrastructure is not damaged, destroyed or otherwise negatively impacted from any use related to natural gas extraction in the region. Require repair or reconstruction of damaged roads by offending party or parties.

