Existing Transportation Network

A balanced transportation network provides a safe and efficient means of travel for both people and goods. In addition, transportation systems, particularly roadways, contribute significantly to the patterns of development in any community, be it a city or town, county, or a region. This section of the Comprehensive Plan examines existing transportation systems in Clay County. The county has relatively good connections to the region through the existing roadway network although there is room for some improvement.

Roadways

Clay County’s existing roadway network connects the county to the region fairly well. Throughout North Carolina, all local, county, state and federal transportation routes are classified in categories under the Roadway Functional Classification System. As identified by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NC DOT), the functional classification system classifies roads and highways according to the character of service they offer, ranging from rapid through access to local land access. The purpose of functional classification is to enhance overall travel efficiency and accommodate traffic patterns and land uses by designing streets to the standards suggested by their functional class. For example, the development patterns on major arterials should have limited driveway or parking lot access points to support traffic that moves at a fast speed, whereas on minor collectors, one should expect slower speeds due to the larger number of driveways and subdivision entrances that are examples of appropriate land uses along these types of roads. Table 6.1 and Map 6.1 provide an overview of the types of roads that comprise Clay’s existing roadway infrastructure.

Future Road Projects

Planning for and the funding of transportation projects can be a bit confusing. Road projects in North Carolina happen through one of two processes—through Division Plans or through the North Carolina’s State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) process coordinated by the Southwestern Regional Planning Organization (RPO).

Clay County and the Town of Hayesville are members of the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization along with county and municipal leaders from Cherokee, Graham, Jackson, Swain, and Macon counties. The RPO has two functions—to assist with local transportation planning and to help with public input between the county and NC DOT. The three representatives involved with the RPO from Clay County include one member from the Clay County Board of Commissioners, one representative from the Town of Haysville, and the Clay County Manager. Plans for large transportation projects must go through the RPO.

The RPO annually produces a prioritized list of transportation projects. There are twenty-five projects in the RPO’s 2009 Priority Needs List, four of which are Clay County projects.
### Table 6.1: Clay County Roads Functional Classification System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roadway</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Roads in Clay County, or Nearest Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freeway (Interstate)</td>
<td>A divided highway that has full access control with intersections that are separated by grade. The primary uses are for interstate and intrastate travel.</td>
<td>A classified freeway or Interstate does not run through Clay County. However, there is access to several major interstates in a 2-3 hour distance in almost any direction from Hayesville (see Map 2.1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Arterial and Other Principal Arterials</td>
<td>The primary function is to carry local and regional traffic, connect communities, and to allow travel between major destinations. This classification of road is used for long distance travel and signals are used in areas of development. In many instances, it is necessary to control access (curb cuts) for safety and to allow for continual flow.</td>
<td>Likewise, there are no Principal Arterial roadways in Clay County, nor are their plans for the development of a principal arterial roadway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Arterial</td>
<td>The role of a minor arterial is similar to that of a major one except that travel distances are shorter and the amount of traffic volume is smaller.</td>
<td>US Highway 64 running from the east to west from Macon County to Cherokee County.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC Highway 69, running south from the intersection at Highway 64 near Hayesville to Towns County, Georgia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Collector</td>
<td>Provide access to and travel between arterials. They provide travel to specific destinations and allow traffic flow between neighborhoods as well as countywide mobility.</td>
<td>Old Highway 64/Phillips Road, also known as Business 64 runs north of US Highway 64 into Hayesville.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC Highway 175, running south from US Highway 64 on the east side of Lake Chatuge into Georgia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A small portion of NC Highway 69, north of US Highway 64 to the intersection of Business 64 and Sanderson Street is designed as a Major Collector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Collector</td>
<td>Minor collectors take traffic from local streets for short distances and then distribute the traffic to major collectors and arterials.</td>
<td>There are five minor collectors in Clay County:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>State Road (S.R.) 1330: Cold Branch Road; S.R. 1307: Woods Road, Tusquittee Road, Tusquittee Street; S.R. 1300: Mission Dam Road, Fires Creek Road; S.R. 1140: Sanderson Street, Myers Chapel Road; S.R. 1302: Lower Sweetwater Road, Fires Creek Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Streets and Private Roads</td>
<td>Local streets allow access to individual lots. Private roads are owned and maintained by property owners.</td>
<td>The remaining roads in the county are classified as local streets or private roads.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NC Department of Transportation
Once a project is included in the RPO Priority Needs List, it can then move to the STIP planning process. Projects from the RPO are ranked with other projects across the state with the result being inclusion as a project in the STIP. Projects are selected for funding on a statewide level based on a prescribed methodology; one of the metrics being whether the project has been named in a comprehensive plan. Involving the public in transportation is becoming more important. For example, a community must have some type of adopted plan that provides a vision or direction for growth/development before NC DOT will complete a comprehensive transportation plan (CPT) in a community.

The Clay County projects included in the most recent STIP include:

- NC 69, Georgia state line to US 64.  Widen to four lanes divided. US 64, NC 69 to east of NC 175. Upgrade roadway with some widening to five lanes. (4.5 miles)
- Chunky Gal Gap westward for two miles. Construct truck climbing lane. (2 miles)
- Guardrail installation and safety improvements.
- Chatuge Lake. Replace Bridge No. 11

### Table 6.2: Clay County RPO Priority Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank (out of 25)</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>STIP #</th>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>A-0011 BA</td>
<td>NC 69 GA State-line to US 64</td>
<td>Widen to 4 lanes - 4.5 miles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>SR 1307 Tusquittee Rd</td>
<td>Safety Improvements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>SR 1135 Settawig Rd</td>
<td>Safety Improvements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>SR 1305 Qualla Rd</td>
<td>Safety Improvements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Southwestern RPO

Interstate 3

Interstate 3 (I-3) was initially proposed by Representative Charlie Norwood of Augusta, GA in 2005. I-3 is a proposed route to link Savannah, GA to Knoxville, TN. The SAFETEA-LU Transportation Department Funding Act of 2005 authorized funds for an I-3 feasibility study. The I-3 study funds remained authorized but unreleased until recently. In a press release dated July 22, 2010, WaysSouth reports that a contract for the feasibility study was awarded to a Virginia based company. According to WaysSouth, “The study process will run approximately 13 months and will identify the steps to be taken in developing the proposed road, an estimate of the cost and a suggested routing. There will be provisions for public comment and input. The Federal Highway Administration may also look further into environmental issues, historical and cultural impacts and the overall need for this multi billion-dollar project, but anything beyond the general scope of the study must be requested by the states involved, who must also put up 20% of the cost. To date, both North Carolina and Tennessee have declined to participate.”

Even though the feasibility study will soon begin, the future of the project is uncertain. Representative Norwood passed away and there is no longer a project champion on the federal level. There is also opposition from many of the counties along the proposed route. Clay County, along with eight other county governments in western North Carolina and north Georgia, passed resolutions opposing I-3. While there is not a specific action being taken at the time of the writing of this report, I-3 should remain on the county’s radar screen.

Small Construction: These funds are available for any road system in the county. There is less than $500,000 available for the Division in this category. Funds may be used to address safety concerns or in urbanizing or growth areas. Examples of past projects include the Myers Chapel gutter system and the curb and gutters on Hickory Street.

Public Access: Funds for construction and improvements for access to public facilities and uses, such as a fire department or school driveway. A recent example is a secondary access road at Tri-County Community College that ties to a driveway for improved mobility.

Economic Development: Funds for projects that result in job creation. The first project in the Division to receive these funds was the Clay-Towns Industrial Park (now named the Clay County Industrial Park).

Secondary Construction Funds: Money that is allocated to a county based on an equation/formula. Dollars are used to widen, improve, and pave unpaved roads. This work has mostly been completed in the county. There are only 18-19 miles of unpaved roads in Clay County.

Secondary Resurfacing: Money to repave roads. This pot of funding gets smaller each year even though it is the biggest need. The price of asphalt has risen, therefore only allowing for completion of one or two projects a year.

Projects not addressed through the RPO or STIP may be completed under the Division Management Program. Clay County is in the NC DOT Division 14, which includes 10 westernmost NC counties. Each division receives funding to complete projects in five areas. Division Managed Projects differ from RPO projects in that they are smaller in scale. Clay County is in District 4 of Division 14, along with Cherokee, Clay, Graham, and Macon counties. Additionally, each county has a maintenance crew and work yard. The Division gets about $15 million dollars a year.

The types of funding available for Division Managed Projects include:

- Brasstown Creek. Replace Bridge No. 4
- Brasstown Creek. Replace Bridge No. 3
- Tusquittee Creek. Replace Bridge No. 9
- Nantahala National Forest at Tuni Creek. Replace Bridge No. 81.
- Phillips Road at Trout Cove Creek. Replace Bridge No. 100.

Ecosystem enhancement program for Division 14 Project Mitigation.

In addition to the projects that are planned for, there are some projects listed as in progress or under construction. These include:

- Blue Ridge National Heritage sites. Interpretative and gateway markers.
- Town square, construct sidewalks on the south side of Herbert Street, north side of Church Street, west side of Main Street and east side of Sanderson Street.
- Georgia state line to US 64. Install paved shoulders and realign curve. (4 miles)
- Provide operating assistance to counties and community transportation systems to meet Work First and employment transportation needs.
- Provide operating assistance for additional transportation services to the elderly and disabled.
- Provide maintenance assistance for community transportation systems to serve the rural general public.

Projects not addressed through the RPO or STIP may be completed under the Division Management Program. Clay County is in the NC DOT Division 14, which includes 10 westernmost NC counties. Each division receives funding to complete projects in five areas. Division Managed Projects differ from RPO projects in that they are smaller in scale. Clay County is in District 4 of Division 14, along with Cherokee, Clay, Graham, and Macon counties. Additionally, each county has a maintenance crew and work yard. The Division gets about $15 million dollars a year.

The types of funding available for Division Managed Projects include:
Public Transportation

Clay County Transportation (CCT) provides public transportation to Clay County residents. CCT has two recent planning documents to guide future program development. The first of these is the Community Transportation Improvement Plan (CTIP) for Clay County North Carolina, completed in February 2008. The second is the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization’s Coordinated Public Transportation and Human Service Transportation Plan, published in March 2009. Both documents include action items and strategic directions for CCT. Therefore, this Plan will not make recommendations regarding the operation of the system.

The text box following this paragraph provides a brief overview of CCT’s services. The biggest misconception about CCT’s services is that the belief that the services are only available to those who are elderly or disabled. In fact, the service is open to any resident, including those who may need transportation to and from employment. When the Director of CCT spoke to the CCCP Committee, she shared that the only way CCT can expand is to grow its public transportation service. Public transportation funds are more readily available, whereas human service funds are decreasing. CCT’s vision is to become more of a public transportation system for the county and not one that is based on need.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Facilities available to pedestrians and cyclists are very limited although pedestrian travel around Hayesville is improving. The walking and biking paths that do exist are heavily used and are an asset to the county. However, these paths are mostly used for recreation rather than transportation. Some in Hayesville, mainly CC-CRA and the Town of Hayesville, are working to make Hayesville more pedestrian friendly. The existing and proposed in-town trail network is discussed in the recently published Historic Hayesville Market Analysis. The Town of Hayesville is strongly encouraged to apply for a NC DOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Grant, which are only available to municipalities. Clay County will have the opportunity to address countywide bicycle and pedestrian planning through the NC DOT Comprehensive Transportation Plan.

Bridges

There are forty-nine state-maintained bridges in Clay County, for which NC DOT maintains condition reports. A bridge’s condition is rated based on a number of factors, including a sufficiency rating. Bridges with a sufficiency rating of less than fifty are eligible for federal bridge replacement funding. Nineteen of the bridges in the county meet these criteria. Seventeen of these are structurally deficient and eight of these are functionally obsolete. The Future Transportation Map 5.2 highlights Clay County bridges scheduled for replacement.

Clay County Transportation

Clay County Transportation’s (CCT) mission is to provide safe, reliable, and affordable transportation to all citizens of Clay County. It is a consolidated public transportation system funded by state, federal and local governments as well as revenues and contributions collected by the system. It became a community transportation system in 1998. Prior to that time, limited human service transportation was provided out of the Clay County Senior Center.

CCT provides transportation for human services agencies, the elderly, people with disabilities, and the general public of Clay County. The fare for general public transportation is 10% of the cost of the trip. They provide daily trips to Asheville on a service called the Ridge Runner. Operating hours are Monday-Friday 8 AM-5 PM (except for holidays). CCT also provides out of county medical and airport trips to Atlanta (Monday-Thursday), Gainesville, and Chattanooga.

CCT has a number of vans equipped with wheelchair lifts to transport passengers with disabilities. It’s entire fleet consists of two light transit vehicles (LTV), each with a lift and two wheelchair stations; one twenty foot LTV with lift and two wheelchair stations; five lift vans, each with two wheelchair stations; two fourteen passenger vans and four minivans with no lifts.

Sources: Southwestern Rural Planning Organization (2009). Coordinated Public Transportation and Human Service Transportation Plan. Sylva: Southwestern Commission; Clay County Transportation
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Review of State Transportation Plans

As discussed above, most of the transportation planning that affects Clay County happens at the regional level through the RPO. There is, however, one state level plan that affects Clay County’s transportation decision making. Because NC DOT’s needs are greater than funding is or ever will be, NC DOT developed a statewide Strategic Corridor Plan to prioritize transportation corridors across the state. According to the NC DOT Strategic Corridor website, “The Strategic Highway Corridors initiative seeks to identify, protect, and maximize the use of highway corridors that play a critical role in regional or statewide mobility in an ongoing effort to enhance transportation, economic development, and environmental stewardship throughout North Carolina.” The section of Highway 64 through Clay County is an identified Strategic Highway corridor. According to the map of NC’s Strategic Corridor, the future road structure for the Clay County portion of Highway 64 is a boulevard. NC DOT’s plan for a boulevard is an opportunity for Clay County, as boulevards mesh well with bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Additionally, a well-designed boulevard serves as a welcoming gateway to those traveling through Clay County.

Scenic By-Ways

North Carolina’s Department of Transportation has designated fifty-four Scenic Byways across the state to highlight the state’s history, geography, and culture. Beginning in Transylvania County, the Waterfalls Scenic Byway follows Highway 64 from Rosman to Franklin, then on to Clay County at Winding Stair Gap. The Clay County portion of the route continues to follow Highway 64 until Settewig Road, where the route shoots southwest toward Brasstown. From Brasstown, the route heads into Cherokee County where it ends in Murphy. The state’s model and for Scenic Byway designation is one Clay County should study in more detail, as the byway program matches well with the goals of the Rural Pathways proposed in the Plan.
Chapter 6: Transportation

Future Transportation Map

The Future Transportation Map brings together the planned projects with those projects the community would like to see.

Transportation Actions

As the primary route through the county, Highway 64 serves a variety of purposes. It should provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods, and should also remain attractive; as it is the first and sometimes only impression many will have of Clay County. In accordance with the NC Strategic Highway Plan, Highway 64 can best meet travel and community needs if it is reconfigured as a boulevard that incorporates bicycle and pedestrian amenities. The priority section to convert to a boulevard is the intersection with Highway 175 to the east to Qualla Road to the west, at least, but ideally to Settawig Road.

Highway 69 from Georgia to its intersection with Highway 64, as one of the primary commercial corridors, should be four-laned and designed to accommodate heavy commercial activity. Additionally, Highway 69, as the primary access road to the Clay County Industrial Park should also accommodate light industrial traffic.

Highway 175 is an identified Rural Pathway because of the number of private and public recreation resources along the corridor. It is also a primary travel route for those on the eastern side of the county who are traveling south toward Atlanta. This corridor will likely experience increased development as water and wastewater services expand. Transportation considerations along this corridor include signage and bicycle pedestrian amenities that connect the Jackrabbit Trail to Hayesville.

The Rural Crossroads are the five identified communities (Brasstown, Warne, Fires Creek, Tusquittee, and Shooting Creek) that have a higher concentration of development or other identifying characteristics that set them apart from other areas in the county. Almost all are along an identified rural pathway. Transportation improvements in these areas should further delineate the areas as community crossroads with signage, sidewalks, and gateway features. Future bicycle and pedestrian planning efforts should develop the rural crossroads as nodes of a master bicycle and pedestrian plan. For example, a person can get on a pathway in Brasstown and travel to a second node, or rural crossroad, in Warne. Finally, transportation planning in these areas should eventually support small-scale commercial and business activities.

The Rural Pathways, as discussed in the Land Stewardship chapter, are a tool to maintain the rural appearance of portions of Clay County. The CCCP encourages the following considerations for future transportation planning:

- Establish reasonable speed limits that permit the driver to experience the pathway;
- Allow for bump-outs and pull-offs for scenic views or interpretative sites;
- Identify and improve unsafe areas, particularly those areas that may be dangerous to unfamiliar travelers;
- Identify safe bicycle and pedestrian paths that follow the rural pathways; and
- Consider scenic byway designation for some of the rural pathways.

The future transportation map identifies three industrial areas for which maintaining adequate access is a priority. These sites include Coleman Cable north of Hayesville, Advanced Digital Cable in Shooting Creek, and the Clay County Industrial Park near the NC/GA line. Currently, these sites have decent access. It is important to prioritize access as transportation patterns change over time. It is also recommended that the coordinators of NC DOT’s Comprehensive Transportation Plan host a focus group comprised of business leaders familiar with the needs of these industries and industrial areas in order to identify their unique transportation needs.
Map 6.1: Future Transportation Map

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