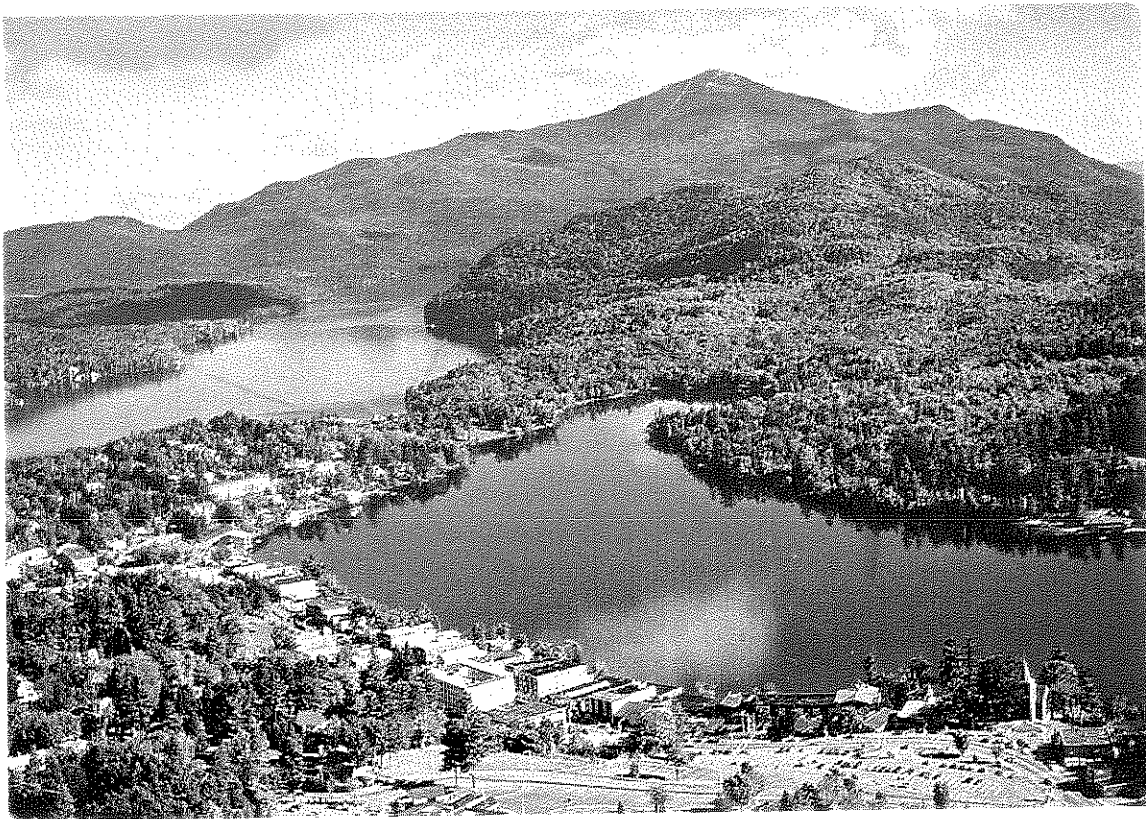


A Mobility Plan for the Lake Placid Area

Executive Summary of the Greater Lake Placid Area Comprehensive Transportation Study



Prepared for:

New York State Department of Transportation, Village of Lake Placid
Town of North Elba and Essex County

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Mobility Plan for the Greater Lake Placid Region* evaluates the existing condition of the transportation system in the region, identifies deficiencies in the system, with respect to access into the area and internal circulation within area, and recommends actions for improving the system to meet the needs of year-round residents, seasonal residents, visitors, athletes, and local businesses. The *Mobility Plan* is based on two premises:

1. The plan must meet the mobility needs of all users of the transportation system by providing for trips by foot, bike, and bus as well as for travel by personnel vehicle.
2. The transportation system must enhance the visitor experience in the Lake Placid area and contribute to the success of the local economy.

The Lake Placid Olympic Region is an area rich in tradition as a recreational, tourist, and sports training destination. The Region is one of the primary destination nodes within the Adirondack Park for visitors and it is also one of the primary economic centers that supports the local permanent population. The economic vitality and health of Essex County and the north-eastern Adirondacks depends on a vibrant and growing Village of Lake Placid and the surrounding area, consistent with its unique natural setting and resource base.

The natural amenities and surroundings are a key component driving the success of the region, but there are a number of other elements that are critical to its overall prosperity. Lake Placid is in an intensively competitive environment with other areas offering similar visitor experiences. In addition to the magnificent natural setting, visitors must be provided with up to date facilities, including modern state of the art facilities for both the recreational and competitive athlete; clean, comfortable and modern lodgings; a range of restaurant choices; cultural activities; and a convenient and effective transportation system linking all of these attractions and offering a range of modal choice for residents and visitors.

A. Study Organization and Goals

The study was initiated by the New York State Department of Transportation by using federal transportation planning funds. A Project Advisory Committee (PAC) comprised of village, town, county, and state officials; representatives from the Olympic Regional Develop-

ment Authority (ORDA); local business owners; and interested local citizens provided policy direction for the study. General public participation was obtained during three public information meetings, a visitor survey, and meetings with individual business groups and local officials.

The following eight goals guided the study and the preparation of the plan:

1. Plan and establish a comprehensive, safe, and accessible network of pedestrian/bicycle/cross country ski connections. Improve parking, its availability, its functionality, and its appearance
2. Provide a uniform, clear, thematic transportation and attraction signage system
3. Provide a transit system for visitors, workers, and local residents
4. Improve traffic circulation without adversely affecting pedestrians or cyclists
5. Integrate the benefits of the transportation system into economic development and promotion activities
6. Create a Sense of Place
7. Develop an implementation and funding framework.

B. Existing Transportation System

Before presenting the recommendations of the *Mobility Plan*, it is necessary to review the characteristics of the existing transportation system. Nearly all travel in the area is now made by vehicle or by walking. A visitor survey conducted in August and September found that 89 percent of visitors used their cars and 59 percent walked during a typical day. Use of other modes is limited with 5 percent biking and 3 percent using the local trolley.

Vehicles travelling in the area are served by two major state highways – Routes 73 and 86 as well as a network of county and local roads. Route 73 and Route 86 in the village serve as the “main street” for local businesses as well as serving through traffic. Route 86/Main Street, a two-lane roadway with parking allowed on both sides, carries about 14,500 cars per day during the summer. The proportion of through traffic varies depending on the time of year, during the summer tourist season it represents only about 20 percent of the total traffic in downtown. Most traffic on Route 86 is destined for a location on Main Street or on Saranac Avenue. This high proportion of local traffic contributes to congestion and frustration on the part of motorists as they cruise along Route 86 looking for a parking space. The resulting slow speeds do provide for

a safer pedestrian environment during peak periods. Trucks double-parking to make deliveries to local businesses also add to the congestion on Main Street.

Parking was an issue cited by many residents and business owners as a significant problem during peak hours. Measurements made during the study of on and off street occupancy during busy periods in July found that over 90 percent of the spaces were occupied indicating there was no extra capacity. Many comments were made by local year around and second home residents that they “do not go downtown during summer weekends”.

A limited transit service is offered in the village and surrounding area by Lake Placid Sightseeing. Funding for this service is provided through state and federal grants and user fares. Seasonal summer service to and around the Main Street and Saranac Avenue business areas is run using only one vehicle which limits frequency and reliability. A limited year around service is provided to Plattsburgh and Saranac Lake. Bus connections are also provided to the Amtrak service in Westport on Lake Champlain.

The condition and availability of sidewalks and bicycle facilities varies throughout the area. The Village has a continuing program to replace deteriorating sidewalks in the commercial areas with precast concrete pavers. Even with improved surfaces, sections of sidewalk in the downtown area are not wide enough to provide adequate capacity during summer peak periods. There are also limited facilities such as benches and other pedestrian amenities that would add to the experience of strolling downtown. There are currently no dedicated bicycle facilities in the area. Shoulders are provided on parts of Routes 86 and 73 but these are not continuous. There are no provisions for cyclists on Old Military Road even though it is a heavily used route because of the location of the Olympic Training facilities.

There is no clearly distinguishable gateway on Route 73 where visitors would be aware they are entering Lake Placid. Nor is signage within the area adequate to direct traffic and visitors to attractions, parking, and alternative transportation routes to promote a better visitors' experience.

C. Recommended Actions

The *Mobility Plan* recommends the following 13 projects and actions to address the transportation needs identified in the study:

1. Main Street Re-Alignment and Re-Design (Saranac Avenue to Olympic Drive): This recommendation addresses the vehicle, pedestrian, bicycle, and on-street parking issues identified for this section of Main Street. It calls for the realignment of the Main Street travel lanes to provide a continuously curving alignment that will allow expansion of the pedestrian facilities. Sidewalks would range from 8 to 22 feet wide and there would be additional amenities added as well. On street parking would alternate from one side to the other; transit stops and delivery zones would be designated.
2. North Main Street Parking Garage: A parking garage on the site of the existing two level parking lot in the center of the Village would provide 2.8 times more parking at this critical location than exists currently. It would be designed to incorporate retail space at street level and a deck with a view of Mirror Lake on the upper level.
3. Olympic Center Lot/Transit Terminal: Initially, the existing lot should be redesigned to incorporate a transit terminal where bus transfers would be made and where visitors could obtain information regarding the transit service. As part of the re-design, a continuous sidewalk should be provided on the north side of Main Street.
4. Expand Transit Service: An expansion of the transit system is recommended that will provide frequent and convenient bus service along the Main Street/Saranac Avenue Corridor as well as connecting with the ORDA sites at Whiteface Mountain and Mount Van Hoevenberg. The service would be provided year around but frequencies would be reduced during off peak seasons. Bike and ski racks would be provided on all buses.
5. Post Office Square Re-Design: The wide expanse of pavement that exists today in front of the Post Office at the intersection of Parkside Drive and Main Street would be replaced by a landscaped island. This would define the Parkside Drive intersection and reduce the length of the pedestrian crossing.
6. Redevelop Parking Lot: The small private lot (28 spaces) on Main Street should be sold and re-developed as commercial space.
7. Route 73/Old Military Road Intersection: This intersection should be re-aligned so that there is one 90-degree intersecting point for these two roads. This will eliminate the acute angles that are present today and provide for a clearer definition for the through movement on Route 73.
8. Old Military Road Bike/Pedestrian Facilities: It is recommended that shoulders be added to Old Military Road to accommodate bicycles and that the existing sidewalks be extended to provide a continuous sidewalk between River Street and Bear Cub Road.
9. South Main Street: Streetscape improvements along this section would provide continuity with the other Main Street recommendations. Trees would be added along with completion of the sidewalk paver treatment.
10. Visitor Center: A new visitor center is proposed for Route 73 on the publicly owned land opposite the Ski Jumps. This visitor center would utilize the topography available to

provide views of the surrounding mountains and it would offer a Gateway into the Lake Placid area.

11. Bandshell Park: The existing deck and staircase would be replaced with a plaza area at street level and a redesigned access to the grass area in front of the Bandshell.
12. Chubb River/Rt. 73 Bridge: The bridge and the surrounding area would be improved as part of an initiative from the US Canoe and Kayak Team to utilize the Chubb River as a training area.
13. Olympic Center Parking Garage: A garage that would add an additional 220 spaces should be constructed as demand and growth continues in the Village.

D. Funding and Implementation

The capital and operating costs of the projects and actions recommended are summarized in Table 1. In this table a phasing plan is suggested that would initiate five of the projects immediately. The critical first project is the construction of the North Parking Garage. This project must be completed prior to the Main Street re-alignment so that there will be adequate parking provided at all times. Revenues from the garage are also essential to help cover costs for the transit system and other projects. After the Phase I projects are completed, the Phase II projects should be initiated. These projects can proceed as funding is secured.

The local share of the capital costs for the Phase I and II projects is estimated to be \$4.4 million dollars after accounting for relatively firm federal and state aid contributions. It was assumed that these costs would be bonded over 25 years. Annualized bonding costs were computed based on alternative interest rates of 5 percent and 7 percent, resulting in an annual bond payment of \$309,000 to \$373,000. Total annual payments for the combined capital and operating costs were projected to be \$771,000 to \$835,000.

A number of county and municipal revenue raising options were evaluated to fund the residual local share of the project costs after accounting for user fees from parking and the transit system. Projections of these fees were prepared based on the current annual daily and overnight visitations to the Lake Placid Area. Depending on the assumptions used, user fees could raise between \$645,000 and \$806,000 per year. Combining the lower estimate for revenues and the higher estimate for the residual local costs resulted in \$190,000 that would need to be raised from other local sources.

Tables I
SUMMARY OF CAPITAL AND OPERATING COST ESTIMATES

PHASE I: 1999 TO 2003
CAPITAL COST

Project	Total	DOT Share or ¹ Other Funding	Local Share	Total	DOT Share ¹	Local Share
North Parking Garage	\$3,400,000	-	\$3,400,000	\$50,000	-	\$50,000
Olympic Lot Re-Design/ Transit Terminal	\$86,000	\$69,000	\$17,000	\$5,000	-	\$5,000
Expanded Transit Service	\$1,300,000	\$1,170,000	\$130,000	\$930,000	\$560,000	\$370,000
Scheme A – Main Street	\$1,500,000	\$1,050,000	\$450,000	\$10,000	-	\$10,000
Post Office Square	\$90,000	\$63,000	\$27,000	\$1,000	-	\$1,000
TOTAL	\$6,376,000	\$2,352,000	\$4,024,000	\$996,000	\$560,000	\$436,000

PHASE II: 2000 TO 2005

Route 73/Old Military Road	\$650,000	\$650,000	-	-	-	-
Old Military Rd. Bike/Ped.	\$500,000	\$400,000 ³	\$100,000	\$10,000	-	\$10,000
South Main Street	\$900,000	\$630,000	\$270,000	\$15,000	-	\$15,000
Visitor Center Design	\$75,000	\$75,000 ⁴	-	-	-	-
Bandshell Park	\$150,000	\$75,000 ²	\$75,000	\$1,000	-	\$1,000
Revenue from Re-Dev. Lot			-65,000			
Chubb River/Rt. 73	\$50,000	\$50,000 ⁵	-	-	-	-
TOAL	\$2,325,000	\$1,880,000	\$380,000	\$26,000		\$26,000

Potential Funding Sources

1. Lowest DOT share, actual may be higher.
2. NYS Environmental Protection Fund or other DEC coordinated aid.
3. TEA-21 Enhancement grant funds.
4. Legislative Member Item.
5. Non-DOT recreation related funding.

SUMMARY OF CAPITAL AND OPERATING COST ESTIMATES

PHASE III: 2005 TO 2015

Project	CAPITAL COST			OPERATING COST		
	Total	DOT Share or Other Funding	Local Share	Total	DOT Share ¹	Local Share
Visitor Center & Parking	\$500,000	\$300,000 ¹	\$200,000	\$35,000	-	\$35,000
Olympic Center Municipal Garage	\$4,200,000	\$3,800,000 ²	\$400,000	\$50,000	-	\$50,000

1. Seek TEA-21 funding for transit terminal/park & ride portion
2. Seek other outside funding sources.

The residual local cost could be shared by local governments, ORDA, the Essex County Visitor and Convention Bureau, and private businesses or it could be funded by additional tax generated revenues at the County or municipal level. If it is necessary to increase taxes, the study proposes that the existing County sales tax be raised by ¼ percent, from 3.0 percent to 3.25 percent, and that the revenue resulting from this increase be shared among all the towns in the County, similar to many other counties in the state. The Town of North Elba would receive \$210,000 to \$225,000 per year if this source of funding were used. This would be sufficient to cover the local residual costs for the projects identified in the Mobility Plan.

The study assessed the economic implications of raising the sales tax a quarter of a percent on both local residents and the tourism economy. It was found that this would have a very minimal effect. The typical resident of the County would pay an additional \$12 per year in sales tax; the typical overnight visitor staying two nights would pay about 75 cents more in sales tax. Anyone purchasing \$25 in a taxable product or service, such as a restaurant meal, would pay an additional 6 cents in sales tax. Overall, 54 percent of the sales taxes collected in the County are estimated to be from nonresident visitors to the County and 47 percent are from year round residents of the County. Coordination with the State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency will be necessary to ensure compliance with the State Environmental Quality Review regulations.

E. Conclusion

The *Mobility Plan* provides a framework for implementing a greatly improved transportation system for the Lake Placid Olympic Region that will enhance the movement of people and goods and support the continued economic vitality of the area as a prime visitors' destination. There is general consensus that Main Street should be re-designed to enhance the pedestrian experience, and that non-auto travel should be encouraged. The changes recommended in the Plan will enhance the Region's attraction to tourists and other visitors and also greatly benefit residents and businesses. Main Street, as illustrated in Figure 1, will become the focal point for the Region.

The Plan proposes specific projects and actions to meet the transportation and economic goals of the area. It is an advantageous time to pursue these goals because of state and federal funding cycles. Actions that are essential to advancing the recommendations are as follows:

1. Include major elements from the Mobility Plan into the Department of Transportation's five-year plans. Initiate design of these projects and conduct the standard environmental reviews during the design process.
2. Designate lead agencies within the County to advance and operate the transit system and parking garage
3. Secure funding from other public sources for projects that are beyond the scope of core DOT highway and roadway related funding.
4. Establish an oversight group to implement the *Mobility Plan*.

Working together to implement this *Mobility Plan*, the leaders and citizens of Lake Placid, the Town of North Elba, and Essex County with the support of the Department of Transportation, and other state agencies, and officials, have an opportunity to improve the transportation infrastructure, enhance the area's economic viability, and strengthen its quality of life to benefit both visitors and residents. This opportunity exists because of a combination of historical conditions and transportation policy changes that have coalesced now to the area's advantage including:

- Growth in the number of visitors coming to Lake Placid in response to the continued demand for outdoor recreation and the attraction of the area as a major tourism, recreation, and sports training destination.
- An interest on the part of visitors to have a "car-free" vacation. The success of transit systems at other resort areas nationally and internationally clearly demonstrate the value that good transit provides to the visitor experience. An efficient and affordable transit system is feasible that will meet the needs of visitors to relax and not have to use their cars for all of their travel because of the concentrated small scale downtown and the proximity of nearby recreational venues.
- Greater availability and flexibility in federal and state funding programs which support greater public investments in alternative modes of transportation besides roads and highways for motor vehicles.
- Recognition by the leaders and citizens of the Lake Placid area of the need to invest in infrastructure improvements in order to strengthen the area's viability as a major visitor destination.

The Village of Lake Placid, Town of North Elba, and Essex County can proceed now to take advantage of these favorable conditions. *The Mobility Plan* provides a framework for these actions and establishes the basis for action by identifying the most important projects to enhance mobility and promote the greater Lake Placid Region's future well being.

